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Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances

When Susan Boyle stepped onto the stage of *Britain's Got Talent* with her unusual clothes, she didn't mind that people might tease her for her appearance. When Jack Dempsey faced off against the much bigger Jess Willard for the 1919 World Heavyweight Champion title, many called the matchup a modern version of David and Goliath. In the face of skepticism, these underdogs transcended society's notions of what people are capable of doing and their internal drive and tenacity pushed them to prove naysayers wrong: Boyle stunned the world with her voice and Dempsey gave Willard the worst beating of his career.

We love underdogs because we can live vicariously through them. Underdogs are special because they aren't special; they are just like us. They are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances and that's what makes them so fascinating to us. In the same year that Dempsey became champion, large, well-organized demonstrations by Koreans demanding independence spread throughout the country. These peaceful demonstrations were violently suppressed by the Japanese government. Japan did everything in its power to conceal the growing unrest in Korea. Although Japan had absolute authority over the media in its own country and Korea, it was powerless when it came to the controlling the downtrodden, yet determined Koreans. The Korean National Independence Union, composed of two million people from a variety of backgrounds, declared the independence of Korea on March 1. This March 1st Movement carried enough momentum that it quickly consumed Korea. As the rallies for

independence continued to grow, the Japanese police force could not control the crowd. In a state of panicked frenzy, Japanese officials called for military forces to help in extinguishing the processions. Ultimately, the Japanese turned to brutal violence and other atrocities in attempts to suppress the Korean people. People were herded into buildings, which were locked and then burned to the ground. Protesters were shot and killed. Leaders were arrested, tortured, and executed. Park Eunsik's *The Bloody History of the Korean Independence Movement* reports that 7,509 people were killed and 15,849 were wounded during the demonstrations.

The Japanese government tried to sweep the events of the March 1st Movement under the rug by heightening suppression of political dissent and dismissing the movement as a “public disorder incident”, but by then, the effects of the movement had already settled. The March 1st movement was a cataclysmic event that provided more momentum for the Korean Independence Movement. The Japanese government tried to suppress and hunt down Korean activists and leaders, but they fled to Shanghai where they persisted in their activities and established the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea. Japan had tried to quell the March 1st Movement, but the drive of the Korean people was too much for it to handle. Japan may have had the military might and political power, but in the true spirit of the underdog, the Korean people were able to peacefully demonstrate and declare their grievances against all odds, while the Japanese government desperately resorted to atrocious acts of violence.

Although some argue that the March 1st Movement failed in the respect that it was eventually extinguished, the movement has had its lasting influences in other areas of the world. The peaceful nature of the March 1st Movements heavily influenced

nonviolent resistance movements in India and other countries in which political dissent was occurring. The March 1st Movement goes to show that violence does little to resolve issues. Rest assured, the many innocent lives that were taken away were not taken away in vain. We celebrate the March 1st Movement not only in memory of those who died to pave way to a brighter future for Korea, but also to remind ourselves and others that pure persistence prevails over petty desperation.