

THE CATALYST OF EMERGENCE:

Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, and the Civil Rights Movement

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INTRODUCTION

Social movements throughout history have been defined on a general basis as something that people create to press for collective change. They often challenge power with cooperative and innovative behavior by citizens with a willingness to disrupt a current social order.[1] In an effort to describe the life of a social movement, sociologists have defined four particular phases as a general outline for any social movement, such as the African American Civil Rights Movement.[2] These four stages can be shown all-inclusively throughout the life of a movement, or they can have some fitting characteristics while others are left out. Each of these four stages must be understood in defining the birth of the African American Civil Rights Movement and its development.

The initial phase of cultural change is defined as "emergence". The emergence phase outlines the widespread discontent felt by a large number of participants in a

community, without action or mobilization behind their concerns. At this stage, the discontent may be discussed among members of a society, allowing social movement organizations to form, without acting on their views. The emergence phase can also be expressed with an increase in media coverage of the negative conditions that are fueling the discontent.

Phase one of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement included each of these factors. Clear, widespread discontent regarding social injustice aimed at the African American race due to a lengthy history of segregation and discrimination toward the black community, as well as the statues known as Jim Crow Laws. Although the NAACP was founded in 1908 with the goal of ending racial segregation, no social movement to amend the views of "White America." had yet occurred.[3] Events, such as the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, led to an increase in media coverage across the nation, permitting the debate about discrimination to be

observed in a more obvious way. In this instance, igniting events led the Civil Rights Movement into phase two.

Coalescence is considered phase two in the outline of a social movement. This stage clearly defines the agitation of the coming movement, and what or who is responsible for creating it. At this point, participating individuals become aware of the members of their community, and mass demonstrations begin taking place in order to display the brutality of the situation. Prominent leaders also begin to emerge within the social movement organizations, and communal behavior can start to be defined as a social movement.

Clear ties to the strategies listed under coalescence are apparent when linking phase two behaviors to the Civil Rights Movement. The agitation became clearly defined as discrimination and brutality against African American citizens, and it was obvious that the government's Jim Crow Laws and the white community enforcing said laws were responsible for

the unrest. Mass protests such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and lunch counter sit-ins began to take place. Prominent leaders of the movement such as Martin Luther King Jr. and A. Philip Randolph began to emerge.

Stage three of a movement is defined by the term bureaucratization. It deems the movement a success to the degree that a coordinated strategy must be organized across all participating social movement organizations in order to gain political power for change. At this stage, subsections of larger organizations must form in order to keep up the continued mobilization of the movement. Mass rallies and inspirational leaders can no longer be solely relied on as the driving force at this point, but instead they must depend on qualified staff to perform the tasks of each institution.

An example of bureaucratization during the 1950s Civil Rights Movement is the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. King and other civil rights activists. The SCLC was

formed in order to harness the authority and center the power of black churches during the movement. They were able to keep up the mobility of the larger organizations by conducting their own non-violent protests such as the March on Washington. Centered groups like the SCLC allowed the Civil Rights movement to gain political recognition through their continued excitement and efforts toward the cause.

Lastly, step four is the decline of a movement. Decline can be defined by repression, co-optation, success, or failure depending on the outcome of the former stages. The repression of a movement happens when overpowering authorities control or halt the efforts of the crusade,

making it fairly difficult to carry out activities. Co-optation occurs when major leaders in a social movement are asked to work for the organization being targeted and do so hoping to change policy from the inside. Unfortunately, when this happens, the leaders often take on the mindset of the organization rather than being consistent with that of the movement. Success is clearly defined and occurs when the members of a movement achieve their goals. Failure, on the other hand occurs by either factionalism, a formation of ulterior motives within a group's organization, or encapsulation, a process by which a group of activists "become so dedicated to the movement that they fail to sympathize with those who do not make the movement a dominant aspect of their life", making the group impermeable.[4]

Historians can categorize stage four within the Civil Rights Movement as a decline due to success. A few achievements included the abolishment of Jim Crow Laws, the removal of segregated facilities, the signing of the Civil Rights Act of '64, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In order to reach this stage, it is common for a movement to be alive for decades, like the Civil Rights Movement was. It encompassed all four characteristics of a movement and carried them out with such a vast following, that success was seen, but not without a struggle. In order to further understand the origin and stages of the Civil Rights Movements, it is crucial to comprehend aspects of its first two phases, emergence and coalescence.

Background

Clandestine discussions occurred amongst black community members during the preliminary phase of the African American Civil Rights Movement regarding the outright discrimination of their race that was protected by Jim Crow laws. However, the black community did its best to keep tight-lipped about their opinions out of fear for their lives. Jim Crow laws were enacted in the South following Reconstruction, and lasted throughout the Civil

Rights Movement. The laws enabled the formation of "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites, but it was evident that these amenities were not equal.[5] The formation of white supremacist groups like the Klu Klux Klan also grew out of the Reconstruction Era leaving many African Americans eager to escape the horrors that were imposed by the Southern legal system. Blacks were denied access to white institutions, including schools and hospitals, and had minimal legal rights and protections. Whites could assault or kill blacks with little fear of prosecution or punishment. The white community held the black community in an inferior position following the Civil War, especially following the fall of Reconstruction.[6]

It was nearly impossible in the Jim Crow South for Southern black citizens to gain an education or master a craft. Even if they did, they were unlikely to utilize their knowledge for fear of the white man striking them down. Although the South bore the brunt of the horror during Jim Crow, white violence against blacks occurred in the North as well.[7] Overall, the African Americans who had survived the war were then forced to face decades of oppression and revenge because of the color of their skin.

Today, it is my opinion that history remembers racial segregation in a way that can be made to seem less gruesome than it truly was, and the whitewashing has filled educational curriculum with delicate versions of the past while strategically misleading the reality. Unfortunately, by leaving out the accurate memories of the horrid events that took place during Jim Crow and other eras of discrimination, we are losing the memory of the thousands who lost

their lives during Jim Crow. One of the victims was named Emmett Till, who falls under the shadow of Rosa Parks. He is rarely taught in the context of Jim Crow.[8]

Research Question

Protest became the norm in the 1950s; African Americans decided that standing up for peace was more important than sitting down in fear. The Civil Rights Movement began after generations of African Americans finally had enough of the hate that their ancestors had dealt with for decades; the discrimination in their own lives was too crucial to ignore. A few vital events have been noticed as the spark of the African American Civil Rights Movement, but what significant event in the emergence phase was the one to kick start the movement into phase two, coalescence?

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Hypothesis

Emmett Till and Rosa Parks are both substantial participants in the crossover from emergence to coalescence, but currently, due to the whitewashing of our history, Parks' protest is considered to be the facilitator of the Civil Rights Movement's mass demonstrations. Till, on the other hand, did not protest, but the extensive coverage of his lynching made an impact that was recognized throughout the U.S. more so than any single case before his. In order to identify which contributor's event was the catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement, the facts and context surrounding each case, as well as the consequences following them should be detailed and examined to fit within the four-phase outline.

My strategy is to focus on how Till's death sparked the Civil Rights Movement by answering whether or not the Movement would have



happened in the same time and fashion had Till not been murdered. We will find that due to the horrific circumstances of his death, activists felt the need to unite against racism without shying away from hate. Thus began the true beginning of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement. The Movement and protests would have still materialized thanks to dissenters like Rosa Parks, but the speed and motivation of the effort would have likely been slower. My goal is to determine whether Till's murder and the circumstances surrounding his funeral and the trial helped Americans truly grasp the severity of the Jim Crow era, no longer allowing them to hide behind their fear, and in fact, motivated people like Rosa Parks to stand up to injustice.

Although it is clear that Till's death occurred before Parks' bus protest and arrest, it is important to determine if its events and context were significant enough to then cause the widespread discontent to move into mass demonstrations. Through my examination, I believe that I will discover that Till's death led into coalescence and bureaucratization phases of the Movement, and that Rosa Parks became a beacon of support and extra motivation for what was already transforming. Such recognition is significant because if my hypothesis is correct, Emmett Till's death should be

more widely recognized as the start of the Civil Rights Movement, and will then allow society to draw more complete comparisons to the formation of African American movements and their purposes in today's society.

Methodology

To determine the impact that both Till and Parks had on the society at the time they each became prevalent, I will first outline the context of social norms surrounding each event in their given time periods. By doing so, changes in community behavior and involvement before and after each event can be clearly defined by following the four-stage outline of social movements. In order to express these comparisons, I will be looking at the effects on media, social movement organizations and their leaders, and the success of public protests within each phase that broadcast enough attention to drive the movement forward.

Media

The media[9] extensively covered both events more so than any other lynching or protest before. The lynching of hundreds of black citizens was discussed in Black Press newspapers and magazines prior to Till's death, but rarely on a case specific basis with little to no witness testimony. By reviewing the specific proceedings within each event, I will better understand how and why they were able to gain widespread

media attention, and why there was an abundant display of coverage, including articles, photographs, and witness interviews within the press compared to prior events. The news of Till's lynching and Parks' protest went viral in an age where speaking out against the white man was deadly. In doing so, the media coverage opened the eyes of white America and made citizens outside of Southern borders realize that there were still brutal inequalities taking place within their nation. By determining the impact that prevalent media coverage had on its readers' emotions, it can be better understood how widespread discontent turned into social protest.

Social Movement Organizations (SMO)

The link between media coverage and social movement organizations defines how pre-existing civil rights groups were able to gain support for their platforms. SMO's could systematize and protest with citizen support with newfound disgust fueled by the Black Press. The success of new and pre-existing administrations continued to drive change within black communities, eventually leading to widespread protest and mass demonstrations. The displayed brutality within the media convinced black activists and community members to come forward and pledge their support to the cause.

Public Protest

Protests and mass demonstrations began to occur once social movement organizations had shocking, well-known events to drive their causes and gained enough support to successfully take their platforms public. They originated by gaining a focalized and collective outlook on the situation, and clearly defining their plans for change. As social protests continued to grow and provide success to positive changes within the black community, their continued behavior started to be defined as the Civil Rights Movement.

Sources

The importance of researching media outlets, social movement organizations, and public protests in regard to Till and Parks is to determine their impacts on society, and the changes they helped to create. I will outline the context of each incident by reviewing scholarly historical sources, and then specifically

look at the press coverage relating to them in order to define how it was able to impact the black community enough to publicly support SMO's. From there, I will read interviews from Till's family and Rosa Parks, and watch documentaries related to each incident to determine the direct effect they had on society, and the changes that resulted from them. I will then explore specific public protests that occurred following each event and the levels of success they had. By studying each aspect individually, and then linking them together to form a timeline, I will be able to determine which event better fits the four-stage outline of a social movement in order to argue my hypothesis.

Evaluation of Emergence: Emmett Till

Context

Jim Crow laws were still prevalent in August 1955 and continued to be adopted by Southern states in an effort to minimize African American contribution to society. Mississippi was recognized as being one of the Southern states with the strictest interpretations of Jim Crow, and publicly disputed *Brown v. Board of Education* by passing three more segregation laws following the case.[10] Chicago, however, was on its way to reversing segregation laws leaving the African American community in Illinois less exposed to the type of racial segregation occurring in the South. It wasn't until a fourteen-year-old boy by the name of Emmett Till traveled from his home in Chicago to visit family in Money, Mississippi, that Chicago would be hit with the devastating reality of Southern prejudice. Growing up in Illinois, Till did not comprehend the severity of discrimination and the impact of Jim Crow laws taking place in the Delta, the "most Southern place on Earth." [11] His mother Mamie warned him prior to his trip about his behavior when visiting Money, telling him, "to be very careful...to humble himself to the extent of getting down on his knees." [12] Jet Magazine kept the black population informed of the rising number of murders that were occurring in the South although they had not yet come in contact with racial experiences similar to those that Emmett would soon face. [13] More than five hundred black people had been lynched in Mississippi prior to Emmett's arrival in Money, making Chicago appear as "a land of promise." [14] Till attended a segregated school, but his experiences of Jim Crow laws were minimal compared to the terror reigning over African Americans in Mississippi. His family and witnesses inferred that his lack of comprehension regarding the severe racial discrimination occurring in the South likely led to his demise. [15]

Emmett did not fully understand his mother's warnings. He traveled ignorantly down to Mississippi, where he then ignored her advice and made a pass at a white woman. According to Till's cousins who were with him that day, Emmett "wolf-whistled" at the white, female store owner, and shortly after, realized his deadly mistake. [16] Although it took a couple of days for the her husband and his accomplice to arrive at the Till family home, that would be the last time they would see their cousin Emmett alive. Black men would often go missing or be murdered for something they did that didn't please the Southern white population and Till's cousins were worried that he was in for the same fate.

Three days later, Emmett Till's body was found washed up in the Tallahatchie River. His face was hardly recognizable. It was soon discovered that he was brutally beaten, shot in the head, and weighed down in the water by a fan from a cotton-gin, only to be identified by his father's ring still on

his finger. Mamie insisted that his body be shipped back to Chicago, rather than left buried and forgotten in Mississippi. [17] Her decision to bring him home and her consequent choices regarding his funeral contributed to the increase in media coverage about Till's murder, allowing the emergence phase of the Civil Rights Movement to expand.

Media

Till became front-page news within two weeks of his disappearance; the headlines stunned white America. [18] The open casket service prompted thousands of viewers to pay their respects, and for Till's mother, allowed the world to "see what they had done to my boy." [19] Jet magazine, as well as several black press newspapers, released photos of Mamie receiving her son's body back in Chicago, and then of his funeral. The coverage described the disbelief and heartache felt by the 50,000 attendees of the funeral, and the 600,000 viewers of the body over the course of five days that it was on display. Till's lynching became the most widely covered murder in comparison to any previous lynching. The publication of the events and the photo of Till's battered face contributed to the history of discontent concerning racial discrimination. It gained support from the African American community that then continued throughout the trial. [20]

Roy Bryant, the husband of the white woman whom Till whistled at, and his accomplice, J.W. Milam, were identified as the men who kidnapped and murdered Till. They were put on trial in Mississippi. The trial lasted five days. After one hour of stalled deliberation, the all white jury acquitted both men for the reason that the state could not identify that the body that was found was Emmett Till's. Although there had been widespread anger following Till's murder, the acquittal of his killers sent protesters into a flurry in major cities across the U.S., and even in Paris, France. The protesters wanted to publicize that what happened to Emmett Till could happen to any black person living in the Jim Crow era with little to no reprimand. Existing social movement organizations began to use mass meetings to gain support for their platforms and allow the Civil Rights Movement to slowly travel toward phase two, coalescence. The extensive media coverage of Till's murder and the suspects' acquittal gave protesters and activists a chance to find a common theme between the lynching and other indecencies occurring in retaliation to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. [21]

Evaluation of Coalescence: Emmett Till

Media

Press coverage of the incidents following Till's murder had a sizeable influence in creating an impact on society. Not only did the attention of the funeral and the trial make racial discrimination into a reality rather than just a story, but the continued reports following the events kept the feeling of anger thriving within the African American community. Look magazine published an interview with Bryant and Milam a few months after the trial, outlining their detailed confession of the murder. They admitted in the interview that their reason for killing Till was to make an example out of him, and to warn others "of his kind" to not come down to the South. [22] Although the men had already been acquitted and could not be retried for the murder following the confession, public outrage ensued and the interview became a catalyst for further protests.

Social Movement Organizations

By the time of the interview, the coalescence phase was already in action. The killers' affirmation solidified the factors contributing to the social unrest. The African American community and its supporters were clearly disgruntled with the pace at which civil integration had been moving, and the consequences they had to endure for lasting discrimination. The idea behind the Civil Rights Movement became collective amongst activists, and it was clear that the party responsible for maintaining the injustice was the government and its action or inaction concerning Jim Crow legislation. The NAACP was then able to focus the social behavior toward a single goal enough to be defined as a movement.

Prominent leaders, especially those in the NAACP, began to emerge during the Till protests and led a number of mass demonstrations, while major press associations helped to make the public aware of every rally that was happening. Leaders like A. Phillip Randolph organized massive public demonstrations that encouraged social action to occur, and made Till's murder out to be not only a crime against a black boy, but also a "crime against humanity." [23] The press and social organizations worked together to encourage persistence, and set the stage for future rallies and demonstrations such as the Freedom Ride, and lunch counter sit-ins.

Success of Public Protests

The strategic involvement of publicity revolving around Till's violent murder to further the unrest of unchanging discrimination of blacks during the Jim Crow era made it possible for the Civil Rights Movement to grow from emergence into a successful decline. The impactful decisions of Mamie Till to bring her son's body back to Chicago and allow it to be viewed publicly, as well as the unusual mass media coverage of the subsequent events, enabled social movement organizations and leaders to grow their platform. They extended the impact of Till's death to the inspire changes in legislation regarding discrimination laws overall, and bring awareness to the individual situations that were still occurring such as voting discrimination and school segregation. The destruction and violence behind the crimes occurring in the South and other regions of the U.S. was impossible to ignore after the coverage of the events of Till's death spread. The displayed brutality of the situation made it easier to gain outspoken support from African Americans who were previously afraid of retaliation. Till himself, "unwittingly played a pivotal role in the modern Civil Rights Movement", and led people to see that, "not only were black men in danger, but black children as well." [24] His death was the catalyst that stirred people up enough to let them know that the black community was either going to stand together or fall together. [25]

The incidents that contributed to the impact of Emmett Till's death on society were significant enough to push the Civil Rights Movement into a focalized and collective effort by protesters into one common goal, justice. They symbolized the brutality that was taking place across America and served as a reminder that society should not stand for injustice. None of the murders or protests prior to Emmett Till's lynching were covered to the same degree in the media. None created enough of an impact on individual citizens that they decided to stand up to discrimination. Till, on the other hand, incited widespread activism, inspired mass protests, and led

individuals to realize that the only way to create change was to participate in it. This ideal played out three months after the murder of Emmett Till, when Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

Evaluation of Emergence: Rosa Parks

Context

After decades of belief that Rosa Parks was an old, tired seamstress who refused to give up her front row seat on a bus to a white man, historians have sufficient evidence to believe that this standard version of Parks' activism is untrue. The true story takes place on December 1, 1955, only a few months after Emmett Till's murder, but Parks' history of activism began long before either of these incidents. For years, Parks and her husband had been active participants in the fight for civil rights. She was the secretary of the NAACP Montgomery Chapter at the time of her act of disobedience. Contrary to popular belief, Parks stood by herself on the bus, but she did not stand alone in her fight toward justice. She was a part of the "organized struggle for freedom" that was the NAACP. [26] She had protested segregation throughout her lifetime and had a record of political action that included a long history of confrontation with bus drivers.

At the time of her refusal to forfeit her seat on the bus, Parks describes that, "everything was segregated by law." [27] She was living through the penalties of *Brown v. Board*, and witnessed the public shame of witnesses who had signed the petition to end segregation in public schools. The activists against segregation and the supports of Jim Crow were both fighting harder than ever against one another to gain success for their futures, and Rosa Parks was an effective participant in the conflict. Parks and the Montgomery NAACP held a mass meeting to debrief their members about what happened to Emmett Till, but as the secretary of the city's chapter, it wasn't uncommon for Parks to hear about violent crimes against the black community. The difference between most other cases and Till, she described, was the effects of the widespread media and the willingness to come forward with the truth of the case. [28]

When December came, Parks realized that her years of determination to gain civil rights for black citizens could culminate in her refusal to give up her seat on the bus. Contrary to the standard story, Parks didn't sit in the first row of the bus, but in the first row of the section designated for black riders. Her seat choice shows that her refusal and arrest were not premeditated, but instead a spontaneous act ignited by years of discrimination. [29] As she continued along the route, the seats in the white section of the bus filled, and one white man was left standing. When the driver asked the first row of black riders to stand and make room for him to sit, Parks refused. The driver warned that if she didn't give up her seat, that he would have her arrested, and she responded, "You may do that." [30] The police showed up and once again asked Parks to relinquish her seat. She refused. The police arrested her upon her continued refusal, stating, ". . . the law is the law, and you're under arrest." [31] Upon later inquiry as to why Parks made her decision to keep her seat, she stated, "I thought of Emmett Till, and when the bus driver ordered me to move to the back, I just couldn't move," making it even more evident that Till's case had made an impact on society and civil rights activists. [32]



Media

Parks' involvement in civic responsibility in her neighborhood and her title in the NAACP were her own forms of media. Her story was a headline in the Montgomery black press as well as in surrounding areas by the time she was released from jail.[33] The headlines stated, "Arrested for Civil Disobedience." Parks, who was already known for her involvement in protests, became the "poster child" for the NAACP to expand their platform to end segregation on public transportation.[34] The Black Press had already been in action reporting incidents of violence and discrimination, and was still on a steady roll reporting the happenings with the Till case when Parks was arrested, so it wasn't a surprise that her story made headlines accompanied by photographs of Parks being booked and stories of her bravery. Both the involvement of social movement organizations and the support of her community gave the story public recognition enough that the media itself wasn't the main source of impact in her case.

Evaluation of Coalescence: Rosa Parks

Social Movement Organizations

Although SMO's had been formed and were in action prior to the bus episode, the NAACP had been looking for a test case to protest segregation on public transportation entities. Parks unintentionally became their headline for the discrimination, and their protest was able to gain momentum. Parks held support from her involvement with the NAACP, and their

plan of action to launch a mass demonstration took place only four days after her arrest, following her trial. Leaders of the organization planned a public bus boycott for the morning of December 5, 1955, that was later taken to a vote to either continue the boycott or end it that day. Parks and a number of ministers, including Dr. King, were present at Holt Street Baptist Church when they voted to remain off of the buses until legislative changes took place to protect the black community from discrimination.[35]

More leaders in the NAACP, like Dr. King, began to emerge as prominent figures in the movement, and formed new organizations to manage their efforts. Edgar Daniel Nixon, President of the Montgomery Chapter of the NAACP, led the Montgomery Improvement Association that would manage the ongoing boycott within the city, and continued to gain public support of the boycott that ended in the following year.

Success of Public Protests

The vote to continue to the bus boycott became successful enough to travel throughout Montgomery. It lasted until November 1956, when the Supreme Court ruled that segregation of public buses was unconstitutional.[36] Alabama officially announced its agreement with the statute the following month. Dr. King's non-violent structure of protest was effective in gaining followers; more than 90% of Montgomery African Americans joined in the protest.[37] The Civil Rights Movement was officially in full swing by this point and was proven when President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law.

The success of the boycott spurred the creation of more SMO's including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, headed by Dr. King, and ignited further protests against the lack of legislation in areas outside of Alabama. The lunch counter sit-ins of 1960 and the Freedom Ride of 1961 sought to test different forms of legislation and challenge the ongoing discrimination throughout the U.S. The March on Washington, however, had special significance because it was held after exactly eight years to the day of Emmett Till's death. Eventually, the years of successful public protests came to an end when in 1964, President Johnson signed the second Civil Rights Act, ending any further segregation and abolishing any remaining Jim Crow laws.

The role of Parks and the participation of African Americans throughout the South allowed groundbreaking judicial changes to be enforced. In a time of emotional rallies with little following activism, "Parks taught us that the key to change is a conviction inside one person who in turn ignites the imagination of millions and stirs them from complacency to action", but it is crucial to remember that her reason for protesting on that day followed from a brutal lynching of a fourteen year old boy.[38] Although there will continue to be a difference between de facto and de jure legislation, the cooperation and success of the African American community as a whole, changed the future for black citizens and diminished their fear of retaliation in cities like Money and Montgomery.

Discussion

Although Parks and Till both had an impact on the Civil Rights Movement, the timing and differences of each case can allow us to conclude that Till was in fact the catalyst of the crusade. With the main source of impact from Till's death being media outlets that then spurred an organization of

protest, it can be said that the widespread coverage of his death encouraged the groups experiencing social discontent to derive a collective plan against discrimination and move into the coalescence phase that then included activists like Rosa Parks. Till's murder primed the black community to publicly unite so that when Parks protested on the bus, the timing was serendipitous and gave the black community too much hope to back down. Without the occurrence of the events that spurred from Emmett Till's murder, I do believe that the Civil Rights Movement still would have begun, but most likely later on, and with less media influence.

Rosa Parks is widely considered the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement." Her boycott occurred at a time when the NAACP was looking to support someone willing to publicly protest public transportation. She was able to carry out a protest that would be nationally recognized with the subsequent media coverage that was still thriving from Till's murder. More so than her opportune timing, I believe that Parks has been associated with the start of the Movement due to the delusion of truthful black history. If it were true that all brutality and pain felt throughout the years of our growing nation had been documented and shared as it actually happened, people like Emmett Till would be better recognized as catalysts for social improvement, rather than forgotten by educational curriculum. Although some truth of the Civil Rights Movement is taught today, Rayfield Mooty, Till's cousin believes that, "historians will talk about the good and the bad, but they don't want to deal with the ugly." [39] I believe this to be true in Till's case, and if history had been told with all segments included, Emmett Till would be taught and remembered today as the match that lit the flame for the Civil Rights Movement.

Importance of Research: Impact

The current chapter of the Civil Rights Movement has taken a new shape with a clear goal. The Black Lives Matter movement began with a hashtag in 2012, following the death of Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old black boy who was shot by an armed security officer. [40] Following Martin in 2014 were Garner and Brown, two black men who were killed by police officers, both in a controversial manner. In the

case of all three of these murders, and many others including Till, the victims were all young black men whose killers were either not prosecuted or were acquitted, and whose cases were nationally recognized with the help of widespread media attention showcasing racial injustice. Like Till's death, the murder of these three men "helped to wake up America", and show that "[black lives] mattered then, and they matter today." [41]

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The similarities between the injustices of the past and of the events occurring today are chilling. The laws of 2017 were not exactly like those of the Jim Crow era, but we are still able to reflect back on the perception of a lacking legal system that allows confessed murderers to go free. When the media picked up the second widespread case of racial injustice, the murder of Michael Brown, and the Black Lives Matter campaign began to gain a considerable amount of support, it became easier to compare each recent case to Till. Similar to when the image of Till's unrecognizable face was released in Jet Magazine, a picture of Michael Brown laying lifeless on the concrete for over four hours enraged the African American community. Both images spread across the media like wildfire and allowed the community to realize that these issues were taking place not only in a secluded area of the country, but also in their front yards. [42] Even though there are countless murders that were not publicly recognized both in the 1950s and today, the media surrounding the incidents of Till, Brown, and now, George Floyd, allowed people to realize that, "[it] takes a tragedy to light a fire under a

community." [43]

The role of the media in such cases was instrumental in keeping attention on the horrors of segregation and falsifying any impressions of a post-racial society. They uncovered the truth of tears, pain, and loss felt by the black community and the families of each victim, as well as the lack of understanding of the country that change needs to occur. [44] Today, places like Ferguson compare to Mississippi in a way that seems foreign to the rest of the country. The amount of discrimination and the day-to-day lives of African Americans living in a predatory reality are unrecognizable to the majority of the nation, just like it was for residents of Money in the 1950s. Though the murderers of Till and Brown were not convicted, both of the boys are recognized for concentrating national attention on racial injustice and discrimination.

The importance of the continued efforts of activists today is to stop the misrepresentation of cases involving racial hatred, and to help the truth of each case be carried throughout history as it actually happened. The Black Lives Matter movement is analogous to the Black Press of the 50s in that they are interested in a similar goal of bringing to light the truth of the past. Hopefully, the accuracy within the BLM articles, including segregation and discrimination still taking place in our communities, won't be swept under the rug in years to come.

Unfortunately, similarly to the 1950s, not all cases of racial injustice are recognized today, but the ones involving witness testimony, videos, or recordings can help to bring the truth forward so that the events of each circumstance can be remembered with honesty. The anger felt by the black community continues to grow with each acquittal, and the backlash of the white community is breeding further hatred. If we do not look back into the truth of our nation's own history and recognize the circumstances of the former Civil Rights Movement, it can be detrimental to the success of our future. These incidents have already begun to ignite a powerful new movement, and as Mamie Till said, "it took something to stir people up and let them know we are either going to stand together, or we're going to fall together." [45] The importance of recognizing Till as the catalyst of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement is so that

our nation today can acknowledge the impact of the horrific events that occurred in the past and prevent them from transpiring again.

Conclusion

My hypothesis was correct in predicting that Emmett Till should be recognized as the catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement, but due to the delusion of historical fact, he has been left in the shadow of Rosa Parks. The impact that Till's murder had on society, and its close comparison to the four stage outline show that the current curriculum on the start of the Movement is not accurate.

In the future, I would suggest that the truth behind black history be revealed in educational curriculum beginning at an early grade level. I believe that if we are to educate our nation's youth about the true horrors that transpired within African American history, it will allow them to make the connection between what happened then, and what is occurring today. The only difference is that in the 50s, it was civilians murdering civilians, and today, it is police officers murdering civilians, which is arguably worse. In order to improve our society and allow for a nation that accepts all races without hatred or fear, we need to be truthful about the mistakes we have allowed to occur.

Unfortunately, a common issue occurring today is that news is readily available through media platforms, which can have both a positive and negative effect on social movements like Black Lives Matter. Although the issues being presented are still relevant, it is difficult for them to hold significance when the public becomes desensitized to the racial injustices that are still occurring. In the 50s, it was rare to see an individualized news story about a lynching that occurred, and when Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown were shot, it was still a rare occurrence to hear about these incidents in the media. Today, however, the success of the Black Lives Matter movement in sharing the truth about each individualized case has arguable disengaged the public, and in turn, gained less legislative change than originally hoped for.

In order for social movements today to have the same successful decline of the Civil Rights Movement, I believe that they should follow the four-phase outline. By following the steps from emergence to decline, Black Lives Matter will be able to expand their platforms, come up with organized goals, and gain continued support for their strategic plan of action. Instead of only using social media hashtags as a form of support for one goal, if the Black Lives Matter movement extended their audience to include more issues, in turn, moving into the bureaucratization phase and creating more platforms for public protest, I believe that they would have a higher success rate, and less of a chance of being disregarded as a radical social group. With the continuity of existing campaigns, and the combination of new tactics, the Black Lives Matter Movement should be able to have a successful decline toward improved legislation for civil rights.

I hope that the inclusion of conversation pertaining to Emmett Till will spark interest and knowledge into the accurate events that occurred in the Jim Crow era. Without truth in history, we as a nation cannot fix past mistakes to improve our future and will continue to live in a racially divided house. As Mamie Till understood, "what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all." [46]

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