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Essay 2
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The story of the United States cannot be told without paying respect to the brave individuals who risked their lives in order to fight against systemic oppression. From the founding of the NAACP in 1909 to the modern Black Lives Matter movement, the fight for civil rights in America has been a constant effort for change made by ordinary people doing extraordinary things. The fight for civil rights has never been a smooth linear success; organizational shortcomings and infighting over leadership or methodology created friction between the large civil rights organizations, however the fight for civil rights at its heart has always been the dutiful repose against the wrongful denial of civil rights made by both individuals and state institutions. Throughout American history, different civil rights organizations have fought for various causes and objectives; however, they have all proactively harnessed their oppressors' tools of subjugation and used them as their very instruments for liberation.

During the late 19th century, scientific racism provided the intellectual justification for the oppression of black people. This pernicious ideology fostered arrogance and fear among white Americans, resulting in abundant violence and the continual legal dismissal of civil liberties for Black Americans, thereby preventing the integration of American society. It was the confounding effects of three events that prompted the organizing of the NAACP; first, the escalation of lynchings in the 1870s, which established a precedent of extralegal violence going unpunished.¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 further established the legal precedent for segregation with its ruling that separate is in fact equal.¹ Following the legal legitimization of segregation, further social tension in communities began to grow with the release of "Birth of a Nation," a film that reinforced the notion that white people must protect their women from estranged black men, resulting in the second coming of the KKK.¹ Whether through acquitting murderers or denying civil liberties, it was the continual failure of our judicial systems to provide Black Americans their constitutional right of equal protection under the law that motivated the formation of the NAACP.

In 1954 the NAACP took a role in the *Brown V Board of Education* case by utilizing the Doll Study conducted by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark; their evidence proved that institutionalized segregation psychologically damaged children by predefining what a good vs bad person looks like, therefore affecting black children's ability to hold self worth.⁴ Because of this evidence, the NAACP was able to prove that it is impossible to maintain both social equality and racial separation at the same time, thus overruling the "separate but equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The brilliance of the NAACP's strategy in *Brown v. Board* stems from the masterful usage of the same empirical methodology used by their oppressors' to maintain their own institutions and preconceptions about segregation in order to win a trial about

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removing a legal precedence for segregation itself. *Brown v. Board* was only one of many instances that proved the NAACP capable of achieve judicial victories, however the ruling also revealed the limitations of the organizations abilities. The NAACP consistently showed the inability to help intact real social change. Even after the *Brown V. Board II*, there was not enough of a local push for real social change, leading to little real integration happening as school officials responsible for integration simply worked “with all deliberate speed”.³ It was this lack of community level leadership that facilitated the need for a new, more confrontational approach to directly challenge segregation in everyday life.

Dr.King joined the NAACP before the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, but he soon grew tired with the lack of urgency in regard to everyday social recognition. In 1963 while in a Birmingham jail Dr.King wrote a letter which stated “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was 'well timed' according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation.”⁵ What Dr. King is acknowledging in this letter is that the oppressed cannot wait for the 'perfect moment' to fight for their rights as that moment will never exist, due to the fact that oppressors will never voluntarily declare such a moment to exist. By demanding freedom immediately rather than waiting for permission, we as activists create the conditions necessary for change. During the 60's the US was deep in Cold War tensions, the US found itself pumping out propaganda proclaiming itself as the shining beacon of freedom and democracy.² Meaning that any broadcast of systemic oppression or racial injustice provided the Soviets with excellent propaganda for the American hypocrisy. The SCLC recognized this vulnerability and developed methods to exploit it, when police dogs were unleashed on Birmingham protesters SCLC strategist Wyatt Tee Walking enthusiastically declared, “We've got a movement. We've got a movement. We had some police brutality. They brought out the dogs. They brought out the dogs. We've got a movement!”⁶ The SCLC was going to use the nation's violent reluctance to integrate as the very tool to integrate.

It was the combination of having the urgency as well as understanding on how to use said urgency to fuel a non-violent civil rights movement that made SCLC so successful. The SCLC enacted Project C, which used direct action, non-violent protests in an effort to peacefully provoke violence, thereby triggering all levels of government through the broadcasting of an American hypocrisy for the whole world to see.³ Sit-ins, marches, and boycotts were targeted at cities with violent tendencies in order to achieve the largest media backlash possible. Through the provocation of violence by simply engaging in everyday activities, the SCLC was able to expose the brutal reality of segregation that still persisted despite the end of separate but equal. The continuous act of protesting led to more and more media attention, motivating the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlined the immediate end to segregation in all public spaces as well as enacted federal funding cuts as punishment for noncompliance.³ Because of SCLC's use of the media to document the violent reactions caused by direct action protesting, the

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organization was able to leverage Cold War tensions enough to spark sufficient national outrage in order to expose the true nature of American liberty, and through the direct challenging of the status quo, the SCLC was able to motivate a complete and immediate federal overhaul. That being said, the very people who participated in the direct action found that race relations only deteriorated due to the purposeful provocation of local residents. The focus on national victories in the media meant that the SCLC was unable to stay in any one community for too long, potentially risking the future of the entire organization due to missing the next hot opportunity. The failure to distribute resources and to translate legal victories into real improvements led communities to feel abandoned, left to themselves to navigate the heightened racial tensions on their own.

When analyzing the NAACP and the SCLC, we see a recurring continuity between the organizations in how they demonstrated the same core strategy of using that which is oppressing as their greatest tool in your fight for freedom. The NAACP demonstrated how to utilize their oppressors' framework in court to expose the flaws in segregationist policy. Similarly, the SCLC harnessed the power of the national media in order to expose the inexcusable acts of violence afflicting Black Americans due to the effects of failing to integrate, challenging the nation's credibility through the national media. Both the NAACP and SCLC failed at creating a complete and lasting fix for all the problems our nation has regarding race, but they both still made progress! Each organization built on the historical precedent they inherited, and together they were able to make some of the largest civil rights victories in our nation's history. Both groups also continued to build off of the legacy of past Americans fighting for civil rights, inspiring future good-willed Americans to stand up and fight for the rights of their fellow citizens.

A recent example of Americans continuing to stand together to protect each other's civil rights started as a simple hashtag and quickly evolved into a global movement against racial injustices and police violence. The Black Lives Matter movement utilizes direct action, non-violent protest strategies similar to those implemented by the SCLC. Protestors gather and/or march in populated areas, and when the inevitable police response comes, protesters either protest for fair treatment or get videos of fully armored police officers tear gassing and using rubber bullets on unarmed protesters, all to be posted on social media, further exposing abuses of power for the whole world to see. Due to the advancements in media distribution, unlike the SCLC, the BLM movement has been able to apply a more consistent and nationwide pressure on legislatures due to the decentralized nature of a movement propagated by the free spread of information over social media. This has allowed BLM to maintain a consistent presence in communities, building off the shortcoming of both the SCLC and the NAACP relating to post-policy accountability. Due to the nature of modern technology, it's hard to separate the BLM movements in New York vs Los Angeles, instead of two movements happening on opposite sides of the nation they act as one connected entity creating more credibility for the movement as a whole.

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Take for instance the SCLC Albany, Georgia campaign in 1961, regarded as a general failure. Due to a miscalculation made by SCLC leadership, the organization didn't account for the city purposefully not reacting in order to avoid creating a larger controversy. Instead, the Albany movement resulted in only escalating racial tensions without garnering any of the productive media attention the SCLC was probing for.³ Due to the distributed nature of the BLM movement, no one person or region has to bear the sole responsibility for organizing and directing the movement, meaning that the movement doesn't have to leave a community in an effort to achieve the larger goal. All of the smaller achievements made by each region compound on each other in parallel, allowing for more simultaneous movements across multiple fronts, leading to hopefully faster social justice reform across the entire nation. This is a fundamentally new concept for civil rights movements, and we are still yet to see the full implications of it. At no other time in history have people had the tools to so readily organize and effectively distribute ideas in a large parallel system, allowing for a new methodology for maintaining accountability for civil rights, one that is cheap, constant, and world wide.

Dr. King wrote this in his letter from Birmingham jail, "For years now I have heard the word 'wait.' It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This 'wait' has almost always meant 'never.' It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.' We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights."⁵ Due to the distributed nature of modern civil rights movements, we don't have to live in a world where we wait for injustices to occur in order to stand up for liberty. Through the distribution of free thought we as a nation have the power to constantly hold our government accountable for the preservation of our constitutional rights.

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