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Humanity's Torch

“An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind”. This cautionary phrase, often attributed to the peace activist Mahatma Gandhi implies that a cycle of retributive vengeance by humanity does more harm than good. These words reinforce the idea that justice shouldn't be attained through revenge, but only through reconciliation and peace. American history continues to show that the greatest achievements in societal progress have been made through non-violent direct action, for it allows space for humane resolution. This principle is still seen today in Freedom University, a school for undocumented young adults, which has adapted non-violent activism strategies from the farmworker rights movement.

Caesar Chavez chose to show humanity and peace through his fasts, protests, and strikes. According to The United Farm Workers (UFW), after years of the Delano Grape Strike, many farm workers/UFW members became impatient and began to believe that fair pay, safe working conditions, and unionization could not be achieved without violence. Caesar Chavez disagreed and decided to carry out fasts that would last weeks as a form of self-purification and personal non-cooperation with California supermarkets. His non-violent action garnered national attention and became instrumental to the passing of the National Labor Relations Act Amendments of 1975 and the California Occupational Safety and Health Act. The farmworker's rights movement perfectly illustrates the stark contrast between oppressors and the oppressed: although the oppressor showed brutality, the oppressed responded with peace. By doing this, the oppressor's iniquity was exposed without resorting to destructive means.

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Following this legacy, Freedom University (FU) fights for the rights of undocumented students in higher education using non-violent direct action. Policy 4.1.6 bars undocumented students from attending Georgia's top two public schools—the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech— and from applying for in-state tuition, and it outright violates Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the right to higher education. Knowing this, Freedom University planned several non-violent forms of direct action, including performing civil disobedience on April 28, 2014. Freedom University students visited UGA dressed in graduation gowns and holding signs that read “We Are Human” while being surrounded by armed cops on standby. Freedom University’s many forms of peaceful direct action were essential in reversing private universities' decision to bar undocumented students, and the first to open their doors was Emory University. These protests have not only shown the injustice imposed on hard-working undocumented students by Georgia’s Board of Education but also the humanity and effectiveness at achieving tangible progress that lies in non-violent protests.

Non-violent direct action has proven to lead communities towards freedom - freedom from segregation and exploitation, and freedom from generational oppressive cycles. Non-violent protests maintain human dignity while disrupting social comfortability and forcing the oppressor to confront the issue. Non-violent protests demonstrate the collective mental prowess it takes to resist and remain in control. This ideology is passed down from one struggle to another, used as a torch by humanity to lead the way to a more compassionate world.