Importance of Protest to Democracy

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# IMPORTANCE OF PROTEST TO A DEMOCRACY

# 1.0 Introduction

Protests are the roads to fighting for equality in political, social, economic and cultural freedom and rights in a country or an organization. For example, protests can be as a result of segregation and unequal treatment against the minority.[[1]](#footnote-1) This makes the affected party to demonstrate for their voice to be heard. Some may protest using go slows, strikes and sometimes violence may be the only option left. Historically, many revolutions and mass movements made evident that protests can effect positive change. Protests have made it possible for equality in human rights and freedom for all, across the world.

On the same, protests give every individual a chance to participate in sharing his or her views on the current affairs in his or her country all over the world. For instance, Iranians protested for a revolution which made USA support them against the anti-regime they were denouncing[[2]](#footnote-2). On the same, for instance, many African countries (including South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria), as well as the United States (especially in Alabama) fought for their equality among the oppressed during colonization[[3]](#footnote-3). In Africa, countries were colonized by the white men, mainly from France, Britain and Germany. They were ruled and demeaned in their own countries of origin. Those who did not collaborate would be sent to work in large plantations to provide free and hard labor.

The white men settled in the highlands so as to get the best out of the black men’s land. As years passed, the black men became literate, which made them more aware of their rights and freedom[[4]](#footnote-4). Eventually they protested for their freedom and democracy. As a result, they expounded on their grievances and opinions, by which a chance to publicly denounce a certain form of leadership was provided. The government that was being demonstrated against is given a chance to rectify on their oppressive moves. In most cases, the most oppressed people in our society are the poor, minority and marginalized. This is the reason why most of the people who are usually spotted on the streets protesting are the low and middle level group.

Sometimes the government that is being denounced tends to feel threatened and controlled.[[5]](#footnote-5) This has made it to treat Protestants harshly; many of them have been physically abused and beaten by the police force. The right to protest is not respected in such cases.

There are principles that do support the right to protest. In the USA, some of the principles include Universal Declaration of Human rights, social and cultural rights and international covenant on civil and political rights. These principles are usually used by activists’ lawyers, civil societies and other shareholders willing to enhance equality regionally and internationally.

On the other end, protests have led to the death of many demonstrators. Its positive effect has been reflected later in the free and fair elections and democracy in the present day[[6]](#footnote-6). This is the price that they had to pay for an effective demonstration. In airing their views, there is the use of media which may support the movement. The role of the media is to report, document and give full information on the protests details.

The minority in protest movements usually fought for freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of speech, right of privacy, freedom in participating in their own culture and religion, right and freedom from discrimination[[7]](#footnote-7). The right to be involved in a protest is usually in the law in the first amendment of the constitution. On the contrary, only a few law enforcement officials sometimes paid attention to that law[[8]](#footnote-8). They violated this freedom of expression as it has been indicated in the recent historical events. Police come up with crack downs through illegal use of extra force and unlawful arrests.

Racial oppression in the USA in the mid-1950s, especially in Alabama, has been the major problem facing the human rights and freedom in the American history[[9]](#footnote-9). Mainly the blacks have been the most affected. They protested for their voices to be heard which took their lives and led to segregation and divisions[[10]](#footnote-10). The slaves who were traded from Africa had started to feel the need for their own freedom and rights in their foreign land. They felt that they now belonged to the land, thus demanded and protested for their right of ownership as the other citizens.

In conjunction with this, the need to study the importance of protests to a democracy emerged, as with the case study of Birmingham Alabama. This reflected the situation in the whole of United States of America and any other protesting and oppressed countries or parties all across the world.

# 2.0 Thesis Statement

This research paperwill study the importance of protest to a democracy by following a case study of Alabama State in Birmingham in the mid-1950s, where the blacks were the minority who were fighting for their democracy, rights and freedom. This will act as a source of reference for all other protests that have happened across the world and their impact and contribution to democracy.

# 3.0 Road Map

The study will be guided by the following objectives. They indicate the importance of protest to a democracy.

They include:

* Creating the protestors unity.
* Creating a turning point of events and effecting change.
* Creating a voice for the minority (blacks in our case).
* Enhancing a winning strategy.

# 4.0 Background of the Study

This study’s background was driven by the major protests that happened in Alabama in the mid-1950s and their impact on democracy in the USA. The first such protest was led by Rosa Parks[[11]](#footnote-11). Rosa Parks was a black woman who was once mistreated on a public bus, forced and coerced to give a white man a seat. This was as a result of the law and rule of segregation that was passed by the white man’s government to discriminate the black community or the minorities. She defied the law, which led to her arrest. The civil rights activists saw that as an opportunity to protest and demonstrate against the segregation laws. Montgomery decided to have a one-day boycott demanding for her release. This inspired the black community to conduct more protests for their freedom.

This was when Martin Luther King decided to join the protests for equality in democracy. As a young man led by his passion to transform his community, he gave them hope and resilience to overcome the brutal ruling regime. They looked for other means to transport them to work. This were small cars that were only drove by the black man. The bus companies, which belonged to the white men, began to feel the financial impact of the protest and the boycott. Due to this, the white government felt threatened.

. Consequently, this led to arrests, killings and bombing of any gatherings of black men. On the same, Dr. Martin Luther King urged the black community to protest with a non-violence strategy, as Mahatma Gandhi did in India on the teachings of the same in his country’s protest for independence[[12]](#footnote-12). The protest was successful after the case was taken to the Supreme Court and the judge ruled out the law of segregation. The current civil rights organizations and movement resulted from these historical protests. Following this historical protest, the effect of protests in the democracy were studied as below.

# 5.0 Effects of Protest to a Democracy

# 5.1 Creating Protestor Unity

During protests, the black community or the minority groups felt unified, which increased their bond and solidarity. Even after social mistreatment and injustices, they still felt togetherness[[13]](#footnote-13). This gave them hope to keep pushing for the democracy that they sought. As Martin Luther King depicted, democracy should be for everyone, regardless of where he is from or the color of his skin. The Protestants would also be secluded from white men at hotels, places of living and schools. As the demonstrations continued, so the dream of having a fair democracy was getting clearer for the minority group. They met in their segregated groups and discussed the racial oppressions. This created a form of console and therapy for the afflicted.

Mass movements always created havoc and this made the white men’s government feel threatened and disrespected according to its way of ruling. This made the whole USA feel the black men’s insight as they fought for democracy. All states which had oppressive segregation laws were challenged. This effected the uprising of a court case by *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in the Louisiana court to fight for the out-ruling of the segregation laws against the black race[[14]](#footnote-14). In the end, the Supreme Court officially denounced the law of segregation which affected the whole of America.

This contributed to the black man community freedom enforcement. That community felt more united than before. Even though the segregation did not end completely from the white man’s mentality, it brought hope to the black community. The blacks hoped that one day they will have the rights and freedom as equal as the white man. The separation and segregation made them even much more united to fight for their rights[[15]](#footnote-15). Many black men died in the struggle and protests, but eventually as they stuck together in unity it was bearing fruits.

# 5.2 Creating A Turning Point of Events and Effecting Change

According to the white man, segregation was only erased in the constitution but not in real life situation. As the turn of events took part on the road to freedom, more black youths were empowered to work hard to get the power of education[[16]](#footnote-16). Even though they were still secluded in black community schools and universities, the revolution was still underway. The black man was now termed as equal to the white man after the 14th amendment of the constitution. Nevertheless, this never gave the black man any freedom and opportunities as the white man.

Black men were still harassed and called names, which reflected on their inferiority. In the late 1960s, black men had already established their civil rights movements which would fought for their rights and freedom against the white men brutality[[17]](#footnote-17). Southern Christian leadership conference emerged, led by Martin Luther King, to effect change through the use of less or no violence in fighting for democracy.

At that time, the white government had already allowed the black man to have freedom of worship and privacy, even though the white man never recognized it in the streets. Many black men were still brutally killed and their deaths happened every day. The power of education made many black men attend school, then universities and study law, which made them understand their freedom and rights. They realized their boundaries and the way that they can effect change for their community to acquire equal and fair democracy.

Due to the protests to achieve democracy, change was inevitable. It was a major revolution in America, as the black men became enlightened and more educated. They emerged from every part of the country. Birmingham led this protest and made it possible for the country to have an effect on change.

# 5.3 Creating a Voice for the Blacks and the Minority

Democracy has a way of giving voice to the people’s demands through the use of multitudes protesting for their rights. Activists and civil rights leaders do become the spokespersons for the oppressed. No matter how much the oppressors ignore the protests, they end up surrendering and giving them a chance to air their views[[18]](#footnote-18). In most cases, before that agreement is reached, blood is shed and protesters are left homeless and mistreated just as a way to coerce and intimidate. This was the tactic that was used by the white man. The equality and the voice of the black community was the major concern the minority generation had in the year 1959 in Birmingham.

In the year 1867, the blacks had already stayed with the white man and they realized that the only difference between them is the color of the skin. Minority groups had also started being more united because they felt a sense of belonging when they were doing the hard duties and receiving mistreats from the white man[[19]](#footnote-19). Some of the black men who believed in themselves started eyeing leadership positions in the public offices. The blacks supported their fellow countrymen to win the leadership positions.

As a way of intimidating the black men from voting, a group called Ku Klux Klan was established in 1867. Its main aim was to scare the black man from vying for leadership positions. They felt threatened to a point of using violence to stop the black community from gaining equality, especially on the time of voting[[20]](#footnote-20).This widened the gap of segregation and equality between the black and the white man. They would scare them and hold them hostage during the voting period.

This made the black community protests less effective, but their motive and dream to achieve democracy never faded away. This was after another blow on the face when Jim Crow laws which was to intentionally seclude the white man from the black on each aspect[[21]](#footnote-21). This law was to ensure blacks are treated second after the white man. Nevertheless, the laws were ridiculous and challenged, thus marking the creation of a voice for the black man eventually.

# 5.4 Enhancing a Winning Strategy

For democracy to be achieved, the numbers do not lie because the majority always wins. The protesters employed perseverance and the urge to fight for their freedom for it to be achieved. The journey was not easy, and some of the blacks turned against their fellow black men just to receive favors from the white man. Dehumanization and discrimination became a way of life. Enslaved and oppressed in chains was the agony that was turned into an accomplishment when they achieved a ruling that black men are free. According to Carter G, Woodson, the accomplishment was too overwhelming, so he founded a black history month of February every year[[22]](#footnote-22).This was a great contribution and inspiration to the black community at large, across America and the world.

The black press was also part and parcel in achieving democracy because itincited its fellow countrymen to resist the ruling of the white men. The laws that demeaned their dignity and their human existence. As part of its celebration, the press made famous the black men who took major strides and risked their lives for the race. Some of them were Presbyterian Minister Samuel Cornish as well as his journalistic partner, John B. Russwurm, who was the black man to graduate from a college in America in the white man brutal era. Many black press emerged, for instance, Freedoms journal by Samuel Cornish, Chicago defender, Fredrick Douglas North star, Ebony and Negro History[[23]](#footnote-23). They discussed the injustices that the black man persevered to emerge free and to achieve democracy.

All of the black men who were providing cheap labor began to receive an extra penny. By the time the revolution happened in the USA, only 3% of the black men in Northern states were slaves. Black population in the southern States was 26%, and most of them were slaves working on farms and plantations for the white man[[24]](#footnote-24). They also offloaded ships, made bricks and performed other forms of hard and manual labor.

Although not all civil rights activists, for instance Malcolm X, believed in non-violence, they had one theme: fight for democracy. The universities started enrolling black men in their curricula following the mass action on civil rights law during the presidency of John F. Kennedy. John F. Kennedy declared equality for all the segregated and discriminated minority groups, mostly in employment and rights to housing. In this period, civil rights leaders were assassinated, which made John F. Kennedy pass the Civil rights bill[[25]](#footnote-25). This was followed by Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, which moved, motivated and inspired masses on a great future of equality and democracy for the black men.

The victories of denouncing segregation laws and putting in place the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked the importance of protest to the American democracy for the black men. Even though full implication of the laws never took part immediately, it was a major step ahead for the black community. The major problem was that many of the blacks were still living in poverty and illiterate[[26]](#footnote-26). Affirmative action laws were enacted, which made racism not a factor in achieving opportunities in America.

The blacks also received federal funds, and they sued anyone who discriminated against them, to the United States Supreme Court if necessary. Many black leaders emerged and ran for public office seats with no fear or intimidation from the white man. Black women also were empowered to run for office; Shirley Chilsom became the first black woman to become a Member of Congress and to vie for the presidency in the Democratic Party.  This led to others, like Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1984, running for democratic presidency, which he lost. In the year 2008, Barak Obama became the first black man to be the president of the USA; he won two terms.

# 6.0 Conclusion

Democracy gives the sense of belonging to a citizen in their specified countries. When the freedom and rights are denied, the oppressed citizens fight back with protests and demonstrations for their voice to be heard[[27]](#footnote-27). The sought-for change may not be effected immediately, but the effort will be recognized depending on how much they persist or they need their equal rights.

Other than America’s black men, protests through civil rights all across the world especially in Jamaica and Africa has been the same struggle. To be civilized, protestors are always urged to use the non-violence mode in order to be understood unless they are attacked with brutality. Sometimes protests do bring a good result in the end. People receive equality, fair education and employment opportunities. They are also allowed to participate in the election to ask for people to vote for them as democracy[[28]](#footnote-28). On the other end, protests also bring deaths, homelessness, injuries and dehumanization to the oppressed.

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