

**Enduring Moments:  
Photography of the Civil Rights  
Movement in Time, Newsweek,  
and Life Magazine**

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In the 1990s, a photography exhibit entitled “Appeal to this Age: Photography of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-68,” toured the United States. It consisted of seventy-four black-and-white photographs, divided into seven roughly chronological panels depicting events from the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 to the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. Using mostly images which first appeared in the mass media at the time, this collection aimed to showcase the powerful images that came out of the Civil Rights Movement. Overall, the exhibit, through its selection of photographs and use of quotes from civil rights leaders, was intended to articulate the violence inflicted on the civil rights demonstrators.<sup>1</sup>

This exhibit is not unique. In the past decade, several major exhibitions, many of which toured across America, have featured photography of the Civil Rights Movement. As with “Appeal to this Age,” these exhibits featured photography originally published in the mass media and encouraged the viewer to see the images as ones of extreme aggression against peaceful African-American demonstrators.<sup>2</sup> However, the images featured in these exhibits were not always interpreted this way. In fact, when these images first appeared, many of them articulated a much more ambivalent message about civil rights than the one with which they are currently associated.

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<sup>1</sup> David Anderson, “The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-1968,” *Afterimage* 26 (1998): 4.

<sup>2</sup> One of these major exhibitions was “We Shall Overcome: Photographs from the American Civil Rights Era,” a Smithsonian-organized exhibit which toured from 1998-2004. Recently, Kodak also released its own online exhibit of civil rights photography, entitled “Powerful Days.” The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia is sponsoring “Road to Freedom: Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1956-68” until 2008.

During the Civil Rights Movement, these images were certainly important. The leaders of the movement understood the power of the media, especially visual media, to shape public opinion. Often, events were staged specifically because of the media attention they would receive. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a main organization in the fight for civil rights, believed that the most effective way to achieve civil rights was to put on “a dramatic clash between violent whites and nonviolent Negroes that would arouse the press, the pulpit, the politicians, and the president.”<sup>3</sup> Their plan worked. More than once, Americans were mesmerized by the “police tactics so barbaric that most people assumed they could not occur in America,” and gradually became not only sympathetic to the movement but also began to support the cause themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Two of the most crucial events of the movement, the protests at Birmingham in 1963 and the march from Selma in 1965, relied heavily on the use of photography. From images of dogs biting at youths to police chasing and beating peaceful protestors, the movement used these images to show the rest of the nation not only what they were fighting for, but also what they were fighting against. The spread of these images throughout the nation was crucial for the movement’s success, and they were reprinted in a variety of different media. Some of the most prominent places, however, were the three major national magazines: *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*.

It is important to examine the manner in which each magazine treats these images, as all three used the photography from the protests and Birmingham and Selma in

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 226.

<sup>4</sup> Vicki Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York City: Abbeville Press, 1993), 204.

differing ways. *Newsweek*'s coverage was most influenced by its editor Osborn Elliott. Made editor in 1961, Elliott claimed that he personally took a huge interest in the Civil Rights Movement, and he himself said that he "pushed the magazine deeply into it".<sup>5</sup> Elliott believed that *Newsweek* had a lot of success when it came to covering the Civil Rights Movement, especially when compared to the other magazines of the day. Whereas some, such as *Time*, he claimed, did not understand the South or its people, *Newsweek* had Southerners at all levels of its operations, letting the magazine "in on the secret of the South."<sup>6</sup> Because of the combination of northerners and southerners working at the magazine, Elliott believed that *Newsweek*'s coverage was ultimately more balanced than that of other magazines.

*Time* and *Life* are interesting because they both shared the same chief editor: Henry R. Luce, who was an ardent advocate of civil rights for every American. Consequently, his magazines tended to sympathize with the Civil Rights Movement, and came out strongly against segregationists and the Ku Klux Klan in particular. On top of this, *Life Magazine* traditionally placed much emphasis on photojournalism, and its articles on the Civil Rights Movement were no different, as each contained several pictures of the events.

In the comparison of the use of photography in these three magazines, two significant trends stand out. First, although all three often use similar photographs (and, in some cases, identical photographs) in their articles about the two events, each uses the photography differently, in order to underline its own political views. Secondly, the

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<sup>5</sup> Osborn Elliott, *The World of Oz* (New York: the Viking press, 1980), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Elliott, *Oz*, 69. Elliott claims he was also personally affected by the movement. Having not previously thought about racism while growing up in an all-white community, Elliott now found himself writing to the headmistress of his daughter's school, telling her to increase the number of minority students and teachers. (Elliott, *Oz*, 75.)

contemporary interpretation of these images is much different from their use today.

Whereas they are now seen as some of the preeminent icons of the struggle for human freedom, during the 1960s none of the magazines ever allowed the images to be interpreted to such an extent.<sup>7</sup>

### **Birmingham, May 1963**

In 1951, Carl Rowan, a black reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, described Birmingham, Alabama as “the world’s most race-conscious city,...a city of gross tensions, a city where the color line is drawn in every conceivable way.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed Birmingham had the reputation of being the South’s most segregated city and was even commonly referred to as “the last stop before Johannesburg, South Africa.”<sup>9</sup> Not only did the city segregate lunch counters and bus terminals, but, after receiving a federal order to integrate public spaces such as swimming pools, parks, and playgrounds, the city closed these places rather than face the prospect of integration.<sup>10</sup> These racial tensions regularly erupted into violence. The frequency of church bombings within the city gave it the nickname “Bomingham,” and raids on the homes of civil rights leaders were not uncommon. In May 1961, the Freedom Riders, a biracial group that rode buses through

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<sup>7</sup> In the past, historians have tended to shy away from using visual sources, and the scholarship on civil rights photography is no different. Consequently, there is little historical scholarship which examines either the way in which civil rights photography was used during the 1960s or how it is currently perceived. The research that has been done, such as *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle* by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, is problematic because it serves more as collections of images, instead of going into the history of the photography. More recently, however, some research has been done on civil rights photography under the heading of photojournalism, such as Margaret Spratt’s *When Police Dogs Attacked: Iconic News Photographs and the Construction of History, Mythology, and Political Discourse*. However, many of these studies lack an historical context because they do not consider why certain images were chosen by certain periodicals.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Fairclough, *Redeem the Soul*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 88.

<sup>10</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 88.

the South in support of integrated interstate transportation, were beaten and arrested upon their bus's arrival to Birmingham.<sup>11</sup>

To many, Public Safety Commissioner Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor embodied Birmingham's hostility toward civil rights.<sup>12</sup> According to Carl Rowan, Bull Connor was a "white supremacist" determined to ensure that no one, neither white nor black, changed the racial status quo in Birmingham.<sup>13</sup> Elected police commissioner in 1936, and again in 1956, Connor led the Birmingham police forces for a total of twenty-three years (1936-52 and 1956-63).

In early 1963, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) selected Birmingham as its next target for demonstrations against segregation.<sup>14</sup> Although the potential for failure in Birmingham was high, the leaders of SCLC also knew there was much to gain. As Wyatt T. Walker, executive leader for the SCLC at the time, noted, "We knew that as Birmingham went, so would go the South. And we felt that if we could crack that city, then we would crack any city."<sup>15</sup> The demonstrations in Birmingham, therefore, were not just intended to fight segregation in one city, but in the entire nation as well.<sup>16</sup>

The campaign in Birmingham, known as Project C (for Confrontation), followed three stages.<sup>17</sup> In the first two stages, both of which began in April 1963, black citizens of Birmingham supported an economic boycott, staged small sit-in demonstrations, and

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<sup>11</sup> Peter B. Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Fairclough, *Redeem the Soul*, 111.

<sup>14</sup> The SCLC was formed during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56. As its name suggests, the organization was closely affiliated with southern, black Christian leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr., the first president of SCLC, later became the person most closely identified with it.

<sup>15</sup> Fairclough, *Redeem the Soul*, 114.

<sup>16</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 19.

marched on city hall.<sup>18</sup> Although the first two stages were successful, the third, beginning on May 2 (known as D-Day, for Demonstration Day), created the biggest impact. That morning, hundreds of young protestors marched from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.<sup>19</sup> The police were ready, however, and in total, they arrested 959 young marchers from both the area outside of the church and in the nearby Kelly Ingram Park. On May 3, the protestors attempted a second march, this time with over one thousand children. Again refusing to let them march, Bull Connor sent police dogs and fire hoses to meet the young demonstrators.<sup>20</sup>

From the snarling German shepherds in front of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, to the fire hoses powerful enough to take the bark from trees used in Kelly Ingram Park, the photographs of the Birmingham protests have become some of the most iconic images of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, many Americans would agree with Charles Moore, a *Life* photographer present at Birmingham, who said, “the sight of snarling police dogs, and the possibility of dogs ripping flesh, was revolting to me.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the way that these photographs were used at the time created a message different from their interpretation today. In fact, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life* magazines all

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<sup>18</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 20. On April 12, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy defied a court injunction ordering the protestors not to march, and both were subsequently imprisoned. During this time, Martin Luther King wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

<sup>19</sup> The use of such young demonstrators, some only in grade school, was controversial at the time both in and outside of Birmingham. However, the use of young children did bring attention to the demonstrations in Birmingham, which was the ultimate goal of the SCLC. Michael Durham, *Powerful days: The Civil Rights Photographs of Charles Moore* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 95. Some of the fire hoses used could deliver one hundred pounds of pressure per square inch.

<sup>21</sup> Durham, *Powerful Days*, 28. In her dissertation, Margaret Spratt conducted several surveys to determine America’s current perception of these images. She found that the images have “a tremendous ability to resonate with people who have experienced the Civil Rights Movement only through mediate recollections. The police dog image continues to evoke intense sadness, empathy, and concern for the perceived victims, and anger and disgust towards the perceived villains.” Margaret Spratt, *When Police Dogs Attacked: Iconic News Photographs and the Construction of History, Mythology, and Political Discourse* (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002), 75.

used the images in different ways, giving the viewer mixed-messages on the interpretation of the events in Birmingham.

*Time Magazine's* coverage of the events in Birmingham consists of a single, rather short, article which appeared in the May 10, 1963 edition. Entitled "Dogs, Kids & Clubs," the article uses vivid language that sympathizes with the protestors, such as its description of the presence of "club-swinging cops, police dogs and blasts of water from water hoses."<sup>22</sup> The article poignantly describes both how the police dogs chased after the protestors and how young children, having been hit by powerful blasts of water from hoses, fell to the ground "and lay there bleeding."<sup>23</sup> Even more shocking is the article's conclusion that "there were no winners in Birmingham last week."<sup>24</sup> The article's ending, though, does provide a note of hope:

The Negro children of Birmingham, however, kept right on marching.  
And despite all they were up against, despite hoses and clubs and police  
dogs and hate and folly, there was a peal of truth in the prophecy of the  
anthem that the marchers sang:  
*Deep in my heart I do believe*  
*We shall overcome some day.*<sup>25</sup>

Two small photographs are included in the article, but they are not as sympathetic to the movement as the article's rhetoric is. The first image shows Birmingham firefighters aiming a jet of water at demonstrators (Figure 1). Whereas the article describes the force of the hoses, which pushed the demonstrators onto the pavement, the image shows them calmly sitting on the ground, as a spray of water harmlessly arches over them. The caption—which reads "Upholding Segregation in Birmingham: With a

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<sup>22</sup> "Dogs, Kids & Clubs," *Time*, May 10, 1963, 19.

<sup>23</sup> "Dogs, Kids & Clubs," 19.

<sup>24</sup> "Dogs, Kids & Clubs," 19. Claiming that there were "no winners in Birmingham" ignores some of the actual goals of the movement. Since the movement often sought out press coverage, the success of the demonstrators was in the fact that *Time* and other periodicals ran these images.

<sup>25</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 61.



Fire Hose”—likewise seems to imply that the police officers were simply doing their job and maintaining cultural standards. Hardly an image demonstrating the police aggression reported in the article itself, this photograph suppresses the violence mentioned in the article.

The second photograph, remaining iconic to this day, is the image of a snarling police dog attacking a young demonstrator (Figure 2). A police officer holds the dog by a leash while simultaneously grabbing the shirt of the protestor, pulling him toward the dog’s open mouth.<sup>26</sup> The demonstrator’s relaxed face, along with his calm attempt to free himself from the grasp of the officer, seems to embody King’s ideal of “passive resistance.”<sup>27</sup> The caption, “With a Police Dog,” however, ignores the violence in the scene completely.<sup>28</sup>

If the intention of either of these photographs was to articulate a view of police aggression, the viewer would not have been aware of it unless he had read the article. Although they both have the possibility of illustrating for the reader the “small civil war” which occurred in Birmingham the previous week, the weak rhetoric in the captions, along with the small size of the actual photographs, prevents any reader from considering them as definitive or separate descriptions of the event.<sup>29</sup>

*Time Magazine* certainly had several different photographs of the Birmingham demonstrations which it could have included in the article, and yet it ran just these two: the one which did not illustrate any violence and the other which showed police

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<sup>26</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Although different readers may have interpreted this photograph of the attacking police dog differently, the meaning one reader took from it is known. In a May 17 letter to the editor, Mrs. Joseph F. Boyd Jr. of Toledo wrote that “the ‘real’ police dog in the illustration is wearing dark glasses, a badge and a smirking grin.” (“Letters,” *Time*, May 17, 1963, 15.)

<sup>29</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 60.

aggression but qualified it in the caption. Although the photographs do not seem to fit with the article, their deliberate inclusion can show the editors' intention for the overall slant of the article. Since they refrained from using photographs to depict violence, the editors could have thought that the inclusion of such photographs would have made the article much too aggressive and sympathetic to the cause of the Civil Rights Movement. Considering the wide geographic and politic readership *Time* had, the magazine needed to show caution in how much support it gave to the movement.<sup>30</sup> With the strong stance in favor of the Civil Rights Movement within the article itself, *Time* may have felt that the addition of aggressive photography would have put the entire article much too far to the side of the movement. In 1963, therefore, *Time*, even though in favor of Civil Rights, may have felt that it was unable to strongly support the movement, given the opinions of its readership.

On May 13, 1963, *Newsweek* ran its own article ("Birmingham, USA: 'Look at them Run'") on the protests in Birmingham. A provocative title, taken from a Bull Connor quote during the attacks on the demonstrators, it could reflect a double meaning. Not only is the quote intended to instill sympathy for the presumably peaceful protestors in the face of police aggression, but "Birmingham, USA" implies that, although these events happened in Birmingham, racial problems could erupt anywhere in the country.

The article is similar to the one found in *Time Magazine*, citing the violence of the police, fire hoses, and "snapping, snarling police dogs."<sup>31</sup> The article does, however, raise some questions about the appropriateness of the movement's use of young children as

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<sup>30</sup> In the Letters to the Editor on May 24, 1963, eight letters about Birmingham are printed. Of these, three write that *Time* was too harsh on the Birmingham police and claim that no officer would have stood by while demonstrators were charging on the sidewalks. The other five support the movement to varying degrees. ("Letters," *Time*, May 24, 1963, 9.)

<sup>31</sup> "Birmingham, U.S.A.: 'Look at Them Run,'" *Newsweek*, May 13, 1963, 27.

protestors. In addition, the article does not claim that all of the demonstrators were innocent and peaceful, as it mentions “angry mobs of Negroes,” and ultimately places blame for the violence on both the police and the demonstrators.<sup>32</sup>

The photographs included with the article have a different tone from those found in *Time*. Again, two images are featured, both of which are significantly larger than the ones found in the previous magazine. The first image is the same police dog photograph that appeared in *Time* (Figure 2). Unlike *Time*, the caption, “A city police dog snaps at a Negro youth,” acknowledges the violence in the image. At the same time, though, the caption also refrains from placing blame on either side.<sup>33</sup>

The second *Newsweek* photograph is an image of eight protestors sitting on wet pavement, hands covering the backs of their necks, trying to shield themselves from the water coming at them (Figure 3). The water shown in this picture is only a light spray—the powerful shots of water from fire hoses described so vividly in the article are nowhere to be seen. Were it not for the caption, “Fire hoses drive marchers to the pavement,” the viewer would find it difficult to see this photograph as one of violence. However, the word “drive” forces the viewer to see protestors who have been violently pushed into the hard asphalt by the force of the water.<sup>34</sup>

The influence of Osborn Elliott, along with the diverse backgrounds of the other editors of *Newsweek*, explains the difference in photography between *Time* and *Newsweek*. *Newsweek* was interested in showing both sides of the argument, making its articles less biased toward either the movement or the police officers. Therefore, *Newsweek* could afford to take a stronger stance in support of the movement, exactly

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<sup>32</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> “Birmingham, U.S.A.: ‘Look at Them Run,’” 27.

<sup>34</sup> “Birmingham, U.S.A.: ‘Look at Them Run,’” 27.

what Osborn Elliott wanted, through its photography, and still not run the risk of siding so much with the Civil Rights Movement that it would alienate the general public.

*Life Magazine*, on May 17, also ran an article about the Birmingham protests. In the 1950s and 1960s, *Life Magazine* was “the single most important media organ.”<sup>35</sup> With over half of the American adult population reading it, *Life* was seen by more people than any television program. Its Birmingham article, eleven pages long, with twelve photographs, stresses the importance of its images, most of which are lacking from the other two magazines. The importance placed on photography can be attributed to the magazine’s traditional emphasis on photojournalism and to the many shots its photographer Charles Moore captured of the incident.

*Life*’s coverage begins with a two-page spread of Birmingham firefighters spraying a powerful jet of water onto a group of protestors (Figure 4).<sup>36</sup> The force of the water is apparent in the way it ricochets off the bodies of the demonstrators, who cover their heads in an effort to protect themselves. With this opening photograph, *Life* depicts what the previous two magazines only wrote about, showing for its readers the force of the police against the demonstrators. In addition, the caption and title of the article “They Fight a Fire that Won’t go Out” articulates for the reader that, although the protestors appear to be in trouble, it is actually the segregationists who will lose this long, drawn-out battle for civil rights.<sup>37</sup>

The next page contains a full photograph of water pelting another group of demonstrators (Figure 5). While the power of the water is no less apparent, this photograph also gives the viewer another insight into the violence which occurred in

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<sup>35</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Moore himself oversaw the design of this article.

<sup>37</sup> “They Fight a Fire that Won’t Go Out,” *Life*, May 17, 1963, 26-7.

Birmingham. A close-up of three demonstrators pinned against a wall, the image allows the viewer to see the distress on the face of one of the women as the water hits her back.

It is not until the third page that the text of the article starts. Only four paragraphs long, it simply references the photographs on the surrounding pages, instead of adding any crucial context the viewer needs in order to understand the photography. “The pictures on these 11 pages are frightening,” the article begins. Frightening, claims the article, because of the “brutal methods” the police use against demonstrators.<sup>38</sup> Frightening, because non-violent tactics still provoke the use of violence. Whereas *Time* and *Newsweek* used their images to illustrate, at sometimes poorly, their articles, *Life* wants the pictures speak for themselves.

The images in the article then switch location. Now in front of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a series of images showing police dogs attacking a protestor are shown across the next two pages (Figures 6-8). Entitled “The Dogs’ Attack is the Negroes’ Reward,” the images show as first one dog rips open a pant leg of a demonstrator and then as the dog attacks the same man again from behind. Finally, two dogs surround the youth, one of which tears at his other pant leg, as the demonstrator steadies himself for the attack.<sup>39</sup> The level of violence found in each of these photographs is much more than that found in *Time* or *Newsweek*. When all three are together, they create a sequence that is hard to read as anything else besides police brutality.<sup>40</sup>

As strong as these photographs themselves are, the caption which accompanies them is even more striking. “If the Negroes themselves had written the script, they could

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<sup>38</sup> “They Fight a Fire that Won’t Go Out,” 29.

<sup>39</sup> Durham, *Powerful Days*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> This attack occurred concurrently with, and only a few yards away from, the one featured in *Time* and *Newsweek*.

hardly have asked for greater help for their cause than City Police Commissioner Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor freely gave,” it reads, articulating to the reader that the movement wanted pictures like these to be published in order to shock America onto its side.<sup>41</sup> By acknowledging the agenda of these photographs, and then proceeding to print them, *Life Magazine* seems to implicitly side with the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, *Life Magazine* also recognizes that the demonstrators may not be entirely innocent and may have provoked the police in order to bring attention to the movement.<sup>42</sup>

The impact of these images can be found in one of the Letters to the Editor printed on June 7, 1963. This letter, from Grady Franklin of Crawfordsville, Indiana, congratulates the magazine on the “superb and bone-chilling” photography of Charles Moore on the coverage of the Birmingham protests and suggests that he be nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.<sup>43</sup>

Although the article certainly emphasizes the purposeful provocation of the police in order for the demonstrators to gain publicity, ultimately, *Life Magazine*’s photographs construct the clearest message of black demonstrators valiantly fighting for civil rights against the violent white power structure.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas today many see these images as having one single message, it is apparent that this was not true at the time. Each magazine used the images in order to underline its main political beliefs. However, even though these images created mixed messages in the magazines, the photographs from Birmingham had a huge impact both

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<sup>41</sup> “They Fight a Fire that Won’t Go Out,” 30.

<sup>42</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 61-2.

<sup>43</sup> “Letters to the Editor,” *Life*, June 7, 1963, 25. Charles Moore did not win the Pulitzer Prize for photography that year; the award went to Robert H. Jackson for his coverage of the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald.

<sup>44</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 62.

within and outside the United States.<sup>45</sup> According to Congressman Peter Rodino, who was at a conference in Geneva in May 1963, the photograph of the police dog attacking a demonstrator appeared throughout the world. Rodino was approached by one of the delegates who showed him the picture and asked, “Is this the way you practice democracy?”, to which the congressman claims he had no answer.<sup>46</sup> Because of the international negative reaction to these photographs, many in the American government realized they would have to support the Civil Rights Movement, for Americans could not aid freedom fighters in other parts of the world while ignoring those who were seeking it in their own country.<sup>47</sup>

The images likewise caused a sensation within the country as well. According to Peter Levy, the police dogs attacking protestors became a “symbol of the viciousness and ugliness of the southern way of life.”<sup>48</sup> Polls showed an increased support for King; while, at the same time, both moderate and conservative Birmingham blacks joined with the movement.<sup>49</sup> Whatever power these images had, however, they were unable to force the passage of any national legislation. Indeed, while Levy argues that the incident in Birmingham convinced President John Kennedy that his previous stance of minimal intervention would no longer work, it was not until June 1963, and Governor George Wallace’s prevention of the integration of the University of Alabama that the president

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<sup>45</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 90.

<sup>47</sup> According to President Kennedy, the United States was “committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free.” Americans were not promoting segregation in these places around the world, and so should also not promote it at home. (June 11, 1963 speech)

<sup>48</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 21.

articulated these views to the American people.<sup>50</sup> While the Birmingham photographs “transformed the national mood,” the movement did not receive concrete victories from them at the time.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Bloody Sunday, March 1965**

In 1965, the Civil Rights Movement turned its sights toward Selma, Alabama. Like Birmingham in 1963, Selma was a prime target for the movement. As of January 1965, only three percent of blacks, who were the ethnic majority of the city’s population, were registered to vote. In 1961, the government filed its first voting-rights suit in Selma. Also similar to Birmingham, the city had a conservative sheriff, Jim Clark, who had once even used electric cattle prods against demonstrators.<sup>52</sup>

Martin Luther King arrived in the city on January 2, 1965, to help with voter registration. What King wanted, though, was to use Selma as a place “to arouse the federal government by marching by the thousands [to] the places of registration.”<sup>53</sup> After a round of demonstrations and arrests, Martin Luther King decided to increase the span of these marchers as he announced the movement’s intention to march fifty-four miles from Selma to Montgomery, the state’s capital. Once arriving in Montgomery, the marchers intended to petition the Alabama governor, ardent segregationist George Wallace, for legislation protecting the registration process for African-American voters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 21. On June 11, Kennedy made an address to the American people, telling that that it was time for “every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color.”

<sup>51</sup> John, Kaplan, “The *Life Magazine* Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore, 1958-1965.” *Journalism History* 25 (1999-2000), 126-139, pg. 134.

<sup>52</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Durham, *Powerful Days*, 34. In Wallace’s inauguration speech on January 14, 1963, Wallace called for “Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”



On March 7, 1965, demonstrators attempted the first march from Selma to Montgomery. Undeterred by Governor Wallace's threat to prevent the march, (he claimed it was "not conducive to the orderly flow of traffic and commerce"), six hundred marchers set out from the city, led by John Lewis, SNCC's national chairman, and Hosea Williams, a leading member of the SCLC.<sup>55</sup> After only six blocks, as many as two hundred Alabama State Troopers stopped the marchers at the end of the Edmund Pettus Bridge and told them that they had two minutes to disperse.<sup>56</sup> Pausing to pray before leaving, the marchers were suddenly attacked by the troopers.<sup>57</sup> With a combination of billy clubs and tear gas, the police severely injured seventy-eight marchers, including John Lewis. The movement would forever remember this day as Bloody Sunday.

The similarities between Bloody Sunday and the Birmingham protests are apparent. Both were staunchly segregated cities with aggressive, segregationist police commissioners and were specifically chosen by the movement in order to gain attention. In addition, the events at Birmingham and Selma quickly disintegrated into violence and ultimately led to an increased support for the movement from average Americans. Yet the press did not cover the Selma March in the same way they had covered Birmingham only two years before.

*Time's* coverage of Bloody Sunday can be found in the March 19, 1965 issue. As with the coverage of Birmingham in 1963, the article is sympathetic towards the movement. "Despite great gains in the past decade," the article opens, "the American

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<sup>55</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 166. SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) was another major civil rights organization. Created in April 1960, SNCC, student-run, was a driving force behind many of the major events of the Civil Rights Movement, such as the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and Mississippi Freedom Summer.

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Pettus was a colonel for the 20<sup>th</sup> Alabama Regiment during the Civil War.

<sup>57</sup> Durham, *Powerful Days*, 35.

Negro is still often denied the most basic right of citizenship under constitutional government—the right to vote.”<sup>58</sup> The article goes on to describe the violence that occurred near the Edmund Pettus Bridge. “Choking, bleeding, the Negroes fled in all directions while the whites pursued them. The mounted men uncoiled bull whips and lashed out viciously as the horses’ hoofs trampled the fallen;” one of the marchers cried out from the crowd, “my God, we’re being killed!”<sup>59</sup> As with the previous *Time* article, this one also ends on a hopeful note, with President Lyndon Johnson claiming that the time of equality in the polling place would not be far away.<sup>60</sup>

The images associated with this article on Selma begin on the front cover, which features a portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Figure 9). Although not the first time King’s image graced the cover (he was also on it for the February 18, 1957 issue and January 3, 1964 issue, when he was *Time*’s Man of the Year), this image is markedly different from the previous two. Rather than a lifelike portrait of the dignified King with whom America was familiar, this cover features an unsettling black-and-white sketch of the civil rights leader, eyes wide and mouth open, as if he is shouting out to the viewer, demanding his attention. No longer depicted as a strong, yet patient leader, as he was in the early years of the movement, this image shows a more aggressive King, calling out to the American people.

The Letters to the Editor record the American public’s reaction to this change in the appearance of King. Some supporters of King were outraged that their leader was depicted in such an unflattering manner. For example, Florence E. Coleman of New York City wrote that only after the movement had achieved all of its goals would it be an

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<sup>58</sup> “Civil Rights,” *Time*, March 19, 1965, 23.

<sup>59</sup> “Civil Rights,” 23.

<sup>60</sup> “Civil Rights,” 28.

appropriate time for “comedy and caricatures.”<sup>61</sup> Other supporters of King found that the image represented everything for which King was fighting. One saw the swollenness of King’s face as a symbol of how King was swollen with dissatisfaction at the current racial injustice in the United States.<sup>62</sup> In addition, another letter a week later cited the similarities between King’s appearance on the cover and Pablo Picasso’s famous *Guernica*, a painting whose subjects’ wide eyes and open mouths are used to show the pain of the victims during the Nazi bombing of Spain (Figure 10).<sup>63</sup> Opponents of Martin Luther King, for the most part, liked the way in which he was portrayed on the cover. One letter even thanked the artist for depicting King as he truly was—“just plain evil.”<sup>64</sup>

These reactions show that, by the time of the Selma march, the American public was seeing a new vision of Martin Luther King. Although some liked the change, many supporters of King were confused by it and wanted to view him in the same way they had before. M. Blue of Ohio wrote that the sketch of King did not even hint at the “Christian sensibilities and calm self-restraint” which made King not only an effective leader, but also a Nobel Prize winner, and that he saw no need to portray King in this manner.<sup>65</sup>

The article itself features only one photograph depicting the events of Bloody Sunday. By Charles Moore, this photograph was taken as the demonstrators ran away from the police after violence erupted in front of the Edmund Pettus Bridge (Figure 11). The image itself displays the police brutality against the marchers. While some officers,

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<sup>61</sup> “Letters,” *Time*, March 26, 1965, 13.

<sup>62</sup> “Letters,” *Time*, March 26, 1965, 13.

<sup>63</sup> “Letters,” *Time*, April 2, 1965, 11.

<sup>64</sup> “Letters,” *Time*, March 26, 1965, 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Time*’s focus on Martin Luther King in this article seems to take away from the importance of Bloody Sunday in its own right. Although King was certainly a leader at Selma, he was not actually leading the marchers while the violence occurred. The text spent on King, although justified, allows the article less time to focus on the actual events at Selma, which causes the reader to become more concerned with the leader than with the actual demonstrations.

donning gas masks, push the crowd back, others fall to the ground in their attack of the demonstrators. On the right side of the photograph, a group of marchers flees from the scene. SNCC leader John Lewis, although not identified in the photograph, is visible on the right side of the marchers in a long coat with a dark backpack.

Whereas photographs accompanying earlier articles lost much of their power when combined with the caption, the caption for this image lends even more power to its meaning. “Alabama Troopers Attack Sunday Marchers,” it reads, “From Montgomery there was only silence—and more troops.”<sup>66</sup> Not only do these words emphasize the violence of the police against the protestors, but the claim that both silence and troops were issued from Montgomery give the photograph an ominous tone. The reader cannot help but interpret the silence from the capital as only the calm before the storm and is forced to wonder what will happen once these additional troops arrive.

Unlike the Birmingham coverage, the article and photography work together to create a strong, sympathetic view of the Civil Rights Movement. The aggressive depiction of Martin Luther King, Jr. also opens up a new way of viewing the movement in general. However, only one image of the violence in Selma is shown, so the magazine did not intend for the photography to stand on its own, assuming the reader would rely on the article itself to learn the meaning of the event.

The *Newsweek* article featuring Bloody Sunday appeared on March 22, 1965. Entitled “An American Tragedy,” this article is filled with aggressive language about the event. Labeling Selma as one of the “great battlegrounds of the American Negro revolt,” *Newsweek* vividly describes the tear-gas and clubs used against the demonstrators.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Civil Rights,” 25.

<sup>67</sup> “An American Tragedy,” *Newsweek*, March 22, 1965, 18.

Although the article uses aggressive language to describe the events, it is not as sympathetic as *Time*'s depiction, which not only labels one of the victims as a martyr, but also, at several different times in the article, directly quotes the racist language used by the officers.

As with the *Time* article, *Newsweek* only includes one photograph from Selma, and, like *Time*, the image shows the protestors as they flee the state troopers (Figure 12). This photograph stretches across the bottom of the first two pages of the article. Unlike previous images, no caption is included, so the photograph is interpreted by the text, which would encourage a reading of police aggression, truly showing the battleground described above it.

On March 19, 1965, *Life* ran a nine-page article on the March at Selma. As with *Time*, the story made the front cover of the issue (Figure 13).<sup>68</sup> Rather than focusing on the role of Martin Luther King, the cover photograph shows a long line of marchers, led by John Lewis and Hosea Williams, crossing over the Edmund Pettus Bridge while state troopers look on. Although at first glance this could be the image of a peaceful protest, when viewed in light of the title, "The Savage Season Begins," and the caption, "Alabama troopers await marching Negroes in Selma," the presence of the few policemen come to symbolize the impending threat to the marchers.<sup>69</sup>

Within the article itself, there are three images relating to Bloody Sunday. The article opens with a two-page spread of two photographs. Entitled "Selma: Beatings Start the Savage Season," these two photographs show the sequence of demonstrators fleeing

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<sup>68</sup> This would be both the first and only *Life* cover for Charles Moore.

<sup>69</sup> *Life*, March 19, 1965, Cover.

from the policemen and then the aftermath of the attack (Figure 14).<sup>70</sup> The upper photograph is the same as the one found in *Time Magazine* from March 19, only this one includes the left side of the original photograph, which was omitted in the *Time* article. This addition shows another “phalanx” of troopers as they “slam into the front ranks” of the marchers, which only adds to the level of violence in the photograph. In addition, this image portrays the police officers as a greater threat because of their sheer numbers. Below this image is a photograph of the aftermath of the violence. One marcher, Amelia Boynton, lies injured on the ground, dazed and awaiting help, but ignored by the nearby police.

The final image is that of a man with an injured head (Figure 15).<sup>71</sup> Under the title “Selma’s faces of Defiance and Death,” the wounded man looks dejectedly down to one side. Although a viewer could read the image as one of defeat, the caption notes that the man, injured in the first march, also arrived for the second attempt to march from Selma. Therefore, the reader knows that this man has not yet conceded and will continue to fight.

As with Birmingham, the news images that came out of Bloody Sunday generated more support for the movement.<sup>72</sup> In fact, “the American public...was outraged by this vicious attack on nonviolent protesters.”<sup>73</sup> Senior editor for *Look Magazine* at the time, George B. Leonard, describing the events at Selma as “unhuman,” claimed that his wife could no longer watch the television reports because the images were too painful to see.<sup>74</sup> Others were so moved by the images they saw on television that they went to Selma to

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<sup>70</sup> “Selma: Beatings Start the Savage Season,” *Life*, March 19, 1965, 31.

<sup>71</sup> “Selma: Beatings Start the Savage Season,” 36.

<sup>72</sup> Kasher, *Photographic History*, 168.

<sup>73</sup> Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Kasher, *Photographic History*, 168. *Look Magazine*, like *Life Magazine*, focused on photojournalism. It was created in 1937, and its last edition was in 1971.

help. One group of people chartered a plane from New Jersey, arriving at 11:00 PM on the night of Bloody Sunday, and told the people of Selma, “We have seen on the television screen the violence that took place today, and we’re here to share it with you.”<sup>75</sup>

But the events at Selma also made an impact at the executive level. In his speech on March 15, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson lauded the African-American demonstrators. “His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety, and even to risk his life, have awakened the conscience of this nation,” Johnson said. “His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change; designed to stir reform.”<sup>76</sup> The Civil Rights Movement’s efforts paid off, and their actions at Selma brought even more attention to their cause. The culmination of the demands at Selma came on August 6, 1965, when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed the literacy test and allowed the federal registration of voters in areas where less than fifty percent of eligible voters were registered.

Although Birmingham and Selma were similar events, the photography used in the coverage of the two incidents are different. Unlike in the coverage of Birmingham, all three magazines used photographs which clearly depicted police aggression against demonstrators. Several possible explanations exist for this change. One explanation is that it was simply more popular to side with the Civil Rights Movement at the time of Bloody Sunday. In 1963, the movement had not been as popular with average Americans, so the magazines felt that their coverage could not side too closely with the movement. By 1965, the movement “enjoyed greater legitimacy and respectability,” so magazines

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<sup>75</sup> Reverend Frederick Reese, quoted in Kasher, *Photographic History*, 168.

<sup>76</sup> Lyndon Johnson, March 15, 1965.

were able to run articles, and photographs, that sided with the movement.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the movement had more support from government officials by the time of Bloody Sunday. In 1963, many northern Democrats were still wary of speaking out in favor of civil rights, as many thought it would lose the party votes in the presidential election. By 1965, not only had many congressmen come out in favor of civil rights, but the American people also believed that it was the government's duty to help fight discrimination.<sup>78</sup>

### **Civil Rights Photography Today**

Many Americans today would recognize these images found in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*. Not only do they frequently appear in popular culture, but these photographs have also become widely recognized thanks to photography exhibits such as “Appeal to this Age: Photography of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-68.”

Divided into seven panels of photography, the fourth panel of “Appeal to this Age” contains photography from the Birmingham protests. All sixteen images in this section were displayed under a heading, taken from the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Today the choice is no longer between violence and nonviolence; it is between nonviolence and nonexistence. The Negro may be God’s appeal to this age—an age rapidly drifting to its doom. The eternal appeal takes the form of a warning: ‘All who live by the sword shall perish by the sword.’”<sup>79</sup> Six photographs by Charles Moore represent the protests in Birmingham. More than the amount found in *Time* or *Newsweek* in 1963, the sheer number of photographs about Birmingham increases its importance in the mind of the viewer. In addition, the photographs chosen were those which clearly depicted violence against the protesters, including the images of fire hoses and police dogs.

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<sup>77</sup> Fairclough, *Redeem the Soul*, 134.

<sup>78</sup> Fairclough, *Redeem the Soul*, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *Civil Rights*, 8.



Combined with the battle cry above, these images are intended to represent aggression against the demonstrators and do so much more clearly than any found in *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *Life*.

The next panel contains images from the Selma. These pictures appear under a quote from Lyndon Johnson's speech before he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964: "[M]any Americans do not enjoy [civil] rights...not because of their failure, but because of the color of their skin. [It] cannot continue. Our constitution, the foundation of the republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it, as the law I will sign tonight forbids it."<sup>80</sup> Whereas the photographs of Birmingham showed more violence than was included at the time, the exhibition's photographs of Selma show significantly less violence than the magazines did. All three magazines showed at least one image of violence against the demonstrators, while not a single image in the exhibit depicts violence in Selma. Electing to show specific marchers or a panorama of the entire group, the issue of violence is suppressed, even though it would have been an appropriate illustration of the denial of civil rights to which Lyndon Johnson's quote refers. Although unknown, the exhibit possibly chose these images in order to show a different view of the movement. Whereas the Birmingham images were intended to reflect violence, these sweeping views of the marchers seem to reflect the grandeur and epic scale of the civil rights protests.

Through the passage of time, the different uses of these photographs have faded away. Without the option for a neutral interpretation, the idea that these images showed heroes fighting off the aggressive law enforcement eventually became the standard

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<sup>80</sup> Anderson, *Civil Rights*, 9.

interpretation of the photographs.<sup>81</sup> When considering the title of this show, “Appeal to this Age,” it also seems that these images have been removed from their historical context. No longer just about certain people at a specific time and place, these images are now used not only as representations of the entire Civil Rights Movement, but also as a call to future generations to fight for equality.

According to Fred Shuttlesworth, “few episodes of the Black freedom struggle are as etched into America’s collective memory as the image of the police dogs and fire hoses of the 1963 Birmingham demonstrations.”<sup>82</sup> Certainly, these images impacted people at the time and incited reform. The power of these photographs even continues today, forty years later, as people flock to exhibits of civil rights photography. It must be remembered, though, that these images were not presented in the same way they are today. In the coverage of both Birmingham and Selma, significant differences existed in the way *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life* used images to illustrate their stories. In the end, therefore, perhaps these images have always been manipulated. From the Civil Rights Movement itself trying to make the images appear in the press, to their use by the mass media at the time to support their own positions of civil rights, to their current tool as an encouragement to future generations to continue the fight for civil rights, these photographs have been politicized for their entire existence.

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<sup>81</sup> Spratt, *Police Dogs*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> Spratt, *Police Dog*, 65.

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## Appendix

Figure 1



“Upholding Segregation in Birmingham: With a Fire Hose.” *Time Magazine*. May 10, 1963, pg. 19.

Figure 2



“With Police Dog.” *Time Magazine*. May 10, 1963, pg. 19. Associated Press.

Also, “A City Police Dog Snaps at a Negro Youth.” *Newsweek*. May 13, 1963, pg. 27.

Figure 3



“And Fire Hoses Drive Marchers to the Pavement.” *Newsweek*. May 13, 1963, pg. 27. Associated Press

*Figure 4*



"They Fight a Fire that Won't go Out." *Life*. May 17, 1963, pg.26-7.  
Charles Moore

*Figure 5*



"Pinned to Wall." *Life*. May 17, 1963, pg. 28. Charles Moore

Figures 6, 7,8

“The Dogs’ Attack is the Negroes’ Reward.” *Life*. May 17, 1963, pg. 30-31. Charles Moore.



Figure 9



Ben Shahn, “Martin Luther King.” *Time*. March 19, 1965, Cover.



Figure 10



Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*. 1937. Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.

Figure 11



“Alabama Troopers Attack Sunday Marchers.” *Time Magazine*. March 19, 1965, pg. 25. Charles Moore.

Figure 12



“An American Tragedy.” *Newsweek*. March 22, 1963, pg. 18. McNamera—Palmer Agency.





*Figure 15*



Life Magazine. March 19, 1965. pg. 36. "Selma's Faces of Defiance—and Death."