

Research paper on civil disobedience

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



- Introduction

Defining civil disobedience is not something that can be considered as easy, just as most scholars would agree. It is a concept that harbours various interpretations making it difficult for one single definition to define exactly what the concept is. However, for clarity purposes, civil disobedience can be defined as a deliberate, public and nonviolent act that is unlawful whereby the culprit/s accepts responsibility and punishment (Camus 52). It is a nonviolent protest aimed at alleviating some injustice, often with an appeal to some higher principle of law. Rebellion, on the other hand, can be defined to as the definite rejection of intrusion considered to be unbearable thereby giving the rebel an impression that certain rights are being violated (Clark et. al 13).

Albert Camus, author of ' The Rebel' was a French author, journalist and philosopher who won the Nobel Prize where his views contributed greatly to the rise of absurdism. In his essay ' The Rebel', he states that his whole life was dedicated to opposing nihilism while at the same time exploring deeply into individual freedom. He can be best remembered for his movement Group for International Liaisons that was meant to denounce ideologies in the USA and the USSR regarding idolatrizing technology. On civil disobedience, authors J. Spencer Clark, Thomas S. Vontz and Kristoffer Barikmo explain what the concept of civil disobedience entails. Thomas S. Vontz is the director of Kansas State University Centre for Social Studies Education as well as an assistant professor in at the same institution. Kristoffer Barikmo is a teacher at the Notre Dame de High School where he teaches U. S. history and civics. J. Spencer Clark has a Ph. D. in curriculum

studies and has taught civics and world history at the St. Aquinas High School.

In trying to expound on the theories and concepts of rebellion and civil disobedience, Kaplan's film *Over the Edge* will provide a good platform on which to achieve this. *Over the Edge* is a film focusing on the lives of teenagers brought up in a planned suburban community (*Over the Edge* 1979). This community has been designed with conformity and strict rules. Consequently, the community gives teens no opportunity whatsoever to grow out of it and live elsewhere. The teens, as a way of fighting back become rebellious by drinking, doing drugs, and indulging in dangerous violence. The local law enforcement officers are inclined to beat the teens into submission, but the kids retaliate by directing their aggravations at the law with tragic consequences. The film is a classic case of rebellion directed towards the powers that be.

Today, the latest civil disobedience movement has been experienced in Hong Kong for the better part of 2014, and it has been termed the 'Umbrella Revolution'. This civil disobedience movement was started by university students and activists with the aim of urging the government to allow them to have a say in who is chosen as the city's leader. As such, it is said to be a pro-democracy movement (Kaiman 2014).

The Nat Turner rebellion is a good example of rebellion, and it was a slave rebellion led by Nathaniel Turner, a slave himself, on August 21, 1831 in Virginia. The Nat Turner rebellion led to the death of 60 whites and over 100 blacks, the largest number of fatalities from a single uprising before the American Civil War (Aptheker 2013).

According to Clark et. al, for an act to be considered a civil disobedience act, it should meet certain thresholds. Most importantly, the citizen must disobey a law or policy. In most cases, it is noted that the law in question is often an unjust law. However, just laws may also be disobeyed just to get the attention of the government (Clark et. al 52). The second most important threshold is that such disobedience must be done in public. Thirdly, the act must be conscientious and, in one way or another, it should be for the common good. A look at these thresholds shows that civil disobedience shares similarities with rebellion. Rebellious movements are usually public, conscientious and believe that their acts are for the public. However, there are differences between these two concepts with a glaring one being the inclusion of violence in rebellion (Camus 17). Civil disobedience is non-violent while rebellion is violent. Another difference is in the laws being disobeyed. Most often than not, rebellion involves the breaking of just laws such as destruction of property and even murder. However, in civil disobedience, it is the unjust laws that are disobeyed and, in many cases, such just laws will only be disobeyed to get the government's attention.

In *Over the Edge*, the kids cannot take the conformity within which they live in and, as a result of such environment, they engage in acts of rebellion. In some instances, acts of civil disobedience can be realized. Having only one designated area where they can spend their free time under supervision is just too much for them. As Camus puts it in his essay, "the movement of rebellion is founded on the definite rejection of an intrusion" (Camus 13). As such, the teens decide to take drugs at the rec despite the fact that they are being supervised. This public display of disobedience shows their

dissatisfaction. A case of rebellion is evident when Mark Perry and his friend shoot at the windscreen of a patrol car, and they run away. Such an intake is a clear case of violence. Towards the end of the film, the teens lock the parents in and they light up fireworks before they go out, break the patrol car and take guns. They then start shooting around and after Doberman arrests Carl they drive off, but Mark shoots the car that crashes and catches fire. It is a classic case of rebellion on the teens' part.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the ' Umbrella Revolution' is a present day civil disobedience movement. What classifies it as a civil disobedience movement is the nonviolent approach that the movement has taken, and it is a social, civil disobedience movement. The students and activists are an organized group and have continued to occupy major streets in the city of Hong Kong in an attempt to slow business activities (Kaiman 2014). The ' Umbrella Revolution' is a pro-democracy movement that wants the government to give citizens to be given a bigger say in how they elect who will lead the city. Clark et al. (2008) point out that the most common justification of civil disobedience is correcting a moral injustice. The people of Hong Kong are aware that the government of the day has suppressed their democratic right to choose their leaders, which is a moral injustice to them. The second case is the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831 which was a rebellion group. Camus states that for an individual/group to rebel against another, the infringement of rights must have passed a certain borderline that the victim himself knows of (Aptheker 56). It means that the rebel must feel that no more can be tolerated. Camus further states in most cases a person will refuse to obey humiliating orders, and this is the point where rebellion

begins (Camus 16). What qualifies Nat Turner rebellion a rebellious movement is the violent approach it took whereby approximately more than 165 people, both whites and black, were killed. Taking Camus' theory of rebellion into context, it is said that Nathaniel Turner believed that he was called upon by God to lead a rebellion that would lead to the stopping of slavery. In other words, he had the common good idea that Camus talks about extensively in his essay (Aptheker 102). The solidarity shown by the slaves under Turner's guide also is an indication that his is a rebellion movement.

Conclusion

Over the Edge harbours both concepts of civil disobedience and rebellion with the later being more conspicuous as the film ends. The teens start by breaking the law through simple acts but their civil disobedience spills over and take the shape of a rebellion. In Clark et. al, the authors talk about arguments against civil disobedience and the lack of prior control is one reason that shows civil disobedience will most times result in violence. Camus on the other hand states that the 'All or Nothing' concept of rebellion questions the idea of the individual in relation to his values (Camus 15). In this context, Turner was ready to sacrifice his life in fighting for what he considered a just cause. He was aware of what would have happened if he were caught; he would be killed. The third example in this paper is the Hong Kong 'Umbrella Revolution' that has maintained its cause and it a good indication of what controlled civil disobedience movements can achieve. The government of China refused to hold talks with student leaders on the issue, and this is what gave rise to the Umbrella Revolution. According to Clark et.

al (2008), failure to reach an agreement with the government justifies the resorting to civil disobedience.

Works Cited

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