

The Civil Rights Movement's Impact on other Social Movements

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Abstract

We have been constantly reminded that, we are not going to succeed in achieving any kind of social change unless we build a strong civil society. Consequently, lots of NGOs in Georgia are founded with the intention to realize this dream. However, we have got a long way ahead of us.

After the election of Obama, when discussing the history of the United States of America, particularly while talking about the 1950-1960s, Georgian people knowingly nod their heads, expressing their understanding that it was an era of intense struggle for fighting for the basic rights by Civil Rights Movement activists, - African Americans.

In order to get full and concise perspective of the significance of the Civil Rights movement, we must provide some information on the impact of the decision on other social movements. Undoubtedly, social movements play an influential role in culture, public policy and mainstream politics: they respond to it and influence it.

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As Meyer & Boutcher argue, although African Americans have been organizing rights for decades beforehand, the decision in Brown & Board of Education was a national political breakthrough. This crucial decision was in a way a demonstration that a depressed minority might prevail in the courts, that the usual trappings of power did not predetermine the results of litigation." (Neier, 1982) This landmark decision in a way was a signal "of changed political opportunities for African Americans." (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007)

In order to get full and concise perspective of the significance of the Civil Rights movement, we must provide some information on the impact of the decision on other social movements. Undoubtedly, social movements play an influential role in culture, public policy and mainstream politics: they respond to it and influence it. According to Meyer & Whittier, "activists choose strategies they believe to be accessible and potentially effective, and the outcomes of their efforts, at least as understood by others, shape the opportunities they and others face in the future." (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007) This litigation for the Civil rights activists perceived this litigation as the best "prospect for political influence, given the inherent difficulties of pursuing minority rights in other (majoritarian) institution, as well as the disproportionate influence that white Southern Democrats enjoyed in both Congress and electoral politics." (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007) The decision in Brown v. Board of Education in a way was a result of social movement activism,

and its interpretation influenced successive movements. For better illustration, I will, use, some concepts from social movement theory.

It is assumed that, social movements can influence other movements in two ways: indirectly in terms of government actions they influence and cultural changes they contribute to and directly, through shared personnel and coalition politics. (ibid.)

It is very important to note that the civil rights movement's personnel were the people who had other, different political concerns, such as, commitments to economic justice, labor movement and piece. Along with keeping of an essentially steady political world view, activists of the movement can shift goals and groups in response to the changing political environment, responding to proximate threats and opportunities. (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007, p. 83) After this decision and after the peak of the civil rights movement, activists moved to other social movements, equipped with tactics and views. It is important to underline that, in these new movements former civil rights movement activists because of their skills, became key, major, chief players in other movements, such as the student movement, the Free Speech Movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the pro-life movement, local environmental campaigns. (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2002)

Undoubtedly an emergence of the movement, its further growth and influence is triggered by the political opportunity, political context. According to Meyer, protest movements change, reshape the structure of political opportunity and "thus the shape and potential efficacy of subsequent movements." (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007) A movement can make certain policies more attractive and promising than others for its successors, and create a pattern of potential government responses and challengers (ibid.). According to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Emulation is a collective action modeled on the actions of others." (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2002) For a successful emulation, it is necessary that activists see similarities in their issues with those they copy. Moreover, they must be confident that the adaptation of the tactics and claims of others will be

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successful.

Meyer interestingly illustrates how the Civil Rights movement, through this famous decision influenced successive social movement. The implementation of the litigation model of the civil rights movement was supported by the movement of personnel from the civil rights movement to successor movements. Experienced young people were eager to return to the communities and work on the issues of economic justice and on the rights of other minority groups.

To illustrate, Mayer talks about anti-war movement, which was built upon the students organization who had supported civil rights. There were plenty of lawyers in this movement, who regarded the Federal judiciary as “a potential ally”.

This has been encouraged by the success of Brown for a number of reasons: a) this decision, “put not only school desegregation, but civil rights for African Americans more generally, on broad national political agenda.” (Ibid, p. 80) b) The Supreme Court provided a great platform, stage for action and activism. It was an independent political institution with a power. The court could stand against the majority will to “defend the Constitution and the rights of minorities: c) Activist had to frame their claims according to the Constitution.

In terms of emulation, the success of NAACP, using the court as its main instrument in the struggle against discrimina-

Table 1

Organization	Founding
American Civil Liberties Union ACLU	1920
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund	1940
Center for Constitutional Rights	1966
National Organization for Women	1966
Environmental Defense Fund	1966
Center for Law and Education	1969
National Consumer Law Center	1969
Americans United For Life	1971
Public Citizen	1971
Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund/Earth Justice	1971
Southern Poverty Law Center	1971
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights	1973
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund	1973
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force	1973
National Right to Life Committee	1973
Pacific Legal Foundation	1973
Student Press Law Center	1974
Animal Liberation Front	1976

Pension Rights Center	1976
Mountain States Legal Foundation	1977
National Center for Learning Disabilities	1977
National Center for Lesbian Rights	1977
Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights	1977
Human Rights Watch	1978
Indian Law Resource Center	1978
Animal Rights Coalition	1980
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals	1980
Animal Rights Mobilization	1981
Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights	1981
Council for Disability Rights	1981
Rutherford Institute	1982
National Organization for Men	1983
Center for Individual Rights	1989
American Center for Law and Justice	1990
American Veterans for Equal Rights	1990
Center for Reproductive Rights	1992
Disability Rights Advocates	1993
Feminists for Animal Rights	1993
AnimalRights.Net	1998
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education	1999
Worker Rights Consortium	2001

tion, “led a range of other interests to adopt litigation strategies.” (ibid, p. 84) Below is the list of social movement groups. Most of them, except the American Civil Liberties Union were formed as a result of Brown decision: *Table 1*.

Conclusion

Donald Smith argues that “civil rights movement in America may be understood best when it is perceived and analyzed as an effort to establish communication between two dissonant groups: the have-nots and the haves.” (Smith, 1966, p. 379) At least theoretically, most Americans believe in equal rights, in the promise of American Dream for everyone.

However, there has been a big inconsistency between the theory and practice in the twentieth century America. Smith argues that this very division and inconsistency has offered “the greatest possibility for social change in the twentieth century” I believe that African Americans with great virtuosity have used “communication as an instrument of social change.” (ibid)

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