

# Intersection and Counter Impact of the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War Movements

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## Abstract

The article gives the short description of Civil Rights and the Anti-Vietnam War movements. It explains their fundamental reasons and shows the outcomes of the struggles. With the help of comparative analysis, the similarities between those two movements will be revealed. However, the article's main purpose is to find the intersection and counter impact between the two movements. It provides the readers with linkage points and major influences of the movements on each other. Finally it attempts to better understand the social, legal and systemic impact of the movements on the USA in a broader spectrum.

**Keywords:** Anti-War Movements, Civil Right Movement, counter impact, intersection, linkage

## Introduction

The 1960s of the twentieth century was distinguished by the self-realization and establishment of various respectful values. The decade can easily be argued to be one of the most vivid decades of the USA history, as each day offered a new challenge for its society, government and state system. However, the most memorable sets of events were the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements. Those are the movements which had many heroes and heroines, who faced the USA with the injustice created against its own citizens. Revivification of the American spirit and perfection of legal issues was a long and self-sacrificing struggle. Notwithstanding of hardship, the cost was worth it. These two movements raised the new generation with a different attitude and approach toward state consciousness and state development. Not only had they a different impact over the society, but they were also a tremendous leap in the perfection of the USA system and national integration.

### 1. Social and legal impact of civil rights movements

The civil rights movement rose due to sharp segregation within the American society along the color line during the first half of twentieth century. (Williams, 2008, pp. 14-25)

“The roots of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s lie in the transformed conditions and experience of Blacks during the Second World War.” (Shawki, 2006)

It was the experience of seeing the world outside of USA, while fighting for liberty overseas, minorities understood that they suffered from a lack of that same liberty at home, at the promised land of independence. However, it must be said that a relatively small part of the nation had thought about the problem already at the beginning of the twentieth century, evidence of this being the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, which via the legislative procedures tried “to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.” (NAACP)

The need of NAACP was caused by the way of life African Americans had experienced in the USA. They were given “lowest-paying and dirtiest jobs the cities had to offer” they mainly lived in poor houses and served as servants to their white land-

lords. They could get education in segregated schools where they were given low quality education within the required short period of time and they were buried in segregated cemeteries.

The first real case which strongly questioned the segregation was NAACP in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The court found the school separation unconstitutional and with that decision:

Overtaken an 1896 Supreme Court ruling known as *Plessy v. Ferguson* which legalized “separate but equal” facilities and services for blacks and whites. (Williams, 2008, pp. 14-25)

Moreover, the strong impetuses for civil right movements were the lynching of Emmett Till for “disrespectful” behavior towards a white woman and the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a white man in a segregated bus.

These two facts could not leave the African American people indifferent and they raised their voices against inequality and disrespectfulness. Their way of fighting was peaceful and nonviolent resistance. It involved, for example, the Montgomery bus boycott, marches, the sit-ins, freedom riders and voter registration projects. The main reason for the peaceful character of the movement was the most remarkable leader of the movement Martin Luther King, pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. He was awarded the Noble Peace prize for his peaceful struggle in the advancement of African American civil rights.

The ideals for this organization he took from Christianity; its operational techniques from Gandhi. In the eleven-year period between 1957 and 1968, King traveled over six million miles and spoke over twenty-five hundred times, appearing wherever there was injustice, protest, and action; and meanwhile he wrote five books as well as numerous articles. (The Nobel Foundation 1964)

Martin Luther King's the most famous speech is I have a dream, where he speaks about the USA granting equal possibilities and facilities to all its citizens:

“When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of

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the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" (King, 1963)

Another distinguished leader of the civil rights movements was Malcolm X, minister of Muslim temples' in Harlem and in Boston. He faced the cruelty of racism at an early age and he dedicated all his life to the struggle against racism:

"To cast off the shackles of racism "by any means necessary," including violence. You don't have a peaceful revolution,... You don't have a turn the cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution." (Bio. True Story)

Malcolm X, despite his militant proposal as violent revolution in order to establish independent black nation, inspired a lot of African Americans. They respected him greatly, even in case they didn't agree with him.

As I have mentioned above, the most prominent leaders were the people having close connections with religion and churches. Therefore, the main targets of the Ku Klux Klan were the churches and temples, seen as the main cradles of the civil rights movements. The assumption was not fallacious. The churches were the only institution in the beginning and the middle of the twentieth century where African Americans could gather safely, free of any segregation and express their will and ideas.

The church was place to observe, participate in, and experience the reality of owning the directing an institution free from control of whites.

However, churches wouldn't have so big impact on the ongoing processes within the society if not the active operation and involvement of several organizations created at that time for the encouragement and establishment of African American's civil rights. Among them were: National Association for the Advancement of African American People (NAACP), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Congress of Racial Equality (CRE) and National Organization for Women (NOW). The latter was founded in 1966 and was mainly oriented on the problems connected with women.

Some historians argue that the women's role in civil rights movements is faded. A few names are known and little is known about their contribution within the civil rights movements. Martin Luther King Jr. was asked for several times to delegate authority in SCLC. The Civil Rights movement is mainly seen to be dominated by male leaders, even though some of the main executive positions in the organizations mentioned above were taken by women and non-African Americans as well. Among them was Ella Baker, belonging the older generation of women civil rights leaders, she was appointed as executive secretary of SCLC in 1960. Another woman who confronted the male leaders in the movement was Septima Clark vice-president of the Charleston NAACP branch.

The unknown role of women within the civil rights movement is considered to have several reasons. First of all, it is perceived being the result of lack of academic work about the role of black women. Secondly several scholars believe women issues were discussed in living rooms, kitchens, barber shops and beauty parlors. (Breines, 1996, pp. 101-121) Finally, the struggle for equality of black people and white women influenced the life of black women as well and excluded the importance of a separate African American women movement for the protection of their rights.

Nevertheless, the Civil Rights movements had a tight knitted connection with the life of African Americans indiscernibly of gender, moreover, were abundant of brave heroines lead-

ing to a struggle for equal possibilities, facilities and respectfulness. Therefore it should not be considered any obstacle in flourishing of women rights movements. However it demanded the right of equal treatment for each person indistinguishably race and gender. Although the gender was not an impending question among the civil rights movements leaders, the fight against segregation and the first feminist movement early in the twentieth century, dealing mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women, was already a strong root for women to be concentrated on different issues, such as inequality of laws, cultural inequality and the role of women in society. However, all these issues were raised by the end of civil rights movement's major decade, when the main goal of the civil rights movements seemed to be achieved.

The above mentioned main goal of civil rights and the great success of the movement was the Civil Rights Act which was enacted in 1964. The Act contained 10 Titles: they dealt with Voting, Public Accommodations, Desegregation of Public Facilities, Desegregation of Public Education, Civil Rights Commission, Non-discrimination in Federally Assisted Programs, Equal Employment Opportunity, Registration and Voting Statistics and Titles IX and X dealt with procedures to follow appeals from federal court orders. (Rhodes, 1982) However, the adoption of the Civil Rights Act did not complete the civil rights movements' goal; rather, it gave inspiration to other acts and legislative processes to encourage the advancement of African American people.

"It ... paved the way for two major follow-up laws: the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited literacy tests and other discriminatory voting practices, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which banned discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of property. Though the struggle against racism would continue legal segregation had been brought to its knees." (History, 1996-2013)

The social impact of civil rights had a tremendous importance. According the Martin Luther King, the movement's main goal was the survival of "American soul". Therefore, the main tool of the leaders was the powers granted by the USA constitution centuries ago: Freedom of Speech. Moreover, the most important feature of the movement was the conceptual change of social order and treatment. White people acknowledged its disrespectfulness towards their counterparts and the USA legislative system recognized its incompatibility with the exceptional character of the American soul, equal opportunities for all people on the land of new prospects.

## 2. Social reasons and impact of Anti-Vietnam War Movements

The USA involvement in the Vietnam War was justified by the USA presidency as the fight for the protection of an independent foreign nation and the struggle against the destructive influence of Communism. Some of the veterans of the Anti-war movement argued that the USA involvement in the conflict underlined imperialistic tendencies of the country and the urge toward being a super power. (A veteran of the Anti-Vietnam War movement, 1990) The attitude has its grain of truth, as the world was recovering from its wounds from the World War II. Both the USA and the USSR were key players in this respect. Being completely different countries and having different visions of social and world development could be mentioned as being the reasons for the confrontation. In the middle of the

twentieth century the USA was really terrified with the fear of communism and it was ready to struggle against each shadow of communism and socialism. Vietnam appeared to be one of these shadows and the USA decided to protect the Vietnamese from its own fear, represent itself as the liberator of the Vietnamese people. However, a different understanding of social life development of the world's the biggest two countries' was the main reason of confrontation, both of these countries tried to prove their rightness anyway and anytime it was capable to do, but both of them refused to understand the root of their distinction. This root being in the origin of their historical narratives: the nation of emigrants with the ideas of equal opportunities to all individual would never be able to accept the ideas of another huge country depriving the individuality and building the common opportunities for all kinds of people. The USA involvement in the Vietnamese conflict was more of an assisting character at the initial stage and the reasons being to help the people on their way to independence. Nevertheless, the real ones appeared to be balance of powers, emphasizing exceptionalism and superiority, and setting the right direction of foreign national development, without taking into consideration the will of that specific people.

Unlike the USA government, it was the American people who suffered from the burden of the Vietnam War. It were the young fellows who were sacrificed to the struggle of the liberation of a foreign nation; it was the money of the people spent in the military equipments and operations; and it was the violence that prevented the USA from establishing the positive goals as it is hard to achieve positive results via violated actions.

The USA revealed its interest towards the Vietnam conflict in 1949 when the country decided to assist the French troops in order to protect Vietnam from expansion of communism. (Drake, 1993)

From 1950 to 1954, authorized US aid had reached \$1.4 billion and constituted 78 percent of the French budget for the war. The extensive written history of the American role in Indochina produced by the Defense Department, which later became known as the Pentagon Papers, concluded that the decision to provide aid to France "directly involved" the US in Vietnam and "set" the course for future American policy. (Drake, 1993)

However, the strengthening of the USA intervention in Vietnam took place in the beginning of the 1960s. The burden of the war became harder for American society and the first traces of an anti-war movement appeared in 1963. That being said:

"[it] did not begin in earnest until nearly two years later, when President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered massive U.S. military intervention and the sustained bombing of North Vietnam" (Well, 1999)

The Anti-Vietnam War movement started mostly on student campuses. The initial steps appeared in February 1965, when the NYU Committee to End the War in Vietnam (CEWV) organized a teach-in at Loeb Student Center. The teach-in discussed the Berkeley anti-Vietnam War demonstration, the Watts riots, and the denunciation of President Johnson's domestic policies. (Oracle Think Quest Education Foundation, 2001)

The first teach-in organized by Students for a Democratic Society at the University of Michigan took place on March 24-25, 1965 (Wikipedia). The event was attended by 3,500 students and it had a more demonstrative character, rather than an argumentative foundation against the Vietnam War. Another large scale, nationally publicized, teach-in was organized by

the University of Michigan and its faculty on May 15, 1965, where 3,000 students and professors participated. During this event the argumentations for and against the War were discussed, along with other points regarding the foreign policy and essence of a USA presence in Southeast Asia.

The Teach-in movement spread rapidly throughout the country and nearly 120 campuses participated in it. The largest teach-in occurred at the University of California at Berkeley, where 12,000 people participated. The event was sponsored by the Vietnam Day Committee. (Hoefflerle, 2009, pp. 185-202) The purpose of teach-ins was to enhance knowledge about the ongoing processes in Vietnam, to estimate the cost of the War and to understand its beneficial or destructive sides. Although teach-ins appeared on many campuses, a minority of students actually wanted to reduce U.S. military involvement; the majority of them still favored the war until late 1960s.

The year 1965 is a distinguished year in the Anti-Vietnam War movement due to the set of actions that attracted worldwide attention. One of them was the self-immolation of people in protest against the war.

In November, 1965, Norman Morrison, a Quaker from Baltimore, followed the example of the Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Due, and publically burnt himself to death. In the weeks that were to follow, two other pacifists, Roger La Porte and Alice Herz, also immolated themselves in protest against the war. (Vietnam Protest Movement)

In addition, other actions involved, for example, draft card burning. On October 15, 1965 David miller, a young Catholic pacifist, was the first who burned his card in direct violation of the law forbidding such acts. He was arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to two years imprisonment. More than twenty-five thousand men destroyed their cards in protest against the War but only 46 were indicted.

Among several events conducted in protest against the war was the protest against the Dow Chemical Company, the march on the Pentagon – arrest of 1500 students, international student and faculty strike to bring troops home (1968), Columbia University unprecedented antiwar demonstration, citizens rally outside the Chicago Democratic National Convention, disruption of speeches, Kent State University shootings, Jackson State college shootings, and several bombings across the Nation. (Oracle Think Quest Education Foundation, 2001) However, the most shocking appeared to be the Kent State University shootings where 4 students were killed; the people were accustomed to the brutality of the authorities, beats and arrest of the protesters, but the killing of students was something that could not be justified. The USA government was seen as a deadly power, not only abroad but at home as well.

The struggle against the War was accompanied with revolt in the US army, as several soldiers refused to combat in a war that could not be won.

The anti-war movement was strengthened by the thousands of veterans who returned home radicalized by their experience in the war. Driven by anger at the US government's lies and the atrocities they witnessed, they moved to the forefront of the anti-war movement - in their uniforms, many on crutches or in wheelchairs. (Wilsdon & Locker, 2002)

Moreover, the cost of Vietnam War was major. The official number of American casualties was 58, 220, however, the number has increased after the war by a rate of suicide of Vietnam veterans that made a total of approximately 67,000. Financially the war had cost to the USA one billion dollars a day at its

peak; the country had dropped 7 million tons of bombs - more than the entire total of all participants in World War II. The cost of the war in 1968 alone was \$88,000 million while the combined spending on education, health and housing in that year was \$24,000 million (The Vietnam War). In addition, the total expenditure of the USA in Vietnam War made a total of \$111 billion which had a huge impact on the economy.

Therefore, the overall impact of the Anti-Vietnam War movement was a forcible impetus for the authorities to rethink their policy, reasons and purpose of intervention. The purpose as declared was the liberation of the Vietnamese people from the claws of communism; however the USA intentionally forgot and did not allow the Vietnamese people to make their own choice. The Anti-Vietnam War movement was a reminder of injustice and non-independence granted to a nation whose liberation was the main aim of the USA. Moreover, the movement made the government to rethink the sacrifice its own country had to make; it revealed the evil sides of the War hidden behind ideological motives.

The movement stated loudly that the USA had to take care of its own citizens and it was not the place that would use violation in order to form the state system worrying about the human rights, freedom of choice and equality of opportunities.

The reasons of Anti-Vietnam War movement had its foundations in the ideology and the management of the war. Ordinary USA citizens refused to believe that communism and self-definition of the political route of Vietnamese people was a great threat for the development of American state consciousness. It were the people, mostly a young generation, and the future of the country which demanded the government to stop violations in order to restore peace and order on a foreign land on the expenses of killing plain citizens. It was the youth who showed the county the price of lives lost in vain and it reminded the authorities that people are not a tool to be directed for annihilation of others' hopes, pursuits and beliefs. It was the American nation that showed its government that is was wrong and that it had to admit its abusive actions.

### 3. Linkage and counter impact of Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements

There is a substantial link between the Civil Rights and the Anti-Vietnam War movements. In the last three decades, civil rights historians have shown how many African-American leaders opposed the USA involvement in the Vietnam War on both racial and moral grounds. Malcolm X denounced the war in December 1964 and, before the end of the year, he was joined by James Forman, executive secretary of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1965, the McComb Mississippi branch of the Freedom Democratic Party distinctly called for a draft resistance. (Young, B. M., 2009, pp. 67-75)

“No one has a right to ask us to risk our lives and kill other African American People in . . . Vietnam so that the White American can get richer. We will be looked upon as traitors to the African American People of the world if Negro people continue to fight and die without a cause . . . We can write our sons and ask if they know what they are fighting for. If he answers Freedom, tell him that's what we are fighting for here in Mississippi. And if he says Democracy, tell him the truth – we don't know anything about Communism, socialism, and all that, but we do know that Negroes have caught hell under this

American democracy.” (Young, 2009, p. 68)

The main notable linkage between these two movements is the memorable speech of the most distinguished leader of the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, known as ‘Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence’ made on April 4, 1967.

“They must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1945 after a combined French and Japanese occupation, and before the Communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. Even though they quoted the American Declaration of Independence in their own document of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its reconquest of her former colony” (King, 1964).

The other bridge between Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements which could be mentioned were the activities and operation of organizations related to both of the movements; among them were the Free Speech Movement and the Students for a Democratic Society. The first of the major civil rights organization's which denounced the war was the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC), followed by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). (Daughterly, 2006, pp. 1-2)

Hall argues that African Americans did not become active supporters of the anti-war movement. However the Civil rights movement must be considered as a major foundation of the anti-war movement with the Mississippi project of the freedom riders. Wide participation of the students in the freedom riders' project accomplished two goals: firstly it covered the aim of the project such as registration for voting, the advancement of black people and their integration in a white men society. Secondly, it showed the students its country, the evil side of segregation and unequal treatments. In other words, the project gave an opportunity to students to get to know their country well and to see a more sober perspective on the land of new prospects.

However, the efforts of cooperation between Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements did not appear to be easily achievable. Therefore, until 1965 two separate movements existed in the USA. The possibility of cooperation improved as a result of the revolt of the black soldiers in the Vietnam.

Black soldiers saw little reason to risk their lives fighting a racist war, in a racist army, for a racist government. (Wilsdon, Locker, 2002)

Hall argues that the first traces of possible cooperation faced quickly as the anti-Vietnam War movements were overwhelmingly white, college based and prone to intellectualism, while the African Americans were concerned by the racially biased draft system, linking the war to colonialism and racism.

In my opinion, such division in reasoning has a grain of truth. Nevertheless, the presiding struggle of the African Americans should be taken into consideration. The Anti-Vietnam war movement was not linked with colonialism for only African Americans, as the white people of the nation had the same notion. It was the impact of the civil rights movements which showed the society the right of the every single person regarding voting, and other issues. The USA government, horrified by the shadow of communisms and the ‘domino theory’ (Whitaker, 2011) was preventing Vietnam its own rights to choose the way of development.

Advocates of Black Power, the organization which had already came out against the war and most inclined to work with the peace movement, feared about being co-opted by the white

peace movement and sought to form separate black anti-war movement. Growing racial violence in Americas' cities concerned peace activist and inspired advocates for racial change and those fighting against the war in Vietnam.

Hall concludes,

“arguments about emphasis and multi-issuism, the cultural and intellectual barriers between white students and antiwar activists and black civil rights workers, and interracial tensions, would, throughout the decade, plague efforts to build a broad, radical, multiracial, multi-issue antiwar coalition.” (Daughterity, 2006, p. 2)

The cooperation between the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements did not appear to be easily accomplishable, although both of them served the USA nation as a breakthrough in building state consciousness and as a tool to reappraise old values.

Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and non-violence when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. As from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition. (King, 1964)

The Civil Rights movement sought for the respect and integration of African Americans and the acknowledgement of their rights. It managed to unionize the African Americans and part of the white population to achieve its goal by non-violent activities. The movement grounded its strengthening not only on the condition of African Americans, but also the different comprehensions of the world by the white population.

The Anti-Vietnam War movement is considered to be based on the high cost of the USA intervention in the conflict, high rate of human sacrifice, huge financial expenditure, non-winnable character of the war, wrongful governmental motives and a revolted US army. All the reasons are rational and enough to launch such a movement. However, without the presiding civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement would not have been as affective and its initial stage would not serve as awakening. The counter impact of these two movements was the regeneration of the country, its main values and beliefs. The nation reminded the government the purpose of its existence and the exceptional charm of the country that attracted the worldwide attention and interest. That was the equal opportunity for every member of the nation of emigrants. Those two movements helped the people having a different nationality, ethnicity or belief background to merge in the struggle for peace, to advance the feeling of the American nation and to reveal and remove deficiency from it.

## Conclusion

The 1960s of the twentieth century appeared to be a reformation era for the USA. It was the time of awakening and the redefining its national and governmental perceptions of the world. Moreover, it was a time in which the main foundation of the USA was exercised and used as main instrument in the struggle against injustice.

The two most distinguished movements, the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements had a tremendous impact, not only on the USA's society. The Civil Rights Movement caused a conceptual change of social order and treatment between the races. Non-violent activities and the right of self-determination, such as equality, respect, right of voting and education

without the racial distinction empowered by legislative acts and decisions, strengthened the foundation of the exceptional character of the land of new prospects. The Anti-Vietnam War movement gathered and unified the people against the human sacrifice, huge financial expenditure and governmental reasons of the war that deprived Vietnamese people from the development on its own way.

As for the intersection of Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements, they both were the creation of one and the same nation; mostly the same people participated and galvanized them. Those two movements cannot be discussed without the observation of the similarities in their setting. However the main idea of counter impact seems to be the regeneration of the country, its main values and beliefs. Those two movements helped the people, having different nationalities, ethnicities or belief background, to merge in the struggle of peace, to advance the feeling of the American nation and to reveal and remove deficiency from its jurisprudence.

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