

Florence Kent
16 March 2022

Eye for an Eye

“Early in life, I had learned that if you want something, you had better make some noise.” (Malcolm) Throughout history from MLK Jr. to Mahatma Gandhi, it has been seen that non-violence has been portrayed as the answer to injustice, but throughout history, it has been seen that the opposite can also be true because sometimes violence has the spice nonviolence does not, because there is no denying that the Stonewall Riots or the Bolshevik revolution brought much change to oppressed communities. Violent protests bring change, bring a group together, and make those opposed to revolt see strength and become more open to the violent protests. Bringing change is the main act in bringing about a better life, for everyone and through violent protests, this can be achieved.

The first pride was a riot, and as such, “The air grew thick with chants — along with bottles and bricks.” (Walsh) Protecting yourself from oppressors and attacking them is a right of vengeance exacted by the oppressed but through violence. Throughout much of colonized history, queer people have been punished for coming out of the hetero-normative mold which is why the marches after Stonewall were so important: “The marches were among the first highly visible public events for people to express their gay sexuality and for allies to have an opportunity to support the gay people in their lives” (Walsh). Through Stonewall, change was made, the first pride was held in NY, and then many more marches elsewhere, making real changes from a riot, to a violent protest. Through Walsh, the legacy that Stonewall has built is shown, and how out of violence blooms a revolution of change. Stonewall was a riot against the oppressors, but after the same year, NY had its very first pride march, and there were many more

all across the U.S. showing how violence leads to those oppressed coming into the light and trying to break their chains. The oppressors' favorite tool is violence as seen, "Police started threatening, shoving. And then a [police] baton struck someone. So some guys started picking up stones. Bricks started flying over," (Beckett). When the oppressed are faced with violence they are asked to be only nonviolent as a counter, the Stonewall riots started as a result of police forcing themselves into New York's Greenwich Village a bar that was a safe haven for queer people. The Stonewall riots were started as a result of the oppressors using violence, but when the queer folk there picked up the bricks and rioted they were able to gain change because it led the queer community to form more radical inclusive groups not catering to just gay men or lesbians. They also began staging public protests in front of politicians forcing them to view the people they are oppressing helping lead to more law changes. The oppressed wanted to take the protest to the streets so they proclaimed, "But all we wanted was to get the street clear. You don't do that by politely asking buses and passing cars, 'Can you divert?' You've got to take the street *now*," (Beckett). Violence is used as a tool to suppress but it can also be used to fight for a better future, one without violence. As shown, in the Toxteth riots the oppressed, even if out of a misunderstanding, are harassed and beaten over and over again, by standing up for themselves by throwing bricks and getting violent they find hope in the tool that has been used against them time after time. Within these quotes it is shown the unnecessary violence enforced on the oppressed but how the oppressed can use violence to 'take the street' and show the oppressors the violence they inflicted and show them why there should be change. Through violent means change can be enacted, if the tool of the oppressor can be used viciously and without discrepancy then may the oppressed also take up their arms and use it for a beneficial change to society. Violence has led to greater equality between those with privilege and those without and lower

rates of unemployment in Toxteth and has led to queer people being able to take a front stance in society. Change in the whole of society however is not the only necessary key to a successful movement also bringing a group together so they can avoid infighting and stick to a cause.

Many before whether they are liberals or conservatives have quoted the famous words of MLK Jr. “A society that judges people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” But do they know the history behind the person of nonviolence that they claim America loved, no. In one of the most powerful and oppressive systems, America, is set to go against anything that could overturn their power and challenge their oppression such as violent protest, and as such the FBI was set to go after anyone they considered under communist influence, which is first a direct violation of the first amendment which states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”, but regardless of this, they went after people considered under communist influence because they did not conform to the people in power, one of their targets being MLK jr. Following how they decided to go after Martin Luther King jr. They set up letters addressed to him “Eventually, the FBI penned and sent King an anonymous letter, along with some of their tapes, suggesting that he should kill himself.” Most of America due to the amount of propoganda being spread hated King, when more militant groups that were gaining change faster than King came they decided they would settle for Martin Luther King jr., because they saw the more militant groups as a greater danger to overturning the current political structures, therefore bringing greater change. Society claims that people like, Martin Luther King jr. or Gandhi, brought the most change in the best way

possible, but this isn't the complete truth, the oppressors that the peaceful protesters are trying to defy don't care about nonviolence versus violence, as long as they can maintain power, they choose to give the nonviolent protesters more ground and giving in to some of their demands compared to the forceful demands of more violent protests, finding a so-called middle ground that causes the oppressed to settle for less.

In finding a way for the oppressed to no longer be oppressed they need to be able to rally together and find something to bring them together; something for them to rally together for could be violent protests. Violence can be utilized for change or a continuation of oppression because oppression through generations is something to be uprooted by the community as a whole which other forms of protest can take longer to achieve, "*Historical oppression* describes the chronic, pervasive, and intergenerational experiences of oppression that, over time, may be normalized, imposed and internalized," (Burnette). As many endure this historical oppression, "Thus, those with less power may emulate the oppressor in hopes of attaining power or preventing backlash," (Brunette). Though the oppressed try to conform to the oppressors' mold, hatred has continued to be part of the culture. Historical oppression leads to internalized hatred, imposed hurt on one's community, and normalizing of the circumstances of those oppressed. If historical oppression were to be viewed through a lens of protest then those who sought change would be the focus as they're the ones asserting for a change to be made. Through violent protest, historical oppression can be identified and specifically targeted at what is still superseding the normalization and imposition of continuation of oppressed values.

Though they have been vilified throughout history, “ Black Panthers believed that nonviolent protests could not truly liberate black Americans or give them power over their own lives,” (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture). Then as, “ Its members confronted politicians, challenged the police, and protected black citizens from brutality,” (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture), they created a future that was freer because of these confrontations and violence, through their free breakfast program, the reforming of police, and the change society's view of Black people. Through the Black Panther’s strifes in arming themselves and fighting against their oppressive forces such as the state and the police, they showed the rest of White America what they should hear. Without the help of violent tactics there can be ‘no power to the people’, power to the people is something that needs to be gotten at any cost, including violence. If oppressive forces aren’t willing to change the tactics of their oppression in violence the oppressed should not have to have tactics that are laying down and taking the violence and hoping that those in the ranks of the oppressors feel enough pity to give them enough ground that they can kneel and not stand. Violence does what nonviolence can not; therefore, bringing those in chains to their feet and letting them run free, bringing longevity to our society.

Opposition to these movements is one of the biggest barriers, but sometimes violence can change the opposition of these groups. Through many other countries' own political changes it has been shown that “The change was no less stark for having been forced by circumstances since it implied that even radical social and political change did not necessarily endanger the vital interests of the United States,” (LeoGrande 29). As rightfully spoken by a U.S. official “you cannot take away from the Sandinistas at the conference table what they have won on the battlefield,” (LeoGrande 27). Through this LeoGrande shows through the United States'

interference in Central America, that no matter how big or widespread the opposition is to the group that wants change there will be change. Change can be brought through battle and violence because it is not only words and as has been famously quoted, 'sticks and stones may break my bones', but words will never hurt me. Politicians may say that riots only push the moderates away, "But riots don't just lead to more attention — other urban upheavals in the 1960s and 1990s led to real reforms in local police departments and governments, and the Justice Department is now pushing the Baltimore Police Department into reform following its investigation,"(Lopez). So "By drawing attention to some of the real despair in destitute communities, riots can push the public and leaders to initiate real reforms to fix whatever led to the violent rage," (Lopez), and as such a way is found to leave disgruntled feelings behind in exchange for a better future. Throughout it has been seen that the riots bring media attention that is not given to those who are nonviolent unless they roll on their backs for whatever the moderate demands. In showing that the riots are out of genuine and an extreme depth of repressed anger showing that they can be valid forms of protest shows that they show the despair of those who are oppressed; through evoking violence it can be shown how in despair these communities are, because if people are not brought to violence how bad can it be. Wars only come when someone wants something or when times are dire, and is it not the same when those who are oppressed want to demand justice.

Throughout history, although nonviolence has been pushed as the only solution, violent protests are also good, because they bring change, they bring a group together, and they can change outsiders' opposition to the group. Through violent protests, there are changes made in history to allow these oppressed groups a route to political justice and greater or equal freedom to their oppressors. There has also been seen when violence has been used by the oppressed that

the rest of the group rallies behind them and creates a stronger overall movement letting them accomplish more goals without as much infighting. While nonviolent protests are a necessary way to pursue change that doesn't mean they are the only way. Violent protests are looked down upon by the masses and those in authority, but they have contributed more than nonviolence has and have pressure to be radically quicker and be distributed to all of the masses in pursuit of a better society.

Works Cited

- Beckett, Andy. "Toxteth, 1981: The Summer Liverpool Burned – by the Rioter and Economist on Opposite Sides." *The Guardian*, 14 Sept. 2015, www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/sep/14/toxteth-riots-1981-summer-liverpool-burned-pa-trick-minford-jimi-jagne.
- Burnette, Catherine Elizabeth, and Charles R. Figley. "Historical Oppression, Resilience, and Transcendence: Can a Holistic Framework Help Explain Violence Experienced by Indigenous People?" *Social Work*, vol. 62, no. 1, 5 Nov. 2016, pp. 37–44, 10.1093/sw/sww065.
- Constitute Project. "United States of America 1789 (Rev. 1992)." *Constituteproject.org*, 2018, www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_States_of_America_1992.

“Documentary Exposes How the FBI Tried to Destroy MLK with Wiretaps, Blackmail.”

NPR.org, 18 Jan. 2021,

www.npr.org/2021/01/18/956741992/documentary-exposes-how-the-fbi-tried-to-destroy-mlk-with-wiretaps-blackmail.

Hager, Robert P., and Robert S. Snyder. “The United States and Nicaragua: Understanding the Breakdown in Relations.” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2015, pp. 3–35, www.jstor.org/stable/26926190. Accessed 5 Mar. 2022.

History.com Editors. “Civil Rights Movement.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 27 Oct. 2009, www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement.

Leogrande, William M. *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*. Chapel Hill, Nc, University Of North Carolina Press, 1998.

“The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change | National Museum of African American History and Culture.” *Nmaahc.si.edu*, nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change.

Walsh, Colleen. “Harvard Scholars Reflect on the History and Legacy of the Stonewall Riots.” *Harvard Gazette*, Harvard Gazette, 27 June 2019, news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/06/harvard-scholars-reflect-on-the-history-and-legacy-of-the-stonewall-riots/.

