In the preface to The Leader's Companion, J. Thomas Wren writes, “Leadership is not a ‘fad,’ but a concept that is both current and timeless.” Understanding leadership is essential to understanding the human condition. Whether or not we admit it, leadership touches each of our lives on a daily basis. We may experience the effects of a leader’s decision, be inspired by a leader’s unique ideas, or even struggle in our own leadership endeavors. Continued contact with this elusive phenomenon certainly generates curiosity and a desire to know and understand the real purpose of leadership. As Wren comments further, “Knowing more about leadership and how the process operates permits one to realize the real end of leadership: the achievement of mutual goals which are intended to enhance one’s group, organization, or society.” In that sense, the Compass serves as a tool for exploring the definition of leadership and, more specifically, leadership that aims to impact our world.

The Compass seeks to provide a forum for the discussion of issues related to leadership and service across every academic discipline and welcomes submissions from all students on these topics. This year’s edition of the Compass covers issues of leadership and service from a variety of perspectives. Carson Land’s paper Groupthink in Stalinist Russia employs the theory of Groupthink as a way to explain the lack of critical thinking in the Soviet Union. James Randolph examines leadership in the pursuit of social change in his paper Portrait of Compassion: Muhammad Yunus as a Citizen Leader. Missy Golson’s paper A Grain of Salt Can Shake an Empire investigates the charismatic leadership of Gandhi as he united the people of India against the repressive actions of the British government. In his paper “Ideas Have Consequences:” The John Birch Society and the Reasonable Right, Peter Starr critically examines the leadership of the historic 1960’s anti-communist movement. In The Service Mindset in American Colleges: Motivations, Problems, and What’s Going Right, Laura Burks presents one point of view in the debate over the role that social justice should play in academics, while challenging her peers to commit to creating a more just society. Our last two papers explore leadership in the movement for civil and human rights. Diana Wilmoth’s paper The Ideological, Cultural, and Political Layers Clothed in Myanmar’s Saffron Revolution for Democracy and Human Rights explores this issue with regards to Myanmar, while Gary Crosby examines leadership in the American Civil Rights Movement in Jack Greenberg: A Visionary Civil Rights Champion for Racial Equality. Together, these papers give us a glimpse into the phenomenon of leadership and the ways it can be used to impact society.

I would like to thank our faculty advisor, Jeanne Jackson, for her support and guidance throughout the publication process. Also, thank you to Patricia Hanson for her organizational help and Tracy Thomas for her much appreciated assistance. Lastly, I would like to thank the Student Government Association for its continued funding of the Compass and for providing students with this unique forum to discuss the important and essential issues of leadership and service. We hope you enjoy the 2008 edition of the Compass.

Channing Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief, Compass
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Groupthink in Stalinist Russia

When Mary Leder left the Soviet Union in 1965, she left her in-laws, her husband, and their daughter behind beneath Soviet soil. After thirty-four difficult years living under Soviet rule, Mary would not realize the extent of the Soviet deception until she arrived in the United States and could read and think freely. Mary Leder’s memoir, My Life in Stalinist Russia, focuses on her experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, but her tale begins in 1931 America. Born in the United States to Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, Mary grew up in Los Angeles, California. The Great Depression hit her family hard. Enamored with devotion to the Communist cause, her parents decided to return to the Soviet Union, a land where jobs were supposedly plentiful and life was easy. Though Mary’s experiences in Stalinist Russia differed markedly from her expectations, she remained loyal to the Soviet Union for at least the first half of her thirty-four year residence. Irving Janis’ leadership theory of “Groupthink” explains why Mary remained inwardly as well as outwardly loyal to the Soviet Union. Coined in the fashion of George Orwell’s 1984, Groupthink refers to Janis’ observation that social conformity leads to a decrease in critical thinking. While Janis focuses on the Groupthink phenomenon in decision-making leadership groups, his general observations are applicable to the population of the Soviet Union.

Mary’s childhood in America provided a contrast to the Soviet system, yet her California involvement in the Communist Youth Group had instilled her with the ideology and promise of the Party. After their hardships in America, she and her parents were primed to succumb to Soviet Groupthink. When they arrived in the Jewish section of the commune in Volochayevka, they accepted the bedbugs and food shortages as part of the struggle for socialism. Divided into three sections – Jews, Ukrainians, and Communists – the commune operated hierarchically with the Communists controlling work assignments and receiving better food and supplies. Mary’s parents witnessed unequal food and labor distribution, but they accepted the view of fellow commune members that it was the duty of the Jews to dedicate themselves to the working classes in the construction of socialism. Miserable in the village, Mary quickly decided to travel to Moscow to attend college. She spoke no Russian and had neither job nor housing, but Mary and her parents were convinced that if she could get to Moscow, she could reap the fruit of Soviet success. It was 1932, and as Mary’s father would tell her many years later, “We thought nothing bad could happen to you in a socialist country.” Mary’s departure for Moscow revealed her and her parents’ loss of critical thinking as they reasoned that even though Volochayevka fell far short of their expectations, Moscow would be better. They were
living in a socialist slum, but Mary’s parents retained their faith in socialism and rationalized that the Soviet Union would emerge victorious with time.

Soon after her arrival in Moscow, Mary realized that her Russian was not sufficient for college admission. Her transformation from American child to Soviet woman began when she found work in a factory at the edge of the city and moved into the first of many communal apartments. She noticed the broken machinery and shortage of raw materials and occasionally heard murmurings of worker unrest; yet Mary eagerly participated in factory Komsomol activities. One afternoon when she had to leave a meeting early, Mary was shocked to find the factory gates locked. Only workers with special permission would be released. Mary was confused and questioned her supervisors about the practice, stating that the factory should not need to order workers’ Komsomol attendance. She believed that the workers should all want to join the Komsomol. Her supervisors did not answer the questions she raised about the importance of worker sincerity; instead, they criticized her outspokenness, blaming it on her “bourgeois” American birth. The societal pressure that silenced Mary at the factory carried over into her personal life. Soon after moving into the cramped six-person apartment, Mary realized that not all of her coworkers were living under the same circumstances. Galya Babushkin, the daughter of an Old Bolshevik, was also working at the factory, and she and Mary became close friends. Galya had postponed college to learn the “proletarian mentality” through factory work. Mary’s friendship with Galya included visits to the extravagant Metropol Hotel where Galya and her mother lived like aristocrats. This contrast is particularly striking when analyzed alongside historian Martin Malia’s assertion that the economy in 1933 produced the largest peacetime decline in standard of living.

Though Mary noticed the gross inequalities in their lifestyles, she made no outward criticisms. Again and again Mary returned to her belief that building socialism took time. Within her first year in Moscow, as Mary succumbed to the pressure and self-censorship present in Soviet Groupthink, she began to rely less on her own beliefs and more on the imposed beliefs of society.

By 1933, Mary’s Russian had improved enough to earn her a position at the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow. Soon after, Mary enrolled at Moscow University and moved into a dormitory, but life was no easier. The hardships heightened in the aftermath of Kirov’s assassination. At the university, administrators warned the students that spies and enemies were all around. The watchword “vigilance” sounded, only to grow louder as the arrests of students began. As friends of friends were getting arrested, Mary frequently believed that the arrests were mistakes; however, at Komsomol meetings, friends would stand and denounce themselves as guilty, blaming themselves for lack of vigilance. Mary’s description of her reaction to the Great Terror illustrates how the Groupthink phenomenon, which originated with Party leaders’ decisions, infiltrated the minds of Soviet individuals. Though she continued to attend school and work throughout the Great Terror, the tumultuous external environment affected all aspects of Mary’s personal life. Because of her loss of critical thinking, her reality became an extension of the Party line.

In the winter of 1939, Mary married Abram Leder, a Soviet Jew who worked as a German translator. Because of his expertise, Abram took a job with the German-language newspaper in Riga, Latvia in 1941. This separation was especially difficult as Mary was pregnant when Abram departed, and their separation lasted throughout the war. Constantly fleeing the Germans, she traveled first to her husband’s family in Rostov-on-the-Don, then back to Moscow, then East to Engels where her publishing house relocated during the war. During that winter of 1942, Mary’s infant girl became ill with croup. Mary went from hospital to hospital, but all of the doctors were too busy tending war injuries to care for a baby. When the child died, Mary alone traveled by horse and wagon to bury her daughter in an unmarked grave in a now forgotten cemetery. Though readers understand Mary’s devotion to her daughter, Mary never uses the child’s name in her writings, and after a brief description of the burial, she never mentions her again. Mary’s silent and private experience of grief echoes the voices of Catherine Merridale’s interviews and her assessment of Soviet grief: “You did not mourn...You survived.”

Despite her wartime sacrifices, Mary’s 1944 application for Party membership is not surprising since Groupthink continued and flourished during the war. Her husband had already joined the Party, and she assumed in vain that her education and activity in the Komsomol would outweigh the liability of her American birth. The Party official encouraged her to reapply, but he also commented on her Jewish heritage. Mary’s assumption that her Jewish-American background was too much of a liability reveals
her awareness of the Soviet fear of foreigners and the rise of Soviet anti-Semitism. Though anti-Semitism had been present in Russia before the Soviet Union, Irving cites stereotyping as a serious symptom of Groupthink, a symptom that often stems from societal pressure which increased during Stalin’s tenure. Furthermore, Malia points out that Soviet officials labeled the Jews “cosmopolitan” and linked them with the West, especially America. As both a Jew and an American, Mary posed a threat to the Party.

After her rejection by the Party, Mary experienced a breakthrough in critical thinking – which, significantly, occurred not in Russia but in Germany. Her husband Abram had received orders to go to Berlin to work in the Soviet Military Administration (SVA) in the German publications censorship department; Mary joined him in January of 1946. During their time in Berlin, Mary read Russian literature and uncensored news voraciously. Immersed in literary freedom, she realized for the first time that the Soviet Union was merely an extension of tsarist Russia, a theory that Malia also advocates. Mary did not want to return to Soviet Russia when Abram was recalled to Moscow. She knew however, that for her husband, fleeing to America would be deserting the motherland for which he had fought, a step he was not ready to take. Though Mary was able to loosen the grip of Groupthink while outside Soviet Russia, she was not able to completely free herself, evident in her refusal to convince her husband that they relocate to America.

After her husband’s death, Mary eventually returned to America. Only after her return did she begin to fully comprehend the extent of the corruption of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1930s, Mary’s initial dream of socialism, combined with her ability to rationalize Party actions as socialism-building tools, increased her receptiveness to Groupthink. Her continued interaction with Party members, both in the factory and in Moscow, reduced her critical thinking as she learned to bend with social pressures and censor herself. Ultimately, Mary censored herself around her husband, the person she cared about most, a decision which nearly shortened her life. Through Mary Leder, readers witness the height of the Groupthink mentality within the Soviet Union.

Endnotes

3 Leder, 44-4.
5 Leder, 46-55.
6 Ibid., 105-10.
7 Leder, 121.
8 Leder, 180-81; 216-17; 220-21.
10 Ibid., 250-52.
11 Janis, 366.
12 Malia, 295.
13 Leder, 264-66: 270-71; Malia, 300.
14 Leder, 275-76.

Bibliography

Portrait of Compassion: 
Muhammad Yunus as a Citizen Leader

James Randolph

The inspiring lifework of Muhammad Yunus to alleviate world poverty through the use of microcredit loans provides an exemplary portrait of citizen leadership. Throughout his life, Yunus has demonstrated cardinal tenets of Richard A. Couto’s conception of citizen leadership, principally through his determination to create a more benevolent world that respects the dignity of each individual, his ability to form relationships characterized by mutual trust, his mission to empower the downtrodden, and his willingness to challenge standing economic and political precepts. In a statement announcing the selection of Yunus as the recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Committee affirmed that “Yunus has shown himself to be a leader who has managed to translate visions into practical action for the benefit of millions of people” (Norwegian Nobel Committee). Truly, Yunus’s aspirations and achievements capture the essence of citizen leadership.

Yunus is widely esteemed as the father of microcredit, a fundamentally new approach to finance. This practice involves the extension of small loans, typically around $130, to the poor at low interest rates; the loans are repaid over an extended time to ensure minimal burden on the borrowers (Dugger). Microcredit has proven tremendously successful in encouraging the poor to utilize their own work ethic, creativity, and intelligence to free themselves and their families from poverty. Consequently, microcredit constitutes a centerpiece in the campaign for a poverty-free world, a vision that Yunus holds as the ultimate and noblest ambition of humankind, one that he believes can be achieved if society empowers the human spirit. In summarizing key elements necessary to liberate the world from poverty, Yunus stated that the “basic ingredient of overcoming poverty is packed inside each poor person. All we need to do is to help the person to unleash this energy and creativity” (Yunus, Acceptance Speech).

Although microcredit operations modeled after Yunus’s program have been established throughout the world, Yunus has focused his attention on helping the poor in his home country of Bangladesh, an impoverished nation that faces numerous social, political, and economic challenges. Only 47.5% of adults in Bangladesh are literate. The Human Development Index, designed by the United Nations Development Program as a gauge of human well-being among nations, ranked Bangladesh 140 out of 177 countries considered (United Nations Development Program). Climate and geography compound the country’s poverty—the rivers flood annually and cyclones pose serious threats (Heitzman and Worden). Aggravating these hardships, women remain virtually powerless due to Bangladeshi societal dictates that women stay confined to their...
household according to the custom of purdah (Yunus and Jolis 82). The human suffering in his homeland has moved Yunus to follow the course of citizen leadership. With his innovative banking system, he has simultaneously elevated the status of millions in Bangladesh while challenging established institutions to adopt a more socially conscious agenda.

Yunus began to develop qualities of citizen leadership during his childhood when he witnessed the brutality of poverty and learned the importance of maintaining an encompassing moral awareness. Born in 1940 in Chittagong, a bustling city on the Bay of Bengal, Yunus was the third child in a family that eventually included fourteen children, five of whom died before reaching adulthood (Ardesher). Yunus’s father was a devoutly religious man who owned a jewelry store and placed much emphasis on education. Because of this influence, Yunus came to value academic success. He was a prodigious learner who typically earned the highest grades in his class. He also taught his younger siblings and motivated them to engage in their studies. Like his father, his mother was also deeply religious, but she began to suffer from mental illness when Yunus was nine years old. Yunus, however, most remembers his mother for her concern for the poor, recalling that she saved money to help impoverished relatives. Yunus has written that his mother had more influence in shaping his life than did any other individual, for her charitable efforts led him to develop an interest in social reform and economics (Yunus and Jolis 4-5, 9, 15). Participating in the Boy Scouts also fed Yunus’s emerging moral awareness. The teachings of Quazi Sahib, an assistant Boy Scout leader, especially molded Yunus’s moral development. Quazi Sahib strove to instill life lessons in the Scouts he led, and the impact of his guidance soon permeated all aspects of Yunus’s life. As Yunus relates, “I had always been a natural leader, but Quazi Sahib’s moral influence taught me to think high and to channel my passions” (Yunus and Jolis 12). These childhood influences nurtured the development of Yunus’s character and values, attributes that would serve as the foundation of his citizen leadership.

Yunus taught economics at the University of Chittagong from 1961 to 1965 after graduating from Dhaka University in Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital and largest city. In 1965, he accepted a Fulbright Scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, to pursue a doctorate in economics. Before beginning his studies at Vanderbilt, Yunus spent a summer at the University of Colorado at Boulder. These two American cities exposed him to a dramatically different culture from that of his native country, a conservative society rooted in Islamic tradition. While attending Vanderbilt, Yunus was drawn to the teachings of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, a professor who urged his students to develop cognizance of straightforward solutions, maintain focus on an overarching goal, and cultivate social awareness. Georgescu-Roegen influenced Yunus’s own approach to teaching, one that motivates individuals to engage in local action to achieve far-reaching results. Indeed, Yunus can perhaps best be described as a teacher, and he has commented that he has always regarded himself in that way (Yunus and Jolis 15-19).

Yunus returned to Bangladesh in 1972 to become head of the economics department at the University of Chittagong. Bangladesh had recently won its independence from Pakistan, and much of his home country was shattered after the months of bitter warfare (Yunus and Jolis 28-29, 33). Yunus could not ignore the devastation plaguing his homeland, even as he continued his teaching at the university. The famine of 1974 only deepened his sense of obligation to help others; it spurred Yunus to spearhead a campaign to alleviate poverty. As the famine intensified, eventually claiming the lives of 1.5 million Bangladeshis, Yunus became increasingly frustrated with the inability of refined economic theories to assist the dying and the downtrodden (Ardesher). As Yunus recalled, “I was angry, angry at myself, angry at my economics department and the thousands of intelligent professors who had not tried to address this problem and solve it” (Yunus and Jolis 48). Frustrated with the lack of leadership and appalled at the magnitude of human suffering, Yunus, in the tradition of the citizen leader, vowed to combat hardships by personally involving himself in the affected communities.

Acting on his personal commitment to help others, Yunus first traveled to Jobra, a village near the University of Chittagong, to observe the livelihoods of the very poor. In Jobra, he was struck by the suffering of forty-two women who were locked in a cycle of debt; he was particularly moved by the plight of one woman who endlessly toiled in making bamboo stools. She told Yunus that her anguish stemmed from her struggle to repay the high interest loans she took in order to buy supplies to make bamboo stools. Touched by her predicament, Yunus loaned a combined total of $27 to the forty-two women, enough money to help them pull themselves out of extreme poverty (Yunus and Jolis 34, 47-
This simple, heartfelt action marked Yunus’s pioneering microcredit loan. All forty-two women soon repaid their loans to Yunus, who grew convinced of the capacity of microcredit to combat poverty and improve human dignity (Yunus, “Fighting Poverty”).

Yunus’s experiences in Jobra foreshadowed his lifework by revealing his willingness to extend help to those members of society who were traditionally shunned, particularly women. In the model of citizen leadership, Yunus was not content with his initial success; rather, he challenged himself to lift others out of poverty through microcredit. According to Couto, citizen leaders are often characterized by their willingness to challenge established systems and their eagerness to question the underpinnings of engrained societal mechanisms (16-17). Yunus demonstrated this key principle of citizen leadership, perhaps most notably, following the success of his microcredit loans in Jobra. Armed with the conviction that small sums could alleviate much human misery, Yunus visited a number of traditional banks, including the bank on the University of Chittagong campus and leading commercial banks, to urge them to implement microcredit programs. These banks, however, dismissed his requests to extend collateral-free loans to the poor. Even as Yunus expanded his microcredit operations and experienced further success as an increasing number of individuals placed themselves on the path toward self-sufficiency while repaying their loans, banks refused to establish microcredit programs (Yunus, “Fighting Poverty”). Yunus remained undaunted. In the vein of citizen leadership, he founded his own bank, the Grameen Bank Project, to advance his campaign to extend microcredit to the very poor. The Grameen Bank Project was formally transformed into an incorporated bank with the backing of the Bangladeshi government in 1983. Underscoring the bank’s focus on the rural poor, Yunus chose to name his operation Grameen Bank since “grameen” means “village” in the Bangla language (Yunus and Jolis 92-94, 119-120).

Yunus has demonstrated citizen leadership through his willingness to question conventional approaches and instigate change by presenting alternatives to institutionalized patterns. His frustration with conventional banking practices began during his observations of poverty in Jobra. Since most definitions of poverty did not include women or children, Yunus fashioned his own parameters to define degrees of poverty. He described categories of poverty as P1 (the poorest 20% of the population), P2 (the poorest 35% of the population), and P3 (the poorest 50% of the population). Each division contains subcategories based on demographic elements, including religion, ethnicity, occupation, region, age, and gender (Yunus and Jolis 41). By catering to the poor, Yunus’s Grameen Bank challenged widely accepted banking methods. As Yunus remarked, “I decided to do exactly the opposite of traditional banks” (Yunus and Jolis 61). With his founding of Grameen Bank, Yunus developed an institution dedicated to the advancement of the downtrodden and promoted policies that diverged from standard banking practices. Whereas conventional banking determines loan eligibility by assessing an individual’s collateral and financial standing, Yunus approaches loan distribution by gauging individual potential (Yunus, “Helping the Poor”). He defines credit according to the “character, capacity, and capital” of a potential borrower (Grameen Bank, “Three C’s of Credit”). As he has stated, “Grameen Bank starts with the belief that credit should be accepted as a human right” (Yunus, “Is Grameen Bank Different...?”). While conventional banks focus on the maximization of profit, Yunus’s Grameen Bank centers on the maximization of human potential.

Microcredit has truly transformed the lives of the poor. As of October 2007, Grameen Bank has distributed over $6.5 billion, serving 80,257 villages and boasting 7,341,313 members, of whom 7,106,048 are women (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”). Grameen Bank currently employs a staff of approximately 25,000 (Yunus, “Is Grameen Bank Different...?”). Grameen Bank’s rate of recovery is 98.35% (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”), the highest repayment level of any banking system (“Biography”). With the success of microcredit, the bank’s loan program has expanded. Grameen Bank has given 19,631 higher education loans and 50,503 school scholarships (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”). Yunus is particularly proud that 100% of the children of Grameen borrowers attend school (Yunus, Vanderbilt). Furthermore, Grameen Bank’s housing loan program has resulted in the construction of 649,774 dwellings (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”). Grameen also serves the poor by providing fortified yogurt to children to combat malnourishment and establishing eye-care clinics that perform approximately 10,000 cataract surgeries a year (Yunus, Nobel Lecture). In a measure of the success of Grameen Bank, its borrowers are estimated to have incomes 25% higher than non-Grameen borrowers (Grameen Bank, “Breaking”).
In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Yunus reflected on his efforts, stating, “I became involved in the poverty issue not as a policymaker or a researcher. I became involved because poverty was all around me, and I could not turn away from it” (Nobel Lecture).

While Yunus directs much energy toward his ultimate objective of bettering the lives of the impoverished, he realizes that to achieve this goal, he must continually seek to improve the internal operations of Grameen Bank. Thus, Grameen Bank has developed a clear action plan that focuses on recognizing problems, formulating viable solutions, establishing priorities, and maintaining social awareness (Grameen Bank, “Method”). To contribute to a feeling of unity and identity among Grameen Bank employees and borrowers, Yunus designed a logo for the bank: a red and green emblem shaped like a village hut (Yunus and Jolis 122). To create a culture of accountability, Grameen Bank workers must annually review their performance, a task guided by ten indicators developed by Yunus to gauge the poverty level of Grameen borrowers. The ten indicators consider key factors in determining quality of life, including family health, access to education for children, availability of nutritious food, and suitable shelter. These parameters provide Grameen Bank staff with specifics that frame the institution’s mission (Grameen Bank, “Ten Indicators”). To further Grameen Bank as an empowering organization for its borrowers, Yunus advocates the “sixteen decisions,” an outline of methods the poor can implement to improve their livelihoods. Grameen Bank borrowers are not mandated to follow the sixteen decisions, but these guidelines support borrowers as they strive to achieve a better life for themselves and their families. The sixteen decisions emphasize independence, work ethic, health, and a spirit of community (Grameen Bank, “The 16 Decisions”).

In structuring Grameen’s microcredit operations, Yunus has funneled much attention toward the empowerment of women. Yunus’s concern for Bangladeshi women, who are socially confined and politically ignored, illustrates a hallmark of Couto’s conception of citizen leadership, for Couto writes that “citizen leaders speak in simple terms about the basic dignity of every human being” (15). Approximately 97% of Grameen borrowers are women (Yunus, “Is Grameen Bank Different. . . ?). Justifying this focus, Yunus notes that women typically spend their income on their children and household, while destitute men, on the other hand, usually spend a larger portion of their money to fulfill their own needs rather than the needs of their families (Yunus and Jolis 72). Furthermore, women are typically poorer than men, so they enjoy fewer prospects for advancement (“Micro Loans”). Extending microcredit loans to women, therefore, improves the lives not only of women, but also of the family unit in impoverished areas. With these loans, women can also assume a stronger role within the family and gain a new sense of pride in a society in which many brides have committed suicide due to difficulties stemming from paying their dowry (“Interview”). Noting Yunus’s transforming impact on the lives of women, New York Times columnist Jerald Posman wrote, “Nobody did as much to empowering women as Muhammad Yunus” (qtd. in Bari).

Still, many societal hurdles hamper Yunus’s vision to extend a microcredit loan to all deserving women. In Bangladesh, for example, women are expected to speak only to men who are close relatives. In his bank, therefore, Yunus emphasizes offering employment to women so as to better communicate the opportunities afforded by microcredit. In addition, women often accompany Yunus as he travels through neighborhoods to inform the poor about microcredit (Yunus and Jolis 46, 74, 77). Yunus, however, has stated that many women still harbor fear regarding their ability to handle a microcredit loan; he, in fact, has identified fear as the chief challenge that women must overcome before taking a microcredit loan (Tharoor). Grameen Bank originally sought to allay this fear by organizing women into groups of five individuals so they could provide encouragement and support for one another (Yunus and Jolis 63-64). Currently, Grameen Bank no longer relies on such groups, opting instead to assign a staff member to work closely with each borrower and offer assistance and motivation with the development of an individualized repayment plan (Yunus, “Grameen Bank II”).

The 1996 elections in Bangladesh reflect the growing empowerment of women, as more women than men voted for the first time in Bangladeshi history. Also in the 1996 elections, the Islamic Society, a fundamentalist political party favoring oppression of women, retained only three seats in Parliament. Prior to the election, the Islamic Society had held seventeen seats and, according to reports, had pressured women not to take Grameen loans by beating them, threatening to deny them a suitable Muslim burial, and telling them that Grameen Bank would enslave or kill them (Jolis). Truly, Yunus’s leadership has strengthened many of the most vulnerable members of Bangladeshi society.
Yunus further seeks to aid the most downtrodden and forgotten individuals through Grameen Bank’s Struggling Members Program. Launched in 2003, this project seeks to help beggars, traditionally the most severely impoverished in Bangladeshi society, adopt a more sustainable way of life. Customary forms of aid rarely reach these people, who typically resort to begging following such misfortunes as natural disasters, divorce, disability, or unemployment. The Struggling Members Program, however, gives beggars opportunities for betterment by offering them interest-free loans, generally in amounts of around $9. Beggars then use this money to buy items, such as bread and toys, to sell as they beg. Borrowers decide the repayment schedule, with the stipulation that they cannot repay the loan with money obtained from begging (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank’s Struggling”). This program clearly embodies Couto’s principle that citizen leaders “act from the conviction that we, as a society, are responsible for redressing the conditions that undermine and understate the human dignity of any of its members” (Couto 15).

In additional efforts to enhance beggars’ self-worth, Grameen Bank gives these individuals identity badges to symbolize the bank’s support and extends to them the same attention and respect afforded to other members. The bank, moreover, avoids using the term “beggar” due to its negative social implications (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank’s Struggling”). Even though Grameen Bank had extended loans to 84,984 beggars by October 2007 (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”), Yunus has acknowledged that much work remains before begging can begin to recede on a large scale, as he estimates that only 10% of participants in the Struggling Members Program have stopped begging (Vanderbilt). Still, the program has extended help to members of society who previously had scant cause for hope.

Grameen Bank’s loan insurance program further illustrates how Yunus has broadened the mission of microcredit. Through this program, Yunus addresses an impediment to the success of microcredit: the traditional belief of many Bangladeshis that souls burdened with debt cannot achieve peace. Effectively allaying this fear, the loan insurance program rescinds the debt of any borrower who dies before having repaid the full balance of the loan (Yunus, “Grameen Bank II”). As of October 2007, this program has covered the loans of 72,787 deceased Grameen borrowers. Grameen Bank also cares for its borrowers through its life insurance fund, which has distributed money to the families of the 97,376 Grameen members who have died since the bank’s inception (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Bank Monthly Update”).

Yunus continues to design and implement programs to aid the poor; the scope of his mission to end poverty extends beyond the success of Grameen Bank. To satisfy the diverse needs of Bangladesh’s poor, Yunus has launched a series of ventures collectively called the Grameen Family of Enterprises (Grameen Bank, “Grameen Family of Enterprises”). Grameen Uddog (“Grameen Initiatives”) is one such operation. Realizing that Bangladesh imported $150 million of fabric from India, Yunus founded this company to produce high-quality cloth using Bangladeshi materials and employing Bangladeshis. The resulting fabrics, called Grameen Check, are considered superior to Indian cloths, and their marketability was demonstrated in a Parisian fashion show in February 1996 (Yunus and Jolis 222-23). Grameen Knitwear Limited is another clothing manufacturing company in the Grameen Family of Enterprises. Founded in 1997, Grameen Knitwear Limited is wholly export-oriented, with the United States and Western Europe serving as its main markets (Grameen Bank, “In-house Projects”).

The Grameen Family of Enterprises also includes a variety of companies to provide the rural poor with the benefits of advanced technology. Yunus recognizes that technology can strengthen microcredit by connecting the poor to an expanded market, financing institutions, and reliable sources of information; in sum, technology combats the isolation that typically colors the lives of the poor (Yunus, “Halving Poverty”). Yunus, therefore, founded Grameen Star Education Limited, a company that provides the poor with training in computer skills and information and communication technology (ICT). Further reflecting his innovative spirit, Yunus formed Grameen CyberNet Limited (GCL), which helped initiate internet service in Bangladesh, and Grameen Solutions Limited (GSL), which develops software for local and foreign markets (Grameen Bank, “Venture Projects”). Yunus has also strengthened the connection between technology and poverty eradication with the establishment of the Village Phone Project of Grameen Bank. This cellular communications company distributes solar-powered cellular phones to rural areas that lack electricity, while offering employment opportunities for impoverished women (Yunus, Acceptance Speech). 300,000 Bangladeshi women, affectionately dubbed
“telephone ladies” by Yunus, make money by allowing other villagers to use their cellular phones. As a result of this program, mobile-phone ownership has become the fastest avenue to earn money and gain social respectability in rural Bangladesh. With 10 million subscribers, Grameen Phone provides all Bangladeshi villages with telephone access (Yunus, Nobel Lecture). In celebration of the success of this program, Yunus and Grameen Bank were named as the first recipients of the Petersberg Prize in 2004, an award given in recognition of the application of technology to better society (Development Gateway Foundation).

In describing citizen leaders, Couto writes that they “are not showered with traditional forms of recognition” early in their leadership careers, although these individuals may later receive rewards as their achievements make a significant impact on society (15-16). Such is true in Yunus’s exemplification of citizen leadership. In his initial push for microcredit, Yunus spent many years virtually pleading with banks and government agencies to embrace the concept, but this effort produced only limited success that was often counterbalanced by frustration. In the 1990s, the world community began to recognize Yunus’s contributions to the alleviation of poverty and sought to honor his unique and substantial achievements. In 1997, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution hailing microcredit as “an effective tool in freeing people from the bondage of poverty” (United Nations). Yunus received the first Sakaal Person of the Year Award, a recognition presented by Sakaal Group, a publishing house based in India, to an individual who “has made a significant contribution to humanity thus bringing about a change and creating a paradigm shift in society” (“Sakaal Person of the Year”). Furthermore, Business Week magazine named Yunus as one of the thirty greatest entrepreneurs in history (Tozzi), and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) recognized Yunus as one of the New Heroes (Oregon Public Broadcasting). Yunus has also served on the Global Commission of Women’s Health, the Advisory Council for Sustainable Economic Development, the United Nations Expert Group on Women and Finance, and the board of the United Nations Foundation (Grandin). The decision of the Nobel Committee to award the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to Yunus and Grameen Bank provides the clearest indication that society recognizes Yunus’s leadership, talent, genuine concern for the poor, and belief in humanity to achieve great ends. After discounting Yunus’s advice for years, the world community has embraced Yunus’s system to better the human condition.

The degree to which society has hailed the achievements of Yunus and Grameen Bank reflects the importance that trust plays in defining Yunus’s leadership style. Couto writes that citizen leaders “acquire the truly distinguishing characteristic of leadership: the gift of trust bestowed by others with whom they work” (13). Indeed, the international community, from isolated Bangladeshi villages to the United Nations, has extended its support and trust to Yunus. He, in turn, trusts individuals, including those traditionally viewed as undeserving of trust, such as the landless poor, women, and beggars. The jubilant public reaction in Bangladesh to the announcement that Yunus had received the Nobel Peace Prize perhaps best illustrates the role that trust plays in defining Yunus’s leadership style. Commenting on the celebrations in Bangladesh honoring Yunus, Professor Ole Danbolt Mjøs, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, stated that many Bangladeshis regarded the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Yunus as the greatest event for Bangladesh since the nation had achieved independence from Pakistan (Mjøs). Weeks after celebrations had ended, posters remained in Dhaka praising Yunus (Robinson).

In spite of this success, Yunus has continued to question entrenched approaches to banking through his drive to foster a more socially aware capitalist society, one that removes barriers injuring the poor. At the core of his mission, Yunus believes that “poverty is created by the institutions we have built around us”; consequently, he argues, “We have to go back to the drawing board, redesign those institutions so that they do not discriminate against the poor” (Yunus, “Fighting Poverty”). In the spirit of citizen leadership, Yunus has drawn the schematics for such a new economy. He believes that a central principle of capitalism – competition – holds much potential, as it has proven successful in spurring creativity and progress (Yunus and Jolis 206). He, however, desires a transformation of the economic order by expanding the meaning of capitalism to encompass more than strict monetary advancement. Enrichment of the human condition would take the helm in a renewed economy driven by his conceptualization of “social business entrepreneurs” (Yunus, “Social”). To help realize this vision, Yunus proposes the creation of a separate social stock market, one that would operate much like
the existing stock market except that investors would fund charitable causes. Yunus envisions a network of new rating agencies, newspapers, and banks to support the social stock market (Yunus, “Social”). He also looks forward to the incorporation of social training into Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs (Yunus, Acceptance Speech). This new system, in Yunus’s view, would help address the chief shortcoming of capitalism, namely “the failure to capture the essence of a human being” (Yunus, “Social”).

The spread of microcredit program throughout the world reveals the extent to which Yunus has changed society in the mold of a citizen leader, for Couto writes that citizen leaders imprint a lasting legacy despite society’s stubbornness in adopting their advice (17). From its roots in Bangladesh, microcredit first spread to Malaysia and the Philippines; microcredit now extends from Scandinavia and Africa to Latin America and China (Yunus and Jolis 155, 161, 191). Today, microcredit operations are implemented by 250 organizations in nearly 100 nations (Oregon Public Broadcasting). In the United States, Grameen Foundation USA and the Association for Enterprise Opportunity provide microcredit loans (Yunus and Jolis 189). Furthermore, a microcredit operation has served approximately 150,000 citizens living in poverty-plagued urban centers such as Chicago and Washington, D.C. (“Micro Loans”). Reflecting the capacity of microcredit to alleviate poverty worldwide, Yunus has stated that microcredit “can work wherever there is poverty” (Yunus and Jolis 175).

Couto’s citizen leadership offers a fresh lens for analyzing leadership, for it draws attention from the traditional symbolic nucleus of leadership, chiefly national institutions, and directs focus on individuals who take heartfelt action to better the lives of others. Muhammad Yunus truly embodies the spirit, purpose, and approach of citizen leaders. Throughout his life, Yunus has never removed himself far from the opportunities – and the challenges – to serve others. While gauging the true impact of Yunus’s contributions to the human condition is an impossibility, one only needs to consider the new optimism of many of the world’s poorest to capture a hint of Yunus’s particular gifts of leadership. Through his pioneering concept of microcredit, Yunus is both a citizen committed to adding his unique contributions to the texture of humanity and a leader dedicated to shepherding others to foster a better world where dignity and economic advancement are synonymous.

Bibliography


A Grain of Salt Can Shake an Empire

Missy Golson

In 1930, Winston Churchill smugly stated, “It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the east, striding half-naked up the steps of the vice regal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.” Many in the outside world saw Gandhi as “the little brown man in the loin cloth,” and he was repeatedly mocked, laughed at, and looked upon with scorn. However, to the Indians, Mohandas Gandhi was a symbol of who they were and of the power and hope they had that could be seen despite his mere appearance. Gandhi was not only the leader of the Indian independence movement; he was the leader of the Indian people. So, what made Gandhi such a successful charismatic leader? What caused millions of people to follow him? Why did a Western-trained, high caste lawyer resort to wearing the clothes of the Indian poor?

This paper analyzes Gandhi’s method of nonviolence, which he named satyagraha, and how he used this method in two of his major nonviolent campaigns: the non-cooperation movement and the Great Salt March of 1930. Through my research and analysis, four aspects of Gandhi stand out and distinguish him as a charismatic leader. Primarily, Gandhi was a skilled organizer. He had connections from the Indian Congress to the most remote village. Gandhi also had a way of stirring up national pride among the Indians. He turned the focus away from internal conflicts between social classes and religion and shifted the battle to fighting an outside force—the British—in which all Indians could be united. The other two aspects of Gandhi that made him a dynamic leader were his political genius and his brilliant use of words and symbols. He used propaganda to stir up the emotions of the Indians and picked strategies that would strike Great Britain at its weaknesses. The symbols he used and the facets of life he sought to wage his battles against were never an accident. An example of this is seen in the way he dressed. Gandhi stripped himself of British clothes to break down the barrier of class and wore what was worn by the millions of poor in India. Furthermore, presenting himself half-naked showed vulnerability, and it was symbolic of how Great Britain had stripped India of her rights and dignity. Simple details, such as a word, also held great power in Gandhi’s mind, as can be seen in his creation of the word satyagraha.

Satyagraha

When Gandhi first began formulating his ideas of nonviolence and political action, he called it “passive resistance.” However, this

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“I have always had a fascination with Gandhi and his revolutionary ideas and theories. Last year, I wrote a paper in Dr. Ed LaMonte’s Civil Rights and Justice course which analyzed Gandhi’s method of satyagraha and his movement to gain Indian independence from Great Britain. After writing this paper and traveling to India the following interim, I became very interested in how Gandhi was able to build such a massive following and wanted to delve deeper into the aspects that made him a charismatic leader. My final presentation in Leadership Studies critiqued these characteristics through examining two of his major, nonviolent campaigns for Indian independence.”

Missy is a senior political science major with a minor in religion. She is active in the Leadership Studies program, Students Offering Support (SOS), Chi Omega, Mortar Board, SPACE, and Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science National Honor Society. Missy serves as a Service Learning coordinator and has participated in a local Service Learning interim project in Alabama. In the summer of 2007, Missy worked as a Hess Fellow with the YWCA of Central Alabama.
phrase did not satisfy Gandhi because his ideas were anything but passive. He said the term was narrowly construed, a weapon of the weak, and did not describe the real nature of the Indian movement. Gandhi particularly disliked the expression because passive resistance was an English term. The great Indian struggle could not be described by an English phrase (Gandhi 318).

After researching and holding a contest in an Indian newspaper, Gandhi combined two Sanskrit words: saty meaning “truth” and agraha meaning “holding firmly” to form the word satyagraha meaning “firmness for truth.” Gandhi’s theory was based upon the principle of ahimsa, meaning nonviolence and love; this idea was taken from the Indian tradition of strict nonviolence. The core of satyagraha was soul force, or the inner power of an individual, which can be obtained through self-sacrifice. Gandhi demonstrated this self-sacrifice his entire life through fasting and living a simple lifestyle. The ultimate goal of his method was to attain swaraj, or freedom, and this concept went beyond civil disobedience to include an all-encompassing approach to moral, social, and political reform (Dalton 8).

Once Gandhi had his word to describe the movement, the next step he knew he had to take was to organize his army of soul force in order for satyagraha to be used on a massive scale. He started a grassroots campaign that lasted years and stretched across the country to districts, cities, villages, young and old, men and women, the political elites, and the untouchables. He established ashrams across India, which are community homes that seek truth, and began training men and women in his method of satyagraha. Once these students were fully trained, Gandhi sent them to villages all across India to spread his new concept of nonviolence action combined with truth. These villagers were then organized and sent to cities and training camps of satyagraha. In a few short years, Gandhi became a national figure because of his organization, and this prepared him to launch his first national campaign of satyagraha (Fischer 61). He was just waiting for the right moment.

**Non-cooperation Movement**

On April 13, 1919, a group of peaceful satyagrahis were at a meeting when they were violently massacred by British troops. Three hundred and seventy nine people were killed, and 1,137 were wounded (Chadha 238). Gandhi’s moment had come. On June 30, Gandhi called for all Indians to adopt a policy of non-cooperation with Great Britain; thus, the propaganda began. He traveled across India promoting his ideas of non-cooperation and criticizing the British government. He would passionately declare to crowds of hundreds and thousands, “The British Empire today represents Satanism and has been guilty of such terrible atrocities that, if it did not apologize for them to God and to country, it would certainly perish. I will go further to say that, unless it so apologizes, it is the duty of every Indian to destroy it...We in India may in a moment realize that one hundred thousand Englishmen need not frighten three hundred million human beings” (247).

The non-cooperation movement officially began in 1920 with a resolution passed by the Indian Congress. Clothes became the centerpiece of symbolism and were vital in the non-cooperation movement. Gandhi called for all Indians to boycott foreign-made clothes. He reintroduced the ancient spinning wheel as a means of making clothes and turned this object into a national symbol of patriotism and self-reliance. Men and women of all classes and religions refused to buy British clothes, and the pride of being an Indian was shown through what they wore (Gandhi 489). The simple piece of cloth that everyone made was called a dhoti. It was cheap so the millions of poor masses could afford it; by wearing the dhoti, elites demonstrated that they were fighting for all of India. Even Hindus and Muslims wore the clothes that showed their common heritage. Gandhi picked this method because it was all-inclusive, it was a simple way to show national pride, and it hurt the British economy.

However, the non-cooperation movement was far greater than just the boycotting of foreign clothes. The movement meant exactly what the name said: do not cooperate with the British. Gandhi’s political genius came through again. He knew that civil disobedience would probably result in massive bloodshed, but what could the British do if the Indians did not cooperate? Gandhi thought that if all Indians refused to cooperate, British institutions would slowly come to a halt (Fischer 63).

In 1921, Gandhi returned two war medals he had earned in South Africa, and, once this was made public in the papers, Indians began denouncing their British titles and honors. Students began boycotting British educational institutions, lawyers left the British courts, and professional men and women quit their jobs and began traveling to the villages to teach non-cooperation. In one year, over
600,000 people were thrown into jail for political offenses. Even this turned against the British because jail became a social gathering. If a patriotic Indian was not in jail, it was seen as a disgrace (Chadha 246).

The movement was going strong by 1922. Jails were overcrowded, the British were greatly frustrated and losing revenue by the hour, and Gandhi was on the verge of launching his most powerful campaign of boycotting taxes. Howard Gardner, a leading theorist on charismatic leadership, said that at this moment, Gandhi was a “person who, by word and personal example, markedly influenced the behaviors, thoughts and feelings of a significant number of human beings” (Gardner and Laskin 267). Gandhi had articulated a vision through his use of symbolism and nationalism. He appealed to the emotions and motives of the people, and, in return, the masses unquestionably followed him. However, at the movement’s peak, the momentum abruptly came to a stop.

Gandhi received word that intense violence had broken out in the city of Chauri Chaura. A procession of satyagrahis had marched to a local police station to protest the jailing of non-cooperation demonstrators. Some of the marchers were reportedly harassed by laughing policemen and retaliated by setting the police station on fire. As the policemen fled the burning building, the mob captured twenty-three of the constables and hacked them to pieces (Wolpert 112). Gandhi was mortified when he found out. He immediately called a meeting of the Working Committee of Congress and suspended the non-cooperation campaign. The Congressional leaders were astounded, but Gandhi knew that the masses had not fully grasped his teachings and that India was on the verge of a thousand more Chauri Chauras. With Gandhi calling off the campaign, the momentum collapsed and India settled into a period of silence (Payne 359).

The Silent 20s

After the fall of the non-cooperation movement, Gandhi was sentenced to jail and almost died from appendicitis. He spent most of the decade recovering, removed from active politics. He wrote weekly in the Indian newspaper, Young India, and encouraged the people to practice nonviolence among themselves. He was at a loss for where to go with his fight for India, so he fasted, meditated, and, as he stated in his autobiography, “waited for God to tell him what to do next” (Gandhi 503).

The Great Salt March

In December 1929, Gandhi returned to the national scene. The Indian Congress declared swaraj, or freedom, as India’s national goal and authorized satyagraha as the means for attaining this goal. They did not announce a specific course of action, so once again the campaign was entrusted to their popular leader; Gandhi. Gandhi’s first political move was to declare January 26 as India’s Independence Day. He did not call on non-cooperation or civil disobedience yet; he first wanted a symbolic gesture of what India was about to undertake. He wanted to stir up the people again and make it known that this time he would not stop until India received its independence (Dalton 92). This symbolism is what Jay Conger, a well-known expert on leadership, would call theatrical language. Gandhi used a simple sign to create a larger, desired effect and to articulate a clear point – a free India (Conger 31).

After Gandhi declared January 26 as Independence Day, he drafted a manifesto that was read in every village and town. The manifesto declared:

The British Government of India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence. (Chadha 288)

His words woke up the sleeping masses again; everyone waited for Gandhi’s plan of action.

“Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life.” Gandhi wrote in the newspaper, Young India. “It is the only condiment of the poor. There is no article like salt, which the State, by taxing, can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed, and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhumane poll tax that man can devise. If the people had freedom, they could pick up salt from the deposits made by the receding tides on the bountiful coast” (Wolpert 142). Gandhi declared that he would fight the British salt tax. He picked this law because salt was an element that everyone needed. The salt tax incited outrage in all Indians, regardless of caste, unifying the nation.
After Gandhi’s announcement that he would fight the salt tax, he publicized his plan to go on a 240-mile march to the seacoast of Dandi where he would break the law by manufacturing his own salt (Payne 392). He recruited his original marchers from his own ashram, those that he could rely on for trust, discipline, and fearlessness in the face of opposition. They consisted of men, women, and children; Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; high castes and low castes; college-educated poets and field laborers. This wide variety of people was also a recruiting tool to draw in more groups of people as they marched from village to village. The route of the march was planned around regional contacts, recruiting potential, and time. Major rest stops were announced in Young India three days before the march, and hundreds of people began congregating in these villages to catch a glimpse of their general (Dalton 104).

Gandhi also prepared for the march by using the media as a tool for propaganda. He issued statements at public prayer services and talked with the press from Indian, American, and European newspapers. Every journalist, film producer, and radio announcer was absorbed in the dramatic action Gandhi was about to undertake. The suspense increased with every word Gandhi spoke. He asserted over and over again, “This is a battle to the finish,” “We shall face the bullets with our backs to the wall,” and “We are entering upon a life and death struggle; a holy war” (Dalton 108).

On March 12, 1930, the day of the march arrived. Gandhi placed the tilak on his forehead, the symbol for devotion; put on his khadi, the mark of simplicity; and picked up his walking stick, a symbol of strength; he then set out for the sea of Dandi (109). The frail, sixty-year old Gandhi was the image of power as he walked from village to village leading his troops into battle. Throughout the twenty-four day march, he spoke to thousands of Indians about independence and British tyranny, and, around the world, millions of people watched as he became the voice of the oppressed (Chadha 292).

Gandhi arrived in Dandi on April 5, and the tiny village population swelled to over 12,000 people overnight. He prayed and fasted all day and, for symbolic reasons, deliberately waited until April 6 to break the salt law. April 6 marked the beginning of “National Week,” which was a day of penance and purification for Indians, and this year it would be marked by the start of the civil disobedience campaign. The next morning at 6:30 am, thousands of people watched in silence as Gandhi stooped down into the ankle deep water. He picked up a handful of mud and salt and said, “With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire” (Dalton 115).

After these words, the Indian nationalist movement skyrocketed. With a simple sentence, a simple act of defiance, and a symbolic march for freedom, Gandhi became a worldwide hero. He empowered millions of Indians to partake in civil disobedience, and within a week, everyone seemed to be gathering salt or reading Congressional booklets on how to make it. The salt satyagraha soon turned into a mass satyagraha, and people were gathering in the streets burning foreign cloths or British goods (116).

Within a month, over 60,000 people were arrested, but violence also ensued. British forces began beating protestors, a terrorist group began killing policeman, and, in retaliation, troops opened fire on demonstrators. Gandhi was arrested, but the movement dragged on. By the end of the year, 100,000 people were arrested, thousands more beaten, and many were dead. Before events spiraled out of control, British officials met with Gandhi to work out a compromise. A pact was made to free all political prisoners in return for suspending the civil disobedience campaign. Furthermore, people living on the coast could collect salt for their own use, and Gandhi was invited to attend the Round Table Conference in London to discuss constitutional matters (Fischer 273). Thus, the second major, civil disobedience campaign came to a halt. Yet, it was a brief halt, as Gandhi had a long way to go before India would achieve her independence.

**Charismatic Leader and Conclusion**

It is clear that Gandhi was a successful charismatic leader. Through his organizational skills, political strategies, unification of the people, and use of words and symbols, Gandhi became the leader of the Indian independence movement. Max Weber described charismatic leadership as “resting on devotion the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.” Charismatic people have a “remarkable ability to distill complex ideas into simple messages, communicate by using symbols or metaphors, relish risk, are rebels who fight convention, and may seem idiosyncratic.” Gandhi obviously falls into this category. However, Weber goes on to state that “of course none of this is a guarantee that the
mission will be correct, ethical, or successful" (Weber 329). So the question is not whether Gandhi was a charismatic leader, but rather, was Gandhi’s strategy successful? Was satyagraha the best way to achieve independence?

Gandhi would fight seventeen more years after the Great Salt March until India received its independence. The non-cooperation movement and the salt satyagraha did not directly result in freedom, and they were full of bloodshed and death. Satyagraha was supposed to be a method of nonviolence, and yet violence was always in its midst. Gandhi considered himself a failure and blamed himself whenever violence occurred. However, what would the alternatives have been—violence or inaction? Violence would have resulted in an immense amount of suffering and death, and India would not have stood a chance against the British Royal forces. Inaction would have left the Indian people under continued suppression.

Satyagraha did result in violence, but India eventually achieved its independence. The question of whether satyagraha was the best method cannot be fully answered, but Gandhi’s method did work. That “little brown man in the loin cloth” spoke to the hearts of more people than any other leader in the twentieth century. He gave people the fortitude to be thrown in jail, beaten, and die for the sake of their country. He strategized, organized, and fearlessly took on the most powerful empire in the world without ever lifting a gun. His strategy was an all-encompassing, emotion-inspiring soul force that could be practiced by every man, woman, and child. He was an idealist, a motivator, a nationalist, a political genius, and the Mahatma, the Great Soul of India. Today, Mohandas Gandhi and his methods have been studied, analyzed, and used all over the world. When his image is seen, it is no longer looked upon with mockery, laughter, or scorn. He is revered. His image is now an image of power, of liberation, and of hope.

Bibliography

“Ideas Have Consequences:”
The John Birch Society and the Reasonable Right

Peter Starr

“In America Since 1940, one of the best history courses I have ever taken, Professor Bill Nicholas required us to research and write about a social movement during the 1960s. I chose the virulently anti-communist John Birch Society. As much as I enjoyed learning about this extreme organization—and its delusional leadership—the prize of the work was becoming familiar with such brilliant conservative writers as Bill Buckley and Russell Kirk. I have yet to find a contemporary political writer from either side of the aisle with such wit and intellect.”

Peter is a junior history major with a minor in Spanish and a member of the Honors Program. He has served as President of the Student Government Association and is a member of Alpha Lambda Delta, Phi Eta Sigma, Omicron Delta Kappa, and Theta Chi Fraternity. Peter also plays on the BSC Men’s Ultimate Frisbee team and participated in the 2007 Service Learning interim in Alabama. Additionally, Peter co-authored and published a 25-page book about the history of football at BSC, Panthers on the Gridiron: Football at Birmingham-Southern.

On December 8, 1958, Robert H.W. Welch, Jr., a retired New England candy manufacturer, invited eleven “patriotic and public-spirited men” to Indianapolis for a two-day conference. The purpose of the gathering was undisclosed due to the gravity and sensitivity of the issues that were to be discussed.1 Welch, however, soon revealed why he had summoned them. “Unless we can reverse forces which now seem inexorable in their movement,” Welch warned in his opening speech, “you have only a few more years before the country in which you live will become four separate provinces in a world-wide Communist dominion ruled by police-state methods from the Kremlin.”2 Welch then laid out the plan, which he falsely attributed to Vladimir Lenin, that the Soviets would follow to conquer the world: first they would take Eastern Europe, then Asia, and finally, they would “encircle that last bastion of capitalism, the United States of America.” To conquer the U.S., though, the Soviets would not have to fight, for it would “fall like overripe fruit into [their] hands.”3

To say the least, Welch’s claims were extreme. Yet his speech convinced the eleven men who had convened there, and on December 9, 1958, they founded the John Birch Society. This society, which was named after a Baptist preacher turned soldier who was murdered by Chinese Communists at the conclusion of World War II, quickly grew into the “backbone and bellwether,” the “vanguard” and “spearhead” of the Radical Right.4 While the Birchers may have been enthusiastically received by radicals, the reaction of mainstream conservatives was somewhat cautious.

Initially, most mainstream conservatives appreciated the enthusiasm of the Birchers; the growth of the Society indicated that a “national awakening,” a revival of American conservatism, was taking place.5 But while conservatives accepted the Society’s members, they condemned its leader, the extreme Robert Welch. By 1965, the relationship was permanently altered—reasonable conservatives condemned the entire John Birch Society (JBS). This break with the JBS resulted from two factors: the first was the growth of an ideological division between the responsible Right and the Society’s leadership which centered on the conspiratorial beliefs of the JBS. As the Society’s beliefs became increasingly severe, responsible conservatives could no longer pardon its members. The second, more immediate factor was political—the John Birch Society had unforgivably damaged the Republican Party in the 1964 election.

As recorded in its manual, The Blue Book of the John Birch Society, the Society’s fundamental belief was that Communism was a world-wide conspiracy to enslave humankind. The struggle between Communism and democracy then, was not merely political but also religious: it was a struggle “between light and darkness; freedom and
slavery; between the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of the anti-Christ for the souls and bodies of men.” Accordingly, the JBS opposed collectivism in all its forms. In fact, the Society advocated a policy of “less government of every kind” and “more responsibility.” By promoting “less government and more responsibility,” the Society hoped to create a “better world.”

Even before the Society’s emergence on the national political scene in the early 1960s, responsible conservatives had already come into contact with the architect of its beliefs, Robert Welch. In 1958, Welch distributed copies of his personal manuscript, The Politician, to William F. Buckley, Jr., the founder of National Review, and Senator Barry Goldwater. The central thesis of Welch’s work—that the U.S. government was controlled by the Communist Party—was extreme, but his denunciations of high-ranking government officials, most notably Dwight Eisenhower, were simply insane. In light of the “overwhelming” evidence, Welch argues that only two interpretations of Eisenhower exist: that he was too dumb to realize that the communists were using him as a tool, which was dubious, or the more “serious” possibility that he had been “consciously serving the Communist conspiracy for all of his adult life.” Either way, it was clear that Eisenhower was a Communist agent. Both Buckley and Goldwater criticized the book, advising Welch not to distribute it, but it was to no avail. He continued to circulate The Politician to select members of the Society, and in 1960-1961, the press released the manuscript to the general public. This revelation caused considerable consternation in Congress, but neither Welch nor the John Birch Society was officially censured by Congress.

Conservative intellectuals, represented by the National Review, were also surprisingly gentle in their criticism. In April of 1961, Buckley wrote an article entitled “The Uproar,” which Rick Perlstein, Goldwater’s biographer, describes as being “worded with the delicacy of a hostage negotiation.” In this article Buckley gingerly scolds Robert Welch and even offers his conditional support for the John Birch Society. By criticizing Welch but sympathizing with JBS members, the article sets the tone for much of the initial conservative criticism of the John Birch Society. It assumes a question and answer format. When asked the extent to which the membership of the John Birch Society “subscribe[s] to Mr. Welch’s views,” Buckley generously responds that the “overwhelming majority of the members” were “never aware” of the contents of The Politician. He does, however, acknowledge that the book’s fundamental assumptions, the “conspiratorial theory of history” and other “mistaken premises,” profoundly shape the Society’s beliefs. Significantly, the article closes with Buckley’s wish that the JBS “thrive[s], provided, of course,” that it resists false assumptions.

A few months later, Russell Kirk, who was described by a contemporary as the nation’s “leading conservative theoretician,” also defended the Society. In a short article entitled “Spring Madness,” Kirk criticized the liberal press’ efforts to smear the John Birch Society through guilt-by-association tactics. Though “indefensible,” The Politician was written before the Society’s founding, Kirk argues. Most members “didn’t know about the private book, and understand themselves to be participating in a movement aimed at combating Communist and socialist influence…” In light of this evidence, Kirk asserts that the liberal press’ branding of the JBS as “crackpot, brutalitarian, and anti-Semitic” are utterly untrue and unfair.

Less than a year later, conservative politicians and intellectuals had formulated an action plan in regard to the John Birch Society; they would denounce Robert Welch while reaching out to the Society’s membership. Carrying out the first part of the plan required little effort; Welch had supplied his critics with plenty of ammunition. Over the summer, American Opinion (Welch’s journal) had reported in its annual “Scoreboard,” which rated the degree to which various countries were controlled by Communists, that the U.S. had moved from 40-60% “Communist-controlled” to a whopping 50-70+%. Welch’s assertion that there were “thousands of Communists in the federal government” and that the CIA was “Communist-dominated” prompted Russell Kirk to castigate him as “remarkably ignorant of the Communist conspiracy” he was supposed to be combating. Though condemning Welch, Kirk diplomatically observed that the organization had attracted a “good many well-meaning and able people.” Furthermore, it was Kirk’s hope and belief that “many members” of the Society would be “grateful for this chance to emancipate themselves from the intemperance of Robert Welch.”

Goldwater, already looking towards the upcoming presidential election, condemned Welch as an extremist in a “Meet the Press” interview and advised the Society, which he believed to be “full of fine, upstanding citizens working hard and well for the cause of Americanism,” to remove Welch from power.
In his first full-fledged attack on Welch, “The Question of Robert Welch,” Buckley cites among others, Barry Goldwater, Russell Kirk, and Congressman Walter Judd (R-MN) as prominent conservatives who had recently denounced Welch. What follows is a devastating analysis of Welch’s most recent claims that the CIA, the State Department, the press, and NATO are controlled by Communists. Buckley quotes extensively from Welch’s most recent edition of American Opinion in which he concludes that “we have seen...in a hundred different manifestations, the unceasing efforts of our government to...bring about the merger of the United States with Soviet Russia...into a one-world socialist government.” This statement alone demonstrates that the central thesis of The Politician still guided Welch’s beliefs.

Given Welch’s supreme distortion of reality, Buckley argued that all JBS members—and American conservatives—had to contend with this question: how can the John Birch Society be an “effective political instrument” while it is led by Welch, whose views are “at so many critical points, so critically different from their own” and “so far removed from common sense”? Buckley’s assumption that most members’ views are “critically different” from Welch’s excuses them for being part of such an organization. Buckley also reaches out to JBS members by praising them as “some of the most morally energetic, self-sacrificing, and dedicated anti-communists in America.” But he reminds them that for moral and political reasons, they must renounce Welch’s leadership. In an eloquent and conciliatory conclusion, Buckley writes that “Mr. Welch has revived in many men the spirit of patriotism and that same spirit calls now for rejecting, out of a love for truth and country, his false counsels.”

Although Perlstein, Goldwater’s biographer, and several contemporaries argue that the reasonable Right’s initial approach to the John Birch Society—criticizing Welch while pardoning the Society’s membership—was driven by political self-interest, the evidence suggests that their efforts were based on the sincere belief that the majority of Birchers were reasonable, patriotic people. As America pointed out in 1961, the quality of the John Birch Society’s leadership set it apart from other extremist groups. Its national council was comprised of “leading industrialists, military men, and former government officials.” This allowed the JBS to attract ordinary American citizens whose confidence in the Society’s purpose was affirmed by its notable leadership. Additionally, political scientist Barbara Stone found that the composition of the John Birch Society defied the categories into which radical rightists traditionally fall. In contrast to the conventional profile of an older, poorly-educated, lower-income person, a Birch Society member was typically young, well-educated, and well-paid. Jeffrey Hart, who worked for National Review in the late 1960s, writes simply that “the ordinary members were...alarmed by the world situation and were anti-communists—decent people who wanted to do something.”

All of this evidence lends a greater degree of credibility to the notion that the initial conservative approach to the JBS was not driven by simple political convenience. Conservative leaders were sincere in their belief that most Birchers were reasonable, valuable anti-communists. This in turn supports the argument for a widening ideological division as a factor for the eventual break of the responsible Right with the Birch Society. As Welch’s views became increasingly extreme, mainstream conservatives, who had previously avoided alienating JBS members, realized that the ideological gulf separating them could no longer be bridged. The Society’s official message, which came from its leadership, had become so paranoid, so bizarre, that its members could no longer be excused; reasonable people would not remain part of such an insane organization.

As the ideological gulf between the John Birch Society and the responsible Right grew, the impending 1964 national election raised the stakes. The John Birch Society, always a political liability, assumed a position of greater significance. Although exact numbers are difficult to pinpoint (because membership was kept anonymous), one 1966 report estimated that there were 4,000 chapters nationwide with about 80,000 total members. The Birch Society was becoming more visible, and its increasingly negative press coverage began to have a detrimental effect on Republican candidates. The opposition’s strategy, it seemed, was to capitalize on the GOP’s refusal to condemn the entire John Birch Society, charging that the Republicans did sympathize and even agree with the Society’s views. This occurred most prominently in the presidential election but can be seen in several congressional races as well.

Reflecting on his presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater writes that out of “literally hundreds” of press conferences, there were only “three or four...[at which] I was not asked if I wanted to disavow the political support of the members of the John Birch Society.” The liberal media portrayed the JBS as a “major threat to freedom” and used them to “smear the entire conservative movement.”
special feature entitled “Thunder on the Right” was especially damaging. In it, CBS extensively covered all of the “crackpot kooks of the radical right” (Welch included), and then “isolated a question [put to Goldwater] involving the John Birch Society.” His response—“I refused to read them out of the human race”—allowed CBS to tie him in with “every crackpot on the Far Right.” Alarmed by these dangerous smear tactics, Buckley wrote in 1963 that the “tendency among opponents of the American Right to fasten on the John Birch Society as a means of sandbagging conservative candidates” had, with Goldwater’s ascension, become a “national political obsession.” Just as John F. Kennedy was not obligated to repudiate the Democratic Party because of its segregationist leadership in the South, Buckley argues, Goldwater need not repudiate the members of the John Birch Society.

The smear, however, was not limited to the liberal press or to liberals in general. Opponents in Goldwater’s own party used the charge of “Birchism” against him. For example, in 1964 Joseph Martin characterized his efforts to nominate Rockefeller as “keep[ing] the Republican Party from becoming a branch of the John Birch Society.” A victory for Goldwater, who was the “only candidate vigorously supported by the Birchers and Rightists lunatic fringe” would also be a victory for the extremists. Other prominent Republicans such as Rockefeller, Henry Cabot Lodge, and William Scranton repeated the charge of extremism to such an extent that Goldwater credits them with the margin of his defeat in 1964.

At the 1964 Republican Convention the stage was set for a showdown between the more conservative forces of the party (those that had been labeled extreme) and the moderates. Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania offered the first amendment to the party platform, which “repudiated the efforts of irresponsible extremist groups, such as the Communists, the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and others to discredit our party” by infiltrating it or by “attach[ing] themselves to its candidates.” When Rockefeller moved the adoption of the amendment, the voice vote (which came primarily from the spectator section) was a “roar of nays.” The vocal reaction to the next motion, George Romney’s anti-extremism amendment, was the same. Despite the vocal opposition, both amendments were added to the platform, but the show was not over yet—Goldwater still had to accept his party’s nomination. Fed up with the charges of extremism and Birchism he had suffered from the press as well as from his own party, Goldwater took the podium and roared these damning words: “I would remind you that extremism in defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!” Given the politically-charged meanings of the words “extremism” and “moderation,” this statement seemed almost an endorsement of the John Birch Society. Whether Goldwater ever had a shot at the presidency in 1964 is unknown, but, with these words, he confirmed the fears and smears of many; and, as always, the critical issue of extremism was inextricably connected to the John Birch Society.

Charges of “Birchism” proved detrimental to the GOP in the congressional elections as well. Following the Party’s significant 1964 losses in the House of Representatives, National Review ran an article that headlined “How to Beat a Good Congressman;” it was subtitled, “Simple. Just keep repeating Birch… Bircher… Birchest…” The article focuses on the way the Democratic Party was successfully able to graft Welch’s four most infamous positions—Eisenhower being a Communist, the impeachment of Earl Warren, America’s immediate withdrawal from the UN, and the repeal of the income tax—onto Republican candidates. The nation’s fear of Birch infiltration of the GOP first arose in 1961 when it was discovered that two Republican Congressmen from California, John Rousselot and Edger Hiestand, were JBS members. This controversy resurfaced when Rousselot, after being defeated for reelection in 1962, became the John Birch Society’s prominent national public relations director. The author of the article, Neal Freeman, put his finger on the nature of the problem, writing that “conservatives share to some extent the opinions of the Birch Society on anti-statism at home and anti-communism abroad,” which made it easy to bill a Republican victory as a victory for the Birchists.

In the wake of the election, Republican leaders of all stripes denounced any association with the John Birch Society. The moderate Senator Thruston Morton of Kentucky, a former Republican National Chairman, was the first to express his concern over the Society’s influence within the party, and other leaders soon followed suit. In December of 1965, the GOP’s congressional Policy Committee adopted a general resolution that urged Republicans to “reject membership in any radical or extremist organization…which attempts to use the Republican Party for its own ends.” When asked if this included the JBS, the committee did not respond until the Birch Society’s public relations director, John
Rousselot, praised the party for rejecting such extreme groups as the KKK or Communist party. At this
Rep. Melvin Laird, the Republican Conference Chairman, snapped, “Let’s quit monkeying around. No
more hedging, damn it. The answer is yes.”

By 1965 then, Republican political leaders had cut all ties with the John Birch Society. This
condemnation occurred almost simultaneously with the National Review’s break with the Society. In a
twelve-page special feature section entitled “The John Birch Society and the Conservative Movement,”
the National Review thoroughly condemned the entire society. The article was authored by “the
editors,” which signified the journal’s unanimity of opinion. To justify the article’s severe censure, the
editors included the obvious political damage the organization had wrought upon the Republican Party,
as well as the new level of ideological “virulence” the JBS had assumed. In addition to its
conspiratorial views on Medicare, the Kennedy assassination, and the Civil Rights Movement to name a
few, the August, 1965 issue of American Opinion raised America’s “Scoreboard” rating from “50-70+%”
to “60-80% Communist-dominated.” That Welch succeeded in “influencing his membership to believe
[his] surrealisms” compelled National Review to repudiate the entire Society.

The new level of ideological virulence that alarmed National Review was not a sudden change.
Rather the severity of the Society’s message—extreme from the beginning—intensified over time as a
result of an underlying assumption. From its inception, the John Birch Society had regarded the threat
of Communist infiltration and control as growing over time. Welch made this clear in his opening
speech to the Society’s founders, proclaiming that America would “in a few more years” become “four
provinces in a world-wide Communist dominion….” The Communists planned to take over the world,
but they had not yet accomplished this feat. The very nature of the Communist threat, therefore, was
progressive. Over the years, Welch and the JBS had reported accordingly. Communism was always
spreading. The federal government was increasingly serving Soviet needs. In short, The U.S. had not
taken the steps necessary to deter the problem; hence, the Society’s message became more severe, more
panicked. How right the editors of National Review were when they wrote that in the three years since
the Review’s last discussion of Robert Welch, his views had not changed, but become “more virulent.”

More than any other issue, the Vietnam War exposed the grave ideological fallacies of the John
Birch Society that resulted from this ideological virulence. The Society’s stance on the Vietnam War
represents the unacceptable political manifestation of their unacceptable belief system. Popular with
conservative leaders such as Buckley, the war in Vietnam produced what Sara Diamond calls a
“puzzling contradiction” for Birchists. How could the United States, a country which was 60-80%
controlled by Communists, fight a war to oppose communism abroad? Finding no logical answer to this
question, Welch resorted to the pseudo logic with which he was more familiar: the war was a fraud, he
argued – its purpose was to convince the American public that President Johnson truly opposed
communism. By drawing China into the conflict, the U.S. could justify allying with “China’s alleged
enemy, but true friend,” the Soviet Union. Welch modified the JBS line on the war accordingly by
extending the slogan “Get US Out!” to encompass not only the U.N. (its original target), but also the
Vietnam War.

This new position placed the John Birch Society opposite the conservative movement; in fact, they
had inadvertently aligned themselves with their supposed opponents, the pacifist, anti-war Left. For
most it was simply unacceptable. National Review listed the Society’s position on the Vietnam War as
one of the primary reasons for their condemning it. In a subsection devoted primarily to this issue,
James Burnham caustically remarked that the John Birch Society had forgotten the simple truth that
“Ideas Have Consequences.” Burnham reminds the reader that “responsible conservatives” have for
some time tried to believe that the Society was only “misguided” and not wrongheaded. He even offers
a final sympathetic nod to the Society’s membership but ultimately concludes that under “years of
[Welch’s] brainwashing,” the JBS has strayed in “directions where no conservative can prudently
venture.” Perhaps it was Frank Meyer who summed it up best, writing that the John Birch Society “is
no longer…merely moving towards legitimate objectives in a misguided way…the John Birch Society is
rapidly losing whatever it had in common with patriotism or conservatism…”

And so, the deed was done. With the National Review at the helm, American conservatives had
“read the Birchers out” of mainstream politics. Never again would the Birchers represent such a
powerful force in a national election. So reduced had their influence become after 1965, that in 1966,
when Ronald Reagan successfully ran for governor of California, he could nonchalantly respond to a
question about JBS support, “I don’t care. They can support me. I don’t support them.” Towards the end of the decade, the “slightly liberal” Commonweal thanked the John Birch Society for performing an unintended function. “By making public cartoons of our private fears,” the author writes, “it helped us to keep them in perspective.” Despite all, the John Birch Society still exists today, but its influence is—and will most likely continue to be—limited.

The condemnation of the Birch Society by the Responsible Right discredited the Society to such an extent that it became almost a political nonentity. The reasons for this condemnation take two forms. The first was the Society’s growing ideological irrationality; as its message became increasingly panicked, the Responsible Right was forced to denounce the Society in its entirety. After the 1964 election in which the charge of Birchism proved so detrimental to Republicans, conservatives realized that political viability and an association with the JBS were mutually exclusive. But the discussion of the John Birch Society and American conservatism should not end here, for in a broader sense, one must consider the Reasonable Right’s role in the growth of the John Birch Society. Rarely does extremism flourish when it lacks a favorable climate of opinion, and, in this particular instance, that climate of opinion grew out of the inflexibility of the American Right.

Endnotes

2 Ibid., 9.
6 Welch, 9; Welch, 39.
7 Welch, 127-128.
8 Ibid, 162.
10 Robert Welch, The Politician (Belmont, Massachusetts: Belmont Publishing Company, 1964), 277-278. The dates of circulation (given in the text as 1958) and publication given in this citation are contradictory because the original version which was circulated in 1958 was a private manuscript. The copy cited here is an edited version that was submitted for publication in 1964. In this version, Welch omitted the most inflammatory paragraph of all, in which he calls Eisenhower a “dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy.”
11 Broyles, 8.
13 Perlstein, 155.
17 Perlstein, 150.
20 Ibid, 643; Perlstein, 156.
22 Ibid, 83.
25 Robert A. Graham, “The John Birch Society,” America 106, (December 2, 1961): 324. Although America was regarded as a mainstream, Catholic journal, and not a conservative one, its recognition of the sound leadership of the JBS is still pertinent to this study. Rather, the fact that this recognition does not come from a conservative perspective lends it even more weight.
28 Epstein and Forster, 3-4.
29 Goldwater, Conscience of a Majority, 48.
30 Goldwater, Conscience of a Majority, 175.
33 Ibid, 179.
34 Perlstein, 383.
35 Perlstein, 384.
36 Hart, 150.
38 Freeman, 550.
39 Ibid.
43 Ibid, 916.
44 Buckley, Meyer, and Burnham, 916.
45 Welch, Blue Book, 9.
46 Diamond, 147.
48 Buckley, Meyer, and Burnham, 925.
49 Buckley, Meyer, and Burnham, 925.
50 Ibid, 927.
51 Buckley, Meyer, and Burnham, 920.
52 Hart, 159.

Bibliography

The Service Mindset in American Colleges: Motivations, Problems, and What’s Going Right

Laura L. P. Burks

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.” – Paulo Freire

I have resolved to confront the conflict; I have resolved to side with the powerless. In the span of two years, I have become increasingly concerned with the state of the world around me, and I become more anxious each day wondering what I can do to help. We are the future, right? It is an ideal that has been taught to my generation by our parents, our teachers, and the media. My earliest memories of Nickelodeon are saturated in episodes of Rugrats, Clarissa Explains It All, The Adventures of Pete & Pete, and pledge drives for The Big Help, the network’s nationwide community service campaign. As a seven year old, I was encouraged to dial the toll-free number at the bottom of the screen and to make a promise of community service hours which was to be kept throughout the year. A television network made me feel personally responsible for the world around me before I could even explain personal responsibility.

Since the start of my freshman year of college, my commitment to service has only deepened. Yet, in the face of experiences and knowledge which should encourage cynicism and apathy, I cannot help but wonder: are we really going to save the world? My peers – not just the people who were born within a few years of me but American college students – and I are arguably privileged (if nothing else, in the intellectual sense and in our academic opportunities), and we are in a prime position to start this world-saving that we have been told for the majority of our lives is our mission. We have more free time and less real world responsibilities than those who are outside of the comfortable bubble which college has afforded us. Most of us do not have the burden of providing for a family, or even for ourselves. Despite the fact that the renowned “college experience” often forces students to perform a delicate balancing act between the demands of coursework and the temptations of social activities, many students find the time to contribute to their colleges’ surrounding communities: in 2000, more than four out of five college freshmen said they had volunteered in the past year (Hill and Jones 516). Still, many students actively choose not to involve themselves in service. A college freshman who had discontinued her service endeavors after her high school graduation was surveyed by Susan R. Jones and Kathleen E. Hill, faculty members of and researchers at The Ohio State University, and described herself as a “typical apathetic, lazy, and uncaring college student” (530).
In order to even begin approaching an answer to my question “are we really going to save the world?” I investigated both the external forces and internal motivations which encourage service, the glaring problems in the collegiate community’s approaches to service, and the programs of a few schools that seem to be getting it right. The results were sometimes surprising and sometimes disappointing but ultimately led me to side with the powerless and leverage my privilege in pursuit of social justice.

In a society and generation in which service is in vogue (Rhoads 277), most students begin community service endeavors before they reach a maturity level at which service is personally motivated. Instead of making genuine first attempts at fulfilling our generation’s messianic destiny, high school students are often lured into service either by obligations such as a graduation requirement of service hours or by sheer competition (Hill and Jones 529; Powell, par. 14). The early 1990s saw a boom in the volunteer efforts of American high school students, not because former hippie parents were raising exceptionally compassionate children en masse but because selective colleges began to demand significant evidence of community service from applicants. College admissions offices’ demands “ha[ve] fired a community service arms race” (Powell, par. 14). The true aims of community service – helping the people around us who are in some sort of need and working for social justice – have been lost on teenagers who must pad their résumés as much as possible in order to be considered for admission to selective colleges (par. 23). Forceful requirements of service only encourage the bare minimum of contribution, beleaguer the poor souls who must meet them, and do nothing to move towards the bright, shining, better future which we are expected to produce. While the service motivations of high school students may be dismal, there is hope in the fact that “for the most part, patterns of participation begun in high school carry over into college” (Hill and Jones 531; Powell, par. 9), where students are freed from the chains of external pushes towards volunteering and are free to find personal reasons for service. Upon reaching college, some students resign from volunteerism with the commonly voiced reasoning that “I really don’t see it as beneficial anymore because I already got what I was striving for [college admission]” (Hill and Jones 529); thankfully, most stay in the habit.

The American college experience and environment has developed a certain peculiarity, an intersection of radical personal development in students and of structural and institutional values, which cannot help but foster a service ethic in students. If we are going to be the salvation of the future, we must start while we are in college. The most basic tenet of the college experience – beginning a life independent of parents and with significantly less structure than high school – is a catalyst for major change in a student. Some call it “self-authorship” (Hill and Jones 522) or “self-actualization” (Rhoads 286) or the development of an “internal authority” (Hill and Jones 532); moving away from home and to a place of relative anonymity provides the perfect opportunity for a student to define himself and his priorities. American universities and colleges have earned the title of “movement halfway houses” thanks to their history of courses which encourage critical analysis and which challenge assumptions with politically engaged professors who seek to correct social injustice through their students’ education (Snarr 29; Ostrander 77). Student experiences in the “halfway houses” provide opportunity for reflection and lead to the discovery of personal, internal reasons for service. For those who do not internalize the significance of service to their identities, service ends with the external obligations of high school (Hill and Jones 529).

The ethics of service and the ideals of social justice naturally align with the goals and positions of most colleges, and, as such, colleges are often in a unique position to offer structural support for students’ service efforts. John Dewey galvanized the importance of democracy’s integration into education as early as 1916, and today it is not questioned that one of the goals of higher education is to create an active, engaged citizenry (Ostrander 75). Thanks to classes that emphasize the analysis of social issues, faculty members who hold positions of influence in students’ moral development, and many colleges’ explicitly stated goals valuing service (Snarr 29), it is easy for students to have academic experiences which reinforce personal service values. In an interesting research encounter, one college student - let’s call him Thor - who was asked about his interest in community service credited his urge to serve not directly to class discussions or passionate professors but replied, “intellectual exploration has been rewarding but also suffocating at times and so I find the desire to do experiential work” (Rhoads 290).
Thor’s desire to do hands-on service instead of just discussing in a classroom what circumstances have caused the need for service is an understandable impulse, but it reflects some of the troublingly common issues of college students’ voluntarism; issues which pose a significant threat to our generation’s mission.

There are many politically correct and valid internal motives for service, such as a student’s inherent altruism, religious beliefs which teach service to others as a moral responsibility, and a sense of commonality between everyone as inhabitants of the earth (Davis 1). However, college students are much more inclined to simply volunteer than to consistently serve (Davis 2; Mosle 24; Snarr 32) – for example, working in a soup kitchen for an evening versus working to get the homeless off of the streets and into financial independence. The reason being that one-on-one contact and short-term service projects (like tutoring an elementary school student and spending a Saturday at a Habitat for Humanity site) are more satisfying than long-term work toward systemic change (Mosle 24; 27). We would prefer to spend an hour a week with an eight year old in an under-funded inner-city school than to use the resources available to us, including the academic elite, to analyze the socioeconomic circumstances that have caused the school system’s decline (Walker 3). Unlike the elementary school student, the school system will not give us a warm, fuzzy hug at the end of nine months and skip off into the summer, releasing us of responsibility and concern for its well being.

Thor speaks of “experiential work” like it is a mid-afternoon study break, and for many college students, it is. An hour or two of “just showing up” (Mosle 24), whenever one finds it convenient satiates the selfish motivation behind service: personal satisfaction (Davis 5; Hill and Jones 517; Rhoads 290; Snarr 30). Small service encounters allow a volunteer to feel like she has directly affected change in an individual or a few lives. Superficially, one more college student has dabbled in saving the world and has therefore fulfilled her sense of obligation for the week without actually having to put in much effort. While there is evidence that individual contact with those being served encourages a long-term service commitment (Hill and Jones 532), these one-on-one service experiences cannot directly affect any meaningful change in the big, bad world of which we are the future because they fail to address the socioeconomic and political circumstances which have led to the need for volunteers. By simple volunteerism we may only hope, as stated by the authors of Common Fire, “to comfort [our] own uneasy conscience” and to satisfy our instant-gratification motives for volunteering (Parks Daloz et al. 14).

In a recent behavioral study of seminary students, only those students who believed they could spare some time while on the way to a “very important meeting” stopped to help a homeless man in distress whom each encountered on the street (Mosle 27). The seminary students’ behavior, while counterintuitive to their chosen profession, reflects a discouraging reality of service on college campuses: “context, far more than conviction” is an indicator of service participation (Mosle 27; Ostrander 74). Even if a student has developed personal reasons for service and acknowledged it as his or her social responsibility, my privileged peers and I often need service opportunities conveniently available before we will pursue them (Hill and Jones 528; Snarr 30). We are not asking for a nudge in the direction of community needs; we are asking our colleges to establish ongoing service programming – to do all of the dirty work – so as to maximize the ease with which we may assuage the guilt of our inequality and/or unwind after a day of taxing “intellectual exploration” by dropping in to volunteer. College students surveyed by Hill and Jones indicated that a significant deterrent in the continuance of high school participation patterns once in college is the abundance of service – there are just too many opportunities from which to choose without the aid of someone within the college. Mark, a student at a large state university, thundered his frustration to the research team: “I think there are a lot of people who do put a lot of emphasis on community service, but I don’t know if the University as one voice has been like, ‘service is important.’” As absurd and whiny as the above complaint seems to anyone who has at least marginally internalized the importance of service, the claim is reflected in a surprising statistic: participation in service activities is inversely proportional to a college’s size. That is, a small, private college’s service participation percentage is likely to be greater than that of a large state university’s because of a higher campus visibility of projects (528). College students surveyed by Hill and Jones indicated that a significant deterrent in the continuance of high school participation patterns once in college is the abundance of opportunities.
In addition to strong institutional facilitation of service (advertisement on campus, faculty participation, established programs), college students must also find local factors (Westheimer and Kahne 74) that affirm the validity of the service which they set out to perform. These factors can range from the visible socioeconomic crises or decline of a campus’s neighboring community to a student’s own life experiences which cultivate empathy (Rhoads 283). If we do not bear witness to close-to-home examples that illustrate why our generation has been raised to value service, it is likely that service motivations will not be personalized (Hill and Jones 530), and therefore service will not be made a priority. It is a surprising path which leads a generation to its goal.

As a college student, simply looking into the process of making a dent in the world’s problems is mentally and emotionally taxing; one must find a mix of external support and internal motivation that is able to sustain his or her interest in a cause, and one must strike a balance between academic, social, and altruistic endeavors (Parks Daloz et al. 2; Rhoads 293). After the preliminary balancing act comes the actual service. Even though any kind of service participation requires a certain amount of dedication, volunteerism (over activism) is pursued as the easy way out of addressing the social responsibility that has been instilled in us (Mosle 26). As college students we are given opportunities to become influential activists for any injustice or inequality that we want to ameliorate. Instead we choose to ladle soup once a week or to collect Christmas toys for poor children. Of course, such services activities are inherently good deeds, but they tend only to highlight social inequities without working towards any permanent, systemic change.

A generational inclination towards meeting goals with the bare minimum of effort is expected; adolescents are notoriously unmotivated. However, that should not be the reason for half-hearted service in college. While most high school students’ service is generally externally motivated, college is the time and place where world-saving, if it is pursued, is done because of a student’s conscious decision to do so (Hill and Jones 527), indicating dedication to a cause. After exploring the service motivations of students and finding only superficial answers to our setbacks (an apathetic pursuit of opportunities, volunteerism as a crutch) (Mosle 26; Hill and Jones 529), an examination of the systems which guide our service efforts must provide deeper answers and give a context for the state of college students’ service endeavors and why we have yet to rid the world of injustice and suffering.

The current emphasis on service, which began in the late 1980s, stems from President Ronald Reagan’s funding cuts of the federal government’s social welfare structure. Private organizations and citizens have been expected to step in and provide the greatly needed services which no longer have institutional support (Mosle 24) – volunteer tutors in the place of well-funded public schools, church-run shelters instead of adequate low-income housing, and river clean-up projects instead of regulations which prevent waterway pollution. However, private efforts have been unable to meet the constantly growing need for community services for two reasons – the first of which is just beyond college students’ sphere of direct influence and the second of which is almost exclusively concerned with college students and their understanding of change. First, it is nearly impossible for private institutions to be comparable to the government’s resources and infrastructure; some of the most visible and respected nonprofit agencies in the country report having to “stretch supplies” in the face of a rising demand that cannot be met (25). Second, most service-oriented education misses its ultimate goal of enabling students to affect lasting social change and therefore renders students’ volunteer efforts insufficient and unable to “save the world” (Harper; Snarr 30; Walker 3).

The latter problem chiefly concerns college students: we are learning the need for service, disconnected from its political implications (Snarr 29). College students are being presented with multitudes of “holes in the dyke” and with different ways to plug them, but we are forgetting to question why there are holes in the dyke, who put them there, and what can be done to prevent more holes. Because most American students’ service education begins so early, “volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy” (Westheimer and Kahne 5), allowing teachers to simplify the goals of community service. However, the disconnect is inexcusably carried into learning and service in college (Snarr 30). Even though some professors and college courses emphasize the political implications of socioeconomic inequalities and injustice (Snarr 28), politics and the issues addressed by community service are not being presented as two sides of the same coin (30). Politics has been taught as a dirty word while volunteerism is presented as a nonpartisan, “morally superior alternative” for affecting change. The college experience is the first time that many students are
simultaneously presented with the importance of politics and service respectively, but they do not make a connection between the two (Walker 2). A recent survey of college students revealed that while 84% had given their time or money to charity in the past year, fewer than 4% have ever given their time, money, or support to a political campaign (Snarr 29). Colleges and other leaders in the service movement fear that political engagement will scare away well-intentioned volunteers. In 1996 the Corporation for National Service (CNS) declared: “National service has to be nonpartisan. What’s more, it should be about bringing communities together by getting things done… Political activities can have the opposite effect. They polarize and divide” (Walker 2). Yes, the political process can be polarizing but even community servants who strive to be nonpartisan acknowledge the unparalleled power and influence of political action (1).

A college student’s service is usually coordinated through his or her school’s service-learning program. While each school’s model varies, service-learning is an integration of a student’s field of academic study, service within the community, and guided self-reflection (Harper; Walker 2). Most models focus on the educational benefits of the student experience (Walker 2) and therefore prefer the short-term, personal connection-oriented service programs of which volunteers are so fond (Rhoads 293). These models are successful in advancing students’ educations, but without a deliberate subjection of the service experience to critical social analysis in the classroom, these models undermine students’ journey to create a more just and equal future by not enabling service-learning experiences to be mechanisms for political change (Westheimer and Kahne 22; Snarr 30). Kristin Harper, Director of Service Learning at Birmingham-Southern College, cites the distinct differences between pure service and service-learning: as a collegiate endeavor, service learning seeks to provide an academic context in which students can understand their service experiences in relation to greater systemic problems. However, contextualization does not guarantee that participants in service learning programs, much less students who volunteer outside of college programming, will be moved to affect systemic change.

For all that can be deemed misguided and detrimental to American collegians’ superheroic mission, there are success stories to be found on college campuses across the country. By focusing on the efficacy of a select few, common practices can be identified: explicit commitment to service within the college’s mission statement, faculty dedication to the college’s goals, and an emphasis on leadership development through service (Snarr 29). Brown University’s Swearer Center for Public Service practices all of the above, but with a twist; service-learning at Brown is student-driven, and it’s the faculty and college which follow behind students’ pursuits. As a result, Brown students are able to commit to an issue about which they are passionate. Service then goes beyond being a short, weekly volunteer effort that is done to assuage guilt to being, in one student’s words, “a lifetime commitment.” Participants at Brown also note that their service would not have affected a change in their mindsets without reflection with faculty members (Ostrander 80). Brown’s approach is one that allows the university to serve its proper role as a facilitator for student ambitions and makes connections between service, self, and education.

Are we really going to save the world? Ultimately, my cynical answer is “probably not.” My hopeful, educated answer is that my peers and I are fully capable of doing so. There is no The Big Help-style pledge campaign for abstract amounts of community service hours on MTV; most of us are no longer scrambling to build impressive résumés; and political action, while still not an everyday tool, is beginning to lose its shameful connotations when compared to volunteerism. By sheer virtue of being a college student, I am in a privileged group which, more than anyone else in our generation, is poised to catalyze radical social changes. We have come into a learning environment which encourages our interests and offers boundless possibilities to learn, explore, analyze, create, and change. It is up to us to pick up the tools that are put before us – knowledge, privilege, responsibility, experience, opportunity – and to “make the personal political” by recognizing that “personal experiences and behavior both result from and are indicators of broader political forces” (Westheimer and Kahne 17). After we have discovered the undeniable importance of taking initiative to save our world, all that is left for us to decide is how radical we are willing to be. Are we going to assuage the immediate needs and pains of our immediate environment or are we going, as a well-educated elite, to side with the powerless and work for significant systemic change? We are all in the position of a peer who said, “I think I have the means, the capability, and the intelligence to affect social change, so I have to do it” (Hill and Jones 537). We just have to make the same decision she did.
Bibliography


The Ideological, Cultural, and Political Layers Clothed in Myanmar's Saffron Revolution for Democracy and Human Rights

Diana Wilmoth

As the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, “... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law” (“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”). Although this rule of law was intended as an international doctrine to be accepted by all nations of the world, many world leaders have chosen not to recognize this code of ethics in their actions. One such country is the Union of Myanmar, formerly Burma, in Southeast Asia. Yet, the country’s authoritarian government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), has insisted that “[a]s for the accusations on human rights violations, forced labor and so on in Myanmar, Myanmar is firmly committed [to] and respectful of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And we, the government, are totally against human rights abuses” (Clements 225). This statement, false in its entirety, does not account for the numerous repressive actions of the government against its people. Myanmar is notorious for killing thousands of its ethnic minorities, forcing labor and relocation, suppressing pro-democratic demonstrations, and incarcerating human rights activists. These actions have continued to be in strict violation of the tenants of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a result, a pro-democratic nonviolent-resistance movement has flourished in the minds and hearts of many Burmese people. One important leader of this crucial movement has been human rights activist, Aung San Suu Kyi. In addition to Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party, the National League for Democracy Party (NLD), the recent movement has clothed itself in the saffron robes of Burmese monks and Buddhist culture.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been one of the most prominent leaders in Myanmar’s human rights movement since its inception. She has been known for her dignity, compassion, and self-sacrificing actions in the name of the movement. However, her emergence as a leader was the result of coincidence. She was born in Myanmar but later lived a majority of her life outside the country. While abroad, she married a British citizen, Michael Aris, and they settled with their two sons in Oxford, England. It was not until 1988 that Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar to care for her mother, who had suffered a stroke. At the time, there were massive uprisings by the public against Burma’s authoritarian rule. However, she was not a participant in these demonstrations, and when questioned about her political

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“I wrote this paper for PS 307 with Ed LaMonte. My original intention in writing this piece was to learn more about the tyrannical situation in Myanmar/Burma. Although I was inspired to find noble leadership in a country plagued by poverty and repression, I was astounded by the magnitude of human rights violations being committed. The situation in Myanmar/Burma presented me with one resounding question…. Since the United Nations passed the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ shouldn’t human rights violations be a matter of international concern?”

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aspirations at the time, she stated, "When I arrived in Rangoon to take care of my mother, my only intention regarding politics was to start several libraries in my father’s memory" (Victor 32). As a result, her advance into leadership was a gradual and unintended progression.

She attributes her subsequent involvement in Burmese politics to the actions of her father, General Aung San. General Aung San is known in Myanmar as a martyr who was killed before accomplishing his goal of bringing independence to Burma from England in 1947. Although Aung San Suu Kyi was a young child at the time, this event had a profound effect on her life. She has addressed the current repressive situation in Myanmar as "the concern of the entire nation. I could not, as my father’s daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could, in fact, be called the second struggle for independence" (qtd. in Lang 62). So, after her mother died, she helped to co-found the political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). As a representative of the NLD, she officially emerged as a leader on August 26, 1988. It was on this day that 500,000 people came to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon to witness the formal announcement of her entry into politics. This speech would be one of thousands she would give in support of the democratic movement.

Although Aung San Suu Kyi embraced her role as a leader, it forced her to make several personal sacrifices in the name of democracy. Her willingness to tell the truth made her a trusted and well-respected leader among the Burmese people. However, this quality directly affected her personal life. She was initially arrested and detained by SLORC under solitary house arrest from July, 1989 to July, 1995 due to her outspoken criticism of the former dictator, U Ne Win. Under solitary house arrest, she was allowed limited contact with family and friends. As a result, she was prevented from spending time with her husband and watching her two sons grow up. Although she was given the choice to leave the country in exile and live with her family, she refused, demonstrating her dedication to the movement (Clements 132). Her influence, even under house arrest, was further acknowledged when she was awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 1991. Eventually, she was released in 1995 and resumed her activities with the NLD, giving speeches on the weekends in hope of garnering more support.

During her rallies, Aung San Suu Kyi brought awareness of the Burmese struggle by placing an emphasis on the impact that change would bring to their daily lives. She believed that people would be more willing to be actively involved if the struggle affected them on a personal level. As a result, many of her speeches detailed the importance of people’s ability to determine their own jobs, education, housing, food, and travel. These freedoms and rights, she argued, were guaranteed by democracy (Clements 161). After realizing the influence Aung San Suu Kyi’s speeches were making on the people, SLORC attempted to deter support. During her speeches, military personnel infiltrated the crowds with video cameras to record people’s faces. Fearful of detention or torture, many people stopped attending. SLORC also imposed limitations on the places Aung San Suu Kyi could travel within the country for her rallies, hindering the expansion of the movement. From September 2000 to May 2002, SLORC detained her once again under house arrest. After her release, she was arrested a year later and sent to Insein jail. She was later transferred to her house, where she remains today under house arrest.

Despite SLORC’s efforts to undermine her position as a leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has continued to be a mouthpiece for the Burmese people using both propaganda and force. As stated by her biographer Barbara Victor, “She is the only reason why the world has become aware of the SLORC’s practice of torture, summary and arbitrary executions, forced labor, including forced portering for the military and abuse of women, among a litany of other offenses that it also commits against its own citizens” (33). In addition, her poise, intelligence, and outstanding public speaking abilities have made her a revered leader in the international community. Despite being under house arrest, she continues to increase international awareness through rare private interviews with journalists. Although the human rights movement is pro-democratic, it is not purely political. It is a movement rooted in spiritual values derived from principles of non-violence and Theravada Buddhism.

Aung San Suu Kyi places a large emphasis on the importance of non-violence in the movement. She believes that violence would not be beneficial in building a strong democracy in Myanmar; rather, she believes it would hinder the movement’s efforts. As Aung San Suu Kyi states:

..In the context of Burma today, non-violent means are the best way to achieve our goal....We’ve chosen non-violence because it’s the best way to protect the people, and in the long term assure the future stability of democracy. This is why my father changed from violence to non-violence. He knew that it was far better for the future of the country to
achieve a democratic state through political means and negotiations, rather than through military means. ...it means that fewer people will be hurt. (Clements 154)

The core of the non-violence movement is the Theravada Buddhist belief in metta, or active compassion. Aung San Suu Kyi believes that in order to incite change, metta must be channeled both to the movement’s proponents and opponents. Among her colleagues in the NLD, the use of metta has created stronger ties of friendship and determination. Likewise, loving-kindness towards repressive military rulers has been used as a means of abolishing fear. This is crucial because, in the words of Aung San Suu Kyi, “You cannot really be frightened of people you do not hate” (qtd. in Lang 63).

Furthermore, she argues that people cannot be free if they live in fear. This fear, she believes, has been maintained because of a lack of active compassion of the Burmese people. In order to promote this necessary metta, people must view love as a strong force that enables the happiness of oneself and others; without this metta, fear predominates in society. Fear is conditioned by tyrannical rulers and forces people to become submissive, resulting in repression (Clements 39). As stated in Aung San Suu Kyi’s ‘Freedom from Fear’ essay, “It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it” (qtd. in Lang 62). Abolishment of fear through the expansion of metta is crucial to the success of the movement.

By ridding themselves of fear, the Burmese people would finally have control over their own lives. This control is what Aung San Suu Kyi has personally defined as empowerment (Clements 160). It is the ability of the Burmese people to create and change their own futures. When asked to define empowerment, she states:

I think power comes from within. If you have confidence in what you are doing and you are shored up by the belief that what you are doing is right, that in itself constitutes power, and this power is very important when you are trying to achieve something. If you don’t believe in what you are doing, your actions will lack credibility. However hard you try, inconsistencies will appear. (Clements 159)

This empowerment also entails an inner spiritual strength. This strength originates from the righteousness of one’s actions, even in the absence of the benefits of these actions (Clements 164). Aung San Suu Kyi believes the success of the movement will only be accomplished when the four Buddhist components of victory have been achieved: chanda, desire or will; citta, the right attitude; viriya, perseverance; and panna, wisdom. She believes that in order to achieve the first component, chanda, the Burmese people must question the situation in their country and believe they possess the ability to change it. This desire to change the situation then leads to the fulfillment of the other three components. Until these moral precepts are collectively adopted, there will not be a successful movement (Clements 165).

Another essential element to an effective non-violence movement is a cultural element that promotes intrinsic unity. Similar to the role of song in the non-violence movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., humor plays a large part in Burmese culture and has been beneficial in the movement. Although organization among the Burmese people is actively being prevented, the Burmese people have used humor as a unifying force. Humor has served as a uniting force by enabling the Burmese to laugh at the irrationality of the SLORC’s actions. Oftentimes, jokes are made surrounding repressive actions, such as forced labor and prison, because the Burmese people understand the underlying significance of the jokes. It has been utilized as a means for the Burmese people to look at their situation objectively and raise awareness towards reforming it (Clements 156). In addition, the collective leadership of the NLD has also contributed to the unity of the movement. Although Aung San Suu Kyi has become a symbol of the movement internationally, she insists that it is a movement based on the collective decisions of several leaders. Consequently, the detainment of prominent leaders, like Aung San Suu Kyi, has not led to the movement’s immobilization.

Although the spiritual elements of Buddhism have become a basis for the principle of non-violent resistance, the movement has been hindered by other Buddhist beliefs and elements of Burmese culture. For example, in Myanmar, collective organization of the Burmese people has proved to be a difficult feat. In Christian societies, such as those in the United States, Christian churches serve as a means of formal organization. It is difficult for the government to prohibit church congregations from meeting weekly. Furthermore, Christian organization is fostered through collective attendance; most Christians become devoted to one church and develop a sense of community within the congregation of that
church. While this sense of community contributed to the success of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, it is in stark contrast to the situation in Myanmar. According to official statistics in 2006, almost ninety percent of the Burmese people practice Buddhism. Yet, Buddhists do not claim to belong to a specific monastery or place of worship. Rather, Buddhists are free to attend several monasteries at various times, resulting in a lack of collective religious unity. Realizing this, the military junta has prevented any type of collective organization, public or religious. Not only have they made public gatherings of more than four people punishable by imprisonment, but they have also pledged to detain and interrogate groups of more than one hundred people who meet regularly at a monastery. By preventing the foundational organization that is imperative to a non-violence movement, SLORC has directly prevented its success (Clements 150).

Another aspect of Burmese religion that has hindered the non-violence movement is the belief in karma: a person will face the consequences of his hurtful actions and will be rewarded for his positive actions. This idea has perpetuated a degree of complacency in the Burmese people’s actions towards the repressive military rulers. For the Burmese people, there is no need to act individually to promote justice. Buddhism promotes the belief that people can change their current unfavorable circumstances by performing kusala, or wholesome deeds. These wholesome deeds generate positive karma that directly improves a person’s position in a future life after death. However, these wholesome deeds are often completed individualistically without regard for other people. As a result, wholesome deeds are not used to directly confront SLORC or the repressive situation in Myanmar through helping other people. Nonetheless, pro-democracy and human rights leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi have promoted kusala as a means to help others. She emphasizes the fact that doing wholesome deeds for others merits as much favor as doing positive things for oneself (Clements 169). In addition, Burmese Buddhists tend to dedicate themselves to the activities of their present existence. This has prevented them from speculating about alternative socio-political systems and instilled in them the belief that they are powerless to change their political system. In response, Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders have tried desperately to demonstrate to the Burmese people that they do have the ability to incite change (Silverstein 2).

Currently, the living conditions in Myanmar are among the worst in the world. A majority of the people live in squalor, without appropriate food, education, sanitary conditions, shelter, or medical care (Victor 4). Although once known as the rice basket of South-East Asia, a significant percentage of children are now moderately to severely underweight in Myanmar; fifty million people spend seventy percent of their monthly income solely on food. In addition, the country ranks 190th of 191 countries in healthcare delivery, and one in ten babies die before their fifth birthday. Only 0.3% of the Gross Domestic product (GDP) is spent on education, resulting in only two-thirds of its children completing more than five years of schooling. In stark contrast, fifty percent of the regime’s budget is used for the military. This inequity between military rulers and the common people is vastly representative of the economic situation in Myanmar (Popham 1).

Presently, Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the world, and a large majority of the Burmese people’s income barely covers their cost of living. This is ironic considering the vast profitable resources that abound in the country. Over ninety-percent of the world’s rubies come from Myanmar, and the country has vast natural gas and oil supplies. The country also has access to teak, jade, pearls, and sapphires. However, through contracts with foreign investors and kickbacks from drug dealers, the military junta has exploited these resources for their own economic gains, thus widening the economic gap between military personnel and the Burmese people. This economic inequity is the result of Myanmar’s status as world’s second largest producer of heroin after Afghanistan and is South-East Asia’s largest producer of methamphetamines (“How to Save Myanmar” 2).

Nevertheless, nation-states have continued to disregard these vast disparities and human rights violations in favor of their own self interest. This is especially apparent in the exportation of natural gas, the military junta’s most important source of income. Thailand exports gas from the Yadana oil field, which is worth one billion dollars annually. In addition, international companies such as ElfTotal of France, Premier Oil of the United Kingdom, and the American company, Texaco, have also utilized Myanmar’s large oil fields. While many international companies, such as Texaco and Premier Oil, involved economically with the military junta have withdrawn in response to recent protests and human rights violations, China remains a staunch supporter of the Myanmar government. China recently
gained a contract for the Shwe oil field, a large oil field discovered in 2004 off the coast of Arakan. This thirty year contract was granted to PetroChina, and China now claims that it has plans to build a strategic China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline to span the 2,300 kilometers from Myanmar’s port of Sittwe in the Bay of Bengla to Kunming in China’s Yunnan province. This contract has economically benefited Myanmar’s military generals as well as the energy resources of China. With this pipeline, China will no longer be dependent on shipping gas from Africa and Middle Eastern countries through the Malacca Strait. Control of the Malacca Strait has been pursued by the United States, leading the U.S. to become involved in the recent pro-democratic protests in Myanmar (Engdahl 2).

The most recent protests in Myanmar have been led by saffron-clad Buddhist monks. The mobilization of these Buddhist monks serves as a symbol of the corruption and repression that the Burmese government has shown towards its people. “For centuries, Burmese leaders have claimed legitimacy through the practice, protection, and promotion of Buddhism….It is therefore the nation’s monks who, as the clergy performing sacrament and accepting alms, signal to the people that the government is upholding those compassionate teachings” (Friedman 1). According to religious tradition, Burmese monks walk around communities in Myanmar twice a day to collect alms or food. This custom enables civilians to receive prayers from the monks in return for food. However, monks began refusing alms from members of Burma’s military and ruling class in September 2007, thus questioning their legitimacy. The monks’ anti-junta efforts continued to escalate as inflation increased and communities were no longer able to provide food for the monks or their families. The monks eventually took to the streets, chanting religious texts and protecting the protesting university students and pro-democracy politicians. With Myanmar’s historic dedication to the tenants of Theravada Buddhism, these actions were highly symbolic to the Burmese people. One of the beliefs of Theravada Buddhism is that it is the responsibility of followers to free themselves from oppression. As such, the Burmese people viewed the monks’ actions as a moral calling against the repression of the ruling military regime (Macan-Markar 2). On September 18, 2007, monks organized in the country’s major cities, continuing their non-violent protests for seven days. Although the monks initially asked the public to refrain from participation, the crowds numbered as many as 500,000 people. Together, the protestors insisted that the military relinquish their positions and reinstate democratic rule. In response, SLORC refused to acknowledge the protestors’ demands. They insisted that the protests were instigated by the NLD, pro-democracy groups in exile, and foreign countries (Wehrfritz 1).

While SLORC did not initially respond to the protests, they later adopted a policy of extreme violence. Unarmed protestors were beaten, shot at, and detained. Sit-in efforts resulted in protestors being beaten and forced into trucks to be transported to jails. On September 22, 2007, Buddhist monks withdrew all of their spiritual services from the military personnel, further challenging the military’s legitimacy. Enraged at being shunned by Theravada Buddhism, governmental officials’ violence escalated. On September 24, a dawn to dusk curfew was implemented, and gatherings of more than four people were forbidden. In October, SLORC stationed police and military troops on the streets of Yangon, and nightly detention squads were sent to houses to arrest people who were suspected of being involved in the protests. Hundreds of people were taken from their homes, detained at unknown locations, and tortured; several died in the course of these events (“Myanmar Politics” 2).

Despite their efforts at an intentionally peaceful movement, the monks were not spared from the brutality of the regime. On September 27, monks at the Ngwe Kyar Yah Monastery in Rangoon were lined up and their heads were bashed into the brick monastery walls by military security forces until they were dead. The senior abbot of the monastery was forced to look upon these actions in horror as he was tied, then tortured to death. Trying to help the remaining wounded monks by building a makeshift clinic, Burmese citizens were confronted by the military and forced to leave. Although other citizens attempted to block the roads to the monastery, they were eventually dispersed by tear gas. Unfortunately, several events similar to this occurred throughout the city. Collectively, this massacre resulted in the deaths of hundreds of monks and the arrest of at least three thousand. The resulting blood stains and tattered scarlet robes of the protests have been termed the “Saffron Revolution” by the Burmese people (Friedman 1).

Although Burmese monks appeared to be the sole leaders of the movement, there are other political organizations backing the demonstrations. These organizations include such American-based groups as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the George Soros Open Society Institute, Freedom
House, and Gene Sharp’s Albert Einstein Institution. These organizations are economically supported and used to promote the U.S. strategic agenda by encouraging “non-violent regime change.” Because it is extremely difficult for monks to formally organize, the movement has been spearheaded by recruited and trained opposition leaders from several anti-government organizations inside and outside of Myanmar. These leaders have been trained through the economic support of the NED by the US State Department in the hope of fulfilling US foreign policy objectives. U.S. support for the NED in Myanmar has totaled 2.5 million dollars annually since 2003. With this economic support, the NED has funded oppositional media, including the New Era Journal, Irrawaddy, and the Democratic Voice of Burma Radio. The recent “Saffron Revolution” included precisely planned tactics, using mobile SMS links between protest groups, internet blogs, protest groups that are able to disperse and reform readily, and highly-esteemed Buddhist monks. This level of organization has been achieved by recruiting activists, training them in the United States, and sending them back to Myanmar to organize. The U.S. Consulate General in Chiang Mai, Thailand has been instrumental to many of these tactics. However, the predominant leader of the entire movement is Gene Sharp, founder of the NED-endorsed Albert Einstein Institution. He has been actively working in Myanmar since 1989 and continues to help train non-violence opposition leaders (Engdahl 2).

Although the efforts of the United States are commendable in contributing to the non-violence movement, its motives are questionable. The prevailing motive, unfortunately, involves the United States’ self-interest abroad. Myanmar has a geopolitically strategic location that the United States desires to control. Since September 11, 2001, the Pentagon has continually tried to militarize the region under the notion of preventing another terrorist attack. However, the military regime has adamantly refused U.S. efforts to militarize the region. One of the world’s most strategic water passages used for naval access, the Strait of Malacca, lies just off the coast of Myanmar. This water passage links the Indian and Pacific Oceans and is the shortest sea route between the Persian Gulf and China. Each year, 50,000 vessels sail through the water passage, and eighty percent of China’s oil imports are shipped by tankers through the Strait of Malacca. Therefore, control of the strait would constitute control over China’s energy resources. Due to the fact that China is one of the most rapidly advancing countries in the world and is predicted to replace the United States as a superpower in the future, controlling China’s energy sources would help maintain U.S. power abroad (Engdahl 3).

Having realized the United States’ motives in instigating regimental change, China has adopted the policy of giving billions of dollars to the ruling military. This money has been used to buy ground-attack and transport aircraft, naval vessels, and surface-to-air missiles. China, in addition to India, Thailand, and Singapore, continues to trade extensively with Myanmar. Within the last year, trade has increased between China and Myanmar by fifty percent, and at least sixty state-operated Chinese companies conduct business directly with the military leaders. In return, China has been allowed to station its troops in the country and build naval bases that provide access to the Indian Ocean. These actions have allowed China to maintain their strategic military bases known as the “string of pearls” in Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. These bases would help counter US interests and control of the Strait of Malacca. In addition, continued oil investment with Myanmar’s rulers and the completion of the China-Myanmar gas pipeline would make control of this strait fairly obsolete. Therefore, the self-interest of China and its beneficial relations with the military junta have dictated its actions in the UN Security Council. It recently opposed U.S. actions to promote tougher measures against Myanmar by the UN Security Council, despite the military regime’s gross human rights violations (“Myanmar Politics” 2). This self-interest and support of military leaders has perpetuated human rights violations. Nevertheless, China recently endorsed a UN statement, signed by the other fourteen Security Council members, calling for the visit of a UN special envoy to Myanmar. Despite this effort, China has continued to try to get the Security Council to avoid placing the issue of Myanmar on its agenda by formally claiming that Myanmar is not a threat to international security because its political crisis is internal and sanctions are unnecessary (“Politics” 2).

The United Nations has made efforts towards mediation in Myanmar. On September 29, 2007, the UN sent special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to Myanmar’s capital, Yangon, to assess the situation. During the four day visit, Gambari met with members of SLORC and with NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Discussion between SLORC and Aung San Suu Kyi was encouraged, but these discussions merely appeased the United Nations. In response to how the UN should handle the situation, Aung San Suu Kyi...
has stated that an absolutist approach would not be an effective approach in dealing with SLORC. She gives reference to the fact that the regime has refused to surrender over the past fifteen years despite growing international pressure. A large part of the junta’s resistance can be attributed to its desire to remain in power and its isolationist philosophy. This policy, characteristic of Burma’s former dictator Ne Win, has led to the building of an underground headquarters in a remote region of central Myanmar for protection against invaders. These paranoid actions demonstrate that it is unlikely that foreign demands will be met by SLORC; concessions must be made to SLORC if reform is to occur. One of the only means of accomplishing this is through the United Nations. As a result, it is imperative that the UN continues to play an active role in the situation (“How to Save Myanmar” 2).

Overall, reforming the situation in Myanmar should become a topic of international interest. In order to contribute to the non-violent resistance efforts of Aung San Suu Kyi, many agreements must be made between countries and international companies. Eliminating the ruling junta’s economic assets is one important means of forcing it into negotiations. Present American economic sanctions have done little to improve the situation in Myanmar because limited European sanctions still continue to provide monetary assets. Also, countries that have extensive economic investments in Myanmar, such as China, need to be pressured to stop these transactions. It would be beneficial if the money that goes through Singapore and Chinese banks was stopped before reaching the hands of the military leaders. Lastly, the United States should use its ability to freeze the international bank accounts of the military rulers under Section 311 of the Patriot Act. Overall, the United Nations needs to promote the approach that a less repressive government in Myanmar is a matter of international self-interest (“How to Save Myanmar” 2). Although UN military intervention has the potential of being beneficial to the Burmese situation, China and Russia will prevent intervention by arguing that the situation is an internal problem. In addition, individualized military involvement does not appear hopeful. The United States is already at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and European nations are hesitant to act alone (Friedman 1). Due to the interconnected relationships and self-interest of certain countries, the situation will most likely continue without collective and formal international aid.

The creation of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights means that every country in the world should be concerned with the human rights violations and situation in Myanmar. As Aung San Suu Kyi states, “...the international community as a whole should recognize that it has got responsibilities. It can’t ignore grave injustices that are going on within the borders of any particular country” (Clements 103). In addition, the oppressive situation in Myanmar is woven in a series of complicated ideological, cultural, and political factors. Although states’ self-interest and elements of the Burmese culture have hindered its success, the emergence of the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) has provided noble leadership to the movement. This leadership has promoted the principles of metta, non-violence, and inner spiritual strength as crucial elements to the movement. As Aung San Suu Kyi firmly asserts, “Real change comes from inside through learning the value of compassion, justice, and love” (Clements 179). Elements within Burmese culture have hindered the success of the movement. These elements include a lack of organized community, prevailing fear of the junta, and submissiveness due to karma. Politically, Aung San Suu Kyi’s desire for better conditions of the Burmese people and the United States’ desire for geopolitical control of the region have perpetuated the movement. Concurrently, military officials have repressed their efforts using brutality, detainment, and forced labor. This repression has been perpetuated by financial contracts beneficial to countries such as China. Although the situation would improve drastically if the military junta was removed from power, there are several interconnected factors that prevent this from occurring. As a result, it is imperative that the Burmese people continue to mobilize and instigate change. As Aung San Suu Kyi states, “We have always believed that peace in the world is only possible if there is peace in the individual countries of the world” (qtd. in Lang 65). Furthermore, it is vital that other countries and organizations, such as the UN, reject their own self-interests in order to help defend the Burmese people. Without this support, it is likely that the repressive situation will not change. Hopefully, the Burmese people’s aspirations for justice will not be torn to shreds like those of the monks’ saffron robes. It is the international community’s responsibility to disprove the Buddhist saying, “Atta hi atano natho: In the end we only have ourselves to rely on” (Clements 177). Human rights cannot be universal if they are not universally defended.
Bibliography


Jack Greenberg: 
A Visionary Civil Rights Champion for Racial Equality

Gary Crosby

One of the most pivotal and profound social, political, and legal movements shaping the meaning of civil rights and liberties in America was the Civil Rights Movement. This movement depicted the struggle for social justice in a nation strictly divided by race and hate. With all odds against the civil rights trailblazers for racial equality, the activists, leaders, and lawyers sought refuge and understanding through the highest court of the land: the Supreme Court of the United States of America. Through the motivation, guidance, and influence of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a trusted and well-respected civil rights organization since 1901, the battle for racial equality gained national and international exposure, leading to a more just America through the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954).

Changing the face of the nation and propelling the nullification of the “separate but equal doctrine” established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Chief Justice Earl Warren declared “[s]eparate but equal has no place” in American life.1

Legendary civil rights giants, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Thurgood Marshall, receive most of the praise for their fearless efforts. However, without the participation of less recognized individuals whose contributions provided the strategic planning and innovative ideas necessary for massive change, the Civil Rights Movement would not have been as successful. An unsung hero, attorney, legal scholar, human rights activist, and professor of law, Jack Greenberg led the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in the courts and played an integral role in obtaining equal rights and opportunities for minorities. Greenberg’s expertise in civil rights litigation and his visionary leadership altered the America legal system by eliminating racial injustice and securing the rights and liberties of minorities under the Constitution.

Drawing from his two autobiographical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement, Greenberg’s sense of purpose and drive that affected change in America is indirectly expressed throughout every chapter. In *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* and *Crusaders in the Courts: Legal Battles of the Civil Rights Movement*, Jack Greenberg recalls his involvement with the court cases influencing the historic *Brown* decision. With an emphasis on the extensive litigation of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) and its strategic legal campaign to abolish the nation’s Jim Crow segregation laws, Greenberg’s memoirs present his clear vision that drove the organization to greater heights. Highlighting the teamwork and professionalism of his fellow colleagues, Greenberg’s humility and life-long dedication shine as a symbol of a better America for all.

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Gary Crosby

“Paving the way for minority students to take advantage of every opportunity equally under the law, Jack Greenberg’s effective visionary leadership along with the contributions of many other unsung NAACP lawyers changed the face of the nation by altering the American legal system. Greenberg’s life story and impact on the Civil Rights Movement inspired me to write this paper for Dr. LaMonte’s Civil Rights and Justice course. From this final project, I am compelled to continue the battle for civil and human rights.”

Gary is a junior political science major with a minor in history. He participates in the Leadership Studies program and serves as the President of College Democrats and State Political Director of the Alabama College Democrats. In addition to other campus groups, Gary is involved in Theta Chi Fraternity, SPACE, and is a contributing writer for The Hilltop News. Gary also volunteers with Impact Alabama’s SpeakFirst project. During Interim 2008, Gary worked with the Obama for America campaign, and he is currently working as the 2008 Baker Donelson Intern at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Reared in a traditional Jewish household near Bronx Park, New York, young Jack Greenberg did not envision himself becoming a civil rights lawyer who would successfully argue the *Brown* case along with thirty-nine other cases before the Supreme Court. His father, Max Greenberg, a native of Lowicz, Poland and a Jewish immigrant, encouraged his son to be sensitive to racial issues. He states his parents “…inculcated in [him] an abiding concern for those who are disadvantaged, which [he] later focused on the race issues.” Many Jewish Americans, like the Greenberg family, shared a similar compassion for minorities; Jewish Americans were the largest contributors to civil rights in America and co-founded the NAACP. Greenberg, a young, white, Jewish attorney, made the decision to devote his entire life to battle for equal rights for African-Americans and other minorities. He affirms, “the simple answer involves going to college, serving in the Second World War, entering law school, and being steered toward civil rights by one of my professors.” Seemingly, Greenberg’s personal convictions to fight for justice and equality were influenced by his worldview, educators, and compassion for others, which would serve as the foundation for his visionary leadership.

Before emerging as a bright, Ivy League law school graduate, Greenberg rarely encountered African Americans; yet, his minimal interaction with minorities did not discount his impact on the legal community and vision for a united nation. He received his undergraduate degree from Columbia College in 1945 and a Bachelor of Laws degree (LL.B.) from Columbia Law School in 1948. Driven and inspired during his years at Columbia University Law School, Greenberg met Professor Walter Gellhorn who influenced his decision to take part in the civil rights cases. Professor Gellhorn influenced students like Greenberg with bright minds and promising futures to serve the community through public-interest law rather than work for a corporate firm. Richard Kluger, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Simple Justice*, renders a concise history of the *Brown* decision and African-Americans’ and other minorities’ plight for equal rights. Kluger cites Professor Gellhorn’s memory of Greenberg’s passion for public-interest law:

> I thought well of Greenberg, Gellhorn recalls. He came to Columbia in the immediate post-war era when the quality of the law school was very high. He was in speedy company. Toward the end, he said he wanted very much to get in *pro bono* work, and there just weren’t many avenues open then. I was a director of the ACLU, so I knew how small a staff they had.  

Gellhorn influenced students like Greenberg to pursue a greater cause and broaden their perspectives by working for progressive organizations and social-activist groups, including labor unions, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Jewish Committee, and the NAACP. As the director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Walter Gellhorn did not have the space or funds to hire Greenberg on his staff; however, Gellhorn knew Thurgood Marshall, the chief counsel of the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, was in search of gifted individuals committed to civil rights. Seeing it as an ideal place for Greenberg to flourish, develop a great sense of legal understanding, and learn how to effectively practice law, Gellhorn recommended his star student to Marshall. Many law school students were guaranteed top-flight salaries working for a private law firm; however, Greenberg stood out from the others. Thus, he was hired by Marshall.

Jack Greenberg began his career at the Legal Defense and Educational Fund by landing an internship at the Fund’s national headquarters in New York. From that point, Greenberg committed not only his career but also his life to the LDF and its daunting mission of changing America. In an exclusive interview, Alabama’s first African-American federal judge and former NAACP civil rights attorney, The Honorable U. W. Clemon, offered a personal account of Jack Greenberg’s impact on the Civil Right Movement. To Judge Clemon, Greenberg was a leader, mentor, boss, and friend. Focusing on his role in forming a sound legal strategy for the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Judge Clemon gave a brief overview of Greenberg’s responsibilities and duties as an entry-level team member on Marshall’s staff:

> During law school at Columbia, Greenberg worked with Thurgood Marshall along with Constance Baker Motley, Bob Carter, and other NAACP staff attorneys. Marshall’s office was in New York. As Marshall would frequently travel across the country, Jack would be left at the office performing all the grunt work such as writing numerous legal briefs.  

Far from the glamorous action of working on court cases, Greenberg’s tireless work ethic and dedication mixed well with the atmosphere at the Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Joining the Legal Defense and Educational Fund in 1949, Greenberg worked closely with talented civil rights lawyers. Greenberg
recalls, “three of us—Constance Baker Motley, Franklin H. Williams, and I—all assistant counsel, worked in a large, high-ceilinged office with big windows facing north, overlooking Fortieth Street, the monumental New York Public Library, and the green lawn and shrubbery of Bryant Park.” Located on the fourth floor of Freedom House at 20 West Fortieth Street, in New York City, the Legal Defense and Educational Fund’s culture motivated the law school graduate to work hard to impress Mr. Marshall and the other NAACP staff attorneys. Marshall soon realized Greenberg was prepared to take on his first independent assignment.

In 1950 under the direction of Thurgood Marshall, Greenberg began work on an amicus curiae (friend-of-the-court) brief supporting members of the Progressive Party who had been the victims of a physical beating. Later on, Marshall assigned Greenberg to represent Mr. John McCray, the Lighthouse and Informer publisher of South Carolina’s only African-America newspaper, in Columbia, South Carolina. Charged with criminal libel for publishing a story of a black man and young white women allegedly having consensual sex, McCray pled guilty and received three years of probation. From these cases, Greenberg realized, “my role was not at the level of great intellectual challenge. It was becoming apparent that being a good civil rights lawyer meant first being a good lawyer, which required doing many things that were not terribly exciting or important.” The foundations of routine cases would assist Greenberg in the milestone cases he would argue before lower courts and eventually the Supreme Court.

A major turning point for Greenberg was his involvement in the integration cases at the University of Texas Law School and the University of Oklahoma Graduate School of Education. Sweatt v. Painter and McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, both LDF cases argued before the Supreme Court, became stepping stones to overturning the “separate but equal doctrine” by mandating the admissions of black pupils into all-white higher education institutions. Greenberg states, “My role in Sweatt and McLaurin was slight. In Sweatt I did such low-level things as spend day and night in the library researching cases, constitutional history, social science literature, and reading proof at the printer.” These cases taught Greenberg the importance of preparation in constructing a well-organized Supreme Court argument, a skill Thurgood Marshall executed gracefully and Greenberg admired. Greenberg took part in several staff meetings at the Legal Defense and Educational Fund during which Marshall, legal scholars, and law professors offered knowledge and strategized for victories in the courts.

Fresh from law school, Greenberg performed several duties as an assistant counsel under the wing of Thurgood Marshall. Kluger states, “New and untried, Greenberg did only minor work in the graduate cases, though within a year of his arrival he would win a major college-desegregation case in the state courts of Delaware.” In Wilmington, Delaware, Greenberg was assigned to work with NAACP attorney Louis Redding to determine if the separate all-white university was equal to the all-black state college. Considering Greenberg’s wife was from Wilmington, he was familiar with the area and people’s views on segregation. Kluger affirms, “It was before the vice chancellor of Delaware that Louis Redding and Jack Greenberg argued Parker v. University of Delaware in 1950.” Greenberg recalls, “On April 1, 1952, Lou Redding and I won the first case ever to order black children admitted to white schools.”

Greenberg’s first, big cases at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund were the Delaware cases. The successful consolidated Belton v. Gebhart and Bulah v. Gebhart (1952) cases created hope in the eyes of the Legal Defense Fund. Francis B. Gebhart from Claymont, Delaware was part of a class action lawsuit filed by black parents of high school students prohibited to attend the all-white high school. Concerned parent, wife of a foreman, and plaintiff Sarah Bulah from Hockessin, Delaware, filed a lawsuit because her daughter had to attend a black segregated one-room school instead of the all-white elementary school on a hill near their house. The Gebhart v. Belton and Bulah v. Gebhart trial included expert testimony on the detrimental effects of segregation on black school children. Gebhart v. Belton and Bulah v. Gebhart were distinctive cases because the Delaware Court of Chancery ruled in favor of the NAACP allowing black students to attend the white school. Chancellor Seitz delivered the shocking ruling that denounced segregation in Delaware public schools and was later affirmed by the Delaware Supreme Court. From these combined cases, lower courts established that they could not rule against the highest court decision. Seitz wrote:

In other words, the Supreme Court…has said a separate but equal test can be applied, at least below the college level. This court does not believe such an implication is justified under the evidence. Nevertheless, I do not believe a lower court can reject a principle of United States
Constitutional law which has been adopted by fair implication by the highest court of the land. I believe the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine in education should be rejected, but I also believe its rejection must come from the Court.”

In reaction to Seitz’s steps forward, Marshall stated, “[f]or the first time, a segregated white public school in America had been ordered by a court to admit black children. ‘This is the first real victory in our campaign to destroy segregation of American pupils in elementary and high schools,’ Thurgood Marshall announced to the press.” Marshall’s words would foreshadow what was to come in the Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which declared racial segregation was unconstitutional.

Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart along with four other cases opened the gateway to overturn the “separate but equal doctrine.” The Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al. case became a celebrated victory of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. For this case, Greenberg worked with fellow NAACP attorney Robert Carter to prepare the arguments. The court case escalated with testimony from parents (the plaintiffs) and experts. The District Court ruled against the NAACP, obligating the Legal Defense Fund to appeal the case to the Supreme Court. In response to Judge Huxman’s unanimous majority opinion from the District Court, in a powerful and predictable statement to Hugh Speer, Greenburg wrote:

Judge Huxman’s opinion, although ruling against us, puts the Supreme Court on the spot, and it seems to me that it was purposely written with that end in view. If it weren’t for Plessy v. Ferguson, we surely would have found the law unconstitutional. But there was no way around it – Supreme Court had to overrule itself.

Judge Huxman put the high court on the spot by admitting African-Americans to a white school. The Gebhart v. Belton and Bulah v. Gebhart decision would serve as a milestone for the Brown decision, a case Greenberg realized would be a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement.

Notably, Greenberg was a forerunner in the powerful litigation of the Brown case. In 1953, before Earl Warren was appointed as Chief Justice, the Supreme Court consolidated the school segregation cases under the single name of Brown. The Brown case was actually comprised of five lead cases which had received disappointing rulings in the lower courts: Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al.; Harry Briggs, Jr. et al. v. R. W. Elliott, et al.; Dorothy E. Davis, et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia, et al.; Spottswood Thomas Bolling et al. v. C. Melvin Sharpe, et al., and Francis B. Gebhart, et al. v. Ethel Louise Belton, et al. Eventually, the Brown case would result in a monumental decision, striking down the Plessy (1896) case that established separate but equal as constitutional.

Greenberg, Marshall, and their colleagues foresaw the Supreme Court ruling the Brown case in their favor. Greenberg states, “Well before we appeared in court, we anticipated that Brown might be a historic case.” The Legal Defense and Educational Fund, under the guidance of Marshall, regarded the Brown decision as a first step toward equal education and opportunities for African-Americans who for years were deprived because of racism and bigotry. With this understanding, Greenberg and Carter reviewed Greenberg’s first draft of the Brown (1951) case in Kansas in preparation for the Supreme Court battle. As the leading crusaders to argue the case, Thurgood Marshall, Jack Greenberg, and Robert Carter revised their arguments. For every Supreme Court case, Marshall and the Legal Defense and Educational Fund staff had a mock trial at the Howard University School of Law. The attorneys argued the case before a large panel of professors, lawyers, and experts who would ask numerous questions as the Supreme Court might.

In the spring of 1953, the Supreme Court failed to deliver an opinion on the Brown case. Greenberg states, “We didn’t wait for the Court’s decision before preparing a forty-four page ‘Blueprint for Legal Action’ and a fifty-five page ‘Civil Rights Handbook’ for the NAACP national convention in March 1953. These documents urged an attack on segregation in education, housing, travel, employment, voting, and public accommodations and proposed how to go about it.” On December 7, 1953, all the lead cases of Brown were once again argued before the Supreme Court. Attorneys Marshall, Greenberg, Carter, and others argued the cases with a new passion and tactic. The convincing arguments of each case contributed to the overturn of Plessy.

The Brown decision struck down Plessy v. Ferguson and declared “[s]eparate but equal has no place.” Presiding and delivering the unanimous majority opinion on school segregation laws, Chief Justice Earl Warren proclaimed:
...separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Marked as a victory of the Civil Rights Movement, the sheer spirit of deprived minorities finally having the chance to rise in the ranks of society was real. Pictured with her daughter on the white marble steps of the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C., Mrs. Nettie Hunt and her daughter read the newspaper headline, “High Court Bans Segregation in Public Schools.” This candid portrayal of an uphill battle for racial equality eased the minds and hearts of several African-American families similar to the Hunts. Brown was a sign of relief for civil rights activists who had fought diligently for the freedom of African Americans to attend public schools with all the other American citizens.

The Brown case promised the end to an era of heightened racial tension and inequalities. Using the legal system was the only way the NAACP would triumph over the years of setbacks and adversity imposed by policies of segregation. Greenberg notes:

Brown raised a legal and moral imperative that set a standard of right conduct. Brown was not merely a pronouncement by the Court. Enforcing Brown established national, not regional, standards as the measure of equality. A people’s movement embraced the principles underlying Brown and demonstrated vigorously for the implementation.

Thus, in the words of Roscoe Pound, the Supreme Court declared that “[l]aw makes habits, it does not wait for them to grow.” Minorities’ civil rights were gained through lawsuits that broke down the “separate but equal doctrine;” Brown implied that separate schools, facilities, and neighborhoods could never be equal under the law. Greenberg and his fellow assistant counsels were revolutionaries who achieved racial change and integrated a polarized nation. The LDF would continue to file lawsuits to test the Brown case and other racial issues.

While the road to civil rights was paved by the Brown decision, the LDF continued to work on several other race-related cases around the country. Marshall’s plan for the Legal Defense and Educational Fund was to move forward with the victories in the courtroom. Marshall’s last case at the LDF was Boynton v. Virginia (1960), in which the Supreme Court outlawed racial discrimination in public transportation. Boynton was one of many sit-in lawsuits argued by the Marshall and his assistants because the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was actively pressing the nation to abide by the Court’s ruling that segregation had no place in American life. In addition, the nonviolent Freedom Riders wanted to test the Supreme Court’s decision in Morgan v. Virginia, in which segregated seating on buses was deemed unconstitutional. Greenberg asserts, “[t]he sit-ins and Freedom Riders transformed LDF.”

News was circulating in the LDF office that Thurgood Marshall would be resigning as the chief counsel and accepting a possible appointment as a federal judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals. The rumors were indeed true. Marshall approached Greenberg to inform him President John F. Kennedy would appoint him as a federal judge. Greenberg was “astonished” at the idea of the Legal Defense and Educational Fund functioning without the initiative, guidance, power, influence, and motivation of chief counsel Thurgood Marshall, who made the organization not only respected and successful, but also a legal force to be reckoned with. Greenberg recognizes, “I emulated his [Thurgood Marshall’s] style to the extent I was able to do it.”

Controversy over Marshall’s successor stirred and angered the black community because many people assumed he would select an African American veteran NAACP lawyer, either Constance Baker Motley or Robert Carter. Greenberg was both appreciative and honored to lead behind legendary trailblazers such as Charles Hamilton Houston, William H. Hastie, and Thurgood Marshall. He acknowledges, “...I joined LDF as a staff attorney. For the next twelve years I observed, learned, and eventually helped litigate some of the most important cases to be argued in the civil rights struggle. Then, in 1961, seven years after the Fund has won the case for which it is most widely known, Brown v. Board of Education, President John F. Kennedy appointed Thurgood Marshall, who had been chief counsel in that case, to the court of appeals.”

The same day Marshall announced his successor the interracial board confirmed the new head of the Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

On September 27, 1961, the executive committee selected Jack Greenberg as General Counsel. Greenberg worked at the LDF for thirty-five years, with twelve of those years under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall and twenty-three as the director-counsel. Not only did Greenberg oversee the legal
strategy. He also implemented an internship program for the Fund and created scholarship programs, a fundraising campaign, and various other activities that contributed to the success of the organization.\(^71\)

Greenberg had the responsibility of sustaining the dream Houston, Hastie, and Marshall had set in place through their service and goals of a better America. Jack Greenberg employed Marshall Sashkin’s theory of effective executive leadership or visionary leadership throughout his life, in his career at the LDF, and in the Civil Rights Movement. In his book, *The Leader’s Companion*, J. Thomas Wren compiles a collection of various theories from contributing writers who have developed unique perspectives on leadership. Marshall Sashkin, professor emeritus at George Washington University and author of “Visionary Leadership,” outlines three aspects that characterize visionary leadership: constructing a vision, stating the vision and creating programs to ensure the success of the vision, and implementing the specific actions of the leader to create and support his or her vision.\(^72\)

In the construction of his vision for the LDF, Greenberg aimed to maintain and improve the opportunities of minorities through more legal cases. The culture of the Fund consisted of highly professional and well-educated civil rights attorneys aware of the organization’s mission and organizational philosophy since its founding in 1940. According to its mission statement, the LDF’s purpose is to defend the rights of minorities and educate them and the world about civil and human rights concerns and to litigate and advocate racial issues by focusing “on issues of education, voter protection, economic justice and criminal justice.”\(^73\) Greenberg’s visionary leadership at the Fund included more than securing an organizational objective that involved the power and influence of legal action.

According to Sashkin’s theory, making a vision become reality requires several steps including composing goals to put the vision in action and interacting with others to achieve the mission.\(^74\) Even though Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) documentation confirmed there was a plot to kill him because of his connections to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Greenberg’s commitment fueled his achievement of the visionary leadership’s second step by engaging his staff to work tirelessly to fulfill the organization’s mission and develop plans to reach its goals.\(^75\) He also increased the staff from five attorneys to seventeen along with affiliate lawyers across the nation.\(^76\) Greenberg launched a campaign to increase the operating budget from $500,000 to $1.7 million, a level which the organization had never seen in its history.\(^77\) The yearly income reached $4.3 million near the conclusion of 1975 and increased in 1980 to $6.3 million.\(^78\) Greenberg spearheaded a corporate campaign, garnering the financial support of the Ford Foundation, Ford Motor Company, Aetna, and other businesses which appropriated philanthropic donations to the fight for civil rights.\(^79\) The same office space originally housing the Fund’s national headquarters upon Greenberg’s arrival in 1949 at 20 West Fortieth Street in New York City could no longer hold the thriving organization; thus, in the mid-sixties, Greenberg made the executive decision of purchasing office space at 10 Columbus Circle.\(^80\) To cover the Southern front and increase the number of Southern civil rights lawyers, Greenberg created the Field Foundation, which would attract law school graduates to reside in the South by offering a $25,000 grant for their efforts.\(^81\) With the goal of recruiting recent graduates and lawyers to commit to public-interest law, he established the Earl Warren Legal Training Program in 1971.\(^82\) The internship program was sponsored by Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations, which allocated more than $1.6 million.\(^83\) In 1966, U.W. Clemon was the recipient of a similar program that allowed him to work as a civil rights attorney in Alabama; in return, the LDF gave him a $7,500 stipend, purchased a personal law library, paid his apartment rent, and bought office space and equipment.\(^84\) Greenberg hired Judge Clemon and assigned him to work with NAACP expert litigator Norman Amaker, a staff attorney and first assistant counsel at the LDF.\(^85\) The mentorship and internship program founded by Greenberg helped similar law school graduates grasp the concept of practicing law and gain practical experience to become “good lawyer[s].”\(^86\) The visionary actions of the tried and experienced director thrived and proved his goals were accomplished.

An impressive docket of court cases, new initiatives, and Congressional legislation evolved during Greenberg’s tenure as chief counsel.\(^87\) Greenberg carefully advised the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; as a result, sixteen cases were filed against the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in violation of the act.\(^88\) In Birmingham, Alabama, the U.S. Steel Corporation, one of the largest private employers in the sixties, was sued by the LDF for racial discrimination, forcing the corporation to adopt a nationwide policy to bar racial discrimination in its companies.\(^89\) Greenberg recollects, “LDF played a large part in enforcing and amending the 1965 Voting Rights Act.”\(^90\) He established a special slate in the
legal strategy for African-American educators displaced and terminated due to integration. Under Greenberg’s supervision and legal knowledge, the LDF initiated a movement to challenge the constitutionality of capital punishment and to eliminate racial discrimination in capital punishment for rape in light of the large number of African-Americans and other minorities who were disproportionately subject to the death sentence. He states, “We were more successful in persuading the Supreme Court, in 1977, to outlaw capital punishment for rape, a sentence that had been more consistently and more blatantly racist in application than any other in American law.” From this national campaign, the power and influence of Greenberg and his staff convinced the Supreme Court to abolish the death penalty for a short while, and a new specialty unit of the Legal Defense and Educational Fund was established for death penalty litigation. In the course of the action plan of defending the rights and liberties of minorities, Greenberg’s vision was a success.

Greenberg executed a vision ranging from the complete integration of public schools to innovative ideas at the LDF. According to Judge Clemon, “Jack was second to Thurgood Marshall when agitating for civil rights. Marshall opened the doors, Jack made sure we walked through them.” Seemingly, as the director counsel of the Legal Defense Fund, Greenberg provided excellent leadership to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Judge Clemon comments, “Jack made the LDF a very viable organization, effectively implementing the Brown v. Board of Education decision, and paving new roads in civil rights for Blacks and minorities as head of the LDF.” Kluger believes Greenberg possesses:

A supple and uncluttered mind, great intellectual energy eagerly exercised and methodically disciplined, the courage to take position on a complex legal question and the stamina to stick to it, and the manipulative skills to keep a large organization of professionals working with dedication toward a goal beyond their own establishment.

After his departure from the Fund in 1984, Greenberg became a professor of law at Columbia University, a distinguished visiting lecturer at Yale and Harvard, and the Dean of Columbia College from 1989 until 1993. Greenberg’s outstanding career and life are a testament to his passion, service, and dedication to civil rights in America. Greenberg has received many accolades from various organizations celebrating his important role in the legal battle for equal rights for all. Rewarded for his great contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and broadening the goals of the LDF, the Fund bestowed upon Greenberg the prestigious Thurgood Marshall Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999, an honor given to the “tireless crusader in the battle for equal justice for more than 50 years.” President Bill Clinton presented Greenberg with the Presidential Citizens Medal on January 8, 2001; he declared, “Jack Greenberg has been a crusader for freedom and equality for more than half a century.”

Jack Greenberg understands his impact on the movement that empowered deprived minorities to rise from the nation’s racist past and reserve a special place for themselves in history. Greenberg admits, “The struggle was hard then. It is hard now. If it seems harder now, or easier, it is only because it is different.” Likewise, Greenberg believes the present civil rights struggle is preventing the assault and possible overturn of the Brown decision by new approaches to twist its intended purpose to assist minorities to achieve greater opportunities. Recent affirmative action cases are an example of how the Court could overturn the Brown ruling. In making a persuasive argument in support of affirmative action, he declares, “Unless you have the affirmative action you’re going to have a country that’s increasingly divided and polarized. You’re going to have blacks vastly, disproportionately out of positions of power, prestige, and importance.” American revolutionary Greenberg is a life-long advocate for civil and human rights and should be highly praised not only for altering the landscape of the American legal system but also for constructing, defining, and implementing a lasting vision.

Endnotes

2 Ibid., 437
3 Ibid.
5 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution*, 50.
6 Ibid., 42.
7 Kluger, 437.
9 Kluger, 438.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Kluger, 439.
13 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 54.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 55.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 69.
26 Ibid., 71.
27 Ibid., 55-56.
28 Kluger, 273.
29 Ibid., 289.
30 Ibid., 431.
31 Ibid., 432.
32 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution*, 149.
33 Ibid., 87.
34 Kluger, 434-437.
35 Ibid., 435.
36 Ibid., 436.
37 Ibid., 450.
38 Ibid, 449-450.
39 Ibid., 449-450.
40 Ibid., 450-451.
41 Ibid., 401.
42 Ibid., 425.
44 Ibid., 117-118.
46 Ibid., 175.
47 Kluger, 401.
48 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution*, 75.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution*, 189.
52 Ibid.
53 Kluger, 793.
54 Kluger, 793.
57 Ibid., 538
58 Ibid., 300.
60 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: Legal Battles of the Civil Rights Movement*, 305.
61 Ibid., 313.
62 Ibid., 315.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 7-8.
70 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution*, xviii.
71 Ibid.

73 Wren, 404.
74 Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: Legal Battles of the Civil Rights Movement*, 322.
75 Ibid., 323.
76 Ibid., 395.
77 Ibid., 403-404.
78 Ibid., 394.
79 Ibid., 403.
80 Ibid., 407.
81 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 324.
88 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 323-326.
93 Ibid., 326.
94 Ibid., 9.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Kluger, 437.
103 Lehrer, 19.

**Bibliography**


