

## Power to the people



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**D**emocracy means many things to many people, but it is universally defined as the power that lies with the people for the people. This power resides, in part, in the right to demonstrate peacefully and to have our voices heard in order to create positive change. The more voices that unite, the more powerful the message for change. The more powerful the message, the greater chance for swift and long-lasting results.

**Throughout our nation's history,** united voices have manifested themselves in protests and ultimately have served as catalysts for great changes in the lives of Americans. Protests give a voice to the seemingly voiceless and hold those

in power accountable. Let's take a look at a few important protests over the years:

**Boston Tea Party (1773)**—This was one of the earliest documented protests in America, where the voicing of people of displeasure over high British taxes eventually led to the dumping of crates of British tea into the Boston Harbor. This act of protest sparked the American Revolution, which ultimately ended in America's freedom from British rule.

**Abolitionist movement (1830-1870)**—This 40-year movement to end slavery led to protests against the government and eventually grew into the Civil War. Finally, in 1865, the 13th Amendment was passed to abolish slavery.

**Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Protest (1911)**—A fire in an unsafe factory killed more than 100 people, prompting a march on New York's 5th Avenue with nearly 80,000 people. This march helped to pass new laws to improve workplace safety and helped unite the growing union movement.

**Women's Suffrage Parade (1913)**—In an effort to support women's right to vote, more than 8,000 people, joined by bands, floats and mounted brigades, marched in Washington, DC, the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. It was the first suffrage parade of its kind. The 19th Amendment was eventually passed in 1920, giving women the right to vote.

**March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963)**—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was joined by 200,000 supporters at the Lincoln Memorial to protest racial inequality. After one of the most famous speeches in U.S. history, King met with President John F. Kennedy to discuss new legislation to remedy these issues. This mo-

ment in history is credited with building support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (protecting against discrimination based on gender, race, color, religion or ethnicity), and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (prohibiting racial discrimination in voting).

**National wildcat strike (1970)**—We all know the story here, as this year marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most momentous events in postal history—the Great Postal Strike of 1970—setting the course of postal affairs for decades to come. A city letter carrier, Vincent Sombrotto—who later served as NALC president for 24 years—was at the forefront of rank-and-file members in New York City, insisting on better wages. This event led to the passing of the Postal Reorganization Act and set in motion lasting changes in the postal labor movement.

**Anti-war movement (1967-1972)**—The protests began as general opposition to the Vietnam War but led to a widespread mistrust of the government. This mistrust began with the discovery of the "Pentagon Papers," which contained information on the war that the government was trying to cover up. Some say that this movement led to the eventual end of the war; in any case, it certainly reinforced the important role of the press to deliver the truth to the people.

**March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation (1993)**—More than 800,000 people marched in Washington, DC, for the rights of the LGBTQ community, seeking anti-discrimination laws that would protect citizens from being discriminated against based on sexual identity. The march helped gain national social recognition for the LGBTQ community, and increased funding for HIV/AIDS research.

**As you can see, protests have been woven into the fabric of America since its founding.** We are greatly indebted as a nation to those who were courageous and used their voice to protest, and their subsequent actions to promote change. Remembrance of these and other important protests is timely, as we the people once again act now against the injustices and under-representation plaguing black lives today.

During this month in which we celebrate 244 years of independence as a nation, let's continue to remember that freedom isn't free from action, and also continue to remember that the power lies with the people.