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MONTANA TECH

The Life and Death of Viola Gregg Liuzzo

Liberal Studies Capstone Essay

Alyssa Ness

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Introduction

Understanding the legacy of Viola Liuzzo's life is very complex. She was a woman who put her own safety and interests aside to fight for the equal rights of all people. Despite the fact that her efforts in the civil rights movement were genuine, Liuzzo was a heavily criticized figure by government figures and the media in America during 1965, because she challenged American values as a white northern woman, and went to Selma to work in the civil rights movement. Unknown to her, she was fighting for equal rights as a woman whom was not yet viewed as an equal herself. Due to the misogynistic social stereotypes of the time, it was easy for J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI, and The United States government to discredit Liuzzo, and make her a target of sexism through slander in order to deflect the many transgressions they made. Her wrongful death has led to many unanswered and disturbing questions about the government and the lengths they will go to protect themselves, their agenda, and their mistakes.

The life of Liuzzo

Viola Gregg Liuzzo was born on April 11, 1925 in California, Pennsylvania. Born as a poor white person, Liuzzo faced a rather unfortunate childhood of instabilities resulting from poverty. Her father was a coal miner and her mother was a grocery store manager. She often lived in one bedroom shacks, moved from state to state, and for a period of time even lived in the segregated South. Due to living in the South and being poor Liuzzo recognized the hardships and hate that black people living in the South endured. By the time she was a teenager, Liuzzo had already developed the charming characteristic of compassion for all kinds of life. She made this evident when she once stole money out of a cash register at the grocery store her mother worked at, not for her, but for a black child that she felt was in desperate need of help.¹

Liuzzo dropped out of high school during her sophomore year, though her parents begged her not to. The constant relocation took a toll on her and school had become a struggle. In 1943 Liuzzo, then only eighteen, married George Argyris and moved to Detroit. Shortly after marrying, Liuzzo and Argyris welcomed the births of their two daughters, Penny and Mary. The marriage was short lived and ended in 1950.² During her marriage to Argyris she befriended a black woman named Sara Evans whom she met at a grocery store. Liuzzo and Evans grew very close and eventually became best friends. The interracial friendship was risky due to the racial tension that encircled them in their city. Just before this time, Denver was a very segregated area which had caused widespread racial rioting.³ Evans helped care for Liuzzo's children throughout the years.⁴ Liuzzo then began working at a bar that hosted many athletes; this is where she met her husband and union teamster, Jim Liuzzo.

During the year 1951, Liuzzo married her husband and eventually gave birth to three more children, Sally, Tommy, and Anthony, then making her a mother of five surviving children.⁵ Between the pregnancies of their two surviving children, Liuzzo experienced the loss of two babies. One baby was a stillborn and the other lived a couple of hours before dying.⁶ Liuzzo suffered greatly from the tragic losses she endured. Due to Liuzzo's husband Jim and his preference for traditional women, he struggled to understand his wife's passion for helping anything or anyone that needed a hand, and always told her that she would one day suffer consequences for her beliefs. Jim did not share his wife's passion for advocacy or her beliefs but he loved her enough to tolerate her determination.⁷

Many of Liuzzo's family members and friends describe her as having been emotionally sensitive. After suffering the loss of two babies, Liuzzo found herself depressed and agitated, checking herself into a mental hospital where she was evaluated for a nervous breakdown. It was

here that Dr. Samet, her evaluator, suggested that she could have possibly been schizophrenic, because when he asked her what she wanted to do in her life she responded by saying she wanted to become a doctor. Dr. Samet also included that she was unhappy in her role as a homemaker. Victorian era stereotypes about women still lingered, the idea was that if a woman was unfulfilled by the sole role of being a wife, mother, and performing household duties, then she was mentally unhealthy.⁸ A woman who felt dissatisfied with her roles and duties of being a woman could run the risk of being thrown into mental hospitals or prescribed valium to cope with her daily life.⁹ Liuzzo and her husband struggled and sometimes clashed when it came to their two teenaged daughters Mary and Penny.¹⁰ Jim felt that the girls needed to be more restricted from social functions, and unable to date, which created hostility among the four of them.¹¹ Liuzzo continued to struggle with her relationship with her teenaged daughters, and this contributed to her ongoing depression. Liuzzo's daughters were extremely angry towards her and resenting of her because she unsuccessfully challenged a law that allowed teenaged kids to drop out of school; she did so by refusing to allow her children to attend public schools anymore and she then began homeschooling her children instead.¹² Her daughters were very irritated that their mother forced them out of public school, and in turn their relationship with their mother suffered. Soon after her hospitalization, in order for things to calm down at home, her daughters moved in with their grandmother for a short period of time and Liuzzo's three younger children stayed home with her.¹³

During the year 1961, Liuzzo became focused on more independent roles aside from running her household. According to her family, she was in need of defining herself. It was at this point that she enrolled in college where she would earn a degree as a medical technician and graduate with honors at Carnegie Institution.¹⁴ Shortly after graduating, Liuzzo enrolled at

Wayne State University in downtown Detroit, in order to further her education to become a nurse.¹⁵ Due to Liuzzo's strong willed nature she was not afraid to stand up for what she believed was fair, even when it came to her workplace. Once while working, Liuzzo discovered that a woman that she worked with was being laid off without any severance pay, Liuzzo felt so terrible that she donated her entire paycheck to the woman, and further protested by quitting her job.¹⁷

During the year 1965, in addition to her passion for advocacy Liuzzo was encouraged by her best friend Sara Evans to join the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).¹⁸ Liuzzo promised Evans that she could and would change the world.¹⁶ On March 7, 1965 American witnessed "Bloody Sunday" because it was being broadcasted on the evening news. Liuzzo cried as she watched the television; people were being beaten and gassed for defending their rights.¹⁹ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. then pleaded with the nation in order to gain supporters, and asked that anyone willing to help the civil rights movement come to Selma, Alabama to march from Selma to Montgomery in order to support the cause of black voting rights.²⁰ This event urged Liuzzo to become active and she insisted on going south to help. Before leaving for the march, Liuzzo asked that if anything were to happen to her while she was away, that she please take care of her children. Evans agreed to do so, but not before begging and pleading with her not to go.²¹ Liuzzo was a rather brave woman of her time, it was extremely untraditional, rare, and frowned upon for a thirty-nine year old white middle class mother of five to leave her children home and travel to the South alone in order to participate in social activism.²² This was untrue for men; it was acceptable and even praised for men to participate in social activism. Traditional women were highly critical of Liuzzo in a way they were not with men who were activists. In a survey conducted about Liuzzo, Women's Journal Magazine

reported that, fifty-five percent of women in the United States said Liuzzo had no business leaving her children to go participate in the march, and several of these women added that she wrote her own death by leaving home to get involved.²³ Other male civil rights martyrs such as Mickey Schwerner were married, yet he was not criticized for leaving his wife. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was married and had kids, like Liuzzo, yet he was not criticized for leaving them to participate in the civil rights movement. Gloria Steinem, feminist author, argues that whether it was intentional or not, women of this time identified with groups that were outsiders.²⁴ Due to the fact that hundreds of women were traveling to Selma to participate in the march, Steinem also describes that women were inspired by the civil rights movement because black people were defying what they've always known as a "birth based order."²⁵

Liuzzo's Activism and Death

On March 16, 1965 Liuzzo at the age of thirty-nine, left her Detroit home for the last time to join the civil rights march on Selma-to-Montgomery.²⁶ Arriving in Selma three days later Liuzzo would then begin her active work in the civil rights movement where she worked at a hospitality desk in Selma and also volunteered her car out to shuttle civil rights workers from Selma to and from Montgomery.²⁷ Her children begged her not to go and her daughter Penny even tried to bargain to take her place in the March. Liuzzo refused and explained that she felt compelled to join the March herself; however she made sure to call her family at home every single night that she was away up until her death.²⁸ While in Selma, Liuzzo stayed at the Carver Projects located next to the Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was the center of civil rights activity in Selma during her work.²⁹ Liuzzo stayed with a woman who housed civil rights workers named Mrs. Jackson and her family, along with Alice West (an active member of the Selma school system) and five others who were also civil rights workers. West described

Liuzzo in high regard as “a white person who was doing everything she could to help the black people as if she was black herself.”³⁰ Liuzzo identified with black people in the South and often referred to the people fighting for black equality as “my people”, she felt their pain very deeply and she was not indifferent to their suffering.³¹ On Liuzzo’s first day of work in Selma she met a nineteen-year-old young man named Leroy Moton. Moton, a transportation coordinator, was also a worker in the movement and his job was to shuffle workers around the city in rented or borrowed vehicles. Liuzzo had formally signed her car over to Moton to use for the duration of the march, and Moton promised to care for her car while it was in his possession.³²

On the days leading up to the March, civil rights workers were empowered to complete the march in order to protest the murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson³³ Many were fearful of the violence that might have occurred on the first day of the four day, fifty four-mile walk that lay ahead. It was however, the last day of the march that created fear amongst the nation.³⁴ President Johnson amongst other several other authoritative figures, prepared for the worst as they had ordered many military figures and marshals to surround the court house, but Governor Wallace of Alabama failed to follow orders.³⁵ Liuzzo had marched seven miles on the first day and returned to work at the hospitality desk.³⁶ On the fourth day of the march, Liuzzo had been assigned nursing work at the St. Jude’s medical complex in Montgomery, and Moton drove her there. There were rumored plots to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other prominent civil rights leaders of the time; however these rumors turned out to be false or unsuccessful. Being the free spirit she was, Liuzzo walked to the capitol barefoot for four miles from the St. Jude’s medical complex in order to meet the other marchers, and witness the speeches given by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.³⁷

After the march was completed there were warnings of violence, and some preventative measures to be taken in order to better assure the safety of the marchers. One of the precautions given was not to ride in single car vehicles. Liuzzo most likely heard this message, but she decided to ride in her car despite the warnings.³⁸

After the march, Moton met Liuzzo at St. Jude with her car full of marchers who needed transportation from Montgomery to Selma. Liuzzo got behind the wheel and began to drive back to Selma. During the ride back, Liuzzo and her passengers experienced verbal harassment from people along the highway, but they arrived in Selma safely.³⁹ After arriving in Selma, Moton told Liuzzo he still had work to do and needed to make another trip back to Montgomery to pick up another group of marchers. Excited about the events of the day, Liuzzo was not ready to go home and rest, so she then offered to drive Moton.⁴⁰ As Liuzzo and Moton got back onto the highway, he grew paranoid about the trip because the highway was unusually deserted; however he let Liuzzo drive on.⁴¹ Moton and Liuzzo soon noticed that a car was behind them. A red Chevy Impala with a driver and three male passengers began to approach them in the left lane. It was then that the men in the car rolled down their windows and pointed their guns at Liuzzo and Moton. At least two men in the car discharged fourteen shots.⁴² Liuzzo's car then drove off of the highway and into a fence. She died instantly.⁴³

Liuzzo's Murder and the FBI

The exact events that took place in the next moments are rather unclear. Moton was relatively unharmed from the incident and has claimed to have been passed out and unconscious for twenty minutes after wrecking into the fence. Contradicting to his first statement, Moton said that he was pretending to be dead so that the men in the car that shot at them would not come shoot him again.⁴⁴ According to Moton, he let some time pass after the horrific shootings

occurred before getting out of the car. Moton describes being terrified of the shooters coming back and being scared for his life to run for help.⁴⁵ Due to the dangers of the time many cars passed by Moton and ignored his desperate cries for help. A carload full of fellow marchers who recognized Moton as a civil rights worker finally stopped to help him and they brought him to Brown Chapel and called the FBI.⁴⁶ As FBI agents arrived on the scene, state troopers had already discovered Liuzzo's body, slumped over in a pool of her own blood.⁴⁷ State officials were extremely unprofessional and immediately assumed that Liuzzo and Moton were in an intimate relationship. Throughout the investigation, FBI agents remained incredibly biased and judgmental of Liuzzo and there was no sympathy for her tragic death.⁴⁸ After extensive questioning by FBI officials, Moton was arrested as a material witness of the homicide. While in detainment he was treated very poorly, as though he were a perpetrator rather than a victim of a serious crime. Moton had a dislocated shoulder from the crash and officials refused to get him treatment for over twenty-four hours.⁴⁹

Several hours had passed after the discovery of Liuzzo's body, yet nobody had informed her family of her murder. This would leave them stirring with animosity towards officials from the very start of their finding out about their mother and wife. The authorities had no leads on the murder except that there were three men in a Chevy Impala involved. J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, told President Johnson that finding the perpetrators of the murder would be like "looking for a needle in a haystack."⁵⁰ It turned out that the men behind Liuzzo's murder were not that difficult to find after all, because one of them was a paid FBI informant in the Ku Klux Klan. He was Gary Thomas Rowe, thirty-one and a well-known racist troublemaker with a violent history.⁵¹ The other men that were involved in the murder of Liuzzo were members of a Birmingham chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, Collie Leroy Wilkins Jr., age twenty-one, William

Orville Eaton, forty-one, and Eugene Thomas, forty-two.⁵² The murder was solved within a matter of hours due to Rowe's presence during the murder. Rowe had allegedly called his FBI agent after the shooting to let him know what had happened during the events of Liuzzo's murder.⁵³ When President Johnson heard the news about the murder he made a televised and nationally broadcasted public service announcement to warn people of the dangers of being involved in the Ku Klux Klan, and suggesting that if they were involved with the Klan then they best get out immediately.⁵⁴ Due to the presence of Gary Thomas Rowe as a witness to testify against the men, within hours of Liuzzo's murder Wilkins, Eaton, and Thomas, had all had been arrested for violating federal civil rights, specifically the conspiracy to injure or intimidate persons for exercising their rights under the United States Constitution.⁵⁵

A Background on COINTELPRO

The stated reason for having an FBI informant in the Klan was part of an aggressive FBI scheme to collect surveillance, harass, and infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan amongst several other groups. This plan to stop crimes committed by the KKK could have worked, but it failed to be effective because they hired Rowe, despite his racially violent background.⁵⁶ J. Edgar Hoover, one of the most feared men in America, had a long history of discrediting people in order to supplement his own agendas.⁵⁷ Hoover and the FBI had obvious experience in wrongfully destroying the credibility of a person, and it did not faze them to do so to Liuzzo in order to detract negative attention from FBI informant Rowe. During the year of 1956, the FBI began a secretive operation called COINTELPRO. This was a scheme aimed at undermining any radical political opposition in the United States under the pretense of communist affiliations.⁵⁸ The FBI carried out these intentions by infiltrating the daily lives and activities of radical leaders amongst many other innocent people in order to gain information that would be used to discredit them by

any means necessary. The shady activities put in motion by the FBI were usually carried out through hired paid informants, who were usually “criminally inclined”. According to Hoover, criminals were the most productive FBI informants, and he referred to these people as “double crossers.”⁵⁹ Some of the illegal activities carried out by informants included but were not limited to undercover spying and bugging phones and bedrooms. The information collected by the informant activities led to even more malicious activity such as false publications about people, exploitation of personal information, harassment through anonymous letters, telephone calls, physical violence, and false arrests.⁶⁰ During the beginning of COINTELPRO and even before, Hoover and the FBI collected secret files on any person that they felt was suspicious including terrorists and communist spies. It was not until the 1950s that Hoover began to see the civil rights movement as a great American threat and added civil rights leaders and anti-war protesters to his list of secret files.⁶¹ For example, he had constant surveillance on Martin Luther King Jr. in hopes of infiltrating him to make him appear illegitimate to the civil rights movement and the American public. This did eventually lead to embarrassing information about his intimate life being leaked into the press and an “anonymous” letter that was sent to Dr. King.⁶² Until Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in the year 1968 he was a target for COINTELPRO infiltration. After King’s death the Black Panther Party became a new target for official destruction. The Chicago BPP chief of security William O’Neal was hired by Hoover and the FBI to infiltrate the group. The infiltration caused the murder of BPP leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark and left seven others wounded.⁶³ Chicago police officers executed a raid on the Chicago chapter of the BPP under the allegations of a shootout, evidence however, proved that the men were ambushed with gun shots in their sleep and only fired one shot after several were fired by police.⁶⁴

The FBI and their Negligence

Rather than preventing crimes committed by the Ku Klux Klan like originally planned, Rowe instigated them and even participated as a suspected gunman in a murder. Rowe should never have been an informant as part of the FBI due to his history of hate crimes against black people.⁶⁵ Amongst several other incidents that involved him, Rowe had been known for boasting about all of the hate crimes he committed against black people. He once viciously beat Freedom Riders with a baseball bat, and was also allegedly involved in the Birmingham 16th Street bombing that killed four young black girls. Not surprisingly, Rowe had even been previously accused of murdering a black man.⁶⁶ The FBI proved to do an efficient job of covering up evidence for Rowe, and Hoover once boasted about Rowe's efficiency as an undercover informant. Neil Shanahan, Rowe's FBI supervisor gave him permission to join the Klansmen the night of Liuzzo's murder. Despite knowing the activities Klansmen often participated in and Rowe's history of violent crimes against civil rights workers, he neglected to arrange for surveillance on a night after a large civil rights rally.⁶⁷ Shanahan stated that he knew the men were going to be harassing marchers and maybe "skinning heads" but did not expect for there to be any murders.⁶⁸ Rowe denied ever knowing there would be any violence involved that night, despite the fact that the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, Robert Creel, allegedly told Rowe that it would be a great night in Klan history.⁶⁹ Mary Stanton, author of *From Selma to Sorrow*, argues that the men were looking for an "outside agitator" to murder that night. When at a stop light the men saw that Liuzzo and Moton were in a car alone together with Michigan plates, they assumed they were a couple, and decided they were going to teach them a lesson.⁷⁰

Another major repercussion from this tragedy involving the FBI is due to the convenient lack of adequate evidence taken at the crime scene. Because of this negligence, the official gunman who killed Liuzzo would never have to serve justice for the consequences of the murder

he had committed. Even basic measures were ignored, for example there were no fingerprints taken at the crime scene.⁷¹ An FBI ballistics specialist identified the bullet in Liuzzo's head to have come from Eugene Thomas' revolver. Thomas, Eaton, and Rowe however placed the blame on Wilkins, and due to the lack of fingerprints taken the shooter could not be officially identified. Later on, Liuzzo's children tried to find out more information on the murder of their mother and would be confronted with questions that could not be answered. Tony Liuzzo, her son, eventually hired two forensic specialists to look over Liuzzo's murder file. The two specialists concluded that the official story of Liuzzo's murder does not match the blood spatter patterns shown in the pictures of the crime scene.⁷² The forensic specialists went on to say that it is reasonable to conclude that Moton was not in the car during the time that Liuzzo was shot, and they indicated that he could have been forced outside of the car. Despite giving two contradictory statements, Moton, now insists he was inside of the car at the time of the shooting.⁷³ The truth may really never be known however, the Liuzzo family stands by the theory that Moton was terrorized by FBI officials to become an official witness because they needed him in order to conclude their story; that would in return protect FBI negligence, COINTELPRO, and Rowe. It is likely that this theory could be accurate because according to Alabama Attorney General, Richmond Flowers, he was never able to interview Moton without the presence of two FBI agents, and he was never able to talk to Rowe.⁷⁴ In the year 1978, after the death of J. Edgar Hoover and thirteen years after Liuzzo's murder, Rowe, Wilkins, and Thomas, the two surviving Klansmen responsible for her murder, were released from federal prison, and required to take a lie detector test. The test was used in order to determine which one of the men was the actual shooter. Wilkins and Thomas insisted that Rowe pulled the trigger while Rowe insisted he did not, he claimed that while the other men were shooting he just pretended to shoot. Yet not

admissible in court, Wilkins and Thomas passed their lie detector tests while Rowe failed his test. Wilkins and Thomas were both subpoenaed to court by a grand jury in Alabama to testify against Rowe in 1975.⁷⁵ Due to their testimony and Rowe's history of violent crimes, Rowe was indicted for first degree murder for the murder of Liuzzo.⁷⁶ A federal judge then intervened due to the fact that Rowe had been granted immunity in 1965 for testifying against the Klan members involved in the murder.⁷⁷ Since the FBI never took fingerprints during crime scene investigations so the shooter will likely never be officially identified.⁷⁸

Hoover and the FBI smear Liuzzo

Immediately after finding out that FBI informant Rowe was involved in Liuzzo's murder, Hoover began trying to justify Liuzzo's murder. He did this by publically denigrating her personal character, a method already used on Martin Luther King, Jr. He deliberately constructed a smear campaign against her to direct the attention of the media on false reports of Liuzzo herself rather than Rowe's infiltration involvement with the Ku Klux Klan and her murder.⁷⁹ Her family endured great amounts of suffering due to the harsh rumors and accusations against their wife and mother. The FBI falsely reported that she had track marks on her arms indicating intravenous needle drug use.⁸⁰ Other public slander about her included that she was a "nigger lover," an unfit mother who abandoned her five children, drug user, and an unfaithful wife. The Liuzzo family was constantly harassed by the public and someone once had even fired gunshots into their living room window, and placed a burned cross was on their front lawn.⁸¹ Overall the FBI and media portrayed Liuzzo as an unstable woman with questionable motives. As if the harassment against the Liuzzos had not gone far enough, federal officials of the bureau had an officer named Marvin Lane dig up anything and everything he could on the Liuzzo family. Lane wrote a very detailed six page report casting them in the most negative light possible, and

revealing a great deal of confidential and private information about Liuzzo and her family.⁸² Liuzzo's children endured great amounts of bullying and criticism due to the light Liuzzo was portrayed in. Liuzzo's daughter Sally had described having people throw rocks at her while at school, and telling her that her mother was a "whore."⁸³ Soon after the report was released, the KKK Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton was spotted suspiciously passing it out to journalists.⁸⁴ The KKK clearly had no regrets for the murder committed against Liuzzo and boasted about it in their magazine called "Night Riders." They published a picture of Liuzzo dead and sitting in her car on the cover of their magazine, bragging about her murder, and they sent it to the Liuzzo family.⁸⁵ Nicholas Katzenbach, the U.S. Attorney General under President Johnson during the time of Liuzzo's murder, recalled information leaks, and said that it was not unheard of for government officials to sacrifice someone below them in order to save themselves.⁸⁶ Included in the Lane Report was the history of Liuzzo's marriages, and a description of her husband Jim as a heavily armed union teamster, criminal, and thug. Also included were her school reform arrest records, her membership in the NAACP, her medical records (including information of her nervous breakdown and Dr. Samet's notes about her possibly being schizophrenic), a missing person's report on her and two on her daughters, and even reports that she was having issues at home with her teenaged daughters. As if demonizing Liuzzo personally did not go far enough, Hoover and other federal agents bashed the Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights event entirely by heavily criticizing the intentions of the march. False accusations included that the march was nothing but a big orgy that included heavy amounts of booze and drug use.⁸⁷

America's view of Liuzzo

America was in a great stir over Liuzzo's controversial life and death. Some defended Liuzzo and others nurtured and supported the hate that was attached to her name. The *Detroit*

Free Press attacked Lane's report on Liuzzo as being "inaccurate, making insinuations without facts, and uncalled for."⁸⁸ Mathew Hopson Murphy Jr., Wilkins' defense attorney, disagreed with this and upheld the existing view that Liuzzo dismissed traditional roles as a middle class white woman and despite warnings rode alone at night with a black man in the car and proceeded to say that "whatever happened to her was her own fault because she shouldn't have been screwing niggers." He also questioned Leroy Moton about the assumed sexual relationship between Liuzzo and him, and then falsely declared that the autopsy found a "quart of semen" inside of Liuzzo's body.⁸⁹

The Klansmen involved would never be charged with the murder of Viola Gregg Liuzzo, but they would serve ten years for violating her civil rights.⁹⁰ Due to the testimony against the three other Klansmen involved in Liuzzo's murder, Rowe was granted immunity in the case and never served time for the murder.⁹¹ It will likely be forever unknown if Rowe himself pulled the trigger.⁹² Although the men were not convicted of murder, this was the first modern federal conviction of Ku Klux Klan members and it revolutionized the future for convictions of other Ku Klux Klan criminals.⁹³

When comparing Liuzzo's murder to other murders during the civil rights movement, it is evident that she not only received less recognition for her heroic dedication in the movement than others but was also heavily scrutinized by the government and the public through the media for defying traditional white gender roles for women of her time. Louis B. Nichols was hired by the FBI in order to manage the bureau's interactions with news and media. Nichol's main role in the bureau was to prevent the bureau from gaining negative attention through media and entertainment by promoting its preferred image, and any media outlet that opposed the FBI would be attacked by supporting media outlets.⁹⁴ The FBI and press distorted the reason Liuzzo

had participated in the march and what the march was about in order to gain public support.⁹⁵

Along with Hoover and the press, traditional middle class white women tormented the legacy of Liuzzo with accusations of her being mentally ill because she was not solely fulfilled by the role of a homemaker and mother.⁹⁶ The public and media also heavily criticized Jim Liuzzo due to his inability to keep his wife under control.⁹⁷ The *New York Times* published an article calling out Liuzzo for failing to deter his wife from her fate.⁹⁸

Comparing Liuzzo to Male Martyrs in the Civil Rights Movement

During Freedom Summer in 1964 three civil rights workers were murdered in cold blood outside of Neshoba County. The three men murdered were in Mississippi in order to help organize civil rights efforts. Andrew Goodman, twenty, and Michael Schwerner, twenty-four, were both white and from New York, James Chaney, twenty, was a black young local black man who had joined CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) to contribute to civil rights efforts in the state. On the night of June 21, 1964, following the investigation regarding the burning of a black church, the three men went missing.⁹⁹ The men were last seen pulled over on the road side changing a flat tire, when deputy sheriff Cecil Price wrongfully arrested them for speeding.¹⁰⁰ The men were placed in jail and held for several hours before paying a twenty dollar fine and being released.¹⁰¹ Once released, at 10 p.m. that evening, Cecil Price escorted them out of town and they began to drive back to Meridian where they were staying.¹⁰² Before the men could make it outside of Neshoba County, Cecil Price once again sped up to them, pulled them over, and arrested them once again; this time however, there were two cars full of Klansman that pulled up next to them.¹⁰³ The men were then unwillingly forced down a gravel road by the KKK members, where they were murdered in cold blood. It was six weeks before search efforts

prevailed and finally on August 4, 1964 the bodies of the men were found in graves, near a dam on the Mississippi River, and on the property of a Klan member.¹⁰⁴ While sweeping the bottom of Mississippi River in search of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, search crews also found additional bodies, including a body wearing a CORE t-shirt.¹⁰⁵ Both Schwerner and Goodman were found with bullet wounds as the cause of death and Chaney was found with dirt in his nostrils and mouth, two broken arms, and bullet wounds.¹⁰⁶ Due to the condition of Chaney's body, it was concluded that he was brutally beaten, shot three times, and then buried alive.¹⁰⁷ This incident contributed to the passing of the Voting Rights Act that became law on August 6th 1965.¹⁰⁸ In January of 1965 eighteen men were indicted of violating the civil rights of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman; however most of the charges were later dropped with charges applying only to Cecil Price. Later on in 1967 the charges were reinstated, and juries convicted seven defendants.¹⁰⁹ It would not be until January 2005, forty years after the murders, that Edgar Ray Killen, the mastermind behind the murders, was convicted of homicide.¹¹⁰ The three civil rights workers men were considered to be heroes by the American public and they were outraged by the violence. Their murders caused an outpouring of conflict across the nation gaining lengthy amounts media coverage and support. Rita Bender, the widow of Michael Schwerner, said the only reason the "national alarm was sounded" was due to the fact that her husband, Schwerner and Goodman were white men.¹¹¹ Bender also was a CORE worker and made efforts to bring the attention to the many victims of racial violence rather than just the white male victims.¹¹²

Jonathan Daniels was also a white civil rights advocate who lost his life while opposing segregation and racism Selma. On the hot summer day of August 20, 1965, Daniels was released from jail in Hayneville, Alabama after being held in custody for six days due to picketing white

only stores.¹¹³ Daniels was a lively person and was known to have kept the spirits up in other advocates while in jail. Daniels, along with another white man and two young black women, went to a nearby store to buy sodas while they awaited a ride from the courthouse.¹¹⁴ When the group of four approached the store, an angry man by the name of Thomas Coleman aimed a gun at the young girls. As Coleman began to fire shots Daniels pushed one of the girls out of the way and shielded her from the blast. Daniels, only twenty six years old, lost his life in order to protect young Ruby Sales's life.¹¹⁵ President Johnson ordered what turned out to be an unsuccessful investigation of Daniels murder.¹¹⁶ Rather than being charged with murder Coleman was found not guilty of manslaughter due to local officials supporting his false claims that Daniels pulled a knife on him.¹¹⁷ Since Daniels' death, he has been honored several times for his heroic gestures as a civil rights martyr.¹¹⁸

Other murders of other civil rights movement workers included the death of a white reverend named James Reeb. Reeb was murdered after he answered Martin Luther King Jr.'s request for support in Selma after Bloody Sunday.¹¹⁹ Reeb was strolling down the sidewalk with two other men beside him, where they had just finished a meal at a desegregated restaurant when a few white men approached them and began viciously attacking them.¹²⁰ One of the men swung a pipe at Reeb hitting him just above his left ear.¹²¹ After thirty-seven hours in the hospital, Reeb died due to substantial brain injuries. Reeb's wife Marie was then flown back home on President Johnson's private airplane.¹²² Reeb's family gained support from people all across the country as hundreds of thousands held vigils in his honor, and his name was in newspaper headings throughout the country. The men who murdered James Reeb were never convicted because the all-white, all-male jury ruled that Reeb's friends failed to get him help and let him die because the civil rights movement needed a martyr.¹²³ This ruling caused outrage across the nation and

against white supremacy during the civil rights movement.¹²⁴ The death of Reeb inspired a televised announcement by President Johnson declaring that it is wrong to deny any American the right to vote.¹²⁵

The attention gained from the murders of Daniels, Reeb, Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner was substantially different than the attention Liuzzo's murder gained. These advocates all had many things in common such as being white (besides Chaney), being at least somewhat religious, their compassion for black equality, and their unjustified murders. The major difference in comparing them is gender. Liuzzo was a female hero in a man's world. Her murder investigation became sexist by the accusations and false reports made by crime scene investigators, the FBI, and the public, and due to this her efforts in the movement were viewed as insincere. The murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner alarmed the nation due to the exposure of transgressions committed by southern local law enforcement. Due to the fact that Chaney was black he automatically gained less national attention than Goodman and Schwerner, yet he gained more national attention than many other black male civil rights workers of his time because he was killed with white people. This leads one to believe that his direct link to Goodman and Schwerner was an accurate comparison of the nation's reaction to civil rights murders based on race.

The media portrayed Reeb as a martyr almost immediately. Reeb fit the perfect mold of what society expected an American to look like, as he was a white religious family man and thus white, America was able to identify with the unfairness of his death.¹²⁶ Daniels, like Reeb, has been recognized for his heroic deeds still to this day. In analyzing the differences amongst the martyrs it becomes clear that in every aspect, even social activism, women had more obstacles to surmount before they would be viewed as an equal to men. Liuzzo's efforts were very similar to

that of her male counterparts yet her legacy has suffered because of lies and criticisms made by government officials and the public due to her being a non-untraditional woman. Today Liuzzo has been honored, although most people do not know her name. Even though she was the only white woman to be killed in the civil rights movement, there have been memorials dedicated to Liuzzo over the years, yet it has taken to many years for her efforts to be recognized. There is a memorial surrounded by tall iron gates at the mile marker where she died, Viola Liuzzo Playground in Detroit is dedicated to her. Her name is also carved into a memorial for all civil rights martyrs in Montgomery. Her picture can be found on the Civil Rights Memorial mural at the bottom of the Edmund Pettus Bridge.¹²⁷

The Civil Rights Movement to Women's Liberation

During the 1960s the civil rights movement overlapped with several other movements and political agendas, and one of these movements was the emergence of women's liberation during the beginning of the second wave of feminism. Women were striving for a sense of equality to men. A main topic supported by women's liberation was the right of total control and protection of their bodies. This in turn inspired more women to stand up for themselves. A sense of control of their bodies was a very big milestone in women's liberation because women were gaining momentum and had high hopes that they would soon be viewed as an equal to men.

Despite the common notion of the day that women were to be fulfilled by the role of a housewife and raising children; like Liuzzo, hundreds of northern women like Liuzzo, traveled to Selma during Freedom Summer because they wanted to help make a difference to the movement. They were given domestic jobs such as caring for children or cleaning.¹²⁸ While working in Selma, white women were inside cleaning and caring for children, and black women were out on the streets with men participating in civil rights work.¹²⁹ Due to common ideals of male

superiority, men were always given the leadership roles, due to this being ‘women’s work’ and not as important as the work of male activists. Due to interracial dating, black women began to see white women as competition for good black men as well, further dividing women.¹³⁰

Although fighting for the civil rights of black people was the main goal, while working in the South many female civil rights workers began to be more conscious of their very own oppression and later birthed women’s liberation ideals. Sara Evans, a feminist author, argues that women “in the concrete realities of day-to-day work, a newfound strength and sense of self would make sexual oppression seem more and more burdensome.”¹³¹ After the civil rights movement began to splinter due to the emergence of Black Power, some of the women working in the civil rights movement were inspired to fight their own oppression in the start of the second wave of the feminist movement and emergence of women’s liberation¹³²

Not surprisingly, Hoover and the FBI were in opposition of women’s equal rights and heightened the fears of women’s liberation amongst the nation, and he did this by accusing older feminists in the movement of communist affiliations.¹³³ Hoover sent COINTELPRO informants into the women’s movement and infiltrated them due to his desire to contain New Left movements.¹³⁴ Hoover viewed the women’s movement¹³⁴ as a challenge to American Values, and labels their file as “ARMED AND DANGEROUS.”¹³⁵

Knowing some of the ways in which Hoover and the FBI operated and controlled so many aspects in the portrayal of social movements is fundamental in understanding why Liuzzo was so easily portrayed in a negative light. It is especially important to understand the way Hoover and the FBI viewed the women’s liberation movement in order to gain insight of their views of women. Liuzzo defied traditional American values of her time, which resulted in her

death. Due to this, she was easily deemed responsible for her own murder by white men and women of the South, and even outside the region. Her heroic work in the civil rights movement was less recognized by press than the murders of her male counterparts, and she was not lauded like them. This is due to the fact that, as a woman she was oppressed and she lacked the media's preferable identity as a white man.

Conclusion

Although many years have passed since Viola Gregg Liuzzo lost her life fighting for what she believed in, she did eventually receive some recognition in later years, yet her name remains unknown by several people in America. Because she was a woman, her legacy and role in the Civil Rights Movement has been misrepresented, and is mostly unknown and somewhat tarnished, due to the dishonest indiscretions inflicted by the FBI. The FBI used her as a scapegoat to deflect attention from their negligence. She tragically lost her life in an event that has overshadowed her true and sincere effort to protect the rights of all people in order to be treated equal. Although she did not intend it, she was ahead of her time in impacting the women's liberation movement and never fairly recognized for it. Liuzzo gave her life with the purest intentions of helping people. Regrettably Liuzzo's place in history has been set and her name has fallen between the cracks of the many heroes of the era.

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