

Sample essay on the civil rights movement

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



A review of the Deacons for Defense: armed resistance and the civil rights movement. By Lance Hill (2004)

The Deacons for Defense is a historical text authored by Lance Hill. Hill used this book to define the historical moments explicitly at the time when people of African origin were struggling to fight for their civil rights. He rightly calls the events that transpired during the time of the Deacons for Defense “ the myth of nonviolence”. The book is based on an array of credible and impressive sources, which increases the chances of creating an accurate account of the historical events. Some of the sources used in the book include; archival materials, FBI files, government documents, news reports and a significant oral history. Given that the Deacons for Defense did not leave written documents, the author had to rely on the information provided by former members of the group and a number of activists. The author integrates information from both primary documents and oral sources, often using one source as a confirmation of the credibility of the other source. Essentially, this approach in collecting information helped the author present an impressive and credible historical account.

Hill provides a detailed history of the Deacons for Defense, an organization that several hundred, joined, and the creation of the twenty-one chapters. The organization helped in developing an “ equal civil rights conscious environment” for all Americans and more specifically those of African origin. The analysis provided by Hill point out to an organization that made efforts to achieve their objectives through nonviolent actions, and headed by religious leaders and some members of the middle-class. Essentially, Hill creates an anecdote of the blacks’ working class who engaged in an armed

self-defense movement that played a remarkable role in pushing the federal government towards dissolving the Ku Klux Klan and ensuring observance of civil rights and liberties.

These Deacons often found themselves in altercations with the middle class black leadership and the Ku Klux Klan movement. Taking into consideration, the spontaneous increase from Jonesboro to Bogalusa, the author rightly express that the push for armed self-defense had support from all the class of working blacks in the entire nation. Regardless of the public perception, the Deacons were no ideologists or revolutionist, but rather they were depicted as pragmatic reformist. Hill expresses that blacks were diligent men, working as barbers, mill hands, and factory workers and Deacons. These men only wanted justice and equality as provided within the American dream (Hill 217). Despite the history of the Deacons being trampled down given their stance on the issue of self-defense, their efforts paid off in the form of material acquisition for blacks in Mississippi and Louisiana. These impressive results help in neutralizing the wrongs perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan. The Deacons assisted in the establishment of dignity, manhood, and a worthy sense of self-determination among the blacks who were earlier living in fear and passivity.

The Deacons for defense forms an impelling account as relates to the “ myth of non-violence”. Hills express myths about the nature of political movements, including those of the modern civil rights movements. He appreciates that the blacks demanded the right to armed self-defense, and fails to recognize the notion that it was an ingeniously crafted form of political resistance.

But individual acts of self-defense did not in themselves constitute a sign of militancy or a leap of consciousness. Physically defending oneself can be motivated by nothing more than common sense and the instinct to survive. Armed resistance had no political significance until it became collective and public and openly challenged authority and white terror (Hill 276).

According to Hill, the Deacons were political given that they were organized publicly and aimed at expanding as an organization. More importantly, Hill fails to appreciate the definition of modern forms of resistance by privileging certain forms of resistances. However, authors such as Kelley in *Race Rebels* ascertain that infra-politics and resistances go hand in hand in making the history of the working class resistance. He asserts that the individual moves in resistance make up for the nature of power (Kelley 47). The various discernible elements and tactics associated with the beliefs in armed self-defense and the emergence of the organization advocating for self-defense provide a reflective as regards to the view of the Deacons for defense organization. It also gives a meaning to the modern definition of the self-defense for Americans. However, there are chances that the Deacons for defense failed to make clear organization as a consequence of the reaction in rising Ku Klux Klan impact and the lack of honoring the civil rights act of 1964. The organization also suffered heavily because of the over-ambitious long term goals for the blacks' resistance.

All through the thirteen chapters, Hill fails to give a reaction as regards to the political ideology, which further reinforces the idea that civil movements held a single objective of acquiring civil equality. This is because the nonviolent movements shifted attention from the economic and social power

movements that were associated with inequality and racism. The Blacks had a number of demands such as equal opportunity, abolishment of segregation, and uphold of the human dignity for all citizens. In a similar quest, the Montgomery Improvement Association advocated for work and respect, and termination of segregation on the basis of skin color. Looking at the trend of the movements, and the placards held in Washington in 1963, there is enough evidence that the Blacks required rights to housing, full employment, end of violence from police and vigilantes, and civil equality, representing the foundation of freedom.

The Deacons for Defense requires contemplative consideration as regards to the opinion of the author concerning the diversity of cultural and political resistance. This is in relation to the level of nonviolence and leadership by Blacks given their values and goals, and their history as African American radicals. This historical narrative qualifies as an exhaustively researched text and should initiate purposeful debate and empower the modern civil rights activists. Nonetheless, Hill has provided a limited conception related to politics and objectives of the civil rights movements. This is the main limitation in his approach, in the Deacons for Defense. Essentially, the study is exhibited as primarily oriented on race relations instead of an effort to explore the lives of the Deacons and their societies. Regardless of the above pointed out limitations and some historical misrepresentations such as the founding date of NAACP as 1908 instead of 1909, Deacons for Defense provides a coherent and a substantive account that contributes to the historical conception of the aspects of civil rights. It is evident that Hill ignites a debate on the dimensions of civil movements, calling for looking at

the history in another aspect. In essence, it is imperative to understand the relationship between gender and manhood in understanding the aspects of civil movements. Additionally, it is relevant to consider elements such as the diverse strategies employed by civil rights movements and the importance of the human memory in making a cognizance of the civil rights movements.

Works Cited

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