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The March 1965

In the mist of the Civil Rights Movement persistent demonstrations, one of these being the Selma to Montgomery March, served as the first steps in history that demanded a future free of segregation and racial discrimination. Martin Luther King Jr. along several other members of the civil rights community, planned a march from Selma, Alabama to the capital of Montgomery. A protest designed to display that all Americans, no matter their skin color, have the right to vote. This March has been remembered and discussed throughout history for its peaceful approach that eventually led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which made it illegal for racial discrimination against voters. Through the history of its origins, its leaders’ reputation and the nonviolent approach the protesters took, the march of 1965 exemplified that no matter the risk or the resistance, peaceful protests are successful in delivering the necessary message and demanding change.

The history of the origins of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March roots back to racial segregation, discrimination and countless attempts of African Americans to fight the unjust system created by white men. The most successful of these attempts was The Civil Rights Movement. A peaceful protest, designed to inspire Black Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The outcome of the movement started with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public places and the impact of the nonviolent protest has been an example that continues to inspire generations. According to Mwamba “At its height in the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement produced a ripple effect beyond its U.S. focus...”, where activists in and outside of U.S. whom were agitating for independence, human rights and justice – “found inspiration in the events that began to unfold in the racially segregated American South midway through the 20th century” (Mwamba).This movement gave some sense of security and example that with the right leaders and the right approach, nonviolent protesting can lead to great change.

In 1870, the United States extended voting rights to African American men through the Fifteenth Amendment. However, despite the fact that the 15th Amendment in 1870 codified that the right to vote could not be denied because of race Southern whites had effectively disenfranchised most Southern blacks by the late 1880s (Santoro). Considering that the priority of that time in history was to reunite the states after a civil war, the federal government did not pressure the former confederate states to enforce the amendments. Ever since 1870, state and local governments across the South established barriers to keep African Americans from voting. Therefore, in order to make the Southern support toward racial discrimination legal in a way, Congress first targeted the poll tax, an important early barrier especially in states where the tax was cumulative (Santoro). For generations, African Americans were subsequently subjected to poll taxes, grandfather clauses and difficult tests, before they could cast a ballot. All this history prior to 1965, including examples of previous successful nonviolent protests and the number of barriers African Americans had to face, is what pushed the March to Montgomery forward. Legal segregation in the voting system ended when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965, proving to protesters and American citizens that demanding change through peaceful protesting is executing one’s rights and it leads to successful outcomes.

Leaders that had a reputation for effective speeches, protests and methods to end racial discrimination, were the ones determined to take action in the form of nonviolent protesting because that was the only successful approach to result on federal enforcement of voting rights. The leader of the march of 1965, Martin Luther King Jr., had already been exposed to the struggles and benefits of an important nonviolent movement, like the Civil Rights Movement. According to Santoro, “Segregationist violence seems to have helped the movement win Southern suffrage since only then the audience was attentive, sympathetic and involved” (Santoro). Therefore, the massive use of violence and injustice since 1776, ironically pushed the movement of 1950 forward. The political strategy of King and his awareness that the press would play a significant role throughout the march is what fostered the nonviolent march to Montgomery to popular support. His reputation and connections and knowledge helped on guiding the march to Montgomery on the right direction.

On a previous attempt, with a different leader of the march, the Alabama State Troopers at the orders of Governor George Wallace advanced on a group of African-Americans leading the march to Montgomery across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Using bull-whips and tear gas, the armed troopers made short work of the defenseless protestors, injuring 57 of them while enforcing the strict segregation of the South (Brown). The protests and riots gained so much popular support as to gain the attention of President Lyndon B. Johnson, who declared that he *deplored the brutality*. The movement became so popular in fact that according to Garrow, throughout the two months of the Selma campaign, “there appear in the texts of the congressional comments approximately six dozen explicit references to sources of information” concerning the Selma campaign and public reactions to it (Garrow, 266). After gaining all this publicity and public support, King was determined to start the nonviolent march from Selma to Montgomery in order to present the governor with the proposal for voting rights and to continue fighting the oppression. Selma became a turning point in the civil rights movement. King’s experience, connections and reputation had prepared a peaceful and successful march that demanded change and was successful in leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act just five months later; a law designed to prevent the denial of voting rights based on race.

The Selma-to-Montgomery march and its successful outcomes, weren’t simply the product of inspiring history and leadership but also a product of the nonviolent protesting example to progressive change. The peaceful protesting approach and the example the protesters set for future generations, are far more impactful than the outcome of the march to Montgomery. Let’s start by explaining the approach white men took with the founding of slavery in 1776. This way, the inevitable contrast will be clear. Segregationist murders had been going on from the founding of slavery in 1776 until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. The use of violence against African Americans had become a normality since the 15th century when Portugal, and subsequently other European nations, were finally able to expand overseas and reach Africa, to encourage and expand the slave trade (Krotoszynski). The key, however, that seems to have often proved its success throughout history, was the approach African Americans took to fight this injustice. The way they fought for their rights, was the complete opposite of the one white man forced into the African Americans for centuries. The two approaches were as opposing as the words *violence* and *peace* are. No matter the anger or sadness they had accumulated for generations, the protesters along with MLK’s inspiring personality, turned their anger into power and maturity by executing the *nonviolent direct-action* approach. The leaders and protesters that marched from Selma to Montgomery, followed the same example of peaceful protest, inspiring the generations to come to stand up for what they believe in and show the world that peacefully protesting can be successful in delivering the big message. Once this message is delivered and people unify, change becomes desirable and inevitable, no matter the resistance of the rest.

The right to peaceful protest is much desired and inspirational to some citizens, however to others it is an indirect threat of morals, a call to change the ordinary. To others, peaceful protests are ineffective because in many cases they tend to turn violent. To other points of view, the violence the nonviolent direct-action approach triggers is ineffective since its outcomes become inferior to the damage done. As Astor implies, “...some of the United States’ most prominent social movements have involved violent confrontations...and the results don’t fit a neat pattern.” Whether they involve a rally, a raised fist or a bent knee protests have always drawn a public backlash and when it comes to judging in terms of plain effectiveness, it is not always the case that peaceful protest helps a movement achieve its goals (Astor).

However, the violence and the “backlash” that prevent the peaceful protests from achieving their goal in a nonviolent matter, seem to have a neat pattern on where they originate from. The violence through the long march to Montgomery started by state troopers and not the protesters. Troopers fired tear gas into the crowd, causing disoriented protesters to weep and vomit while “...men on horses were moving in all directions, purposely riding over the tops of fallen people..."(Brown). And so it seems that the execution of the first amendment and the right to protest trigger the opposing side to turn violent towards peaceful protesters. In the meantime, between 1961 and 1965, instances of black protest coupled with continues white violence, include repeated mob attacks on freedom riders (1961); the highly-publicized use of police dogs and fire hoses against demonstrators in Birmingham as well as the use of similar tactics of violence surrounding the community-wide campaign in Selma (Santoro). In fact, in terms of plain effectiveness, peaceful protest does help a movement achieve its goal. The power of executing the first amendment right peacefully and constantly is what triggers the opposing side to turn violent. Such response proves that the peaceful protest is in fact effectively delivering the necessary message to the public, whether they decide to be part of the movement or not. As history has proved such claim, finally, the continues white violence “facilitated black efforts to achieve voting legislation” and it underscores the fact that the approach had shifted the audience in ways favorable to civil rights reforms by the early '60s (Santoro).

To conclude, the Selma to Montgomery March was one of the first protests that proved to many that once citizens stand up for their common beliefs, and for a long as the exigence, the leader and the approach they take, all come together peacefully into a movement, progress is inevitable. Protests such as these, kept alive by the spirit of activism, changed the course of history, inspiring generations to come to fight against racial injustice but not only. No matter the opposition, the fear did not prevent the March from Selma to Montgomery to accomplish its goal, abolishing the literacy tests and granting black citizens the right to vote.

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Reflection Paper

In this paper, I was assigned to write this argumentative essay that gives insightful information and develops an objective opinion on the matter about a topic, which I was already very familiar with and was passionate talking about. The reason why this topic is because of the impact it had on future generations, including the one we live in. The genre of this assignment is an argumentative essay. An argumentative essay is a biased essay that tends to not only give insight on the topic but rather argue it. The argument developed in the paper is supported by evidence and a counterclaim is usually mentioned, along with a strong rebuttal. The thesis of this assignment should be a biased and precise one, that highlights the main focus of the paper and does takes a stance on the issue/topic. My assignment follows the conventions of an argumentative essay because it informs the reader on a topic, the information is backed by evidence and the counterclaim is followed by a rebuttal, offering a stance and a biased view of the matter. The media of this assignment is only digital due to the closure of the university because of the pandemic.

The first part of this multi level project was the submission of the annotated bibliography on a topic we desired to research. It was composed of two introduction paragraphs and 5 different sources, including a book and academic journals, that would help as a research tool throughout the paper. The second part of this project was the composition of the expository essay. This part was crucial to the whole project because it required all the information gathering. We had to compose each paragraph separately rather than writing a first draft. The introduction and conclusion were the first paragraphs we composed and then came the body paragraphs and the first draft. This helped because sometimes it is very overwhelming to sit down for hours and do research and write the essay at the same time. This way we had more time to research daily and track our progress. The third part of the project is the argumentative paper for which we had a workshop, presenting an initial outline and our ideas on how the paper might go. To conclude the project, we had to create a PowerPoint explaining the key aspects of out papers. Every part of this multilevel project had to be submitted to the professor via Blackboard. Many supplements homework that helped complete the project, were submitted into the discussion section. This is because that way we could read each other's work and give feedback. Through our virtual classroom we were assigned different peers and we gave constructive criticism through the “Fishbowl” exercise.

The stance I took in this argumentative essay us that peaceful protesting has proved to be effective throughout history and is the only right way of protesting. In this essay I had to explain to the reader which side of the argument I lie on. Since the purpose of the argumentative essay is to persuade the reader into believing what the writer believes and is able to prove. I did my best to provide information supported by the annotated bibliography regarding the topic. My initial audience is my professor and my classmates in the peer review session. But there is a chance I might share this essay with friends and family members who wish to know more about the Selma to Montgomery March. The audience expands in that case. Now that I am developing an argument, the audience might be the people who believe in nonviolent social protesting and the opposing side as well. Through the amount of evidence and the persuasive tone, I have made my stance clear. The exigence for this assignment comes from the time I am living in and the amount of activism, especially this year, that reinforced the fight to injustice and racial discrimination. Protesters are seeking to fight against police brutality and many of the BLM protests have followed the same approach MLK followed; peacefully protesting.

This assignment meets course learning outcomes four, six and eight. CLO 4 is to engage in the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes. Since this is argumentative essay on a social topic I was able to write a paper that relates to the time and circumstances I live in. As a result, this will ignite discussions and an exchange of opinions with other peers that might have a different opinion on the matter. CLO 6 is to locate research sources (including academic journal articles, magazine and newspaper articles) in the library’s databases or archives and on the internet and evaluate them for credibility, accuracy, timeliness, and bias. The assignment meets this course outcome because the annotated bibliography had to be created using only the CCNY library’s databases. Not only did we have to find academic journals and books that provided insight for the specific topic we chose to discover, but we had to evaluate the credibility of the sources as well. The last CLO this paper meets is number 8. This one highlights the practice of systematic application of citation conventions. This assignment meets this learning objective because throughout the paper I had to include evidence to inform the reader of details about the topic. This meant that I had to properly cite my evidence throughout each body paragraph.