

More Than Laws: Redefining Success in Civil Disobedience

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of civil disobedience can be measured by its ability to achieve policy change, but what should *also* be taken into account is its ability to radicalize public consciousness and reveal systemic oppression. While John Rawls emphasizes legal reform and moral persuasion, this framework overlooks the impact that civil disobedience can have on individuals who become newly aware of discrimination and inequality.

Drawing from my personal reflections on the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, John Rawls's influential definition of civil disobedience as a public, nonviolent, conscientious act aimed at appealing to the "regular people's" sense of justice within a nearly just society is reworked by adding another dimension: radicalization. In this paper, I propose a revised definition of the effectiveness of civil disobedience, built on four core elements: nonviolence, clear goals, willingness to accept legal consequences, and the power to radicalize public consciousness. Traditional expectations of "civility" can silence marginalized groups and limit the transformative potential of protest. At the same time, it cautions against forms of disruption that become counterproductive and shift attention away from the underlying injustice.

Ultimately, this paper insists that civil disobedience serves not *only* as a mechanism for institutional reform but also as a process of awakening individuals to the realities of systemic oppression. Its greater success lies in making invisible inequalities visible and inspiring lasting changes in public consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

I watched the Black Lives Matter protests unfold in the spring of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, and initially saw a powerful and unified demand for justice. The movement spread through major cities such as Rochester and Philadelphia. The media interviewed participants, created podcasts, and more, demanding an end to police brutality. The Black Lives Matter movement engaged in civil disobedience. Rather than relying solely on permitted marches and speeches, participants actively and consciously broke specific laws to force the public conversation. Protestors intentionally occupied and blocked intersections, major highways, broke city curfews imposed by local governments, and staged

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disruptions by laying their bodies down in the street. They physically placed themselves in places they knew they were not supposed to be, causing conversations and economic halts. Because of the disruption, the activists successfully caused a non-violent crisis. These actions constituted civil disobedience because they were deliberate, public violations of law designed to challenge a much greater injustice.

Before this, I possessed a limited understanding of modern-day discrimination. Like many, I grew up viewing discrimination as a relic confined to history books. This belief stemmed not just from ignorance, but from a comfortable version of reality that shielded me from systemic unfairness. However, witnessing this resistance radicalized my perspective, not just in terms of racism, but in terms of other forms of discrimination such as sexism, classism, and homophobia; the list goes on. As an Indian female inspired by this resistance, I was encouraged to question persisting discrimination. I watched Americans poke fun at my parents' accents, a daily reminder that people unfairly doubted their intelligence. I noticed men refuse to listen to my ideas until a male peer backed mine; the list *again* goes on. These were not merely "rude" incidents but represented a deeper pattern of systemic bias woven into the citizens and government of society.

Existing accounts of civil disobedience are based on John Rawls' definition, which states that an effective civil disobedience movement consists of a public, nonviolent, conscientious, and political act contrary to law, usually targeting clear injustices in a nearly just society (for *contemporary* theories in politics).¹ His approach was influenced by movements led by Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Rawls appeals to the majority's ("regular people" who do not face any direct oppression) sense of justice and acts as a last resort when legal methods fail to address significant violations of justice.² However, Rawls's definition overlooks the personal transformation I experienced while witnessing the Black Lives Matter movement. Rawls' focus does not include the radicalizing potential of civil disobedience, an important aspect that affects many. My viewpoint differs because I believe civil disobedience movements should aim to communicate toward *minority* groups who remain unaware of the systemic oppression they face from dominant groups, rather than attempting to communicate toward the majority who do not directly face any oppression. These dominant groups could include but are not limited to: politicians, white people, males, and heterosexuals.

Civil disobedience plays a critical role in making unjust structures visible. It challenges those in power and exposes hidden discrimination to those who do not directly face it. Beyond these observations, I realized how deeply society had normalized discrimination. These experiences occurred so routinely that I initially overlooked them. Only exposure to broader discussions about systemic injustice made these patterns visible to me. This realization also changed how I interpret silence. What I once viewed as neutrality now appears more complex. In many cases, silence does not indicate a lack of opinion; rather, it could signal comfort within existing systems. My shift in awareness reflects the broader function of civil disobedience: to make the invisible visible. Without movements that disrupt these micro-aggressions, individuals like me would continue to view inequality as something other than systemic. I believe the effectiveness of civil disobedience should not be measured *solely* by immediate policy change, but also by

its ability to radicalize public consciousness, particularly among those who are unaware of the oppression.

Given that I believe effectiveness should also be measured by whether or not the movement has the potential to radicalize a public population or not, effectiveness should not be determined by media communication. Initially, the Black Lives Matter movement successfully brought global awareness to systemic racism in the United States. It led to more news coverage and conversations about racist patterns seen towards black individuals; however, this view quickly changed. As protests continued, violence emerged. A tiny percentage of protesters committed arson at the Minneapolis Police Third Precinct building, prompting the media to shift its focus in a total 180. I personally witnessed news outlets retract statements of empathy and adopt a different approach. Audiences stopped seeing positive headlines and instead encountered narratives of disorder and destruction. This shift introduced the “protest paradigm,” a concept where the media portrays social protests as disruptive to highlight reporter bias rather than the protesters' real message.³ Ultimately, this coverage undermined the movement's goal, decreased public sympathy, and tried to stereotype African-Americans as violent.

The protest paradigm influenced the way I saw this particular protest. It changed my view from: this protest is a movement that effectively reached and impacted me, to now seeing it as a prime example of when protests have strayed far away from the original message. It showed me how the protest now focused on defending itself from negative critics. This led me to wonder, how would it be possible to peacefully protest effectively? I would find the answer years later. It is difficult to avoid bias when dealing with reporters, media, or really anyone with a differing opinion. The effectiveness of civil disobedience in social change depends on maintaining the balance between challenging the status quo but still preserving public respect that acts as an awakening force for the public and oppressed to realize deep engraved oppression. Without this balance, civil disobedience risks becoming either ineffective or counterproductive. However, the protest paradigm is not the *single* determining force for a civil disobedience movement. After the protest paradigm has occurred, the media will portray protests in any way regardless of what the protestors do. So, if the message gets distorted anyway, then the protestors can disregard the negative comments and continue peacefully protesting. Media bias does not undo radicalization. I saw how nonviolence is important to avoid media bias. However, if violence had occurred, I was still able to understand complex conversations. The protest paradigm explains that it is important to go into a protest with a nonviolent mindset. However, if the protest finds itself victim to the protest paradigm, it is not a factor that should determine the outcome of a protest.

The atmosphere of the domino effect of emerging conversation after Black Lives Matter created a new sensitivity within myself and others. I argue that civil disobedience contains four core elements: nonviolence, clear goals, a willingness to accept responsibility for breaking the law, and the power to radicalize specific public consciousness. These elements define an effective movement. Although the Rawlsian definition builds on and includes the first 3 core elements, it is missing the last one. Which I believe is one of the most important to consider.

This paper explores a qualitative approach to political theory. It mainly develops its proposal through a

close and deep analysis of John Rawls' account on civil disobedience. This paper particularly engages with critics who disagree with certain Rawlsian strategies. These theoretical perspectives are considered alongside the 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement, which serves as an illustrative example, but not the only example. Through this analysis, the paper examines existing definitions of civil disobedience and proposes an expansion. Hoping that in the future, radicalization of public consciousness may also be considered as an additional measure of effectiveness. Rather than arguing against Rawls, I propose a new dimension that critics should consider, while still including Rawlsian components in my definition.

RAWLSIAN METHOD

John Rawls developed a foundational definition of civil disobedience mentioned earlier. Rawls deepens this definition by framing civil disobedience not just as a protest, but as a stabilizing act that helps to strengthen the democratic society. By being public and nonviolent, the protester acts as a citizen appealing to a common sense of justice held by the majority ("regular people" not facing any oppression). Those wielding power (lawmakers, politicians, and governors) are forced to respond and address these issues proposed by the active minority (facing oppression and participating in the protest) due to public pressure and the belief that fairness and equality should exist as the baseline of social cooperation.⁴

Rawls believes that civil disobedience is a last resort and a corrective measure for an "almost just society" that has developed systemic flaws separate from its own principles.⁵ This consensus relies on the heavy assumption that Rawls's government is reachable through moral appeal- specifically, that the protestor can reach an audience by targeting their internal sense of right and wrong. However, those in government or policy-making positions, might ignore a moral appeal if the protest disrupts their daily lives or challenges their grip on power. If the government bodies feel like *victims* of the protest rather than witnesses to injustice, they likely won't be reached by the moral message. If the government bodies were not reachable by moral appeal- if they were entirely motivated by self-interest or power- Rawls would argue that civil disobedience is no longer the right tool. In that case, the society would not be "almost just," and citizens might instead be justified in more radical forms of resistance or revolution.

My experience with the Black Lives Matter movement reveals a new dimension to be discussed in this Rawlsian logic. The Rawlsian take on civil disobedience being built on reaching the community through moral appeal does not account for when protests reach communities in other ways. Instead of mere persuasion, these movements reach a new audience by radically changing public consciousness. Instead of appealing to the majority who do not face direct oppression, the movement reaches a new audience and appeals to minorities facing oppression who are not aware they are facing it. Similar to the radicalization I underwent after the Black Lives Matter protests, this process is to a fundamental change in mentality and core principles. The goal of such movements is not mainly to confront those in power but to *also* awaken those unaware of systemic injustice.

This framework prioritizes the radicalization of minority consciousness as the foundational mechanism

for a broader systemic change. This focus does not imply that majority or general public radicalization is unimportant or impossible. In a flawed democracy, the dominant majority is not directly affected by similar experiences of marginalized groups, meaning widespread societal awakening cannot happen spontaneously. Instead, it requires the oppressed minority to undergo a collective shift, and build society. By focusing on minority radicalization, the marginalized groups gain the political leverage necessary to reach the broader public. With this, the minority stops seeking majority approval, which can limit success and force minorities to keep waiting for the “right time” (more on that later regarding Martin Luther King).

Rawlsian democratic logic explains effectiveness in a situation where the people in power are persuaded to act (by changing a law or correcting an injustice) by the protestors. For Rawls, since his situation occurs in a democratic sense, the success has to be in policy. It lacks the radicalization dimension because that would not be democratic. At its core, the purpose of civil disobedience is to communicate.⁶ It is to raise awareness and publicly voice dissent rather than being successful *only* when a law is changed. Rawls believes communication is a large part of civil disobedience movements, hence his emphasis on the “moral appeal.” This leaves the realization that he does not account for a radical change of mind as a valid method of communication alongside his traditional moral framework. By expanding Rawls’s definition to explicitly include this internal awakening, we do not counter his theory, rather, we fulfill his ultimate goal; working towards a well-ordered society based on principles of fairness.

While Rawls focuses on the legal consequences and the government response, he skips over the internal transformation that occurs when individuals recognize how systemic oppression (often directed at women, immigrants, and low-income groups) manifests as microaggressions in their own families. This shift in consciousness suggests that the movement’s primary audience should not be *solely* the “majority,” but including the minority groups who have internalized their own oppression. By communicating resistance toward the unaware, the movement achieves a separate goal: the radicalization of public consciousness against dominant groups. In this view effectiveness is measured by awakening, rather than Rawls’s goal of wanting everyone to agree on principles to improve current institutions.

Rawls further supports his theory by distinguishing civil disobedience from conscientious refusal. He defines this as a private, non-political act of noncompliance based on personal moral or religious beliefs.⁷ Conscientious refusal is not a direct political appeal; it is a declaration that an individual or group cannot keep going/comply. Conscientious refusal does not directly seek to change laws but simply to preserve individual integrity. Rawls closely ties together conscientious refusal and collective refusal. Although never using the terms “collective refusal,” he speaks of it indirectly with his definition of civil disobedience. Collective refusal is not conscientious refusal “just with widespread noncompliance.” The shift truly occurs with intent and communication. Collective refusal needs to be public and due to political beliefs rather than moral; this is when the shift occurs. Widespread collective refusal enforces solidarity and a sense of “coming together” the very sense I witnessed and felt in the Black Lives Matter movement. Although becoming radicalized is not “refusing” anything, when people slowly take a step closer to realizing discrimination in their daily lives, it could cascade into a domino effect leading to taking part in

collective refusal or civil disobedience.

Rawls justifies civil disobedience as a last resort to protect the stability of the constitution, warning that simultaneous uncoordinated protests risk undermining the rule of law. To prevent this, he demands that groups coordinate their efforts to ensure the principle of fairness, prioritizing a system of cooperation to prevent social fragmentation.⁸ This prevention of social fragmentation is incredibly important, as true social solidarity and a “coming togetherness” is exactly why the Black Lives Matter movement was able to reach me. While a superficial “stability” might favor a silent status quo where oppression is ignored, Rawls’s deeper vision of stability aligns with the secure, goal-oriented nature of movements like Black Lives Matter. Here, it is useful to distinguish between institutional stability- the mere order of government bodies- and a truly stable society, which relies on solidarity and “civility.” When viewed through this Rawlsian logic, the disruptive nature of simultaneous protest is not a threat to justice, but a way to align institutional order with true societal stability. Rawls’s framework can therefore be fortified by reframing civil disobedience not just as a transactional tool for legal reform, but as a mechanism for internal radicalization and the awakening of public consciousness. Accounting for internal radicalization as a valid metric of success provides a more inclusive definition of effectiveness.

CRITICS AND THINKERS DISCUSSION

John Rawls civil disobedience makes sense in a democratic and political sphere. Linda Zerilli believes Rawls frames civil disobedience as a tool only for stabilizing a nearly just democracy, and forgets to include the personal side. The concept of “self restraint” and “mutual respect” are key values of the political theorists. In an ideal society, one listens to another's proposals and arguments leading to compromise and negotiation; however this remains just an ideal.⁹ Zerilli refers to a theory by Joshua Cohen; civility as a political duty means making arguments in terms that are not restricted or limited, i.e. do not have moral or religious value.¹⁰ A pluralist democracy is one where power is spread and decisions are made through negotiation, which is directly related to deliberate democracy where decisions are made through careful discussion rather than just voting.¹¹ Deliberate democrats have recognized that groups have violated civility norms, and that perfect outcomes are ideals. However the deliberate democratic approach can oversimplify complex issues. The problem is not lack of information but lack of effective ways to process it.

To understand the nature of public reason, Zerilli contrasts the perspectives of John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum. Rawls asserts that publicly claiming one's own moral or religious views are “correct” is inherently unreasonable. He believes this is because any opposing group could make the exact same claim.¹² Similarly, Nussbaum argues that political reforms must begin by acknowledging the reality of reasonable disagreement among citizens. Rawls proposes the concept of an “overlapping consensus.” This framework suggests that individuals holding entirely different beliefs (whether religious, ethical, or philosophical) can still collectively agree on a singular, shared conception of political justice. This political conception is strictly “freestanding,” meaning it does not rely on any specific metaphysical

beliefs.¹³ Nussbaum explains his frustration with foundational political texts, such as the United States Declaration of Independence or the Indian Constitution. Both documents explicitly invoke theological concepts, referencing "God" and "self-evident truths."¹⁴ For political liberals, this reliance on metaphysics violates the "method of avoidance," the philosophical principle that offensive language must not be used in respect for all groups.¹⁵

As a result, the Rawlsian "duty of civility" is fundamentally about politics rather than politeness. It demands that dissent be understood within values that support life, liberty, and general welfare. This causes activists to remain open, accommodating, and ready to listen to their *oppressors*. Zerilli exposes the inherent problems of this framework: these parameters of "civility" and public reason function as tools to silence marginalized groups. By forcing protestors to conform their resistance into a box that the privileged dominant group finds acceptable, it is no longer achieving what it originally wanted. Rawls assumes a shared moral baseline born from an almost-just society. However, when a government or cultural institution is inherently oppressive, this universally agreed-upon baseline of "values" does not exist. Therefore, the duty of civility falls short, making the radicalization of the audience's consciousness one of the only reasonable objectives. Ultimately, Zerilli's critique concludes that the Rawlsian framework works in a democratic society, but can be controversial when challenged with any dissent between individuals trying to maintain civility.

Alexander Livingston is another critic of the Rawlsian definition, but specifically in the context of Mohandas Gandhi. Rawls interprets Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha* (which translates to "holding firmly of truth" in English) into a legal tool aiming for political reform. Instead of what Gandhi originally believed it was; a radical and spiritual challenge of the fundamentals in the government, rather than simply improving laws. Specifically, the difference between "fidelity to law" vs "fidelity to truth." Rawls' fidelity to law refers to one's willingness and ability to accept consequences for a law broken while participating in civil disobedience, as he says below:

"This fidelity to law helps to establish to the majority that the act is indeed politically conscientious and sincere, and that it is intended to address the public's sense of justice."¹⁶

This concept of fidelity to the law only works in the condition of an almost just society. On the assumption government bodies can be reached by persuasion and are generally reasonable, assuming government bodies act in good faith *all the time*. However, this once again brings up the dimension; if the government institution is inherently oppressive, then the main goal is to radicalize the public consciousness *first*. Gandhi's fidelity to truth refers to an ethical lifelong practice that targets the moral conscience of the unaware, and seeks to break an illusion. Gandhi's view is similar but also contrasts mine. It is similar because it is also a radicalization in consciousness. However, it contrasts because Gandhi wanted to stray away from Western ideals completely- a spiritual and mental "cleansing."¹⁷ Gandhi essentially believed the only way to rid British impact would be to entirely "change" rather than "fix." While I believe the people do not need to stray away from any particular side, but rather "wake" up and see the oppression in a big-picture. Livingston notes Gandhi's view that civil disobedience is a transformative project aimed at reshaping subjects/people rather than merely changing laws.¹⁸ The

democratically-focused Rawlsian definition works in the context of politics in an almost-just society, but when regarding the personal side, it requires more deep analysis. Gandhi and Livingston's critiques help explain that a more active approach needs to be taken during civil disobedience, rather than a "wait til the policy changes" approach that Rawls' protestors look for. When in context for radicalization, an active approach could be useful when convincing bystanders to join a protest.

To further add onto the Rawlsian model, one must examine Martin Luther King Jr who heavily inspired Rawls's definition. In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, King expresses deep disappointment with the "white moderate." The white moderate is an individual who prioritizes "order" over justice.¹⁹ They are not driven by hatred, but rather by a deeply comfortable desire for social peace and personal calm. Because these individuals prioritize their own uninterrupted lifestyle, they become entirely unreachable through standard Rawlsian persuasion. Rawls's theory assumes that the government bodies are reachable and reasonable, not accounting for the fact that privileged groups often become entirely unreachable due to their own interest in the status quo. The white moderate delays liberation, constantly advising the marginalized to wait for a "more convenient season."²⁰ This helps support Zerilli's critique: the marginalized are forced to wait and conform to the traditional, comfortable standards of privileged non-protestors which limits efficiency of the protest. King highlights a second internal obstacle: those within the oppressed community who have become comfortable with their own ignorance, or who receive benefits from remaining silent.²¹ The privileged individuals benefit from the existing status quo, they will never find a convenient time to disrupt their own comfort. These exact groups (the comfortably ignorant) are the true targets that civil disobedience must bring into awareness. Individuals who exist in a state of comfortable ignorance must be brought to confront the systemic oppression faced by their own minorities. Even unaware bystanders benefit indirectly from their refusal to acknowledge systemic oppression.

Finally, Judy Rohrer builds on similar concerns and argues that compulsory civility can silence minority groups but she focuses on a new approach which is interesting to consider when contrasting an almost-just society to an inherently oppressive one. This section has focused on writers whose definitions are similar to Rawls, however Rohrer takes a different directive and more firm stance on making (un)civil disobedience a necessary tool for achieving social justice.²² In her work, particularly in the context of university settings, Rohrer takes a look at how there have been many instances where what is considered "civil" has been defined by those in power to suppress dissent and maintain existing systemic power. Rohrer introduces the concept of compulsory civility. Which refers to the expectation that individuals must adhere to norms of politeness in order to be heard.²³ This take affects marginalized groups unevenly. She uses many examples in the United States where marginalized groups were forced to lessen their arguments to appeal to the people in power (similar to Zerilli). Rohrer believes uncivil disobedience can be a necessary and effective way to achieve justice and believes solidarity between staff, faculty, and students is necessary.²⁴ Solidarity within the people is an important uniting force kick-starting radicalization. When uncivil disobedience is disrespectful on purpose, it can be violent. She believes the goal is justice for all, and that sometimes unconventional tactics are necessary in order to achieve this. However, Rohrer's framework tends to prioritize disruption without fully addressing its potential consequences. While uncivil disobedience can draw attention, it can also lead to the dilution of a

movement. As seen in the Black Lives Matter movement, the presence of aggressive or violent actions- regardless of how representative and justified they are- can shift public focus away from the message to the behavior. This can reinforce negative stereotypes and reduce public support, ultimately undermining the movement's goals. In addition, Rohrer's emphasis on achieving "justice for all" reflects an idealistic vision that may not be entirely attainable. While this goal is morally compelling, it lacks realism. In a perfect world, it is ideal for everyone to live equally, work equally, and be given equal opportunities. However this remains just an ideal.

Movements that aim too broadly risk losing focus. In contrast, my framework emphasizes the importance of clear, defined goals and incremental change. Rather than attempting to transform society all at once, civil disobedience should aim to create shifts in individual consciousness that accumulate over time. While disruption may force attention, it does not guarantee understanding or empathy. In some cases, it may even cause backlash. This highlights the importance of balancing disruption. Civil disobedience must be disruptive enough to challenge the status quo, but not so alienating that it prevents the formation of broader support/societal solidarity. Where Rawls seeks to reform institutional structures to allow equal opportunities for all participants through formal equality, Rohrer exposes how those foundational structures are inherently built on exclusion. For Rohrer, Rawls's framework forgets to include the systemic hierarchies- such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism- that secretly infiltrate society, even if it seems everyone agrees on a set of values on the outside.

The purpose of including Rohrer is to take away that in some instances uncivil disobedience is necessary when trying to reach particular government bodies. Yet when trying to gain broader support and radicalize a public, it is necessary to be nonviolent to ensure the correct audience is reached. Rohrer's work implies that passing a law does not equal justice if the underlying cultural, ableist, or colonial mindset remains intact.²⁵ This is exactly why there is a focus on mental radicalization. Although radicalization is not an act that promises equal justice, it is what comes after. After the Black Lives Matter Movement, citizens called out law-enforcement establishments, I was one of these citizens. Slogans like "ACAB" (all-cops-are-bastards), forced establishments to put police men and women back into training. Establishments put emphasis on treating everyone equally. It is not radicalization that promises equal justice, but forcing institutions to take a new look at themselves due to public pressure leads to a more just society.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While this paper offers a necessary re-evaluation of Rawlsian civil disobedience by introducing the metric of radicalization, it is important to acknowledge the theoretical and empirical limitations. First, my framework relies heavily on the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement as it is the primary case study. That being said, Black Lives Matter is not the only civilly disobedient protest that has happened during this timeline. While it serves as a vital contemporary example of an organized resistance that reshaped public consciousness, it does not perfectly represent the dynamics of other movements that may operate under

different systemic structures (or in non-Western contexts). It is my hope that future research will apply this four-element framework to more resistances- such as climate or non-democratic regimes to test whether radicalization operates similarly in these contexts.

Second, due to the scope of this paper, several political and social theories were left unconsulted. Specifically, my analysis would benefit from deeper research on race theory, colonial framework, and feminism. Incorporating critics of this nature would provide some more insight on why the Rawlsian duty of civility is inherently exclusionary. This paper touches on feminism with Linda Zerilli, but could be expanded if there were more contemporary thinkers regarding civility explored. Additionally, while this paper introduces individual consciousness shifts as a success metric, there is not an empirical way to measure radicalized consciousness across a population over time

While this paper focuses primarily on minority radicalization as the primary target group, it leaves open the question of how this internal awakening will achieve general majority radicalization. Future work could map the trajectory through which the radicalized consciousness of a minority finally reaches the majority.

Future research building upon these ideas would allow there to be a bridge between political theory and political psychology. Writers and scholars moving forward could investigate the long term effects of an unaware bystander turning into an active ally. Investigating the long term sustainability of radicalized consciousness- and whether it leads into policy change down the line- remains an essential point for fully incorporating this dimension into modern civil disobedience.

CONCLUSION

The true effectiveness of civil disobedience cannot only be measured by the simple metrics policy of change, but also by its capacity to radicalize public consciousness and expose the systemic oppression woven into daily life. While John Rawls's foundational framework accurately outlines the public, nonviolent compartments of protest, it treats civil disobedience as a political appeal within an "almost just" society. As critics like Linda Zerilli and Alexander Livingston expose, this reliance on a shared moral baseline and a strict "duty of civility" unintentionally functions as a tool to silence marginalized groups, forcing them to conform to standards acceptable to the privileged. When a society's foundational structures are inherently oppressive, the primary target can no longer be a reachable government body, but instead could be what Martin Luther King Jr. identified as the "white moderate" and the comfortably ignorant bystander.

To create a change within this comfortable sphere- which routinely normalizes the microaggressions- some disruption is absolutely necessary. However, as Judy Rohrer's defense of uncivil disobedience suggests, over-disruption risks complicating the path to justice. As witnessed during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, when resistance crosses into chaos and disorder, it could fall victim to the media's

"protest paradigm," shifting public focus from systemic change to behavioral outbursts limiting solidarity. Therefore, a civil disobedience movement must have the four core elements: nonviolence, clear goals, willingness to accept consequences for breaking a law, and the explicit power to radicalize public consciousness. By balancing this resistance with conscientiousness, civil disobedience is no longer a mere tool for policy change. Instead, it fulfills an additional goal: acting as a necessary, disruptive action that forces a comfortable population to confront its own thinking, facing internalized hierarchies, and permanently making the invisible oppression visible.

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