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## Through Savage Dogs: Police Dogs, African Americans, and Opportunity for Change Amidst the Civil Rights Movement

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Images of police dogs during the American Civil Rights Movement presented a chance to showcase police brutality against protesters to an uninformed public. Police officers used canines in the field as instruments to combat crime across America to ensure peace and order. As the Civil Rights Movement began, police came to use dogs in a supposed effort to bring about law and order, but to the protesters, these dogs represented the history and power of the white status quo that had tormented African Americans for generations. Through their use, these dogs symbolized an impediment to their goal of ending racial discrimination.

Police dogs, however, acted not only as obstacles, but as a part of historic change for African Americans. As historian Erica Fudge argued, animals “are active, world-producing beings” that share an interconnected history with humans in which both develop simultaneously.<sup>1</sup> While these dogs did not function as self-thinking agents, they unintentionally helped civil rights protesters further the goals of their movement and push America in a new direction through their clashes with the protesters. As historian Lewis Perry noted, African Americans subjected themselves to horrific acts of police brutality to mobilize “national emotion” and raise awareness of the brutality against Americans by Southern governments.<sup>2</sup> The American media captured the violent uses of these police dogs against the protesters and criticized the actions of the government and law enforcement, which, in turn created sympathy and, in some cases, support for the movement’s push for equality.

The United States of America during the 1950s and 1960s experienced a mass movement pushing for racial equality through the advancement of civil rights. Led primarily by African

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<sup>1</sup> Erica Fudge, “What Was It Like to Be A Cow: History and Animal Studies,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. Linda Kalof, 258-78, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 260.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 240.

American activists, the movement reflected a new approach to fighting institutional racism, during which they “launched a direct assault on the system itself.”<sup>3</sup> The movement practiced non-violent forms of demonstrations such as sit-ins, boycotts, and marches to persuade the country to end institutional racism and legal segregation within the nation. But as these protests challenged the status quo of white supremacy within American society, the movement faced “massive resistance” from white southerners, especially those within state governments.<sup>4</sup> The movement clashed with the status quo, represented through law enforcement, that attempted to suppress it through various tactics such as mass arrests, spraying protestors with fire hoses, and the use of police dogs. In addition, the country experienced a need for law and order that allowed law enforcement to gain additional resources consisting of the recruitment and training of police dogs. As the Civil Rights Movement expanded across the country, police response increased, along with widespread attention from the American press that captured the ensuing violent clashes.

So how did police dogs contribute to the goals of the Civil Rights Movement? The dogs presented an opportunity for African American protesters to demonstrate their commitment to equality against the force of a suppressive system. Since the time of slavery, White Americans used dogs as a tool to uphold their supremacy over African Americans, keeping them at the bottom of society. The use of dogs by law enforcement during the Civil Rights Movement was no different from this historic trend, as the status quo used dogs as an obstacle against civil rights protestors and their calls for equality and civil liberties. However, the protestors successfully fought back against the status quo during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, using the

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<sup>3</sup> David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 290.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Wayne, *Imagining Black America* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 112.

media and the size of the movement to achieve their goals. Thus, the brutal use of police dogs presented a chance for the Civil Rights Movement to push back against a society and shared history laced with discrimination in order to create a future rooted in racial equality and understanding.

The clash between African Americans and law enforcement and their dogs during the Civil Rights Movement showcased an interconnected history between human and animals that creates and pushes history. For instance, by examining animal history, historians create another process to analyze human history and the relationship between humans and animals within civilization and nature.<sup>5</sup> As historian Erica Fudge noted, narrating animal behavior and motivation differs very little from narrating human behavior and motivation, as both require a certain interpretation from the historian.<sup>6</sup> From this analysis, interconnected history coincides with typical history since historians often do not know the thoughts and reasoning of each historical figure. Thus, they must make inferences that connect with a historical pattern. On the other hand, Alan Mikhail argued that a figure or animal does not need to have some form of awareness of their surroundings to be a part of history.<sup>7</sup> In the same manner that historians infer motivation, history also constructs the meaning of agency through the historian’s emphasis on the role of the subject.<sup>8</sup> However, historian Jennifer Adam Martin argued that interconnectedness between humans and animals denies animals their own diversity, history, and agency as wild animals due to a refusal by humans to understand them.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, animals become another tool to examine human history, rather than their own personal history, as our understanding of

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<sup>5</sup> Fudge, “What Was it Like to Be a Cow,” 260.

<sup>6</sup> Fudge, “What Was it Like to Be a Cow,” 262.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Fudge, “What Was it Like to Be a Cow,” 264.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Adams Martin, “When Sharks (don’t) Attack: Wild Animal Agency in Historical Narratives,” *Environmental History* 16 (2011), 454.

their “history” comes from their violent interactions with us. But these moments of violence, however limiting to the true nature of these animals, helps showcase them overall as a part of history, and their violent clashes with history help to contribute to the historical advancement of human society.

The Civil Rights Movement also highlighted the notion of martyrdom and its connection to a developing media and public. Throughout history, martyrdom has represented a display of suffering that necessitated a sacrifice from the individual.<sup>10</sup> Through the martyr’s sacrifice, they revealed a great wrongdoing in their world that needed addressing. Though, martyrdom does not necessarily mean one must die for a cause, death remains a common result of martyrdom. Martyrdom requires a display of suffering which then highlights the cause of the martyr. However, for a martyr’s suffering to have an impact, it must have an audience to bear witness to their suffering, one that understands the reasons for it.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately for them, martyrdom thrives on media, which produces a captive public that can express sympathy.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Black abolitionist William Cooper Nell used speeches, magazines, pamphlets, and his 1855 historical compendium, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, to transform the neglected story of Crispus Attucks, an African American slave who died in the Boston Massacre, into a symbol for the struggle for equality during the 1850s.<sup>13</sup> Nell’s transformation of Crispus Attucks into the first martyr in America’s struggle for liberty made it possible for the potential transformation of White American’s historical and political consciousness regarding the struggle of African

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 125.

<sup>11</sup> Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution in Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Kantrowitz, “A Place for ‘Colored Patriots’: Crispus Attucks Among the Abolitionists, 1842 – 1863,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 18 (2016), 192.

Americans.<sup>14</sup> Thus, when discussing the sacrifice of one’s own wellbeing, martyrdom can be found within the Civil Rights Movement as their violent clashes with police produced a form of martyrdom for the media to present to the larger public.

To further understand the connection between the protestors and law enforcement requires an understanding of their bitter relationship throughout American history. As historian Larry Spruill noted, American slave owners used dogs to police plantations, intimidate slaves, and prevent them from escaping.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, slavers and hunters (along with their bloodhounds) were invested with the power of their local counties and acted as police to protect “whites from black insubordination and criminality,” haunting the lives of black slaves who sought escape from their horrific conditions.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, dogs became an extension of white racial power against African Americans within the American South meant to preserve that which Southern whites believed was social balance and harmony. This racial conflict left a bitter legacy that carried over into modern American society and its race relations. Even as slavery died, Southern white supremacists refused to give up their power by continuing existing and establishing new forms of systemic suppression meant to keep African Americans below whites. These racial tensions continued into the 1950s, as the United States experienced a law and order frenzy in which police departments across the nation bolstered themselves with police dogs and other equipment to fight crime.<sup>17</sup> For author Nikhil Pal Singh, these dogs became the face of Southern white resistance during the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as law enforcement and

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<sup>14</sup> Kantrowitz, “A Place for ‘Colored Patriots,’” 202.

<sup>15</sup> Larry H. Spruill, “Slave Patrols, ‘Pack of Negro Dogs,’ and Policing Black Communities,” *Phylon* 53 (Summer 2016), 45.

<sup>16</sup> Spruill, “Slave Patrols,” 49.

<sup>17</sup> Tyler Wall, “‘For the Very Existence of Civilization’: The Police Dog and Racial Terror,” *American Quarterly* 68 (2016): 863.

<sup>18</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 57.

African Americans clashed over the course of American history, the dogs became both a historical and a controversial tool within these clashes to maintain the status quo order of the United States.

Beginning most notably during the late 1950s and early 1960s, law enforcement across America admitted dogs into their departments because they proved useful in reducing crime. For instance, news outlets reported that the Vicksburg Police Department’s use of dogs caused the crime rate in the city to drop “practically to nil.”<sup>19</sup> Police dogs showed officers their practicality as their presence on the force reduced their cities’ crime rate. The dogs’ contribution to law enforcement helped human society progress toward an idea of peace and order, and away from the fear of crime. Because of this drop of crime, Lexington, a nearby city in Mississippi, followed Vicksburg’s precedent and adopted dogs to serve an “invaluable” role to the officers.<sup>20</sup> Vicksburg’s results inspired other Mississippi law enforcement agencies to see police dogs as a practical approach to fighting crime. Additionally, other cities throughout the country “where police dogs are used” also experienced reduced crime rates.<sup>21</sup> Across America, police dogs created a cause-and-effect scenario where their presence contributed to a reduction in crime, thus bringing about peace, which resulted in additional police departments moving to adopt dogs as a necessity in the maintenance of law and order.

Coinciding with the increased use of police dogs came a recognition by the officers of the dogs as valuable resources due to their abilities for great physical feats as well as intimidation of criminals. For instance, Vicksburg police gave credit to their canine companions for a reduced

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<sup>19</sup> “Vicksburg Officials Cite Purchase and Use of Dogs,” *Holmes County Herald*, May 18, 1961, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed October 20, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> “Lexington to Obtain Police Dog in May,” *Holmes County Herald*, May 4, 1961, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed November 22, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> “Vicksburg Officials Cite,” *Holmes County Herald*.

crime rate as they found criminals “are scared to death of them.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the Baltimore Police Department found that people, whether criminals or not, “will not argue with a dog.”<sup>23</sup> Dogs discouraged criminals from breaking the laws through their potential threat. These dogs could not be handled like officers can, and their differences from their human counterparts created a sense of fear within criminals. Furthermore, the dogs’ effectiveness in fighting crime reflected the ways police departments trained their dogs, such as having them climb up barricades, walk across logs, track suspects, and bite criminals after an officer’s order of “get him.”<sup>24</sup> Police departments transformed their dogs from simple animals into aggressive agents who can support their human counterparts both physically and psychologically when handling criminals. From their training and their in-field performance, the dogs developed an intimidating reputation based on their aggressive responses. Due to their effectiveness, police saw the dogs not only as a valuable resource, but as team members who growled “for law and order.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, law enforcement transformed these dogs into hunters, loyal only to the police and aggressive toward their enemies.

But police dogs also became potential instigators in already tense relationships between police and civilians. As former Detroit police commissioner George Edwards remarked, everyone feared the dogs, not just criminals.<sup>26</sup> And fear, he reflected, made for “the least effective and dependable way to build a relationship.”<sup>27</sup> While they helped combat crime, police dogs also increased previously established racial tensions between the police and African

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<sup>22</sup> “Vicksburg Officials Cite,” *Holmes County Herald*.

<sup>23</sup> Doris Kanter, “For Law Enforcement with Teeth.” *Evening Star*, June 16, 1957, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed October 20, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Kanter, “For Law Enforcement with Teeth,” *Evening Star*.

<sup>25</sup> Kanter, “For Law Enforcement with Teeth,” *Evening Star*.

<sup>26</sup> George Edwards, “Minority Hostility has Deep Roots,” *Topeka Post-Review*, October 1, 1970, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed September 16, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, “Minority Hostility has Deep Roots,” *Topeka Post-Review*.



Americans. White officers that worked in primarily poor neighborhoods associated crime with Black Americans and in turn acted “like an army of occupation.”<sup>28</sup> These forms of treatment divided police from the African American community, adding to the tensions already high due to past race relations: the decision to use police dogs, tools that not only inspired intimidation, but that already had a history of suppressing slaves, escalated racial tensions. During an era marked with racially charged protests, the decision to counter civil rights protests with dogs poured “gasoline on a fire,” according to Edwards.<sup>29</sup> Police departments, such as the one located at Greenwood, Mississippi, “threatened to turn” their police dog loose if the protesters “did not disperse.”<sup>30</sup> Such threats only increased the tensions between the two sides and the resolve of the protesters, and law enforcement’s hopes of using police dogs to bring peace resulted in merely fanning the flames of the Civil Rights Movement and emboldening protesters to march against an authority that relied on fear to suppress demands for equality.

Throughout the civil rights protests, African American protesters clashed with law enforcement as the officers used dogs against them. In one instance, photographer Charles Moore captured an incident in which a police dog ripped an African American man’s pants as he peacefully marched during a demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>31</sup> Though the attack did not draw blood, the dog’s actions illustrated the police’s willingness to use their dogs to disperse the protests, despite their non-violent nature. Law enforcement’s disregard for these nonviolent protests revealed their need to restore law and order against supposed civil disturbances by any means necessary, including using animals to attack protestors. Additionally, Reverend D. L.

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<sup>28</sup> Edwards, “Minority Hostility has Deep Roots,” *Topeka Post-Review*.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, “Minority Hostility has Deep Roots,” *Topeka Post-Review*.

<sup>30</sup> “Hundreds Want to Vote in Greenwood,” *Mississippi Free Press*, April 6, 1963, *America’s Historical Newspaper*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org> (accessed September 30, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Charles Moore, *Police Using Dogs to Attack Civil Rights Demonstrators, Birmingham, Alabama*, 1963, 33 x 50.5 cm, *International Center of Photography*, <https://www.icp.org> (accessed November 22, 2020).

Tucker recounted that a police dog knocked him down and bit his leg during a nonviolent march to register African Americans to vote.<sup>32</sup> The dog continued to bite members of the Greenwood demonstration, including Matthew Hughes who “required hospital treatment” afterwards.<sup>33</sup> The dog’s aggressive behavior against the protestors reflected the will of the police department and their attitude toward people they deemed either as law breakers or disturbers of the peace. Therefore, instead of being cooperative agents of law enforcement agencies, these dogs represented a direct and violent obstacle by law enforcement to suppress the Civil Rights Movement.

This use of dogs presented visible examples of white supremacy and racially charged responses against the predominantly black protesters. When Reverend D. L. Tucker led the Greenwood demonstration, white bystanders yelled racial slurs at him and demanded the police dog “kill him” as it knocked him down.<sup>34</sup> *The New York Times* also reported that these bystanders yelled at the officers to let the dog “sic ‘em.”<sup>35</sup> The bystanders’ approval of violence against these black demonstrators illustrates the racial discrimination that plagued the American South to the detriment of African Americans. These southern whites dehumanized the protesters, showing no remorse for them as the dogs attacked them and even encouraging the dogs’ savagery.

Greenwood mayor Charles Sampson rationalized the use of the police dog, saying that the protestors attempted to go “to the Alice Café for a sit-in.”<sup>36</sup> To Sampson, the peaceful

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<sup>32</sup> “Hundreds Want to Vote in Greenwood,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

<sup>33</sup> “Hundreds Want to Vote in Greenwood,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

<sup>34</sup> “Hundreds Want to Vote in Greenwood,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

<sup>35</sup> Claude Sitton, “Police Loose a Dog on a Negroes’ Group; Minister is Bitten,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1963, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, <https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org> (accessed September 30, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Sitton, “Police Loose a Dog on a Negroes’ Group; Minister is Bitten,” *The New York Times*.

demonstration justified the use of the police dog as the protesters dared to challenge the status quo and disrupt social harmony. The protests sought to challenge and end racial discrimination, which, if successful, would systemically make African Americans equal to White Americans and disrupt the existing social system. To maintain the status quo, their protests necessitated a quick, brutal response in order to continue the existing social normalcy, which the South embraced. Consequently, the use of the dogs reinforced a belief held by the black community that police departments adopted these dogs “only for use against” them.<sup>37</sup> Thus, these dogs contributed to the black community’s disdain of Southern governments and law enforcement, as the South seemed intent on keeping African Americans beneath whites.

These attacks by police dogs created fear within the demonstrators that then seeped into the black community. A photo captured during the Greenwood demonstration showed Matthew Hughes, an African American protester, thrown back on the sidewalk after a police dog bit him.<sup>38</sup> To some, such as the journalist at *The New York Times*, Hughes’s posture signified fear, as he cowered away from the police dog and its white handler.<sup>39</sup> The fear Hughes felt seemingly triumphed over any desire for racial equality, as he faced a harsh reminder of the opposition and intolerance to the movement. So protestors, such as Hughes, faced a personal conflict between the desire to protest and their own safety, which affected their choices in the moment. The use of dogs at Birmingham also created fear in the protesters, as they looked in shock as the dogs attacked one of their own.<sup>40</sup> The horror on their faces as the dogs attacked them revealed the consequences that came with protesting against the status quo. Despite the peaceful nature of

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<sup>37</sup> “Police Dogs and Future Race Relations Here,” *Jackson Advocate*, October 28, 1961, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> “Hundreds Want to Vote in Greenwood,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

<sup>39</sup> Sitton, “Police Loose a Dog,” *The New York Times*.

<sup>40</sup> Moore, *Police Using Dogs*, International Center of Photography.

their protests, the police and government in the South refused to hold back and tried every means to disperse them. Finally, one woman wrote to the *Mississippi Free Press*, stating that her husband feared to register to vote in the aftermath of the Greenwood demonstration because of “the dog they had up there biting folks.”<sup>41</sup> From these accounts, it appears that the dogs succeeded in acting as an intimidating force. Their savagery instilled fear in the protesters that in turn seeped into the black community. Therefore, the status quo seemed to use these dogs to cripple a movement that was dedicated to fighting injustice, leaving protesters fearful of these savage beasts.

But despite their fear and pain, the protesters refused to give in, motivated themselves to press on, regardless of the danger that waited for them. Reverend D. L. Bevel commented after the Greenwood demonstration stating, “if the dog bit Rev. Tucker today, it will have to bite Rev. Bevel tomorrow!”<sup>42</sup> Bevel’s quote suggested that he did not intend to stop protesting and expected the police dog to attack him as a result. He believed that he had to fight to create a better future, even if it meant inevitable harm would come to him. Bevel’s intentions highlighted the sense of martyrdom present during the Civil Rights Movement as individuals accepted bodily harm to motivate others around them to act. Aaron Henry, a resident of Clarksdale, Mississippi, remarked that despite “the coward group of police who sicked the dog on a man,” the protesters are “not afraid” and will not be stopped.<sup>43</sup> Henry, and others like him, rejected the police’s intimidation tactic of using dogs. He described the differences between the police, who feared the protesters and sicked animals on them, and the protesters, who despite clashing with these

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<sup>41</sup> “Songs of Freedom,” *Mississippi Free Press*, April 6, 1963, *America’s Historical Newspaper*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org> (accessed September 16, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> “Songs of Freedom,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

<sup>43</sup> “Songs of Freedom,” *Mississippi Free Press*.

vicious animals refused to give in. This sense of courage motivated the protestors, who were determined to bring about change, to continue fighting against the cowardly status quo and their beasts. Roy Wilkins, a leader with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), shared a similar opinion, praising the bravery of Birmingham citizens “who defied police dogs” during the Birmingham protests to protests injustices.<sup>44</sup> For him, their cause would not be stopped by the fear of these dogs and the harm they inflicted, and their willingness to defy these dogs and endure being attacked as a result, should not only be commemorated, but encouraged. Their readiness to step into danger against these dogs revealed a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement, where a sense of martyrdom and desire for a better future overcame fear of the police and their dogs.

However, some within the black community believed they needed to meet the savagery from police and their dogs with violence of their own. Individuals like Malcom X believed that if a “police dog, a hound dog, or any kind of dog” attacked a black man, that man “should kill that dog” and “any two-legged dog that sicced [sic]” the animal on him.<sup>45</sup> While the larger Civil Rights Movement focused on meeting violence with nonviolent demonstrations, Malcom X and others advocated for violent retaliation upon those who threaten and attack the black community. Malcom X saw no difference between the officers or the police dogs, he regarded them both as beasts that attack African Americans and therefore must be hurt or killed to guarantee the safety of African Americans. Associated Press photographer Bill Hudson captured a clash between an

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<sup>44</sup> “Wilkins Speaks in Birmingham,” *The Detroit Tribune*, May 4, 1963, *Library of Congress*.  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed September 22, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Malcom X, interview by Professor John Leggett and Herman Blake, recording, University of California Berkeley, October 11, 1963, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZMrti8QcPA>, (accessed October 24, 2020).

officer and his dog and an African American man who swung “at the dog with a small knife” during the Birmingham campaign of 1963.<sup>46</sup> Though, additional reporting revealed that the man did not participate in the marches, and initiated the clash first by “slashing at one of the police dogs,”<sup>47</sup> his initiation of the attack revealed that African Americans of the time associated police dogs with violence. Therefore, they must protect themselves from the brutality of law enforcement, even using violence to do so. That said, these actions and calls for violence still reflected the idea of martyrdom found throughout the movement. African Americans continued to clash with a larger foe, potentially sacrificing their wellbeing to ensure that a broader idea of peace and equality could be obtained. Thus, these actions during the Civil Rights Movement, whether peaceful or violent, reflected a willingness to put themselves in harm’s way to bring about a better future.

As the protesters continued to clash with law enforcement and their dogs, their struggle turned into opportunity as the media showcased the violent clashes for a national audience. For instance, a *New York Times*’ article covered the Greenwood demonstration of Matthew Hughes, portraying him as a vulnerable protester cowering against a police force that “set the dog on the heels” of him and other protesters.<sup>48</sup> The use of words like “cowers,” along with a photo from the demonstration, painted a horrifying picture of Southern whites beating down African Americans who sought to acquire equality. Articles and images such as these “brought the movement into the homes of millions of whites,” as they saw the brutality of the dogs attacking the

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<sup>46</sup> Bill Hudson, “Police Dog Used During Protest,” 1963, 3000 x 2109 resolution, *Associated Press*, <http://www.apimages.com> (accessed November 23, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> Foster Hailey, “Police Break Up Alabama March: Birmingham Protest Ended as Negro Attacks Dog,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1963, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, <https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org> (accessed November 10, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Sitton, “Police Loose a Dog.” *The New York Times*.

demonstrators.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, photographer Bill Hudson of the Associated Press captured a photo of a young black man, Walter Gadsden, struggling to remove an attacking police dog from his arm.<sup>50</sup> In reality, Gadsden described himself not as a protester but as a bystander with little connections or support of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>51</sup> But Gadsden’s revelation did not stop newspapers across America from presenting the incident as “the perfect picture of non-violent protest in action.”<sup>52</sup> For the press, the photo presented “a grinning cop setting his savage dog at the throat of a frail” African American boy.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of the fact that the photo failed to accurately portray that moment, its perceived horror spread throughout America as a disturbed nation saw the images. Once again, the movement’s willingness to continually risked violent clashes against police and their dogs resulted in focusing increased attention on the protests, which in turn attracted a larger audience.

In shock, this larger audience began to criticize law enforcement and Southern governments for their brutal use of police dogs against the protesters. A journalist based in Jackson, Mississippi expressed the opinion that police dogs had no place in Jackson as they “are out of character and spirit of this city and its people.”<sup>54</sup> She turned her criticisms toward the white leadership and their “non-existent or completely immobilized” response to cease the rising clashes between cops and protesters.<sup>55</sup> Jackson’s use of police dogs shattered ideas of tolerance and character that she, and possibly others, believed the city and the South possessed. Instead,

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<sup>49</sup> Martin A. Berger, “Race, Visuality, and History,” *American Art* 24 (Summer 2010): 94.

<sup>50</sup> Alvin Adams, “Picture Seen Around the World,” *Jet* 24 (October 10, 1963): 26.

<sup>51</sup> “The Foot Soldier of Birmingham,” *Revisionist History*, podcast audio, July 5, 2017, <http://revisionisthistory.com>.

<sup>52</sup> Adams, “Picture Seen Around the World,” 26.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Gold, “Change the World.” *Daily Worker*, May 26, 1963.

<sup>54</sup> Hazel B. Smith, “Through Hazel Eyes,” *The Lexington Advertiser*, October 19, 1961, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed September 22, 2020).

<sup>55</sup> Smith, “Through Hazel Eyes,” *The Lexington Advertiser*.

with the clear use of violence against protesters by police and their dogs, people such as this journalist grew more critical of the South and its reactions toward the protesters.

Another journalist felt that the use of dogs against the protesters seemed “like something out of the era of slavery.”<sup>56</sup> Likewise, a citizen described the use of dogs on people as “sickening to contemplate” and a form of “savagery” found in primitive societies.<sup>57</sup> These reactions illustrate a hatred toward law enforcement and the Southern government due to the manner in which they treated fellow Americans. Their tactics represented a philosophy that was not fit for the modern world. To further illustrate this point, yet another white reporter felt horror and shame that White Americans would treat African Americans “as if they were less than the lowest form of animal life” by allowing police to turn dogs “loose on them” for protesting.<sup>58</sup> Beyond just criticism of the South and police, many felt shame knowing that such brutality existed within the United States. While they may not have fully supported the Civil Rights Movement, they understood the protesters as people and acknowledged their right to protest. Thus, a national audience turned towards the Southern society and government and condemned their apparent approval of such brutality. With this condemnation, the dogs themselves shifted from a position of barrier to an opportunity for the movement to flourish.

Some government officials began to support the movement, finding in it a remedy for racial discrimination. For example, Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas stated that African Americans who sought to register to vote must be greeted “by human beings with pencils and

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<sup>56</sup> Robert G. Spivack, “Silence in the South,” *The People’s Voice*, May 17, 1963, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed September 22, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> James B. Kelly, “Use of Dogs in Riots,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 1964, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, <https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org> (accessed November 10, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> P.D., “East Side,” *The Petal Paper*, May 2, 1963, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed November 22, 2020).



papers” and not by “police dogs.”<sup>59</sup> Yarborough, a Southern senator, broke rank from the “political cowardice” that plagued Southern leadership to give his support for the movement’s goals against the brutality by law enforcement.<sup>60</sup> His response showed his disgust of the dogs and the way police used them to deny a group of people their rights as Americans and as humans. Additionally, President John F. Kennedy, who initially urged a “more moderate approach” to the movement’s demands, changed his stance after the Birmingham demonstrations.<sup>61</sup> Birmingham Police Chief Bull Connor’s use of dogs made Kennedy realize “how tense and flammable the situation has become” and forced him “to seek stronger civil rights legislation.”<sup>62</sup> The use of dogs against protesters caused individuals within the government to move away from a moderate approach to the issue and closer to finding a more radical solution. Ironically, an initial step to suppress the movement by Southern governments resulted in efforts by the Federal Government to act in favor of the demonstrations.

The violent use of police dogs, thus, created sympathy from both the media and its larger audience for the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. As one reporter reasoned, so long as a nation denied an individual their freedom due to their race, “there can be no surety of freedom or respect of individual rights” for everyone.<sup>63</sup> This reporter made the Civil Rights Movement a movement that affected all Americans: if one group suffered attacks by police dogs for crying out for civil rights, then the principles that founded the United States became vulnerable to future attacks. Therefore, Americans and their government must assume a role that guarantees the

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<sup>59</sup> Spivack, “Silence in the South.” *The People’s Voice*.

<sup>60</sup> Spivack, “Silence in the South.” *The People’s Voice*.

<sup>61</sup> Drew Pearson, “The Washington Merry-Go-Round,” *The Chronicle*, June 10, 1963, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>62</sup> Pearson, “The Washington Merry-Go-Round,” *The Chronicle*.

<sup>63</sup> “The Shame of Birmingham,” *Arizona Tribune*, May 10, 1963, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed November 20, 2020).

<sup>63</sup> “The Shame of Birmingham,” *Arizona Tribune*.

recognition of the rights of all Americans to “master the sickness” of racism that contaminated society.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Robert Hamill of Boston University, in the aftermath of the Birmingham protests, argued that a crisis “is here and now” stating that the Birmingham police revealed that Americans really are a group of people “who use firehoses and dogs to mistreat those we don’t like.”<sup>65</sup> The police dogs demonstrated the true nature of Americans, not only as those that deny others rights they enjoy but also stand by as these injustices occur. To Dr. Hamill, America needed to remedy these wrongdoings by ensuring that the African American community get “all their rights right now and right here.”<sup>66</sup> While the use of police dogs revealed the dark underbelly of American life for marginalized groups, this horror did not define America’s identity moving forward. As a group, Americans could still overcome the dogs and brutality by ensuring that all Americans become equal. Thus, the use of police dogs created a new wave of support for the Civil Rights Movement where Americans backed those in the fight against discrimination.

Additionally, the use of police dogs brought up fears regarding the Cold War and how America should present itself to the world. Attacks by police dogs against protestors appeared to Americans to be similar to tactics in “the barbwire-enclosed Communist Eastern Sector of Berlin,” where the communist government used dogs to keep people in line.<sup>67</sup> This comparison to East Germany represented a fear that America, a supposed beacon of freedom and democracy during the Cold War, shared authoritarian tactics with their enemies. The dogs, therefore, not only failed to quell racial tensions within America, but also highlighted authoritarian tendencies

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<sup>64</sup> “The Shame of Birmingham,” *Arizona Tribune*.

<sup>65</sup> “Boston U. Dean Castegates Segregationists,” *Arizona Tribune*, May 24, 1963, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed November 22, 2020).

<sup>66</sup> “Boston U. Dean Castegates Segregationists,” *Arizona Tribune*.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, “Through Hazel Eyes,” *The Lexington Advertiser*.

that went against its own values. Furthermore, some of the media believed that the United States’ continued racial problems, aggravated by the police dogs, provided a “a great, and glaring victory for world communism.”<sup>68</sup> To some, America’s agitated race problem only served to weaken its standing internationally, a failure to meet its own standards of equality and freedom for all citizens. This, in turn, would only serve to benefit America’s enemies, who could use its racial problems to expose America’s weaknesses in order to destroy it. With the ongoing Cold War, a growing number of individuals saw the use of police dogs as a hypocritical practice by America in its supposed authoritarian practices against peaceful, democratic demonstrations.

Therefore, the new national audience demanded change by calling for the termination of the use police dogs. To one Jackson-based reporter, the dogs presented “a false and exaggerated picture” of the city, its people, and spirit, and “should be sent back” to wherever they came from.<sup>69</sup> The dogs represented a perceived un-American abuse of power against a group of individuals protesting for their rights. Before this, America had no qualms regarding the use of police dogs to combat crime and maintain peace. But in the wake of the protests, police appeared to use their dogs as a means to suppress protesters who fought for their rights. Others argued that “there is no way to allay the antipathy” the black community harbored towards these dogs, therefore, the police must “discontinue the use of police dogs” to create a possible remedy in light of the tensions.<sup>70</sup> Instead of protecting some form of social harmony within America, police dogs only created bitter tensions between the police and black community. The dogs represented a history of racial discrimination by which white supremacy dominated the culture for

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<sup>68</sup> “The Police Dogs Another Victory for the Communist,” *Jackson Advocate*, April 8, 1961, *Library of Congress*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (accessed September 30, 2020).

<sup>69</sup> Smith, “Through Hazel Eyes,” *The Lexington Advertiser*.

<sup>70</sup> “Police Dogs and Future Race Relations Here,” *Jackson Advocate*.

generations. Only by terminating police dogs for this use could there be a change in the way the two sides viewed each other. While the dogs originally posed an obstacle against the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, they ended up providing a chance to create unity between the movement and a greater American audience that called for their end.

Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, the views regarding police dogs differed considerably depending on the side. Law enforcement, and the status quo to a larger extent, saw these dogs as useful tools in maintaining order and peace throughout the nation. Seen as reliable and effective animals, law enforcement throughout the country incorporated the use of dogs in their daily policing. But as the Civil Rights Movement gained traction, the police used their dogs against the protestors, in hopes of discouraging them and restoring what they believed to be peace. To the protesters, these dogs meant nothing more than the continuation of the white supremacist status quo and a desire to suppress any challenge to the racial order within America. Throughout their demonstrations, the protesters felt a sense of fear from these animals as they repeatedly clashed with them. In spite of this fear, the use of police dogs did not halt the movement, but rather aggravated it, inspiring the protestors to march on in their struggle for equality. Their clashes soon reached a larger audience that in turn sympathized with the protestors and demanded a resolution.

During this movement, police dogs symbolized the impact of the relationship between animals and humans. As noted earlier, these dogs existed within this moment not as independent actors, but as a representation of the power of American law enforcement, most notably within Southern American society. Law enforcement trained them to act as an extension of their power and accomplish their goals of stopping crime and keeping the peace. However, despite their lack of independency, these dogs still took part in creating historical change during the Civil Rights

Movement, as their clashes with the protesters created a sense of sacrifice that then led to their martyrization by the press. The protestors’ struggle for racial equality turned them into martyrs, fighting for a hope of a better future in which no one would be denied equality and decency due to the color of their skin. Their message and actions spread across the nation, thanks in part to various forms of American media, which garnered support from individuals in various social and political positions. In a time of racial strife and demands for change, these animals contributed to the Civil Rights Movement by highlighting the brutality of the status quo within America against racial minorities and protesters for an uninformed public. The dogs’ presence within the movement does not take away from the sacrifice and courage of the protesters, but rather enhances it, allowing their resolve and bravery to be captured and shown to a larger audience. Thus these dogs’ relationship to humans allowed them to affect history and society by functioning both as an obstacle and a tool to enable change.

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