

Both the Civil Rights and the Women's Rights movements of the mid 20th century had a similar goal in mind: To create opportunities for their minority groups that were as equal as the majority had. These movements had to deal with the question of how one goes about pursuing such opportunities effectively. In this paper my primary goal is to compare, account for, and assess the effectiveness of the methods used in both the Civil Rights Movement and the Liberal Feminism Movement. To go about this I'll first talk about each movement and their methods separately, and then do some direct comparison and analysis.

For the purposes of discussing the Civil Rights Movement I'm going to be looking specifically at the 1957 integration of Little Rock Central High School and the Selma to Montgomery march. Melba Beals was one of nine black high school students in Little Rock, Arkansas that chose to participate in the integration of their city's Central High School after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (WDC 22). Arkansas' governor initially blocked that integration by using the state's national guard (WDC 48), but eventually, with security support provided by the federal government via the 101st Airborne Division of the Army Beals and her classmates entered Central High School and was able to go to class (WDC 134).

That was, of course, not the end of their worries. All but a very few of their white classmates wanted them out of school. Each school day the Black students faced painful actions by whites (WDC 162). The Black students all needed to find some way of coping with their situation in order to survive. Beals' grandmother (who lived with her, her mother, and her brother) was the first to introduce her to Gandhi's work in India, and his theories of nonviolence (WDC 210). From that point

on Beals practiced nonviolence as her only way of coping with her situation (WDC 262). An example of this was when Beals did her homework in the lunchroom instead of breaking through a crowd of white boys trying to hurt her. During this time she even turned their hurtful comments into complements (WDC 260). Once when one of her fellow black students fought back with violence it started a downward trend that ultimately forced them all out for the rest of the year (WDC 220). That the use of violence undoes the effect of nonviolent action follows the basic theories of nonviolent action campaigns, though no one in Little Rock thought of integration as a nonviolent campaign (of course in reality the whole Civil Rights Movement was known as a nonviolent campaign).

The second movement within the larger Civil Rights Movement (which started with the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* ruling and moved through desegregation in public facilities up to the voting rights act) that I want to discuss is the Selma to Montgomery march that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Martin Luther King Jr. helped organize. Through years of struggle the government proved unable to secure civil rights for Black people, and so activists started to take matters into their own hands in the early 1960s. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an offshoot of SCLC, began the Selma voting rights campaign, which was a campaign to get blacks registered to vote. As that campaign started running out of money SCLC and MLK moved in to take it over and worked on continuing it.

The Selma to Montgomery march was in response to white murders of blacks. They proceeded with the march even when the governor ordered it stopped

and as such were met with immense violence from law enforcement. Following pre-march training most marchers kept to strictly nonviolent behavior, and those that used violence got talked into understanding how nonsensical and suicidal violence is. It was after this bout of violence that SNCC was on board with the march to help combat such violence in the future. However, shortly after SNCC pulled its support and started organizing in Montgomery.

Though both the students involved with the Little Rock integration effort and the marchers in the Selma to Montgomery march used the underlying method of nonviolence, the tactics they used were different, as was the language they used in talking about the movements. First of all, nonviolence was a trained tactic for the marchers but something that the Little Rock students really came to understand themselves. Secondly, the marchers were one large group whereas the students were individuals. The language used to talk about the Civil Rights Movement morphed from being political in Little Rock to religious in Selma. In Selma you had SCLC, religious leaders, and churches as meeting places, just to name a few of the religious influences on the new movement. "Personality" was being used to refer to the theological notion of "humanness" in the Selma campaign. Overall nonviolence is the method that we'll be comparing to the methods of the Liberal Feminism Movement in a few pages.

The Liberal Feminism Movement was initially fueled by the black Civil Rights Movement and then by the broader social upheaval during the 1960s (H 861). In 1961 "Kennedy appointed a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, which issued a 1963 report documenting job and education

discrimination.” (H 861) This led to Title VII in the Civil Rights Act to make discrimination based on sex illegal when it was signed in 1964. In 1966 the National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded by liberal feminists based on the NAACP with the aim of bringing civil rights to women where the legislation wasn't being honored (H 861).

The liberal feminists were primarily well-educated older white women of the middle-to-upper class who were in professional positions. They spoke to both their generation and the younger generation. The Liberal Feminism Movement used many of the same strategies and methods as the Civil Rights Movement. As with portions of the Civil Rights Movement portions of the Liberal Feminism Movement used strikes and boycotts (WDMN), as well as other nonviolent techniques. In 1969 the media caught on to the movement and brought a wider audience into it that in turn created more momentum to get their goals met (H 862) alongside the goals of blacks (King had actually advocated equality for all not just blacks). The opportunities for women in higher education expanded, as did their visibility in public life (H 863). The movement, fueled by these successes, renewed a push for an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution (H 863). Initially this push split the movement because it jeopardized protective legislation that limited women's work hours, but that fear didn't prevent feminists from favoring the amendment (H 863). The amendment was adopted in 1972 and states began adopting it, but adoption abruptly halted two years down the road (H 863) and ultimately failed. This halt came from conservative opposition in three-fourths of the states (H 865). Two prominent opponents had these views: Jerry Falwell opposed the amendment

because he believed that women deserved more while Sam Ervin opposed the amendment because he believed that God made women less capable than men (H 865).

The ERA provoked a political struggle with both supporters and opponents mobilizing and lobbying their legislators (H 864). The work of the Liberal Feminism Movement started to merge with the work of the Civil Rights Movement, as both were movements seeking similar rights for their respective minority groups. Blacks were largely the group violently pushed back against, and the group for which Affirmative Action was initially formed, but both movements were met with similar opposition as they played out at the same time (H 866).

For the purposes of the comparison, which will constitute the remainder of this paper, I'll be focusing on the ways of making their message known as the methods of the Liberal Feminism Movement since the nonviolent commitment was equal for both the Civil Rights Movement and Liberal Feminism Movement. These ways include the unusual method of yelling out quotations from the president in front of the White House.

Let me start my comparison by digging into the reasons why I think the Civil Rights Movement used nonviolence while the Liberal Feminism Movement used similar tactics without being as strictly nonviolent. Both the women of the Liberal Feminism Movement and blacks were minorities, but blacks were by far considered a definite minority due to skin color. Feminist women (for the purposes of this paper) fall into the majority white population and are therefore protected to some extent from undue harm by authorities. Blacks on the Selma to Montgomery march

couldn't expose their anger towards whites since that would be detrimental to their goals, and so formally emphasized their nonviolent commitment.

Nonviolence is a powerful tool that, though as we've seen recently can accompany extreme anger when used by the majority, fits snugly with extreme calm when used by the minority. In the recent nonviolent social revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt nonviolence was the tool of the majority of the populations of these countries who were undoubtedly extremely angry with their country's government. In our Civil Rights Movement nonviolence was the most useful tool for the blacks because they were (and still are) the minority. Anger in their case would have been detrimental, but nonviolence was still the tool of choice. For the Liberal Feminism Movement there was some room for angered nonviolence, but to be on par with the Civil Rights Movement they used nonviolence like the tool of the minority as well.

To account for the use of nonviolence as the method of the blacks in the Civil Rights Movement you simply need to walk through their circumstances, opportunities sought, and the overall historical context. Though the Civil Rights Movement accomplished this goal in manageable steps, the ultimate goal was equality with whites (quite similar to the feminists' goal of equality with men). The true power of nonviolence can be shown with the example of marchers seeing the humanness in their opponents while pushing back against them. Furthermore nonviolence fits the larger shape of any religious movement, which SCLC and King turned the Civil Rights Movement into, as it is commonly thought of.

Accounting for the slightly wider array of methods used in the Liberal Feminism Movement can be done by describing their goals and circumstances. This

movement had a goal as extensive as racial equality since gender equality with skin of the same color felt like a task of the same size to the feminists. The existing protective legislation, along with their existing role in families, was a kind of barrier that the members of this movement used to shield themselves from some of the backlash their methods could inflict.

Which method was more efficient at attaining the similar goals for their respective minorities? I would say that nonviolence would always be a method worth choosing for movements similar to the Civil Rights Movement and Liberal Feminism Movement. I also say that the religious affiliations of the latter portion of the Civil Rights Movement legitimized nonviolence for many of the marchers as the proper method. The methods of the Civil Rights Movement fit with the religious language it had, where in the Liberal Feminism Movement they used secular political language as their primary way of discussing the movement.

In conclusion we find that nonviolent methods are best for achieving civil rights goals when looking at the two movements compared here. Nothing has seemed to largely revert from any of the decisions in the heat of the movements since then, so we can rightly use that as further evidence of the effectiveness of nonviolence. Historical contexts and precedents were heavy in the effectiveness of the methods as well.