



RAFO21203-2/12/69-GREENVILLE, N.C.: Greenville city police lift members of a protest march towards a police paddy wagon following their arrest here today (2/12) after they attempted to march through city streets. The marchers, part of a six day trek to the State Capital at Raleigh to protest school segregation problems, were taken to the city limits and set free. jb/jb
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White People Hate Protests

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Introduction (@CarolynChernoff)

White people hate protests, but white people love to talk about Martin Luther King. White people like to ask each other, “What would Dr. King have done?” as soon as they hear about a protest, mostly to criticize any action taken. “What would you have done during the Civil Rights Movement?” has become a popular icebreaker at trainings and meetings, and the answer is invariably heroic—“I would be on the front lines!” “I would go to jail!” “I would lead protests!”

But we’re living in yet another very specific Movement moment, and most white people are doing the same old thing: ignoring injustice and violence until it touches us personally.

I write this introduction as a white scholar and educator who studies white people. You don’t have to believe me. You can just go to Fox News, or the New York Times, or Twitter to see what white people have to say about Black Lives Matter, or gun control, or public education,

or professional athletes taking a knee during the National Anthem.

@prisonculture wrote this zine to examine some current assumptions about white people's opinions on the Civil Rights Movement—and Martin Luther King—at the time. Right now, white people love to talk about Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and other civil rights leaders we see as protesting “the right way”—meaning *not challenging white supremacy in all its forms*. But that’s exactly what they were doing, and what current and future activists do.

Activists challenge the powerful. Activists challenge the status quo. There’s no such thing as a successful protest movement that those in power approve of or support.

This zine debunks some of the current myths about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, chief among them that white people by and large were supportive of both.

@prisonculture compiled the data for this zine from major opinion polls from the 1960s, asking these questions:

What were white people's opinions of the Civil Rights Movement in real time?

What are white people's current assessments of the Black Lives Matter Movement?

This zine reminds us that popular protest isn't popular.

That is, while protests are made by people, it's just not true that those in power like them. No one invites a protest to their birthday party. To be clear, as @prisonculture reminds us, "white people never co-sign protests focused on Black freedom and liberation."

After the fact, once struggles have been somewhat successful, sure, everyone loves to be on the right side of history. But we are currently in the middle of a crucial fight for racial justice, even to the point where some deem it radical to simply declare that Black Lives Matter.



That's why @prisonculture wrote this zine.
That's probably why you're reading it. So read,
learn, share, and organize.

After all, what will you be saying in 50 years
about what you did to make sure Black Lives
Matter?

Assessment of the Civil Rights Movement by White People

In a December 1963 NORC survey, a national sample was asked: *“In recent months a lot of attention has been paid to what has been called the Negro Civil Rights Movement, in your opinion, what are the main things that American Negroes are really trying to get?”*

This question gets at how white Americans saw the movement to obtain equal rights for Blacks. Respondents could give more than one answer, and the distribution of responses is given in Table 1. Answers are ranked in the order of frequency with which they were mentioned by the total white sample.

**TABLE 1 – Goals of the Negro Civil Rights Movement
(Percent white respondents)**

Goals of the Negro Civil Rights Movement	Region and Education*						TOTAL	
	South			North				
	Grade	High	College	Grade	High	College		
Economic equality	30	32	43	34	51	61	45%	
Educational equality	33	38	43	35	44	49	41%	
Access to public places	24	31	22	10	19	29	21%	
Housing equality	8	14	10	19	22	35	21%	
Political equality	14	17	22	15	16	16	16%	
Equality, n.o.s.	14	16	16	19	18	13	17%	
Domination	27	20	10	14	9	5	12%	
Understanding, dignity	3	7	9	7	6	14	7%	
Marry Whites	7	8	13	2	3	1	4%	
Other	5	6	4	5	5	6	5%	
Don't know, no answer	4	1	-	7	2	1	5%	
N	(115)	(157)	(69)	(209)	(466)	(209)	(1,225)	

Source: NORC Survey SRS-330, December 1963

*Responses for educational categories do not equal 100%
since respondents could give more than one answer.*

The two most frequently mentioned goals were economic and educational equality. These are the issues that over 40% of the respondents recognized as critical concerns for Black people.

Access to public places and the desire for equality in housing represent a second degree of frequency of issues mentioned, this time by about 20% of white respondents.

About 15% of the respondents mentioned political equality or equal rights without further specifications.

Both the desire for domination and the desire for understanding were cited by about 10% of respondents.

Southerners with less than a college education most frequently expressed the beliefs that Blacks want to become superior, to gain control over society, to take over, to obtain more than their share, or to receive preferential treatment.

IN RECENT MONTHS A LOT OF ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED THE NEGRO CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. IN YOUR OWN OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAIN THINGS THAT AMERICAN NEGROES ARE REALLY TRYING TO GET? ANYTHING ELSE?

EQUALITY OF SCHOOLING, IMPROVED EDUCATION, OF INTEGRATION SCHOOLS--RIGHT TO GO TO SAME SCHOOLS, TO GET A GOOD EDUCATION

POLITICAL EQUALITY, RIGHT TO VOTE, HOLD OFFICE, EQUAL REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT, TO GET OWN PEOPLE IN POLITICS

ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT, EQUALITY: RIGHT TO JOBS, HIGHER PAY, BETTER LIVING STANDARDS--SAME OPPORTUNITY AS WHITE MAN TO MAKE A LIVING, SAME SALARIES AS WHITES GET

ACCESS TO PUBLIC PLACES ON EQUAL BASIS: PARKS, RESTAURANTS, CHURCHES, HOTELS, THEATRES, BUSES, TRAINS, LUNCH COUNTERS, ETC.--TO BE ACCEPTED WHEREVER THEY GO, TO GO ANYWHERE THE WHITE MAN CAN, TO MINGLE, TO MIX WITH WHITES

EQUAL HOUSING, IMPROVED HOUSING, RIGHT TO LIVE ANYWHERE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION--TO BE ABLE TO MOVE TO BEST SECTIONS, NOT TO HAVE TO LIVE IN SLUMS

UNDERSTANDING, DIGNITY, RESPECT, PRESTIGE--TO BE TREATED LIKE HUMAN BEINGS

THEY WANT ATTENTION, TO BE NOTICED, TO BE HEARD,
THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

THEY WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE, PEACE, CALM, QUIET,
NO VIOLENCE--MOST OF THEM WANT TO BE LEFT
ALONE BUT THEIR LEADERS TRY TO STIR THEM UP

EQUALITY UNSPECIFIED, FREEDOM, EQUAL RIGHTS,
EQUAL STATUS, RECOGNITION AS EQUALS: TO LIVE
LIKE ANYONE ELSE, TO BE TREATED LIKE ANYONE
ELSE, TO HAVE ALL THE RIGHTS OF THE WHITE MAN

THEY WANT TO MARRY WHITES, INTERMARRIAGE,
MISCEGENATION

THEY WANT SUPERIORITY, DOMINATION, TO GET
CONTROL, TO TAKE OVER, MORE THAN THEIR SHARE,
PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT--THEY WANT JOBS EVEN
IF WHITES HAVE TO BE FIRED TO PROVIDE THEM

THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY WANT, DIFFERENT
NEGROES WANT DIFFERENT THINGS--NO SPECIFIC
MENTIONS

THEY WANT A SEPARATE NEGRO STATE OR AREA

THEY WANT MISCELLANEOUS THINGS NOT CODEABLE
ABOVE--BETTER MEDICAL CARE

I DON'T KNOW, DON'T FOLLOW IT, CAN'T SAY

Respondents were also asked, “*How do you feel about these actions (Negroes have taken to help their cause), do you generally approve of them or generally disapprove of them?*” 37% of respondents generally approved of these actions while 57% generally disapproved. 6% said they didn’t know.

Turning to an evaluation of how much Black freedom groups have been asking for, at a later point in the same survey, respondents were asked, “*All in all, do you think Negro groups are asking for too much, too little, or just about what they should be asking for?*” In general, 37% of respondents said that Black freedom groups were asking for too much and 3% said too little. 57% of respondents said they were asking for “just about what they should.”

TABLE 2 – Opinions of How Much Negro Rights Groups Are Asking For (Percent white respondents)

Negro Rights Groups Are Asking For:	Region and Education					
	South			North		
	Grade	High	College	Grade	High	College
Too much	63	49	52	37	38	32
Too little	-	1	-	1	1	4
About what they should	36	45	45	54	57	61
Don't know, no answer	1	6	3	7	4	3

Source: NORC Survey SRS-330, December, 1963

In the South, the balance is on the side of those who say Negro groups are asking for too much, while the opposite is the case in the North. The contrast is especially sharp between the most disapproving grade-school educated southerners and the least disapproving college-educated northerners.

Respondents were asked, “*Who do you think is really behind the recent Negro actions – would you say it is the Negro people themselves, or some other person or group?*”

More respondents believed that others were involved in the actions in question than believed that they were solely the doing of Black people. In general, 46% of respondents said that the Negro alone were behind the rights actions, 38% said that others were, 10% claimed both and 6% said they didn’t know who was really behind the recent Negro action.

Differences between regions and educational levels appear in Table 3. The likelihood of saying that Blacks alone were behind protests/demonstrations was greater in the North, and in both regions it increased with greater education.

TABLE 3 – Persons or Groups Behind Recent Negro Civil Rights Actions (Percent white respondents)

Group Behind Recent Negro Civil Rights Actions	Region and Education					
	South			North		
	Grade	High	College	Grade	High	College
Negro people	25	31	41	44	45	55
Other persons or group	57	52	43	40	42	30
Both	12	14	13	4	7	11
Don't know, no answer	6	4	3	12	6	4

Source: NORC Survey SRS-330, December, 1963

All those who answered either that other persons or groups were involved, or that both Blacks and others were involved, were then asked, “Who would you say is really behind these actions?

By far the largest group in this category mentioned communists, either domestic or foreign. Forty-four percent of the whites who felt Blacks were not alone answered in this fashion.

WHO WOULD YOU SAY IS REALLY BEHIND THESE (RECENT NEGRO) ACTIONS?

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 42% | COMMUNISTS, COMMUNIST GROUPS, RUSSIA, CUBA--
SUBVERSIVE LEFT-WINGERS, RADICAL EXTREMISTS,
CASTRO, REDS |
| 5% | WHITE TROUBLEMAKERS, WHITE AGITATORS
(UNSPECIFIED) INCLUDE NORTHERN WHITES, YANKEES |
| 3% | SYMPATHETIC WHITES, DEMOCRATIC WHITES
(UNSPECIFIED) |
| 9% | WHITES, WHITE PEOPLE (UNSPECIFIED) |
| 9% | POLITICS, POLITICIANS, POLITICAL REASONS--WHITE
POLITICIANS, REPUBLICANS LOOKING FOR VOTES IN
THE SOUTH |
| 1% | LABOR, LIBERAL GROUPS--LABOR LEADERS, CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION |
| 6% | AGITATORS, TROUBLEMAKERS, FANATICS (UNSPECIFIED
AS WHITES) |
| 7% | NEGRO LEADERS, LEADERSHIP (UNSPECIFIED)--RICH
NEGROES THE MORE INTELLIGENT NEGROES, NEGRO
MINISTERS |
| 17% | SPECIFIC NEGRO OR CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS OR
GROUPS, NAACP, MARTIN LUTHER KING, BLACK
MUSLIMS, CORE, EVERE, SNCC, ETC. |
| 11% | OTHER, MISCELLANEOUS INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, NOT
CODEABLE ELSEWHERE |

The Impact(s) of Direct Action



(KV1)KNOXVILLE, Tenn., May 8--BLACK STUDENTS PROTEST--Members of the Black Students Union at the University of Tennessee picked the university's Administration Building today in protest of what they called being "ignored and unjustly treated." The picketing was peaceful and there was no interruption of classes. (AP WIREPHOTO) (gs51645str) 1969

The Black freedom movement of the '50s and '60s relied heavily on direct action including freedom rides, sit-ins, pray-ins and other mass demonstrations.

A question was asked in the December 1963 NORC survey, “*During the past year or so would you say the actions Negroes have taken to get the things they want have been generally violent or generally peaceful?*” 47% answered generally violent and 49% said generally peaceful. 4% didn’t know.

The same respondents were next asked, “*Do you think the actions Negroes have taken have, on the whole, helped their cause, or on the whole hurt their causes?*” 51% of respondents said they had helped and 43% said they had hurt.

In Trends in White Attitudes toward Negroes, Mildred A. Schwartz cites a different question which was asked by the Gallup organization that “found fewer whites receptive to the helpfulness of Negro actions than did the NORC sample.” In 1963 and 1964, Gallup asked, “*Do you think mass demonstrations by Negroes are more likely to help or more likely to hurt the Negro’s cause for racial equality?*” As can be seen in Table 4, the percentage of respondents who felt that Blacks would be helped declined from 21 to 10 in one year.

TABLE 4 – Do Demonstrations Help or Hurt Negroes' Cause? (percent white respondents)

Effect of Demonstrations on Negroes' Cause	1963	1964
Help	21	10
Hurt	66	81
No difference	4	3
No opinion	9	6

Source: AIPO release, June 7, 1964.

An October 1966 Harris survey of white respondents asked “*All in all, do you feel the demonstrations by Negroes on civil rights have helped more or hurt more in the advancement of Negro rights?*” Fully 85% of whites said demonstrations had hurt more while only 15% said they had helped.

These numbers are in stark contrast to how Black people viewed and responded to similar questions. In 1969, Newsweek commissioned Gallup to conduct a survey of Black adults. One question asked “*Do you think the methods the civil rights leaders use, like marches, picketing and demonstrations are helping or hurting the cause?*” 74% of Blacks respondents said they were helping while only 10% said that they were hurting.

In August 1966, a Harris survey asked whites, “if you were in the same position as Negroes, if you think it would be justified or not to march and protest in demonstrations?” 53% of white respondents thought that it would be unjustified to march and protest if they were in the same position as Blacks while 46% said it would be justified.

In 2017, Martin Luther King has been canonized by white people across the political spectrum. Things were different when he was alive and agitating for Black freedom. A Harris survey in December 1966 found 50% of white respondents saying that Martin Luther King Jr. was hurting “the Negro cause of civil rights.” 36% said that he was helping that cause. 14% weren’t sure. This was even before Dr. King forcefully spoke out against the Vietnam War which would further erode his standing among whites.

An October 1964 Gallup question asked: *“People have different views about the Negro demonstrations. With which view do you agree? Some people say the Negroes should stop their demonstrations now that they have made their point, and even though some of their demands have not been met. Others say they have to continue demonstrating in order to achieve better jobs, better housing, and better schooling. With which view do you agree?”* Nationally, 73% said Blacks should stop and 19% felt they had to continue, while 8% had no opinion (AIPO release, November 13, 1964).

Assessment of the Black Lives Matter Movement

A July 2017 Harvard-Harris poll question asked a national sample of registered voters: “*Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Black Lives Matter protests and protesters?*”

57% of respondents had an unfavorable opinion of BLM protests and protesters while 43% had a favorable opinion. Only 35 percent of whites expressed a favorable view of the movement, while 83 percent of blacks had a favorable view.

In response to the question in the same survey: “Which would you say is a bigger problem today - black on black crime in African American communities or police violence towards African Americans?” 70% of survey respondents stated that “black on black crime” was a bigger problem than police violence towards African Americans.

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2016 found that 43% of respondents said that they supported the Black Lives Matter

movement, including 18% who strongly support it. 22% said that they opposed BLM and a significant percentage (30%) said that they either hadn't heard of BLM or did not offer an opinion about it.

Support for Black Lives Matter is particularly high among blacks: 65% support the movement, including 41% who strongly support it; 12% of blacks say that they oppose the movement. Among whites, 40% express support, while 28% say they oppose Black Lives Matter.

A 2015 PBS/Marist survey found that 55% of respondents thought that BLM distracts from the real issues of racial discrimination while 31% said that the movement focuses on the real issues of racial discrimination. 14% were unsure. Only 25% of white respondents believed that BLM focuses on real issues of discrimination while 59% said that it distracts from them. In contrast, only 26% of Blacks said that BLM distracts from real issues of racial discrimination while 65% said that it focuses on those issues.



41% of whites in the PBS/Marist survey answered that BLM is “mostly a non-violent, civil rights campaign” while 43% said that it “mostly advocates violence to make its point.” Among Blacks, 82% said that BLM is “mostly a non-violent, civil rights campaign.” Overall, 50% of the country thought of BLM as “mostly a non-violent, civil rights campaign.”

Closing Thoughts (Kelly Hayes)

Today, in March of 2018, some might offer that we have reached a watershed moment, when protests against a fundamental aspect of American society -- namely, gun culture -- are being widely embraced, in the form of the Parkland student movement. But it is important to recognize that the organizing launched by Parkland students, in the aftermath of the tragic school shooting at their school, is not a measure of progress when examining protest in the context of white supremacy. While an energized youth movement that's barreling leftward on a rightwing landscape should be encouraged, the momentum of the Parkland students is an example of what Dick Gregory described when he said that if President Johnson and his wife "woke up one morning as black as my wife and me," they would take action. It's not that white people are unwilling to live in a country where murdered children are the norm. They have long made peace with such conditions. It's nightmarish attacks on white children that have spurred a sudden tolerance, and even great support for (some) youth-led, disruptive protest.

It is not a rejection of American gun violence that has brought popular support for the Parkland students, but a rejection of gun violence that unexpectedly impacts white students. That is not to say that the Parkland students are not righteous in their motives, or clever in their work, but the absence of any racial analysis, in the rhetoric and imagery that has propelled their campaign thus far, allows them a level of support that is not enjoyed by those whose organizing seeks to undermine American notions of who is human and worthy of protection and who is not. This is not a condemnation of these students, but it is an invitation to them, and their supporters, to complicate the conversation. Because if the Parkland students ultimately expand their dialogue to include the crimes of the police state, or choose to problematize the racist implications of criminalization as a social fix, they too will learn that undermining what's at the heart of American injustice is a guaranteed path to unpopularity.

“The Black Racists” (Dick Gregory)

“There are many critics of the struggle for human dignity, both black and white. These critics are fond of saying that certain kinds of demonstrations only hurt the Negro’s cause. Such a statement is like saying you are giving too much medicine to a dead man. Even President Johnson had criticized certain forms of protest. But if he and Lady Bird woke up one morning as black as my wife and me, they would both sign up for the next demonstration!

So many people criticized the stall-in in New York City on the opening day of the World’s Fair. They said we were going too far. People used to ask me, “Where did they ever get such a crazy, wild idea of running out of gas on the expressway?” The answer is simple; from watching all those cars run out of gas on that TV commercial. I can easily justify the stall-in. If the senior citizens of this country, our Senators and Congressmen, can hold a stall-in in the sacred halls of Congress debating civil rights legislation, and call it a “filibuster,” we second class citizens can hold a stall-in on a dirty American highway.”

Sources:

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NORC Survey SRS-330, December 1963

Trends in White Attitudes Toward Negroes by Mildred A. Schwartz (1967)

Thanks to Josh Begley, Dr. Tamara Nopper, Simon Daniel, and Kelly Hayes for their insights and for lending a critical eye to this publication.

1963/2017/2018