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The Barber of Birmingham

The film “The Barber of Birmingham” gives a glimpse of history that contributed to the Civil Rights Movement. This film demonstrates different aspects of what was going on back in the days and how far this country has come by contrasting the past and present events.

The film is portrayed through the eyes of an 85-year-old barber James Armstrong who was a civil rights activist for the majority of his life and was one of the average Americans who risked their lives and freedom just for the sake of fight for racial equality and right to vote. In the film, Armstrong looked back on the old days when he was a civil rights activist while remembering the hardships and struggles that he and his peers faced. The film takes us to the journey of Armstrong through a timeline of history, the history of the African American people and the Birmingham barber who took part in the making of this history. The film sheds light on how important was Armstrong’s barbershop for the community and how it serves as an asset to the civil rights movement. Armstrong’s barbershop serves as a political hub in Birmingham which brought many communities together. As he was an army veteran his shop’s interior was a reflection of his army background as the walls of the shops were covered with newspapers and photos of him as a proud army man. He also had pictures of President Obama as well as Martin Luther King Jr. who had their hair cut by him on multiple occasions. The film revolves around the Selma march that started in 1965 in which many people including Armstrong participated. These people were named as “American foot soldiers”. These foot soldiers risked not only a jail sentence but also their lives fighting for equality. Armstrong also took part in this movement and stood in the front lines with many of his community members. During this peaceful march, Armstrong carried the American flag even though he was brutally beaten by the police officers. This day in history is marked as Bloody Sunday. As a result of this movement African Americans were allowed to vote. Due to this many black politicians were elected which was indeed a threat to the all-white government. This threat leads white officials to pass a law that required voters to pass a fluency test. The test measured the ability of an individual of being able to read and write. An individual would be asked to read and interpret the selected part of the constitution to satisfy the registrar. Lastly, two white males would have to verify the voter to accept the voter's vote.

The film also showed how Armstrong filed a ground-breaking lawsuit challenging school segregations that led his sons to enroll as first black children at Gray Mont Elementary school in which all the white children used to study. Although this was a breakthrough in history little was known that many struggles were yet to come. Armstrong’s kids were to set an example for other colored children and the Caucasians as well. So, his children could not behave as their peers would they would have to behave like an adult. Also his children faced constant criticism and were bullied often but neither could they raise a hand even in their defense nor could they speak to the white children (Video Project).

James Armstrong lived through the most important and live changing phases of history. He lived to be a part of a peaceful protest of the civil rights and had overcome the adversities along the way. He lived through when the voting rights were given to the African American and when the first African American was elected as a president of the USA in 2008. In the film, Armstrong said that “the worst thing a man can do is nothing”. It was due to his and his peers' struggle that black people were given their right to vote. The Barber of Birmingham tells the untold story of the American foot soldiers while demonstrating the impact of the civil rights movements and the effects it had on the making of modern-day America through the eyes of James Armstrong (Video Project).

**Work Citied**

Video Project. "The Barber Of Birmingham: Foot Soldier Of The Civil Rights Movement." The Video Project. N. p., 2011. Web. 29 July 2019.