

20th Century History

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Black Power Movement justification

Are the extreme lengths the Black Power Movement went to justified? I believe that the Black Power Movement was justified to achieve the goal of equal rights and fair treatment. The first source I will analyze is the “Historians and the Black Power Movement” by Peniel E. Joseph. Peniel E. Joseph is a joint professor for the LBJ School of Public Affairs and the History Department in the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin, and the creator of the “Black Power Studies” sub-field. He is an award-winning author for his narratives on the history of Black Power in America. This excerpt of a magazine was created in 2008 and was published in the OAH Magazine of history. This excerpt was written to make the reader rethink the Black Power Movement itself, not as the romanticized bus boycott filled victorious era as many media outlets present it as. Nor is it the short lived ineffective movement that created tension and backlash as other extreme media will presents it as, but as a medium in between both. This document exists to give the readers a deeper understanding on the Movement itself and how many accounts of history may have skewed its perception. The author presumably chose this format because a magazine is very accessible to many people relatively inexpensively, and the people who have

subscribed to a history focused magazine would have a higher chance of being interested in this topic. This excerpt goes into depth on just how much of a watershed moment the Black Power Movement was, to many of the important people and groups that made it possible for this movement to occur. This is valuable to my argument because understanding how massive and influential the Black Power Movement was, is the first step to understanding of this Movement was justified. Even though this excerpt was able to find and analyze many primary sources, the author himself did not live through the era and was not able to experience this first hand. The second source I will analyze is "LIFE and Civil Rights: Segregation in 1956 South Carolina" Ben Cosgrove. Ben Cosgrove is a writer and editor for TIME Magazine and an editor for the political site the Netizen. This article was created in 2012, in TIME Magazine. The purpose of this article was to inform the readers of the magazine about the atrocities of life during segregation. This format was chosen presumably because putting this article in a major magazine would reach a lot of potentially interested people. This is valuable to my argument because it shows how bad the situation was and how much a change was needed. The limitations of this article are that the author was not alive or African American, so he cannot fully understand or experience truly how bad it was. The origin of this excerpt is important to the writing of this article because it is meant to be a brief synopsis of an issue that is pressing to the author. The limit is that because magazines main goal is to sell more copies, the article may have been written in a way that almost sensationalized the issue to become more eye catching and appealing to buyers. The limit of this is that because the article may have been sensationalized. The content was

valuable because it goes into detail about the struggles of segregation. The limit to this was that neither article showed the opposing sides of the argument.

During the segregation era, the many of the courts and judicial systems were set up to systematically oppress ethnic minorities. The Black Power Movement did not always delve into the legal sides of the way they operate. Legislation was not always an effective way of obtaining a goal, especially with regards to civil rights. Even on the off chance that a piece of legislation was passed, it was not always enforced. One example of this was the separate but equal laws. Under this law public things, water fountains, restaurants, buses etc., could be segregated, but only if it were equal for all races. Unfortunately, seldom were these actually equal. The colored version of these would be dirty, run down, dilapidated and out of the way while the white counterparts would be clean and well kept. Another example of this would when many African Americans were denied constitutional rights, one of these rights denied was the right to vote. Even when legislation is passed it did not always help the cause. The Black Power Movement recognized that to progress the African American race, legislation would not be the most efficient way of going about it.

While laws and legislation can be ignored protests cannot. The most famous of the protests were the civil rights protests, specifically the protests for equal opportunities and the end of discrimination based upon race. These protests included the iconic Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington and the Selma to Montgomery March and events at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a protest from December 5, 1955 to December 20, 1956. During this year of protest, many African American people who would usually ride the bus found other ways to get to their destination. This included walking, biking, and even carpooling to get to work and back. This protest was for the desegregation of the bus system. This protest was so powerful because it hit their target audience, the bus company, where it hurts, their bottom line. These protests were successful because the bus company did desegregate the buses to keep their business afloat. The second of the very

influential protests was the March on Washington. This massive protest consisted of a quarter million people who marched to the Washington Monument to protest job inequality and race relations. When the protesters reached the Washington Monument they heard the famous "I Have a Dream" speech. This was a defining moment for the Civil Rights Movement. This protest brought an immense amount of attention to the cause of civil rights, and helped achieve the goal of equal opportunities. The Selma to Montgomery March was a peaceful protest met with violence. The march was intended to be a 54-mile peaceful walk to vote. This march was met with brutal police force. The police beat many of the protesters with night sticks, the beatings were so bad many referred to this day as bloody Sunday. One activist James Reeb even died, he became a martyr for their cause.

Unfortunately, many of the peaceful protests were ignored so many members who believed in the cause took another route. This sub group urged all African American people to arm themselves and take a stand against oppression. The Black Power Movement members were prepared to act civilly or not civilly to gain equal rights and status, meaning they were prepared to retaliate violently to their oppressors. Like the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement would organize rallies and marches but these on the other hand could become violent. One of the most famous cases of these violent rallies is the Watts Riots. The Watts Riots was a six day riots in a very racially divided neighborhood in Los Angeles. The arrest and police brutality of Marquette Frye was the catalyst of the riots. Rumors of police brutality and the beating of a pregnant woman spread like wildfire. A crowd then formed at the spot where Frye was arrested on Avalon Boulevard. This crowd quickly became violent attacking the police with stones. During the six days, the riots then expanded to cover 46 miles. Over

50,000 black people looted, burned and attacked other races causing upwards of 40 million dollars in damages. These riots were so out of control that the National Guard was called to subdue them. Upwards of 30 of people lost their lives because of the police in these riots. In total, there were almost 1000 buildings damaged, looted or destroyed by these riots. Another of these riots was the 12th Street Riot in Detroit, which occurred July 23, 1967 to July 28, 1967. By Monday, there were almost 500 reported fires and 1,800 arrests. The National Guard even brought in tanks to try to regain peace. In total there were 43 deaths, most of which were black and came at the hands of the National Guard and the fires. There were almost 1,200 injuries most of them were civilians, over 7,200 arrests, there were also over 2,500 stores that were damaged in these riots. On top of that there were hundreds of families that were now homeless because of the riots.

These last examples show just to what lengths people would go to achieve equal rights and fair treatment, but was it worth it? “Conversely, Black Power has been viewed as a destructive, short-lived, and politically ineffectual movement that triggered white backlash, urban rioting, and severely crippled the mainstream civil rights struggle. Black Power’s classical period of 1966-1975 is most often characterized as a kind of fever dream dominated by out-sized personalities who spewed words of fire that make this a justly forgotten era. Moreover, histories of the New Left tend to blame Black Power radicalism for inspiring white radicals towards a simplistic and tragically romantic view of “revolutionary” violence” This quote shows an opposing viewpoint that disagrees with my claim. The Black Power Movement was viewed as destructive because the peaceful

protests that occurred early on were ignored and were achieving progress too slowly. These 'destructive' protests only occurred to gain national attention for the cause and with a goal to achieve and maintain a level playing field between the African American race and the white counterparts. The white animosity towards the African American race already existed but just manifested itself differently after the Black Power Movement. The movement was viewed as short because it was relatively successful. Even though goal of full racial equality to this day has not been fully reached, at the end of this era, around 1975, major progress had been made.

Most of the works that I referenced were from a historian analyzing primary sources and first-hand accounts. This gives the works much more validity because primary sources are always viewed as the most reliable sources and a historian is able to give good input on the source. The biggest limitation I ran into was that the author was not alive during the era the essay discusses. This means that the author never came in contact with the treatment they discussed. All of the historian analysis was of sources and not their own first-hand account. A large challenge many of the historians faced was coming to a conclusion if the Black Power Movement was successful. Judging the treatment of a large group of people is hard to measure. Unlike a mathematician there is no numerical data on the treatment of a group of people. Archive based history has a unique set of challenges because many of the sources and people who could give first-hand accounts either passed or aren't able to be found. Meaning that many primary sources are not found, limiting the amount of sources available to be analyzed.

According to Oxford Dictionaries bias is defined as, prejudice in favor of or against one

thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair” and selection as, “the action or fact of carefully choosing someone or something as being the best or most suitable”. The main difference between the two is the intention. Bias has a negative connotation, its intentions are to lift one group above the other or lower one beneath its counterparts. Selection on the other has a more positive connotation. Selection would be more to make and emphasize a point. To find these sources I used online sources to find solid peer reviewed sources.