# NAKED POWER AND *THE CIVIL SPHERE*

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*The Civil Sphere* offers a bold and original thesis about the critically important role that civil societies play in Western democracies. Although I will challenge Alexander's thesis, it is important to state at the outset that *The Civil Sphere* is a valuable book packed with rich social histories, lively engagements with ancient and contemporary theories, and novel interpretations. There is much to be learned here about the historic and sociological nature of racial, gender, and ethnic oppressions, and the struggles waged to overthrow them. This book makes an excellent case why social scientists and humanists should undertake serious study of civil society.

In Alexander's (2006) view, the civil sphere has been neglected theoretically, empirically, and substantively by contemporary philosophers, humanists, and social scientists. This is a shame because the civil sphere is a powerful actor that significantly shapes the politics, stratification orders, economics, social movements, and all important dimensions of modern societies. Moreover, the civil sphere designates those persons who are considered worthy and deserving rights and selects those who are to be viewed as damaged goods not fully possessing democratic sensibilities. These designations correspond roughly to a society's stratification order.

This book pays particular attention to those aspects of the civil sphere that encompass structures of feelings, symbols, psychological identifications, and sympathies, which in turn, determine to a significant degree, who gets what, when, where, and how. While structural domination, instrumental power, brute force, and strategic thinking matter in modern democracies, they are, according to Alexander, less consequential than this structure of soft power nestled in the civil sphere. Alexander warns that to ignore the centrality of this sphere is to engage in faulty social science. Equally disturbing, if scholars fail to study and theorize the civil sphere, they miss the opportunity to harness a liberating force capable of providing an exit from the iron cage of oligarchic bureaucracies and other crippling structures of human domination. Thus, the inability to recognize and understand the civil sphere forces us to live inside an impoverished house of social science and human possibilities.

We owe Alexander an intellectual debt for directing attention to the civil sphere and its structure of feelings and cultural institutions that knit social actors into in and out groups, and provide that sense of "we-ness" and solidarity that is the essence of peoplehood. And if the civil sphere (and our understanding of it) holds the key that unlocks the door to human emancipation, we are deeply in Alexander's debt.

I am convinced by Alexander's argument that key aspects of the civil sphere have a significant impact on social life. To be sure, solidarities that are able to bind members of

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a society together across class, racial, gender, religious, ethnic, and regional boundaries are important pillars of social stability. Moreover, symbolic and emotional attachments that enable disparate individuals to see and treat others as sisters and brothers promote collegiality and decrease destructive conflict. Such shared identifications create fertile grounds for the growth of democracy. But I do not believe that the civil sphere, as crafted by Alexander, can be found in real societies. Alexander's civil sphere has awesome power; it can pull myriad social strings and relegate rival societal spheres to subordinate position. Alexander's portrait has limited utility because it cannot be mapped onto social reality.

*The Civil Sphere* underemphasizes the role that political, economic, and social power play in modern democracies. While Alexander acknowledges the importance of such power, he leaves it unanalyzed in his haste to establish the enormous significance of cultural power embedded in civil society. Rather than analyze various types of interactive powers arrayed across multiple social spheres, Alexander minimizes the insights of those scholars who concentrate on instrumental power exercised in the political and economic realms rather than the soft power of civil society. I think we need to keep instrumental power at center stage (where it belongs) while we acknowledge the reciprocal power across spheres.

Alexander claims that the civil sphere has no rival because all others spheres including the state, family, religion, and the economy are driven by noncivil, antidemocratic, particularistic values. I will argue that this is inaccurate because other social spheres house certain civil values as well, and that noncivil, particularistic values are also foundational components of civil society. This overlap of social spheres is important, because if other spheres share civil properties and the civil sphere shares noncivil properties, then it does not automatically follow that the latter has a monopoly on civil power.

Social movements are crucial to Alexander's argument because he attributes great power to them to expand or deflate the membership and power of civil society. Yet, his theoretical approach to movements I will argue, largely robs them and their participants of the ability to actually generate the power to make change. For Alexander, social movements are effective only if they persuade actors in the civil sphere to psychologically identify with movement participants and then mobilize powerful civil and state actors to intervene on behalf of the movement. In this approach, social movements can only be effective if they can mobilize powerful institutional actors, who then supply the direct agency necessary to achieve change.

Applying this logic, Alexander reanalyzes the American Civil Rights Movement. He claims that this movement could not produce the direct power to make changes in the racial order. Rather, that power became available only after the black movement convinced northern white liberals to identify psychologically with blacks. Once such psychological alignment was enacted, sympathetic white liberals situated in the civil sphere provided the influence that convinced power holders to enact racial changes.

This explanation of the success of the civil rights movement is as inaccurate today as it was 20 years ago when I first argued against it. Despite Alexander's claims, his "new" interpretation of the movement is old wine which I thought had vanished from the

vineyards a quarter century ago (Morris 1984, 1993). But Alexander has repackaged the old argument and put it in new bottles stored on the racks of his civil sphere. Like analysts of a previous generation (Lipsky 1968; Garrow 1978; McAdam 1983; Barkan 1984), he places the primary agency of change in the hands of whites. But he is wrong. The black masses generated real economic and political leverage, and that power served as the primary direct force of social change. Additionally, this multidimensional black agency moved actors in state as well as civil spheres, demonstrating that the spheres are mutually interactive. That is, this example illustrates both the lack of primacy of the civil sphere and the dynamic overlap between civil society and other spheres.

## CORE ARGUMENT

Let us consider *The Civil Sphere's* core arguments. Alexander writes, "Civil society is conceived here as a sphere or subsystem of society that is analytically and, to various degrees, empirically separated from the spheres of political, economic, family, and religious life" (p. 53). Civil society is a solidary sphere characterized by a universalizing community where people's relations are driven by democratic discourse, civility, honesty, openness, constructive criticism, and mutual respect. Embedded in this sphere is a structure of feelings that provides members with a deep sense of connectedness, shared feelings, and symbolic commitments that engenders mutual identifications uniting people across class, race, religion, ethnic, race, and gender divisions. In this space both individual rights and collective obligations are fiercely protected. The civil sphere is an oasis of democratic values and solidaristic bonds sustained by a set of communicative and regulatory institutions. It is surrounded by noncivil and particularistic spheres including the state, economy, family, religion, and community. Democratically speaking, the civil sphere is superior because, "in terms of the normative mandates established by democratic societies, it is the civil sphere of justice that trumps every other" (p. 34).

Throughout his analysis, Alexander makes clear that civil societies are deeply divided, riddled with contradictions, and fragmented. Its members often use an anti-democratic discourse to exclude groups by labeling them civilly incompetent. In this manner, particular races, ethnicities, gender, and classes can be discriminated against and locked out. Thus, the civil sphere is forever incomplete because it is always fragmented. But, according to Alexander, the civil sphere provides the tools for its own democratic recalibration. It can always be repaired by social movements, which use the values and civil discourses of the civil sphere to root out that sphere's contradictions and expand its reach.

## *THE CIVIL SPHERE* AND REALITY

Does this model of the civil sphere correspond to social reality? To what extent is the civil sphere actually civil? Despite all of Alexander's warnings that the civil sphere is riddled with contradictions, inequalities, and fragmentations, he largely treats civil defects as exogenous factors flowing from noncivil spheres into the civil sphere. In his view,

racism, sexism, classism, ethnic discrimination, and other inequalities invade the civil sphere and distort and pollute its pure democratic qualities. But in reality, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, religious bigotry, and ethnic purity are also constitutive pillars of civil societies. That which is constitutive does not intrude; does not distort; does not pollute; and is not transferred in; racism, sexism, class domination, and ethnic cleansing are foundational pillars of the civil sphere, rather than uninvited and despicable guests. Alexander's conceptual logic pushes him to treat these factors as exogenous because, if they are constitutive, they decrease the distance between noncivil and civil spheres. Constitutive defects are not in need of repair but transformation.

Alexander's flawed analysis can be illustrated by scrutinizing those institutions that he conceptualizes as communicative and regulatory, and which are therefore crucial elements of the civil sphere. Communicative institutions are the mass media, public opinion, polls, and civic associations. Voting, political parties and the office are the regulatory institutions of civil societies. Communicative institutions are responsible for producing, crystallizing, broadcasting, and articulating the civil sphere's structure of feeling. They broadcast interpretations emanating from the civil sphere and direct them back and forth between various spheres. Regulatory institutions enforce the will of the civil sphere through concrete instruments, including elections and laws that codify and regulate social behavior.

Empirically, it has to be asked, is the essence of political parties the pursuit of civil virtues, as Alexander claims, or is it the pursuit of instrumental power as Weber has argued? Are elections largely driven by civil values or are they driven by the interests of those who pay millions of dollars to get politicians elected? Is the essence of the mass media its activities on behalf of civil values or the interests of its upper class owners and advertisers? Most significantly, Alexander ascribes a huge positive role for media nurturing social movements, yet he ignores the work of scholars (Molotch 1979; Gitlin 1980; Gamson 2001) who show that the relationships between media and movements are highly variable because of conflicting interests. The use of media by movements represents attempts of nonestablishment enterprises seeking to realize their interests through the use of an establishment institution. The nature of the framing used by media to portray movements constitutes the crux of the tensions between media and movements. Such framing is often rooted in the preconceptions and biases of media owners and decision makers. The larger point is that the institutions that Alexander assigns to the civil sphere—at least—have their feet planted solidly in instrumental power. They may, at times, be a force for democracy or for democratic values, but they are also, at times, forces for racism, sexism, and all the other antidemocratic forces swimming in the sea of civil society.

I turn to the contrapositive: that extent to which civil values are monopolized by the civil sphere. If Alexander is right, scholars and political actors should turn their attention to the civil sphere because therein lies the only viable route toward justice. But we know that families, schools, and religious institutions play early and critical roles in socializing the young and that a significant part of that socialization is the inculcation of civil norms.

Alexander's analysis of black society, its politics, and the civil rights movement, claims that all of these have been driven by the universalistic values of both the black and national civil spheres. Thus, if black leaders are to be successful, they must be skilled at manipulating the symbols of the secular faith of America's civil society. Yet, numerous scholars of the black community (DuBois 1898; Frazier 1964; Morris 1984; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Harris 1999) have demonstrated that black politics and social movements have been driven largely by the universalistic norms and discourse of black religion. Even in the quotes from black leaders offered by Alexander, religious values and orientations are stressed simultaneously with those of civil society. Often, those religious orientations are expressed even more frequently and prominently. Alexander highlights the civil values while ignoring the role of religious values in spurring black collective action. This example alone casts an impressive shadow of doubt on Alexander's claim that the civil sphere reigns supreme in marshalling civil values.

But the most audacious claim of *The Civil Sphere* is that in modern societies civil power has become a real contender for the dominant center of power. Here Alexander seeks to fry big fish, arguing that civil power has surpassed bureaucratic, economic, military, and political power in significance in highly democratic societies. On this point Alexander claims:

> How can the most powerful material and organizational force in modern society—the bureaucratic state—be controlled by solidary institutions of such manifestly lesser force? . . . To the degree that there is an independent civil sphere, the people "speak," not only through the *communicative* institutions that provide cultural authority, but through *regulative* institutions as well. The civil community regulates access to state power. To do so, it constitutes a new and different kind of power of its own. To the degree that society is democratic, to that degree regulatory institutions are the gatekeepers of political power. It is civil power that opens and closes the gate. (Pp. 108–110)

Alexander has constructed a formidable conceptual structure, which argues that the whole tradition of power analyses stretching back to Thrasymachus, Marx, Weber, Michels, and C. Wright Mills are no longer applicable to modern societies. He argues that this has transpired because a unique civil sphere with its own logic, dynamics, and institutions has sprouted up in parliamentary democracies. Rather than being driven by naked economic and political power, these societies are now fueled by new hegemonic democratic feelings and discourses. This new power permeates all organs of modern societies including social movements.

Having raised some challenging issues with Alexander's overall approach, I turn now to showing how the civil rights movement, contrary to Alexander's claims, generated instrumental power that was crucial in toppling Jim Crow. I do agree that civil power played a role in the success of the movement, but I do not believe it was as determinative as claimed by Alexander. Our disagreements are basic: We have different views about what movements are, how they conduct business, and what accounts for their success and failure. Our respective analyses of the civil rights movement will reveal these more general differences.

## CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND CIVIL SPHERE

For Alexander, the basic purpose of this movement was not the overthrow of Jim Crow. Rather, the movement's goal was to repair the destructive racial distortion that southern racial inequality caused in America's civil sphere. His is not an account about how thousands of local black communities organized themselves through their institutions and culture into a powerful mass movement that produced the power that brought down Jim Crow. Movements, in Alexander's view, cannot do such a thing; they only influence and persuade rather than exercise power.

Thus, for Alexander, the power to overthrow Jim Crow rested squarely in the hands of elite northern white liberals situated in the civil sphere. He argues that their actions convinced powerful state actors to enact racial change. The movement's job was to develop tactics and strategies that were defined largely by their possibility of gaining the attention and sympathies of the northern white community. Mobilization, in his account, is not about a movement assembling the material and cultural resources and developing creative strategies to confront and overthrow an enemy with superior power who will beat, jail, starve, and kill to maintain power.

For Alexander, in order to be effective, the Civil Rights Movement had to skillfully use civil discourse and provoke grotesque human tragedies to spur white members of the civil sphere to identify psychologically with oppressed blacks. Thus the major challenge of the movement was a translation problem: A communicative process had to be created that would enable the movement to grab and hold the attention of the northern white civil sphere. Communicative mobilization was the key. The central institution in Alexander's account was not the black church, but northern media and its northern white reporters. This logic is captured in Alexander's introductory comment: "We will begin our explanation of the Civil Right movement with the white journalists who worked for progressive newspapers and magazines" (p. 295).

But how could the movement entice white media to glue its attention to the black struggle, thus triggering action in the civil sphere? In this account, the prince of peace, Martin Luther King, Jr. and movement leaders hit upon the answer: stage explosive confrontations with racist segregationists who then could be counted on to beat demonstrators into a bloody pulp and even blow off some heads with shotguns. King is portrayed as the master manipulator, expert at provoking violence, and as the chief advertiser of uncivilized southern violence to the northern civil sphere. King is projected so prominently in this role that Alexander's analysis borders on a great man explanation of the movement.

According to Alexander, this communicative mobilization worked. Black demonstrators, including small children, were severely beaten, attacked by dogs, and crushed by water hoses in Birmingham in 1963, while the cameras and pens of northern white reporters broadcast the noncivil dastardly acts back to the northern civil sphere. In Selma in 1965 it happened again, when demonstrators were viciously attacked as reporters broadcast images of their gaping wounds back to the northern civil sphere. This time a few murders, including several whites from the northern civil sphere, embellished the process.

Victory! Northern whites' civil sensibilities stumbled with each blow and cringed with each drop of blood. White shame and guilt led them to pity the unfortunate blacks and transfer their very beings into black shoes. As they became one with blacks, the psychological identification was complete. As their civil sensibilities became mobilized, northern whites organized themselves against the noncivil sensibilities of southern white oppressors and prodded powerful state actors, whose civil consciousness had already been pricked by the movement, to act and pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. These measures enabled southern blacks to take their seat at the table of civility. Jim Crow fell, and Alexander was sure why: "The movement had succeeded only because, over many years, journalists committed to repairing civil society had continually translated the movement's normative pleading into the language of realistic description" (p. 366).

Before discussing particular movement dynamics, I will state some general conceptual differences between Alexander's account and my own. First, I argue that movements can generate transformative power through protest that causes political, economic, and social disorder. Such disorder can serve as the leverage to exact change from power holders. Second, in terms of race during the civil rights era, Alexander stresses regional differences attributing actual and potential civil virtues to northern white liberals capable of transforming race relations. By contrast, I see regional differences as minimum given that Jim Crow practices originated in the North (Woodward 1974) and deeply affected northern racial inequality during the civil rights era. Racial segregation and discrimination kept blacks at the bottom of northern racial hierarchies. This dichotomized regional framework led Alexander to ignore crucial factors affecting movement outcomes.

Such regional formulations ignore shared class interests between southern and northern upper class whites. They shared corporate interests often jointly owning corporations whose southern branches were characterized by Jim Crow segregation and discrimination. They jointly embraced southern Jim Crow practices because those practices deflated workers' wages by driving a wedge between black and white workers, preventing cross racial unionization (McWhorter 2001).

A great irony of Alexander's regional approach is that it prevents him from discovering that the majority of journalists providing the lion's share of media coverage of the civil rights movement were in fact southern white liberals (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). These southern journalists broke from the segregationist values of their region and exhibited an independent spirit as they covered the movement. This is not a story about the northern civil sphere, but one about southern liberalism and the roots that produced it.

Another casualty of this dichotomized regional approach is the complete absence of the Cold War as a factor affecting the outcome of the Civil Rights Movement. As recent scholarship has shown (Dudziak 2000; Layton 2000), the Cold War provided crucial leverage for civil rights efforts aimed at overthrowing Jim Crow. Following World War II, up through the 1960s, the federal government was extremely vulnerable to racial protest, given its aspirations to position America over the Soviet Union as the world's great superpower.

The view that the North was far more progressive and rooted in a stronger civic sphere leads Alexander to another major oversight. Namely, blacks responded to northern racism by organizing civil rights movements that paralleled those in the South rather than following them with riots and black power. Alexander ignores a whole body of recent scholarship (Biondi 2003; Countryman 2005; Whitaker 2005) that is rewriting the historiography of the movement, clearly revealing its national scope. These northern movements ignored by Alexander figured prominently in the outcome of the southern movements.

There are differences between how Alexander and I analyze media coverage of the movement. Because Alexander views journalism "as a profession that is an underemphasized political domain of democratic practice" (Alexander, e-mail to author, April 11, 2007), he emphasizes what he believes to be transformative coverage of the movement by a handful of northern white reporters. He characterizes them as critical agents who helped the northern white world facilitate the transformation of northern civil power into political power that led to the overthrow of Jim Crow. As previously mentioned, the majority of reporters who covered the movement were southern journalists who had the advantages of better understanding southern racism, of being able to access important southern networks in both black and white communities, and, because of their ability to blend in with the locals, of being able to be closer to the action (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006; Roberts 2007).

Because I see the media as representing both pro-democratic and antidemocratic forces, I also emphasize how national media coverage impeded movement goals. The media used a narrow "racial disturbance" frame in its coverage of the movement, which led to covering events where violence was likely and to equate both protesters and white mobs as violence prone. As Pat Watters, a southern liberal, white journalist explained, the media were "looking everywhere for violence and headlining the rare 'fistfight' journalists labeled protest 'racial disturbance,'" which obscured "the fact that Blacks almost invariably absorbed White violence" (Jackson 2007:113). While emphasizing violence, white journalists usually ignored movement messages extolling nonviolence, white and black brotherhood, and other civil messages. Such coverage frustrated black civil rights leaders including King who complained bitterly about the press's obsession with violence. Moreover, when elites of the press disagreed with movement goals and activities, they either failed to cover the movement or criticized leaders in print for the choices they made. The full story is that media coverage simultaneously hindered and promoted the goals of the movement, because its institutional features were mired in both antidemocratic and pro-democratic tendencies. I now turn to concrete movements dynamics.

In my view, the goal of the Civil Rights Movement was for southern blacks to overthrow Jim Crow. Black leaders recognized racial segregation as a blight upon American democracy, but their immediate goal was securing freedom for their communities, not repairing the northern white civil sphere. My account is about how thousands of local blacks were organized, using both their institutions and culture, into a powerful mass movement that generated the power that toppled Jim Crow. The central actors in

this story are southern and northern black people, their institutions, creative culture, and their capacity to mobilize for change. It is about the strategies and tactics they devised to overthrow a regime of racial apartheid, rather than merely about an effort to communicate to outside audiences who could do it for them. The northern media was certainly important, for it enabled the movement to cast a national and global light on black oppression and the sacrifices made by the movement to overthrow it. The Supreme Court, Executive Branch of government, Congress, and judges were also important, for they would be central to producing legislation outlawing racial discrimination.

But in the final analysis, overthrowing Jim Crow required a black movement capable of generating real power. Following Weber, by power I mean the movement had to create the leverage to realize its own will despite fierce resistance from the South's powerful racist regime. It had to create the leverage to force the national government to pass federal legislation prohibiting Jim Crow despite the government's concerns for law and order and offending the southern white power structure. The strategy to achieve this end was nonviolent direct action, designed to cause a breakdown in social order, a breakdown in the functioning of the economic and political institutions in the South. But to achieve such power, thousands of people had to be mobilized to face violence, jail, beatings, and even death. For scholars of movements, it is crucial to analyze such mobilization, because it is extremely difficult to achieve and sustain. Beyond this mobilization challenge, the movement had to creatively devise effective tactics to generate massive social disruption, despite the best efforts of the opposition to prevent it. Mobilization and tactical matters consumed the efforts of nightly mass meetings and frequent all-night strategy sessions, all designed to create and sustain "nonviolent disruption." The northern civil sphere was a secondary issue for these demonstrators, because they had to make immediate choices about being fired, about the possibility of their family homes being bombed, and about whether accomplishing the goals of the movement outweighed the possibility of longevity.

How could such massive mobilization and tactical innovation be crafted to achieve movement goals? A cultural discourse far dearer than that of the northern civil sphere, and cherished institutions far more intimate than the northern media, were needed to achieve the mobilizational requirements of the movement. This is where the historic black church, its traditions, and culture entered the picture. Embedded in the church was a religious discourse that expressed the values of the black masses through preaching, oratory, music, prayers, testimonies, emotionally stirring meetings, and charismatic clergy. At the heart of that discourse was a fundamental universalizing principle: All human beings are God's children deserving freedom and justice. Out of this black institution came the human power that would be the primary force to overthrow Jim Crow.

Let us see whether it worked. As the movement developed, the black masses took the fight directly to the oppressor rather than leapfrogging them as claimed by Alexander. Through mass marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and other methods, the black masses disrupted businesses, segregated buses, downtown streets, libraries, segregated parks, bridges, white churches, swimming pools, and even jails, by filling them up. As this disruption mounted,

the black masses and their leaders were fueled by music, prayers, and sermons of their religious sphere that cried out that familiar religious theme: "Pharaoh, let my people *go!*"

However, these nonviolent protests generated another source of disruptive power. Significant numbers of local black people, who were not part of the disciplined nonviolent movement but either witnessed or saw white segregationists savagely attack nonviolent protesters on television, were willing to engage in violent confrontations with the white opposition (Piven and Cloward 1992; Jackson 2007). At times they actually engaged in such violence, but more often such violence was barely held in check by nonviolent leaders and social control agents. The nonviolent movement started the rebellion, but once that genie was out of the bottle, all methods of resistance were up for grabs. Major bloodbaths were narrowly averted in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1961 when James Meredith integrated Ole Miss, in 1963 during Medgar Evers's funeral, and in Birmingham during the 1963 confrontations, and during numerous other confrontations. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations were acutely aware of the likelihood of tremendous violence, because they were receiving reports from their field marshals, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, and even segregationist officials with whom they were negotiating. Thus it was both nonviolent and violent protests—especially the ever-present threat of violent race riots—that helped to create the social disorder that worried the federal government and destroyed peaceful business climates on which capitalists relied for their profits.

Civil rights protests in the South and North deeply threatened the shared economic interests of northern and southern white capitalists. This was apparent as early as the 1960 student sit-ins, because establishments such as Woolworth's and Kress were national chains. As a result, "Often students managed to shut down the stores themselves, and Black communities organized pickets and boycotts. Northern activists staged sympathy sit-ins and pickets" (Jackson 2007:112). This national economic disruption caused by protest would only intensify and help bring Jim Crow down, but its potency escapes Alexander's media-centered framework.

Even in the late 1950s, black protests were creating a foreign policy nightmare for the federal government, which was then overseeing the Cold War and preaching the virtues of American democracy to developing nations. Research (Layton 2000; Dudziak 2000) has shown that the 1954 Brown Decision was rendered in part because of Cold War concerns. Similarly, Cold War pressures led the racially conservative President Eisenhower in 1957 to send in the National Guard to integrate Little Rock Central High School, because the demonstrations were counterproductive to America's Cold War aspirations. By the 1960s, Cold War victories were becoming more important goals of the federal government than maintaining Jim Crow, while civil rights protests were digging its grave. Even though media coverage was crucial in this dance between the Cold War and black protests, Alexander fails to capture the enormous impact that protests had on the Cold War and the overthrow of Jim Crow because of his preoccupation with the northern civil sphere and northern white liberals.

The transformative power of protest would reach its zenith in Birmingham and Selma. In Birmingham in 1963, the movement caused a total breakdown in social order.

Because of nonviolent demonstrations and the threat of bloody riots, capitalists could not make money, politicians could not govern, and police could not maintain law and order. Commerce ground to a halt because of impassable streets, while local racial tensions derailed white comfort. When order broke down, it was Birmingham's business elites who reached a settlement with movement leaders to end segregation. Birmingham's local capitalists who historically had supported racial segregation to keep control of black and white workers reached the accord because of the collapse of local profits, because of the pressure placed on them by their northern capitalist brothers who co-owned local businesses, and because of pressure from the Kennedy administration. They did so on the condition that the movement would halt demonstrations, thus allowing social order and profits to return.

But it would take additional protests beyond Birmingham to force the Federal Government to enact legislation aimed at overthrowing Jim Crow. Thousands of protest demonstrations were held throughout America following the Birmingham confrontation. Here it is important to understand that these demonstrations with mammoth crowds usually emerged from cities outside the South where civil rights movements were already underway. Indeed, as Jackson wrote, "a truly mass movement had emerged nationwide, incorporating thousands of working class Africans pursuing a broad agenda" (Jackson 2007:167). Unnoticed by Alexander, significant numbers of northern whites participated in these protests, adding to the political muscles of the movement. In some of these confrontations, blacks made it known that they were prepared to fight back.

All of this national unrest moved President Kennedy to act. He addressed the nation, promising national legislation to overthrow Jim Crow that would become the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Kennedy acknowledged the power which had brought about the change: "The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them. The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives. . . . It is a time to act" (Kennedy 1963). Kennedy knew the race problem and disorder caused by protests was not merely a southern problem: "This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety" (Kennedy 1963). He also acknowledged the relationship between protest and the Cold War: "We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is the land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or caste system, no ghettoes, no master race except with respect to Negroes" (Kennedy 1963).

In 1965 during the breakdown of social order in Selma, President Johnson also acknowledged the power of protest at a press conference. Birmingham's Governor, George Wallace, seeking to escape the heat of social disorder, asked the President when

the demonstrations would end. Johnson, knowing that the power was not in his hands to end demonstrations, responded that they could not be stopped until blacks were granted the franchise. As with Birmingham, hundreds of protests were organized in support of the Selma movement throughout the nation. Ten thousand marched in Detroit behind King. Fifteen thousand marched in Harlem (Jackson 2007:223). Indeed, the power of protest was evident in the North and even at Johnson's press conference which prompted a reporter to ask him, "Mr President, how do you feel about the demonstrations that are going on outside the White House right now, or in other parts, in other cities of the United States, and in front of federal buildings?" (Johnson 1965). Johnson revealed how he felt about demonstrations, because on March 15, 1965, in the midst of national protests, the President "announced his voting rights' legislation on national television . . . proclaiming, 'We shall overcome' " (Jackson 2007:223).

## CONCLUSIONS

Media coverage played an important role in exposing southern racism to the nation and the world. Such coverage led significant numbers of whites to be educated and shocked by the racist treatment southern blacks experienced daily. This coverage, especially of peaceful blacks being attacked, also educated many blacks, prompting some to leave the sidelines and join the struggle.

Alexander and analysts before him are right to emphasize how violence unleashed on civil rights activists upset some northern whites who then pressured the Federal Government to make racial changes. They are also right that modern media with its advanced technologies were able to convey the undemocratic treatment of blacks to millions with speed and clarity. Letters from white individuals and public statements by powerful white elites provide evidence that media coverage led some to pressure government to make change. I am less certain that media coverage led whites to deeply identify psychologically with blacks or that such identification was crucial to the overthrow of Jim Crow. I am also skeptical about the claim that it was the values of the northern civil sphere that were the dominant triggers that kindled the sensibilities of northern whites to seek change. I suspect that family, educational, and especially religious values were equally potent in creating desires for change.

It is clear that media coverage was crucial in the interaction between protest and Cold War politics that figured significantly in the federal government's decision to oppose Jim Crow. But all the media coverage would have meant nothing if blacks had not been able to mobilize and sustain a national movement that disrupted the political, economic, and social functioning of the society, thus creating the primary leverage for change. What we need now are analyses that integrate insights about how symbols and psychological states rooted in various spheres combine with strategic power dynamics of movements to produce change. My analyses suggest that the disruptive capacity of a movement is the primary change force, but that such force can be buttressed by the movement's ability to attract media coverage that assists in mobilizing the jarred sensibilities of disparate groups to join the movement in its efforts to achieve change.

I also believe that it is crucial for scholars to take a critical approach toward media coverage of movements. It is important for us to understand why major media refused to publish King's civil-oriented *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and why initially they strongly opposed King leading a movement in that city in 1963. Why did the media become extremely critical of King both when he opposed the Vietnam War and when he called for a redistribution of wealth and income in America to alleviate widespread poverty? Such "radical" goals did not fit the narrow "racial disturbance" frame adopted by media executives to explain racial conflict to Americans during an era of turbulent confrontations and change. It must be asked why Howard K. Smith, Washington Bureau Chief at Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1961, was fired when he refused to operate within the narrow media framing that depicted nonviolent protesters and white mobs as moral equivalents?" (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006:252). And we must also ask to what extent the media is responsible for violence against the movement, given its obsession with covering violence to the neglect of pursuits consistent with values of the civil sphere?

If Alexander's explanation of the civil rights movement is off target, then perhaps his claim that civil power is now approaching dominance in modern democracies misses the mark as well. Stubborn social reality dictates that the power analyses of Thrasymachus, Marx, DuBois, Weber, and Mills cannot be so easily overthrown.

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