

Third Place Senior Essay  
Addisyn Carruthers  
Oscar F. Smith High School, Mrs. Marianne McMillin

The shrieks, the running, the blood. All coming from my brothers and sisters. This is how black people were treated in America. The racism, the discrimination. All of this because of the color of our skin. I am John Lewis. You may know me as a Civil Rights leader. Back in the 1960s, I fought for the rights of my black brothers and sisters. Let's take a look back at the events that occurred, and reflect on my thoughts during that time.

Walking down the streets, everything was so divided. Separate water fountains, separate telephone booths, and even separate parks. This was America. Black people were not allowed to sit in the same restaurants as white people. We weren't allowed to sit in the front of buses. Black and white children were forced to attend different schools. My fellow black brothers and sisters were beaten because of the color of their skin. We were brutally attacked. We were verbally and emotionally abused. Sometimes I thought society would always be this way. I always used to think, would this ever change? Would the world ever become equal? Every day I prayed that I would be able to do something to make a change. And eventually, I, John Lewis, was able to do something, to better the future of America.

This mistreatment was unbearable. We knew we had to do something. However, that "something" needed to be peaceful. But what could we do? Would it even be worth it? This is when a group of black and white Civil Rights Activists gathered together. We called ourselves the Freedom Riders. Everyone within this group, including me, of course, rode interstate buses into the Southern part of the United States. The South was the most discriminating, racist, and segregated place in this country. Here, we planned on protesting at segregated bus terminals. The

Freedom Riders attempted to use “whites-only” lunch counters and restrooms. From our actions, we faced horrific violence. The police officers violently beat us to the ground, and also arrested many of us. However, we did not stop there. “Bloody Sunday,” was an infamous day in history. On this day, myself, MLK, Farmer, Randolph, Wilkins, and Young led a march. This was a march for voting rights. What were we to expect? We would surely be harmed, wouldn’t we? And that is certainly what happened. It was March 7, 1965. During the march, the police force brutally attacked us. They used tear gas, horses, bullwhips, anything you could possibly think of. Around 14 of us were injured. 13 were even killed. Was this worth it? Is all of this pain and suffering going to lead to a positive future of America? Throughout the years, we never gave up. We kept persevering and pushing forward, optimistic that the future would be better. We were hopeful that our actions would positively impact the future of this country.

And in the end, our actions did positively impact the future. After many years, racism, discrimination, and segregation were finally becoming less popular. After “Bloody Sunday,” the Voting Rights Act was passed in August. People used to place poll taxes on voting, or require a literacy test, since many black people had limited education. This act allowed African Americans to vote. Finally, after hundreds and hundreds of years, we were allowed to vote! The protests and marches paid off, didn’t they?

In 1972, The Equal Opportunity Act was passed. With this Act, black people were ensured to have better representation in industries. With better representation, more black people could work. More of us could get jobs. Things were finally looking up for us. African Americans had more opportunities. We were finally getting treated better. After many years of black people struggling, racism was finally coming to an end. These new opportunities have blessed so many of my brothers and sisters. By 1992, eight thousand of us were holding positions of elected

office. After all of these years, things were finally looking up for me and my brothers and sisters. The progression of the country from when the Civil Rights Movement began (1954) to when it ended (1968) was substantial. I once stated, “Not one of us can rest, be happy, be at home, be at peace with ourselves, until we end hatred and division.” And now, the hatred and division has finally come to an end.

In my heart, I truly believe that we all can be at peace with ourselves at this very moment. The blood, sweat, and tears many of us put into the Civil Rights Movement has finally paid off. We black people are being treated well at last. Racism has almost completely dissipated. There are no more “whites-only” bathrooms. No more “whites-only” restaurants. There are no more “whites-only” train stations. Sometimes I wonder if there still would be, if we hadn’t had the courage to stand up. But now, we have a united country. We are at peace. We are America.

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