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A Descriptive Analysis of the Civil Rights Movement

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the Civil Rights Movement from the point of view of its most important years from 1955 to 1965. It explains every special episode that occurred in the United States during this period. The years of resistance, along with the struggle against segregation pervaded much of American history. Whites were masters who governed and determined the lives of American citizens. Blacks were considered inferior, unequal and were held at the bottom of society. The first chapter of this thesis provides an account of the Civil Rights Movement, and introduces the means that the movement applied such as boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides and marches; whereas the second chapter analyses the movement and shows how black leaders surmounted obstacles of white mobs and got into it within peaceful outlets that contributed to the black self-awareness, and improvement of their social position; the thesis concludes with the years 1964 and 1965 when the Civil and Voting Rights Acts were approved.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRM Civil Rights Movement

EEOC Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

KKK Ku Klux Klan

MIA Montgomery Improvement Association

MOWM March on Washington Movement

NAACP National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NCC National Council of Churches

SCLC Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SNCC Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

UNL National Urban League

VEP Voter Education Project

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Our readings and our occasional investigations about American history changed our vision of the United States as we had previously understood. It changed our view and stimulated our increasing interest in American history. It is known that this so called democratic country in the world revealed its darker sides which in many cases resulted in a bloodshed scenery. Segregation, Board of Education, sit-ins, marches and many other expressions were new to us but all connected with a name, the only known to us, that of Martin Luther King, Jr. Thus the decision to compose this thesis concerning the Civil Rights Movement entered our heads.

Reviewing the history of the United States had resulted in the recognition that the Civil Rights Movement had not been restricted to some ten or fifteen years. It is

necessary to provide the Algerian reader with a chance to see that the history of the United States had not always been smooth and without mistakes.

In order to explore adequately Civil Rights Movement through these years, we raised the following questions:

- Why had only non-violence been used and no other direct actions such as riots to obtain civil rights?
- Why had African Americans waited until 1950's to take action?

This thesis creates a guide for English teachers who might be interested in American history from a different point of view. It can offer reasons and explanations for the mass Civil Rights Movement.

Thus we assume the following statements:

- Non-violence revolution had been the one and foremost means to obtain civil rights.
- The 1950's was regarded as the turning point of Civil rights Movement.

The first chapter of this thesis initiates the explanation of the movement and how the later Civil rights movement was based on non-violent tactics and civil disobedience and not on open defiance. It further indicates how the resistance of African Americans became more organized and directed at specific targets and shows the cooperation by local branches on grassroots level with parent organizations was essential for the movement.

The second chapter starts with two events considered as the beginning of the movement along with the means applied to gain success, where non-violent tactics represented a turning point that persuaded African Americans to believe in their battle. These means are shown in action and the advances of the movements are described. Finally, this part concludes with the two Acts of 1964 and 1965 as a large victory for the black community.

CHAPTER ONE

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Chapter One:
An Account of the Civil Rights Movement

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Formation of the Movement
 - 1.2.1 The Trigger of the Movement
 - 1.2.2 The Main Cause of the Movement
 - 1.2.3 Civil Rights Movement Defined
- 1.3 The Wherewithal of the Movement
- 1.4 Boycotts and Sit-ins
 - 1.4.1 The Montgomery Bus Boycott
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 - 1.4.3 Sit-ins Spread in the North
- 1.5 The Civil Rights Acts of the 1950s
- 1.6 Further Incitement Policies
 - 1.6.1 The Freedom Rides
 - 1.6.2 Voter Registration
- 1.7 Conclusion

1.1 Introduction

This chapter displays the process of the construction of the Civil Rights Movement. The researcher wants not only to attract the reader to some important events that shape the hidden reality of the CRM but also to show the significance of the movement in building the nowadays African Americans liberation. Through this chapter we claim that it is not true that the movement arose from nothing. It began neither with the murder of Emmett Till, a young black boy in the summer of 1955, nor with the refusal by Rosa Parks to vacate her seat on a public bus to a white man. Next, a closer look at these two incidents that crowned the years of waiting for freedom and equality will be provided in more details.

1.2 The Formation of the Movement

There could not have been a better time for the advancement of the Civil Rights Movement nor to set the stage to it. From the very beginning, the journey to equality was long since African Americans could not openly resist the violent tactics of whites. Peaceful, quiet and patient behavior had to be practiced so as not to irritate whites too much. They could not display their actual characters and their real feelings had to be veiled. Though, the formation and the building up of this movement underwent and witnessed very important events.

1.2.1 The Trigger of the Movement

What Emmett Till's mother decided to do was something completely new. On seeing the mutilated body of her son, she said: "...there is no way I can tell the world what I see. The world is going to have to look at this" (Facing History 2006: 17).

The visit of, Emmett Till who was born in 1941, to his cousin ended in tragedy. One hot day Emmett wanted to buy some candy, as he left the shop, he said to the white shop assistant bye, baby. It was done on a dare. His friends did not believe that he attended school with whites who he regarded as friends. No southern boy would dare address a white woman first. Emmett did it. Southern racial mores were unknown to Emmett who at fourteen did not realize how different his life was in the North from his cousin's in the South. Four days later Emmett was murdered (ibid.)

This was not an isolated event in the South. At the funeral the casket remained open so that everyone could see tortured body of Emmett. A week later, the local press published dreadful photos of his body which attracted the attention of the country to the continuing violence occurring in the South (ibid.).

The trial in September became a sensation, both in a positive and negative sense. Emmett's great uncle did something unimaginable. While he was on the witness stand, he accused two white men sitting in the courtroom of coming to his house and

kidnapping Emmett. Despite this testimony, two days later the jury consisting of twelve white men acquitted both defendants (ibid.).

To sum it up, the importance of this case was the attention that it appealed. Thousands of blacks and whites condemned the verdict which only served to convince Black Americans that it was time for a change.

1.2.2 The Main Cause of the Movement

Another incident may be seen as the main reason behind the CRM. The case Rosa Parks, a black seamstress who was returning home on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama.¹ When she was asked by the driver to vacate her seat to a white man but she refused. Some argued she was just an elderly woman tired after her long day at work who decided to defy. Then the driver repeated his request she refused again. At the next bus stop she was arrested by the police “for violating the municipal ordinance mandating segregation on publicly owned vehicles” (Sitkoff 1993: 37-38).

Rosa Parks had participated in several actions of nonviolent civil disobedience and together with her husband had solved numerous cases involving murders, rapes, lynching, and whipping. She became a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)² in 1943. The murder of Emmett Till acted as an aide and motivated her to act. “I felt it was just something I had to do” she once commented (qtd. in ibid: 38).

The arrest of Rosa Parks was the spark, E. D. Nixon, President of the Alabama NAACP, had been waiting for in his efforts to involve the black masses in forcing changes on Montgomery. Rosa turned for help to Nixon who paid a bail to release her from prison. After Parks’ discharge, he contacted Jo Ann Robinson, president of the

¹The Montgomery bus boycott was a mass protest by African American citizens in the city of Montgomery, Alabama, against segregation policies on the city's public buses.

²Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization.

Women's Political County to discuss the next step. He Proposed actions included a one-day bus boycott on the day of Rosa Parks' trial. Nixon telephoned college professors, civic spokesmen, and ministers and asked them to spread the news about the boycott. The Women's Political County printed thousands of handbills that appealed to black people to support the boycott because next time it could be you who would be arrested (ibid: 38-41).

1.2.3 Civil Rights Movement Defined

What has been mentioned above can be considered as the actual beginning of the movement. Shortly said, and following those different organizations namely, the SCLC, the NAACP, the CORE, and the SNCC, the civil rights movement emerged as a reaction to segregation, racism and discrimination. The basic principles of CRM were peace and non-violent actions. Masses of black and white people who desired change were the backbone of the movement. Numerous local branches obtained inspiration from and supported each other. Moreover, black leaders assumed that direct actions based on principles of non-violence could attract the attention of the mass media. The result would be that blacks would be presented in the mass media victims of white violence.

As a result, the leaders of the NAACP and The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)³ recognized that what they needed was to attract white sympathizers to their side. The more support they would obtain in their civil rights struggle, the more they could push for the necessary laws to be passed in favor of equal civil rights.

³ The Congress of Racial Equality was founded by an interracial group of students in Chicago-Bernice Fisher in 1942.

It must be said that not everything had been prepared before the Montgomery boycott. The most typical feature of the CRM was that it consisted of local branches of the NAACP, CORE, the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)⁴, and in later years the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)⁵. There was no centralized leadership; in fact the movement was spread all over the United States and its power was in its people.

1.3 The Wherewithal of the Movement

As already stated, the Montgomery Bus Boycott can be considered as the beginning of the movement. As described in the following chapter, the Montgomery Bus Boycott consisted of not traveling by local buses and became successful due to the unity of all involved. In subsequent years boycotts were used along with other forms of protests.

As a first impulse, sit-ins appeared in the movement in 1960 and were organized by students, both black and white. Their goal was to sit at various lunch counters until they would be served. Soon, large numbers of students in many other cities joined them and black adults supported them by boycotting a variety of store chains.

Secondly, the Freedom Riders⁶ that entered the movement in 1961 stated their goal clearly. They knew that Southern states would defy the decision of the Supreme Court, therefore they decided to provoke a crisis and thus oblige the federal government to act and gain support in putting the decision into effect.

⁴The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed in 1957 just after the Montgomery Bus Boycott had ended. Its main aim was to advance the cause of civil rights in America but in a non-violent manner.

⁵The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is a U.S. civil-rights organization formed by students and active since the 1960s, whose aim was to achieve political and economic equality for blacks through local and regional action groups.

⁶ Freedom Riders was a group of civil rights activists in the early 1960's who rode buses through parts of the southern United States for the purpose of challenging racial segregation.

Other direct actions used by blacks were marches. Marches as a part of demonstration that is “a form of activism, usually taking the form of a public gathering of people in a rally or walking in a march . . . to refer to the public display of the common opinion of a group of people” Among these marches, the researcher aimed to mention the famous March on Washington in 1963 that satisfied black demands for equal civil rights that its importance built up the movement.

1.4 Boycotts and Sit-ins

There was no doubt that at the beginning of the 1960s the civil rights struggle needed new inspiration and vitality. Who would be a better choice than the young people growing up in an atmosphere of constant change? Their enthusiasm and courage to overcome fear of white resistance and violence were to be witnessed. One proof is that without the help of black youth community in boycotts and sit-ins demonstrations, the movement would unconditionally never see the light.

1.4.1 The Montgomery Bus Boycott

In the 1950's, the church became more politically involved and organized alternative nonviolent actions, offering programs for the young black community so they could feel welcomed. Notwithstanding the foregoing, those blacks were becoming increasingly impatient with the slow pace of change. Consequently, the church offered more programs to the youth in their religious communities. Various radical groups represented dangerous temptation to youth by encouraging violence to change the system. The church became more politically involved and organized alternative nonviolent actions (Franklin and Moss 1994: 473-474).

Therefore, it came as no surprise that ministers were elevated to positions of leadership, and were able to attract masses of people to the direct actions. It therefore

was accepted without objections when Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was asked to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)⁷. At first, the employment of more black bus drivers was demanded along with better treatment of black passengers who were still required to sit in the rear of buses (Sitkoff 1993: 40-41).

Ella Baker once stated that King did not make the movement; it was the movement that made King (2005: 2- 3). That was true but without King's exceptional oral ability; the movement's goals would have been difficult to get across to the masses. In addition, he did not consider himself as a leader of the movement but rather as someone completely devoted to it.

He exhorted that if they wanted to succeed, their actions must conform to the law and that unity was considered crucial. The only weapon they had was their right to protest. "We are impatient for justice but we will protest with love" (qtd. in *ibid.*: 45) were the words that galvanized the movement. "First and foremost we are American citizens . . . and we are here for our love for democracy . . . and the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right" (qtd in *Facing History* 2006: 21).

The boycott persisted days, then weeks, then months. Some black women had to walk up to ten kilometers each day, in order to reach the white's houses where they worked. Though physically tired, their souls were filled with hope (Sitkoff 1993: 46-47).

After a myriad of protest movements led by Martin Luther King, on the 4th of June, the federal court district settled the suits of four black women, thus ending bus segregation. The decision listed that segregation on public buses violates "equal protection of the law clauses of the fourteenth amendment"⁸ (qtd. in *ibid.*: 50). On the 13th November, 1956, African Americans could celebrate their victory. The Supreme

⁷The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed on 5 December 1955 by black ministers and community leaders in Montgomery, Alabama, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁸The fourteenth amendment is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, defining national citizenship and forbidding the states to restrict the basic rights of citizens or other persons.

Court confirmed the decision of the federal court and ended the 381 day long boycott that changed lives of African Americans (ibid: 51-52).

This most wanted verdict showed that a mass action combined with the unity of all participants could induce the federal government to intervene. Also, it meant that change was possible and that it was in the hands of each individual black man or woman.

1.4.2 The Sit-in Movement

The changing situation in Africa became a new inspiration for African Americans. Black author James Baldwin ridiculed the situation: “All of Africa will be free before we can get a lousy cup of coffee” (qtd. in Sitkoff 1993: 75).

In 1960, only six percent of schools had begun desegregation, and states such as Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina had done nothing. Impatience of young people was justified. They were different from their parents and grandparents. Most of them had grown up in an environment that promised change. They were also better educated, and were adding to the numbers of the black middle class (ibid: 75 - 79).

Alike to the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-in movement began as the individual action of one man. Students from the black Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina decided to rebel against the everyday refusals by whites to serve them in restaurants and lunch-counters reserved for whites. They were exhausted of living in isolation from American society (ibid: 61)

On the 1st of February, 1960, four students entered a downtown Greensboro store, bought some school supplies, then sat at a lunch counter and ordered coffee. They knew the waitress would not serve them because they were black, but proceeded with their plan. They sat and waited to be served the whole afternoon, until the store

closed. The next day, several nervous students were waiting on their campus to avenge them. On the third day there were sixty-three seats occupied by black students. On the fourth day, three white students joined them and they now occupied all sixty-six lunch counter seats. That same day, a nearby department store was also targeted, and by the fifth day over three hundred young people were demonstrating, doing nothing, only sitting and waiting for their coffee (ibid: 62 - 63).

By the end of March, sit-ins began again. Then in April the first arrests appeared. Forty-five students were jailed for trespassing and defying police officers who asked them to leave. The black community supported the students by not doing their shopping in stores where they were refused to be served which resulted in profits dropping by more than one third. The white council decided to give in. Six months later, blacks could order their cups of coffee at whatever lunch counter they wished (ibid: 64).

1.4.3 Sit-ins Spread in the North

Northerners expressed their support for the movement by staging various sit-ins and other forms of demonstrations in New York, Chicago and Boston. Students had begun a new phase of the black struggle and awakened dignity and self-awareness in thousands of black citizens (Sitkoff 1993: 81).

Sit-ins confirmed how injustices affected the everyday lives of thousands of African Americans. Gradually, protesters turned their attention to other segregated public facilities and new tactics appeared, such as kneel-ins in churches, sleep-ins in hotel lobbies, swim-ins in pools, wade-ins on beaches, read-ins in public libraries, and play-ins in parks (ibid: 73).

The more whites tried to suppress the sit-ins, the more black students became resolute and the more sit-ins spread to other cities. Students were determined to reach

victory and instead of paying fines they decided to be jailed. Now they understood King's words: "We've got to fill the jails in order to win our civil rights" (qtd ibid: 66).

Although students wore their best clothes and their behavior did not provoke whites, their presence in white only territories was enough provocation for whites to attack, beat or kick them. Some of them became victims of lynching or practices of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)⁹. On the other hand, every arrest initiated a new sit-in somewhere else (ibid.).

Imprisoned students hence attracted the attention of the mass media. Police arrested only demonstrators, whereas whites remained free. These actions of unfair treatment exasperated more and more whites in the North who began to encourage equal civil rights for all American citizens. And they even realized at least, that the Jim Crow policy¹⁰ was starting to be untenable (ibid.).

Young black people were cautious, determined and strongly believed that they could change racial prejudices in the United States. They refused slow trials at courts and saw nonviolent actions of civil disobedience as the proper way to achieve racial equality in all aspects of their lives.

1.5 The Civil Rights Acts of the 1950s

Make safe equal rights for all American citizens was considered by the President Eisenhower as a solely cause for federal interference. The right to vote was guaranteed by the fifteenth Amendment¹¹, regardless of race or color, and the President planned his campaign for a second term securing on freedoms for African Americans.

⁹The Ku Klux Klan is a white supremacist group. It holds that only white, heterosexual Christians deserve civil rights.

¹⁰Jim Crow Law is a practice or policy of segregating or discriminating against blacks, as in public places, public vehicles, or employment.

¹¹The Fifteenth Amendment is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1870, prohibiting the restriction of voting rights "on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude."

After long negotiations in the Senate three sections of the proposed Act were approved. They included:

- Voting rights litigation.
- The establishment of a Civil Rights Commission.
- Civil Rights Division.

Fortunately, desegregation was excluded from the Act. Some civil rights leaders were disappointed with the Act, but in fact it represented an important legislative precedent for further struggle. These two recently created organizations should have provided for an increase in black voter registration (Steven 1991: 58).

Three years passed revealing the failure of the Civil Rights Act. It could not persuade Southern whites to treat blacks as their equals. Consequently, the Civil Rights Act of 1960 authorized the courts and not federal registrars to assign legal aid to blacks with difficult franchise cases (Sitkoff 33-34).

The Montgomery bus boycott shifted the civil rights struggle from the North to the South and from extended trials in courts where whites determined the lives of African Americans to the streets and into the hands of the black masses. Each black man or woman could participate in improving his/her future.

In the years 1956 and 1957 blacks believed that their first-class citizenship was very close. Their conviction was encouraged by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, although some civil rights leaders intuited that it would bring more disappointment than satisfaction. White outrage forced the President to intervene, which many blacks comprehended as a good sign for their struggle. On the other hand, civil rights leaders knew that the President supported them, but very slowly and without pressure from white Southerners. The President would act only in extreme cases.

No wonder that with the snail's pace of school desegregation and enduring problems with voter registration that many black people in the South felt disappointed

at the beginning of the 1960s. It was necessary to search for new means to defy whites, the government and the President and to make improvement toward racial equality in the United States.

1.6 Further Incitement Policies

When talking about the strategies taken by activists of CRM, regardless to non-violence demonstrations of sit-ins and boycotts, we may discuss the defiant means that managed to overcome the fear of thousands of blacks and whites who joined the struggle for equal civil rights for all. At this phase of the movement, it was no longer possible to ignore it. Whether people were for or against it, the issue of first-class citizenship for African American was becoming the key question of those days. Since students did not believe that failure was an option, they decided to support even the dangerous actions as the Freedom Rides.

1.6.1 The Freedom Rides

After the successful sit-ins, black leaders sought a new sphere of interest where they could battle the still strongly segregated South. The decision of the Supreme Court in 1960 that ruled against segregation not only on interstate buses but also in rest rooms, waiting rooms and all terminal accommodations provided them with an opportunity (Sitkoff 1993: 88-89).

Both blacks and whites became volunteers for the freedom rides. They decided to travel on interstate buses into the heart of the Deep South and test if the decision of the Supreme Court was being respected there. They expected troubles from whites and wanted by conducting the freedom rides to induce the federal government to act.

From the very beginning of the freedom rides, President Kennedy was not excited about them. Although he supported the civil rights struggle, he preferred more

peaceful means than the freedom rides. He was afraid that the aim of the freedom riders would be to force him to act (Steven 1991: 80).

On May, 1961, about thirteen blacks and whites, trained by CORE set off from Washington, D.C. on two buses to Anniston and Birmingham. The closer they got to the Black Belt, the worse the situation became. Outraged mobs were waiting for them at each stop. Though the buses were damaged and freedom riders hurt, they decided to continue. Their journey ended in the two cities where no bus would accept them to travel to Montgomery (Sitkoff 1993: 90-93).

The SNCC students were determined to continue. With the words “the ride must not be stopped. If they stop us with violence, the movement is dead.” (qtd. in *ibid*), they wanted to finish what the CORE had started. They set off on the journey to Birmingham where they were attacked by the KKK and arrested for violating the local segregation orders (*ibid*).

Other twenty-one students boarded the bus to Montgomery and during their journey were protected by the police. During this time, the freedom rides attracted the attention of the public and the mass media. When they got to Montgomery, there were neither policemen nor buses at the station. Only an outraged mob of more than a thousand people who received permission from the governor for fifteen minutes to show the freedom riders that they were not welcomed there. The picture that was broadcasted by television was horrifying. Young well-dressed white and black students were kicked and beaten with baseball bats, and one man was set afire. Some of them were very seriously injured before the police came. This bloodshed became page-one news, and not only in the United States. The President decided to act and promised federal protection to the freedom riders despite his disapproval of such coercion aimed at white Southerners as well as himself (*ibid*: 94-96).

Another freedom ride headed to Jackson, Mississippi where the riders were arrested which served as a protection against mob violence. Rather than pay bails, students filled the jails. More and more students became volunteers and traveled across the South. By the end of the summer, there were more than a thousand freedom riders (ibid: 98-100).

1.6.2 Voter Registration

After the success of the freedom rides, civil rights leaders found out how to improve the unequal conditions in the South even further. They knew that power counts and that power was suffrage. The SNCC, the CORE, the NAACP, the SCLC and the National Urban League¹² joined their efforts in the Voter Education Project (VEP)¹³. Its main goal was to raise the number of registered voters in the South as well as improve housing and employment (Sitkoff 1993: 106).

At first their work was hard and dangerous. They had to go from door to door and persuaded blacks in the Deep South that to exercise their rights was important. Workers helped them to gather courage, overcome fear and accompanied them when they went to register. They had to face attacks from whites who sent them back to the North. They saw blacks kicked, beaten, whipped, and killed but they did not surrender (ibid: 106-111).

The civil rights workers believed that the federal government would protect its citizens if their lives were in danger while trying to register. The Justice Department expressed its support but was reluctant to intervene. Everything was in the hands of Southern state courts where blacks had only a tiny chance to succeed (Steven 1991: 90).

¹²The National Urban League is a nonpartisan civil rights organization based in New York City that advocates on behalf of African Americans and against racial discrimination in the United States.

¹³The Voter Education Project was established in April 1962, coordinated the voter registration campaigns of five civil rights groups (SCLC, SNCC, NAACP, CORE, and NUL).

The situation in Mississippi in 1964 became an inspiration for the SNCC whose members prepared a plan for increasing voter registration there. The action called the Freedom Summer consisted of several projects, including voter registration, white community project, law student project, research project and establishing of forty-one freedom schools. The Freedom Summer drew attention because of its interracial character. Hundreds of white college students, especially from the North participated as volunteers, and worked together with civil rights activists and both the black and white citizens of Mississippi (Facing History 2006: 71-73).

Only few people in the North realized how critical the situation was in the South. Nevertheless, the Justice Department claimed that it was not possible to protect each black man or woman who would register from beating, murder or arson (Steven 1991: 99).

Voter registration drives were in a different position. Almost no one knew about them. There was little coverage on the evening news that a house of a black man was fire-bombed because he wanted to register. Getting involved in policy is a dangerous trap and Washington did not desire to clash with Southern state governments.

Hence this can be considered as one of the most difficult battles that the CRM ever. It was clear to see how the cooperation at grassroots level was significant and how only group-centered leadership was more important than centralized leadership. Each new vote that was added to the rolls became a small victory. It meant that after years of fear another black man or woman found his/her dignity and self-confidence.

1.7 Conclusion

Through this chapter, the researcher mentioned in great part the very important incidents of turmoil and confusion approved during the century leading to African

Americans freedom. There had been long years of resistance, challenge, planning and preparation, combined with courage and a self-awareness in the United States. Voter registrations, freedom rides, sit-ins, boycotts are tactics of black activists who needed to be free. Though they realized that they were headed into the arms of outraged white mobs, they did not step back. Of course, most Americans condemned the behavior of the white mobs but, on the other hand, most of them did not sympathize with the freedom rides as much as with the boycotts and the sit-ins. No matter what the public thought about them, they were victorious and predetermined the voter drives.

CHAPTER TWO

CARRYING ON THE DREAM

Chapter Two: Carrying on the Dream

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Strikes and Demonstrations
- 2.3 The Failure in Albany
- 2.4 Hard Victory in Birmingham
- 2.5 The March on Washington
- 2.6 Massive Call for Freedom
- 2.7 The Civil Rights Act of 1964
- 2.8 The Final Battle in Selma
- 2.9 The Voting Rights Act of 1965
- 2.10 Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

The former chapter treats the Civil Rights Movement as an entity, and indicates the means and basic principles of the movement as peaceful and non-violent actions.

However, the second chapter starts the analysis of the movement from its hard times of protests and strikes. Blacks in America understood that if they desired equality, it had to be given to them by law. If laws were to be changed, political influence would be a necessity. More than ever before blacks realized how vital their suffrage was. Only Northern blacks could go to the polls. Victories that they had won were not breathtaking, but contributed to the belief that change in the United States was possible. Furthermore, the chapter includes the increasing suffrage movement and the beginning of marches and demonstrations along with the Civil and Voting Rights Act as well as the final battle in Selma.

2.2 Strikes and Demonstrations

In 1962 black leaders comprehended that despite their many successes; full freedom was not as close as they presumed. The first half of the year 1963 featured increasing numbers of marches, boycotts and other forms of demonstrations.

Demonstrators often served as a part of the plan for the desegregation of public facilities in cities. They filled the streets, tied up traffic and challenged city councils to act. They were singing and through marches they expressed discontent with their lives.

Marches were actions that attracted attention because they were not limited to one place. People were constantly moving, met other citizens of the city and the number of demonstrators rapidly increased.

Since the demonstrations proved to be effective in their results, including in Montgomery, Greensboro, Georgia and elsewhere, new demonstrations broke out in many cities in the spring of that year. All of them made demands for equal job opportunities, equal housing and education without segregation. Undoubtedly, vicious behavior by some whites who felt that their time of superiority was approaching to its end escalated the situation (Franklin and Moss 1994: 502-504).

Blacks began to push for their first-class citizenship as never before. Another reason was that the year 1963 was celebrated as the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation¹⁴. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson commented on the situation in the United States: “Until justice is blind, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men’s skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact” (qtd. in *ibid* 1994: 502).

By 1963, thirty-four African nations had freed themselves from colonial bondage, but more than two thousand school districts remained segregated in the South. Only eight percent of the black children in the South attended class with whites (Sitkoff 1993: 120).

2.3 The Failure in Albany

The Albany Movement was the first movement to attempt to unite the entire black community. Some activists, however, considered it as a failure. Others said that any disobedience against Jim Crow policy enhanced black activism somewhere else and forced white Americans to realize that, even if without success, a segregated society was not acceptable for them any more (*ibid*: 115-117).

The primary goal of the Albany movement was to desegregate all public facilities by using sit-ins and boycotts along with marches. Hundreds of people peacefully marched day after day toward the City Hall demanding equal civil rights. Though, the more demonstrators participated in marches, the greater crisis increased, but the sad truth remained that many of them doubted the nonviolent tactics that could drive them to failure (*ibid.*).

Amongst the reasons that caused their failure was that one clever Police Chief developed a strategy that caused the failure in Albany. When he came to realize that

¹⁴The proclamation issued by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863, freeing the slaves in those territories still in rebellion against the Union.

only by not advocating violence from the side of police, could Albany remain segregated. His troops protected demonstrators from the attack of white mobs and when arresting members of the movement, he acted cautiously. He was careful not to use too much violence and claimed the arrests were for unauthorized demonstrations. Within the year he jailed over a thousand activists who were placed in various jails around the county. This prevented the city jail from being overfilled. What black activists experienced in the jails can only be surmised. The fact remained that his considered actions did not attract the attention of the mass media nor was federal intervention required. He was the man who managed to keep order and prevent bloodshed (ibid.).

2.4 Hard Victory in Birmingham

At the end of 1962, Martin Luther King, Jr. along with the SCLC prepared the liberation plan for the Birmingham movement. Although he was aware of the doubts that many blacks had after the failure in Albany. He was afraid of the conversion of his people to the movement of Malcolm X whose approach was more radical. Moreover, what King mainly disapproved was Malcolm's belief that white people are enemies and blacks could not live with them in the beloved community (Sitkoff 1993: 118-119).

Birmingham, Alabama was considered as the most segregated city in the United States. The reputation of this city was especially due to the character of Eugene T. Bull Connor who defied desegregation by any accessible means (ibid: 120).

The sit-ins occurred on April in Birmingham and black protesters were arrested which attracted the attention of the mass media. Thereafter, the marches began and more than fifty African Americans marched on City Hall and, as expected, Connor had them all arrested. Marches on following days continued with the same results. During this time, everything was recorded by television cameras and broadcasted to all the

people in the United States. Connor became furious and the police along with dogs arrested nearly a thousand marchers (ibid: 121-122).

Other marches followed, along with boycotts of white merchants. Connor lost his patience and the news broadcasted peaceful marchers being arrested with increasing police brutality. Pictures of dogs barking and trying to bite marchers upset many Americans. King was also jailed and after his release D-day arrived (ibid.).

The same situation was to be repeated the following day. Connor lost control of himself in front of television cameras. He ordered the police to isolate half of the children in the church, whereas the other half was being arrested in the opposite park. Furious attack dogs bit several children. Policemen beat and hurt others, which outraged bystanders. They began to defend children and threatened the policemen with stones and bottles. Unfortunately, policemen seriously hurt both children and adults, and caused property and tree damage (ibid: 126-127).

The next day brought the same picture. Over two hundred students were arrested and several thousand adults skirmished with the police and threw rocks at them. Connor acted again by sending dogs and high-pressure hoses. Photographs of children attacked by snarling dogs, women beaten by police, and old people hurt by hoses appeared on the first pages of the newspapers. Millions of Americans were now involved in the movement and demanded an end to this (ibid: 127-128).

The city council had to negotiate but was not willing to conclude any agreement. Blacks again responded with new massive protests that were suppressed with such police brutality that there did not remain any other way for the city council than to agree with the demands of the protesters. Birmingham became a synonym for unrestrained police brutality and the municipal authorities decided to put an end to the disorder in the city. Moreover, they did not want to risk federal intervention that was hanging over their city (ibid: 128-131).

The movement won its hard and painful battle. Due to King's excellent timing of individual events, Birmingham now could celebrate "desegregation of lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms and drinking fountains; upgrading and hiring of Negroes on a nondiscriminatory basis throughout the industrial community of Birmingham and the formation of a biracial committee" (qtd. in *ibid.*).

This was the first time in history that blacks managed to win such a great victory in the Deep South. The Birmingham victory changed the hearts of millions of white Americans who began to support full freedom for all citizens.

However, the strong resistance of segregationists, as powerful as it was, made many blacks impatient and they called for immediate freedom. Moreover, the clashes with the police during the Birmingham demonstrations showed how close blacks got to the violence. It was high time to solve the unequal position of blacks at the federal level.

2.5 The March on Washington

In June of 1963, President Kennedy had spoken to the American people: "We face . . . a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our everyday lives" (qtd. in Sitkoff: 505).

Several days after his speech, President Kennedy submitted a broadened civil rights program just after watching the demonstrations reaching their peak, especially in Birmingham. He proposed special recommendations to Congress, so that he could concentrate more on domestic affairs. Thus, he was aware that it was necessary to support the voting rights of African Americans (*ibid.*: 504).

The civil rights leaders of the SNCC, the SCLC, the NAACP, the CORE, the National Council of Churches (NCC)¹⁵, the National Urban League and others joined together and planned the most massive march in history. Since all the organizations differed from each other, their understanding of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedoms differed as well. Some wanted to express support for the civil rights bill, while others saw the march as an opportunity to criticize it. The leaders themselves were surprised by the tremendous support from various civic, religious and labor groups that participated (Franklin and Moss 1994: 505-506).

On the 28th of August, 1963 more than 200,000 blacks and whites from almost every state assembled at the Washington Monument. From there they marched peacefully to the Lincoln Memorial where individual civil rights leaders gave their speeches. Among them was Martin Luther King, Jr. who delivered his famous I Have a Dream speech. The civil rights leaders were then welcomed by the President who expressed his support for equal civil rights along with the concern that filibusters in Congress could bury the bill (ibid: 506-507).

Martin Luther King, Jr. searched for a new opportunity to prove that it made sense to use nonviolence. The year 1963 was generally full of marches and other forms of demonstrations. Black citizens were conducted for full freedom and they eagerly waited for the civil rights law. Such pressure that was created that year could be ignored by neither the President nor Congress. Filibusters in Congress, however, indicated that the bill would not be passed. First excitement after the March on Washington was replaced by disappointment and disillusionment.

2.6 Massive Call for freedom

¹⁵The National Council of the Churches was founded in 1950; it has been a leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States.

More and more blacks became involved in the spreading of the CRM thanks to the victory in Birmingham, with its reputation as the most segregated city in the United States. It encouraged thousands to join the movement. They wanted freedom and they called for it. Although, there was the threat that blacks could turn to violence if their nonviolent actions were ignored.

Eight hundred boycotts, marches and sit-ins occurred in two hundred cities and towns throughout the South within a few months after the Birmingham movement. More than 20,000 protesters were arrested, and at least ten were killed. About 80,000 marginalized blacks demonstrated for their right to vote. Northern blacks supported their comrades in the South and the number of demonstrations there was comparable to those in the South (Sitkoff 1993: 137-138).

Many Southern white leaders were willing to agree. Some fifty Southern and border cities began with desegregation of public facilities, biracial commissions were established, the first black policemen were hired, Blacks were allowed to be registered, and their children were accepted to white schools (ibid.).

However, from southwest Georgia to the Louisiana delta, whites were determined to defend white supremacy by all possible means. Murders, bombing, and arson were forms of their resistance. A high level terror and brutality settled in this area where churches that were not bombed were the exceptions. The situation escalated with the murder of Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi which brought on new demonstrations (ibid: 138-140).

Blacks and whites in the North were alarmed and called for the Civil Rights Act. Surveys confirmed that most Americans supported equal housing, jobs, voting rights, desegregated schools and public facilities (ibid.).

After the murders of black children and the repeated postponement of the Civil Rights Bill, they had to watch a large number of pro-segregationists who succeeded in

the November elections. On the 22nd of November President Kennedy was assassinated. The end of the year was approaching but African Americans had not yet realized full freedom (Franklin and Moss 1994: 507).

2.7 The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, strongly supported the passing of the Civil Right Bill and pushed Congress to enact it. On the 24th of January, 1964 the 24th Amendment¹⁶ to the Constitution was ratified. It outlawed the requirement of the poll tax in national elections. Soon after, the House of Representatives passed the Civil Rights Bill and the Senate did not block its passing with filibusters and approved the law (Franklin and Moss 1994: 507).

The Civil Rights Act banned discrimination in public accommodation. It gave the attorney general the power to protect citizens against discrimination in public facilities, housing and voting. A federal Community Relations Service was founded which would help with cases of individuals and communities concerning civil rights problems. The Act further established a federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)¹⁷. The United States Office of Education was authorized to provide financial and technical aid with the school desegregation (ibid.: 508).

This Act was the most comprehensive law that ever appeared in the United States as far as equal rights of its citizens were concerned. No one, however, expected everything to be problem free. There was the law, but on the other hand there were entrenched ideas about races and their inequality in the United States. Blacks were excited and pushed for equality which caused problems and riots in many places (ibid).

¹⁶The Twenty-fourth Amendment was ratified in 1964, forbidding the use of the poll tax as a requirement for voting in national or U.S. Congressional elections.

¹⁷The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is a federal agency charged with eliminating discrimination in all terms and conditions of employment.

As predicted, the worst situation remained in the Deep South, especially in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia. Despite the law, whites refused to comply and changed public facilities to private institutions. The KKK marched in the streets and promised to maintain a segregated society and publicly supported the white city councils. The strongest opposition persisted in preventing blacks from registering to vote (ibid: 509).

At that time, the SNCC started the project known as the Mississippi Freedom Summer.¹⁸ It revealed that the desegregation of public places would be acceptable for the South but would not provide blacks with a franchise. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood this would be the final battle in their pursuit of freedom.

2.8 The Final Battle in Selma

According to Steven F. Lawson, seventy-seven percent of eligible voters remained marginalized in Alabama. Only 335 blacks out of a total population of 15,000 (Steven 1991: 105) were registered in Dallas County with Selma at its centre. Since the earliest days, Selma was considered by whites as their capital of the Confederacy, Black Belt, and white supremacy. James G. Clark, the Dallas county sheriff had much in common with Bull's tactics of police brutality and oppression of blacks (ibid: 107).

If King wanted to appeal to the federal government to intervene, he had to do it cautiously. He relied on the mass media and support of other Americans. He was aware of strained relations between whites and blacks in Selma and was afraid of bloodshed. King just came back from Oslo, Norway where he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and strongly felt that the removal of obstructions in voter registration would liberate the Deep South (ibid: 105-108).

¹⁸ The Mississippi Freedom Summer was a nonviolent effort by civil rights activists to integrate Mississippi's segregated political system during 1964.

Fortunately, King could count on the support of the President. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the President lost white support in the Southern States of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. He expected that blacks with full voting rights would support his party instead of white supremacists. Moreover, he also believed that blacks with full rights could more easily attain advancement by themselves (ibid.).

In 1965, the movement for suffrage began and during January and February of that year, the SCLC initiated numerous marches to the courthouse demanding registration. But this situation had not lasted long before Clark lost his patience. Despite the warnings of moderate whites who were afraid of negative publicity, he ordered the first arrests (ibid: 110-111).

In mid-February, a young man was shot while helping his mother who was being beaten by state troops. This action outraged the local activists and they planned the fifty mile long march from Selma to Montgomery. On Sunday, the 7th of March, 600 protesters set off on the journey. They were, however, stopped on the Edmund Pettus Bridge where state troopers along with Clark's posse attacked them with tear gas, kicked, beat and injured many of them. The rest of the marchers were chased back to town. This terror attracted the national attention of the public and secured the federal intervention that King needed (ibid: 111-112).

The President ordered the march to go ahead, and the new one was scheduled on the 21st of March. The protesters were under federal protection which deterred white violence. The march which originally started with some 300 demonstrators numbered on its final day approximately 50,000 black and white people from all over the United States (Franklin and Moss 1994: 510).

2.9 The Voting Rights Act of 1965

During the crisis in Alabama, the President supported the struggle for suffrage. He acted as quickly as he could and proposed to Congress the voting rights bill. Congress passed it without filibusters and the Senate did the same. By August, 1965 it became the law. The Gallup Poll that spring recorded that “76 percent of the nation favored a voting rights bill; in the South surprising 49 percent of the sample indicated approval compared with 37 percent in opposition” (Steven 1991: 115).

The Act forbade any discriminatory practices which prevented voting, including literacy tests and others that were demanded especially by the southern states. The only condition to become a registered voter would only be about citizenship. The attorney general got the power to supervise such states or counties that were considered to be preventing blacks from voting. Federal registrars could be sent into states such as Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and twenty-six counties in North Carolina, Alaska, along with scattered counties in Arizona, Idaho and Hawaii. If any of these states jurisdictions would implement changes in voting, it had to be done with the approval of the attorney general (Franklin and Moss 1994: 510-511).

By the end of the year, nearly 250,000 new black Americans added their names to the rolls (ibid.). The most significant change was recorded in the Deep South: “In Mississippi black registration leaped from 6.7 percent in 1964 to 59.4 in 1968 . . . In Alabama jumped from 23 percent to 53 percent. In Dallas County . . . from less than 1,000 to over 8,500 within months after the suffrage law took effect” (Steven 1991: 116).

2.10 Conclusion

Through this chapter, the researcher evokes the events of the 1960s which brought many improvements to the lives of blacks in America. As mentioned previously, freedoms would not have happened without their effort. The fact that more

and more African Americans became involved in the civil rights movement finally caused white segregationists to surrender. Desegregation of public facilities, housing, and employment secured the first victory. Suffrage without obstacles ensured the second one. However, the struggle could not be considered finished. Desegregation of schools was a lasting battle. To improve standards of black living concerning housing and employment took much time as well. But with the support of the laws, African Americans could consider their struggle for equality and freedom as partially accomplished.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Civil Rights Movement was a war. It was a war where innocent people died in the same way as people die in a war. They were determined to achieve full freedom, justice and equality and these were aims that were worth dying for. They chose nonviolent direct actions such as boycotts, sit-ins, marches and others to provoke crises that would force the federal government to change their status at the federal level. In most cases, they relied on the support of white Americans and the mass media.

On the other hand, they realized that support would come only if they were attacked by the police or by outraged white mobs. For this reason, we do not condemn the behavior of white Americans. They defended their America, their dreams and their lives. They understand now that the harsh and violent tactics that were applied by them had nothing in common with a civilized society, but it reflected a more than three hundred year old entrenched approach regarding blacks.

All along our research about this long lasting struggle, we have been coming to some results about how the civil rights movement had come to its end. A victory claimed by members of a movement using only non-violent methods and showing to

the entire world that within the numerous ways of claiming one's rights, they have chosen peace rather than outrage.

The United States fortunately could not defy the inevitable changes that were brought in the mid twentieth century. It could no longer be tolerated that the country representing the symbol of democracy throughout the world would deny its own citizens their basic rights.

Both President Kennedy and President Lyndon B. Johnson understood that race did not have any place in a democratic country and actively supported full freedom for blacks. Passage of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts meant not only legislative change for the lives of the black community, but, above all, insured the effectiveness of the law.

White Americans proved what was believed impossible could, in fact become true. The fact, that the United States elected its first black President goes to show the immense changes the souls and minds of the American people have undergone since the Civil and Voting Rights Acts. More than three hundred years of humiliation, inequality and injustice were buried in less than fifty years.

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