


7-13-2012

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Recommended Citation

Greeson, Matthew (2012) "Fighting for Equality: The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Legacy of Civil Rights," *Colgate Academic Review*: Vol. 5, Article 10.

Available at: <http://commons.colgate.edu/car/vol5/iss1/10>

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Fighting for Equality: The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Legacy of Civil Rights

Matthew Greeson, 2009

The 1986 passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAA) by the U.S. Congress over President Reagan's veto marked the culmination of years of growing opposition by the American public to the apartheid policy of the white minority government of South Africa. The United States had been since the early Cold War a supporter of South Africa and a major importer of strategic resources from that country, especially minerals, regardless of the white government's repressive racial policies. The Reagan administration, while tipping its hat to the need for change with its "constructive engagement" policy, stayed true to a cold warrior mentality and maintained that South Africa was of strategic interest to the United States. The CAA put the U.S. in an entirely different direction as a leader in the international campaign for sanctions on the apartheid state. Some have argued that the sanctions included in the CAA instead were the result of changing strategic interests, such as a decreasing American reliance on South African mineral imports. This paper, however, argues that the sanctions were a direct result of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States, particularly on university campuses, which in turn gained its strength from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and was furthered augmented by the Carter administration's foreign policy focus on human rights.

The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAA) of 1986 was the first big defeat for Ronald Reagan in the foreign policy making process. More importantly, it made the United States the first nation to impose wide-ranging economic sanctions on the white-dominated regime of majority-black South Africa. The U.S. was followed quickly in this action by European countries, including the United Kingdom, far and away the biggest foreign investor in South Africa. This massive disinvestment put substantial pressure on the already beleaguered Pretoria government and in 1989, the

reformist Afrikaner politician F.W. de Klerk was elected president and began the process of dissembling the apartheid state.

Much of the scholarly work done on the anti-apartheid movement, with good reason, focuses on the public protest aspects of the cause. In *Loosing the Bonds*, Robert Kinloch Massie discusses the dual role of the protest movements in the U.S. and South Africa during the 1980s. The comparison is undoubtedly apt, but in the focus on the demonstrations and upheaval, the necessity of focusing the on mundane process of political persuasion seems

lost. Donald R. Culverson comes much closer in his examination of the role of former civil-rights organizations in the anti-apartheid cause, but fails to draw a sufficiently stark comparison between the civil-rights and anti-apartheid movements.

There can be no argument that the CAA marked the culmination of a long campaign to change American policy on South Africa, but there remains disagreement about the role and effectiveness of the movement in bringing about that change. In 1986, political scientist Steven Metz argued that the “structure and composition of the anti-apartheid movement has often caused it to utilize an inapplicable paradigm of the formulation of American public policy.” More specifically, Metz argued that, by pursuing “outside strategies of influence,” like public protest and media campaigns, and forgoing “inside strategies of influence,” like lobbying Congress and political compromise and bargain-making, the anti-apartheid movement was doomed to failure.¹ Clearly, Metz was proven incorrect by the ultimate success of the movement in meeting its goals, but the question of why this was so remains.

The argument put forth here about the reasons for such success is as follows. First, the anti-apartheid movement was the spiritual and material successor to the civil-rights movement. The 1960s saw dramatic upheavals in the American political system and these changes were

consolidated in the 1970s. As the nation continued to make progress, however, the civil-rights movement drifted directionless for a time, and seemed to lose a sense of purpose after meeting many of its objectives in the preceding years. The anti-apartheid campaign gave the civil-rights movement a new banner to carry. The second and more substantial major argument in this paper is that, contrary to Metz’s belief that outside strategies of influence would be unsuccessful in persuading policy-makers into making changes, the anti-apartheid movement found success using exactly that strategy. This was because the anti-apartheid movement inherited three key elements of the civil-rights movement.

First, the two movements shared a common ideology of equal rights for all human beings, regardless of race. While one movement was a domestic cause and the other international, American society had grown to accept human equality as a moral imperative, and the anti-apartheid movement found great success by emphasizing the necessity of such changes and the similarities between Jim Crow America and apartheid South Africa. Second, civil-rights and anti-apartheid shared the same tactics. In essence, the movements emphasized peaceful demonstration, using similar techniques, such as protests, boycotts, and a media campaign, organized by and within similar institutions, including churches, universities, and organized labor. Third, and most importantly, the civil-rights and anti-apartheid movement shared the same leadership. This overlap was important for both symbolic purposes, connecting the two

¹ Steven Metz, “The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Populist Instinct in American Politics,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (1986): 381.

movements, as well as logistical purposes, allowing for organizational competence by experienced protest leaders and mobilization of the staunchest supporters of the civil-rights movements by the same leaders.

The final element of this paper will be a study of the anti-apartheid movement on the Colgate University campus. This movement, while much smaller in scale, was representative of the trends of the anti-apartheid movement. Like the movement throughout the country, it was generally successful because it was the heir of the civil-rights movement and shared similar ideology, tactics, and leadership.

Apartheid and the Civil Rights Legacy

Although it had hardly eliminated the problem of racial prejudice from the country, the civil-rights movement of the 1960s achieved many of its measurable, concrete goals. Schools across the country were integrated, with some districts even enforcing diversity benchmarks through mandatory bussing. Jim Crow was a thing of the past, and by the 1980s, there were six-thousand black elected officials throughout the United States, a major change from years past.² While income, education, and lifestyle inequality remained major problems, the American race situation seemed to be quickly improving, and for a time, the civil-rights movement seemed without a galvanizing cause. The same could be said of those who had so passionately protested the Vietnam War. The goals

² *Have You Heard From Johannesburg?*, produced by Connie Field, 90 minutes, Clarity Films, 1990, DVD.

had been achieved, but this only left each movement with a great deal of passion and experience, but adrift and rudderless.

Opposing apartheid was an obvious evolution for the movement and its adherents. Apartheid and American-style segregation had much in common, and the focus on equal rights created during the 1960s translated well to an even more brutal system of official prejudice. This was a shared ideology between the two movements, and this ideology will be discussed later in terms of its role in promoting the sanctions passed in 1986.

The ideology of human rights found a supporter in President Jimmy Carter. After years of *realpolitik* under Henry Kissinger, secretary of state to Nixon and Ford, the new focus on human rights in foreign policy during the Carter years was both a refreshing change and a source of encouragement to those who opposed the continued oppression of black South Africans.³ Of course, during those years, trade with and investment in apartheid South Africa continued to grow, even as the white regime grew increasingly harsh, but at the very least Carter gave new emphasis to the moral implications of such support. In May 1980, his Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Patricia Derian, referenced the nascent calls for disinvestment by American companies in statement before a subcommittee meeting of the House Foreign Affairs

³ Sanford J. Ungar and Peter Vale, *South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed in South Africa: Apartheid and Divestiture* ed. Steven Anzovin (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1987), 170-1.

committee, saying, “private groups...have urged the U.S. Government to curtail or halt private trade and investment to South Africa...It might be useful for this subcommittee to review those recommendations, too...”⁴ This new discussion of human rights, surely a product of the changes in American society, seems all the more principled and relevant when compared to the policy of the President Reagan, who took office in 1981.

Reagan took office at a time when South Africa was off the radar screens of most Americans. While a few devoted advocates were greatly concerned, America was in the depths of the Cold War and this dominated the public’s attention. Reagan, professing a commitment to equality and disgust with the apartheid system, played the principled moderator. While privately Reagan said that all he knew of Southern Africa was that “he’s on the side of the whites,” his administration called for a policy of “constructive engagement.”⁵ In this strategy, the United States made no major policy changes except to promise to pressure the Pretoria regime and seek “positive reform” by continuing to do enlightened business in South Africa.⁶ In the face of this seemingly acceptable policy, few

advocated for real reform and action. Indeed, others argue that constructive engagement was a necessary stepping stone for American public opinion, even if lacking as a policy.⁷ It would take years for the anti-apartheid movement, as a successor to the civil-rights movement, to actualize real change.

There has been much discussion of the intersection of race and U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Thomas Borstelmann discusses the contradiction between American support for regimes like South Africa’s and the espousal of American values during the Cold War, including the necessity of spreading freedom and democracy. George Fredrickson makes a similar argument, and like Borstelmann, compares South Africa and its system of discrimination to that in the American South before civil rights.⁸ What these books make clear is that Americans, in viewing South Africa in the 1980s, would not have had to stretch too far to find clear comparisons between that system of injustice and their own recent history.

These historical parallels between apartheid and the tainted American legacy on race made the comparisons between the anti-apartheid and civil-rights movements all the more poignant. In 1966, in the heat of the American civil-rights movement, Robert F. Kennedy traveled to South

⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights in South Africa*, Current Policy No. 181 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, 1980); U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Interests and Ideals*, Current Policy No. 180 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, 1980).

⁵ Robert Kinloch Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 485.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Wants an End to Apartheid*, Current Policy No. 787 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, January 19, 1986).

⁷ Ungar and Vale, 162-3.

⁸ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 259-65; George M. Fredrickson *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 239.

Africa and, during one leg of his trip, spoke to a group of students at the University of Cape Town:

I come here this evening because of my deep interest and affection for a land settled by the Dutch in the mid-seventeenth century, then taken over by the British, and at last independent; a land in which the native inhabitants were at first subdued, but relations with whom remain a problem to this day; a land which defined itself on a hostile frontier; a land which has tamed rich natural resources through the energetic application of modern technology; a land which once the importer of slaves, and now must struggle to wipe out the last traces of that former bondage. I refer, of course, to the United States of America.⁹

This powerful speech, which continued on to call for people all around the world to stand up to injustice, highlights the parallels between each nation's existences. The anti-apartheid movement, by its very nature, could not stand separate from the battle for domestic civil rights.

Indeed, the anti-apartheid movement was undoubtedly an extension of the civil-rights movement and a fight for "majority rule...and equal treatment for the members of all races."¹⁰ It is true that, unlike the domestic civil-rights movement, the anti-apartheid campaign involved some

tricky questions of national interest and the foreign policy-making prerogative of the president. However, after the success of the civil-rights cause, the overtly subversive nature of the anti-war protests during the Vietnam era, and the human rights advocacy of the Carter administration, Arthur Vandenberg's famous statement about the limits of partisan politics ("politics stops at the water's edge") seemed less relevant. The organizers of the anti-apartheid movement were prepared to use the tools of the civil-rights movement – the ideology, tactics and leadership – to fight for equality on the other side of the world.

Ideology

The previous section discussed the evolution of the civil-rights ideology up to the anti-apartheid years. During these years, the ideology of the anti-apartheid movement created both a motivation – universal human rights for people of all races – as well as a spiritual connection to the civil-rights movement. Both of these factors were interwoven and contributed to the eventual success of the campaign. The motivation gave those fighting to impose sanctions on South Africa a reason to fight and the connection to the battle for domestic rights gave them legitimacy and reminded Americans that their own fractured past was not far in the past. This ideology of equality can be seen in commentary, pop culture, and the events of the time.

The massive changes in American society brought about by the movements of the 1960s and 1970s were solidifying in the 1980s, and the anti-apartheid movement reflected the

⁹ Richard D. Mahoney, *Sons & Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), 325.

¹⁰ Untitled Editorial, *Hartford Courant*, April 25, 1986.

changing priorities and beliefs of Americans. As *The Philadelphia Inquirer* stated shortly before the sanctions vote, the debate was “not simply about South Africa. It was about an America that must look itself in the mirror each morning.”¹¹ The United States was pushing its way into the modern age, and continued support for the apartheid regime did not match the modern image many Americans had of themselves and their government. Ronald Reagan could denounce apartheid all he wanted, the reasoning went, but action was needed.

Worse yet, if the United States did not take action against South Africa, it could easily be seen, in the light of this ideology of universal equality, as definitive evidence of American racism. Bishop Desmond Tutu, in an appearance on ABC’s *This Week*, pointed out that the United States had not hesitated to use sanctions in countries where white people were suffering, such as Poland, but that in places like South Africa where the blacks were the victims, sanctions were somehow a less acceptable option, at least for the administration.¹² A political cartoon from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* shared the same sentiments. In this cartoon, Reagan is seen boldly shouting “economic sanctions!” next to signs reading Poland, Nicaragua, and Libya. Under the heading of South Africa, however, a confused looking Reagan says “Economic sanctions? Everyone knows they don’t work...”¹³ The message was clear for anti-apartheid

activists and their targets in the public opinion war: double standards could not be tolerated on such an important issue.

Much of the language used to promote the anti-apartheid cause was imbued with notions gained from the civil-rights campaign, and lent the issue legitimacy and a tone of importance. *The Syracuse Herald-Journal*, in one of the most direct allusions to the issues at stake in the fight for sanction, condemned Reagan’s intransigence, saying, “as personal freedoms and human rights Americans hold so dear are systematically erased in South Africa and democratic nations around the world condemn actions of the Botha government, the Reagan administration continues to resist calls for sanctions against South Africa.”¹⁴ *The Ann Arbor News* stated that “by putting strong pressure on Pretoria, the U.S. can strike a blow for legitimate human aspirations.”¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times and World-News*, in a direct reference to the civil-rights years, reminded readers that “if nothing else, the imposition of sanctions puts the United States on the side of their struggle for freedom against an oppressive government. It is the kind of struggle that the United States, of all countries, should sympathize with.”¹⁶ These editorial statements from papers across the country reflect the power held by the legacy of the civil-rights fight, and the way in which the struggle for

¹¹ Untitled Editorial, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 5, 1986.

¹² *Have You Heard From Johannesburg?*

¹³ Political Cartoon, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 18, 1986.

¹⁴ Untitled Editorial, *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, June 18, 1986.

¹⁵ Untitled Editorial, *Ann Arbor News*, June 24, 1986.

¹⁶ Untitled Editorial, *Roanoke Times and World-News*, September 30, 1986.

international human rights became the successor to that earlier cause.

Religion played a powerful role in creating and legitimizing the ideology shared by the anti-apartheid and civil-rights movements. Even conservatives in the United States had trouble denying the Christian imperative of ending legalized discrimination and oppression in all forms and in all places. This ideology was made all the more effective by events like the Reverend Jesse Jackson leading pray-ins at the South African consulate in Los Angeles, or when Tutu, in a hearing before Congress, said that apartheid “is evil, is immoral, is un-Christian,” and demanded sanctions be levied on his own country.¹⁷ There can be no doubt that such religious language harkened back to the challenge to end segregation given to the United States by another man of the cloth, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Beyond simply the shared leadership, however, it was equally the principle behind the religion which swayed minds in the anti-apartheid campaign.

Popular culture, always an effective public relations tool, reflected the ideology of the anti-apartheid movement, much like the role it took on during the civil-rights movement. The fight against American racism included movies (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and protest songs which reflected the messages promoted by the wider movements they represented. Similarly, anti-apartheid cultural icons emerged. In his album *Graceland*, Paul Simon introduced the world to Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a black South African band

which remains popular today. *Graceland*, while not containing any explicit protest songs, shed further light on the South African problem and elevated a black band which could never have achieved the same level of success in their own country. The album went platinum five times and was Simon’s best selling album.

More explicitly anti-apartheid was the film *Cry Freedom*, based on the true story and starring Kevin Kline as liberal South African newspaper editor Donald Woods and Denzel Washington in a breakthrough role as Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness pioneer. In many ways, the film tracked Woods’s ideological journey as if it were America’s own. Woods, initially opposed to Biko’s idea of racial equality, comes around after seeing for himself the horrors of apartheid in black townships and being rationally persuaded by Biko. Woods gained fame for publicly uncovering Biko’s eventual death at the hands of the South Africa police, and the movie ends with his escape from South Africa with his family.

Simon’s album and *Cry Freedom* are both representative of the increasing ideological sympathy of Americans for the black cause in South Africa, as well as of the legacy of civil-rights contained in this new movement. As Borstelmann argues, the eventual passage of the sanctions legislation “reflected the consolidation of a broad national agreement on the immorality of legal racial discrimination.”¹⁸ Similarly, the huge commercial and critical success of *Graceland* and *Cry Freedom* (Washington earned his first

¹⁷ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

¹⁸ Borstelmann, 263.

Oscar nomination as best supporting actor) mirrored the same trend.

The civil-rights movement had changed America. The United States, which had fought a civil war over race and still continued to oppress blacks into the second half of the twentieth century, had turned a corner. The ideology of universal equality took root, and the anti-apartheid movement seized on this new reality, and used it to great success. The ideology was reflected in both the protests and popular culture. Many Americans, looking back with shame on their own history, saw that South Africa needed to either accept change voluntarily, or be forced into it from the outside.

Tactics

More than anything else, it is the tactics of the anti-apartheid movement for which Metz reserved the greatest criticism. He argued that the tactics of mass mobilization could not affect public opinion on a foreign policy issue. Metz further posited that even if the anti-apartheid movement succeeded in changing public or Congressional opinion, such pressure would be irrelevant because of Congress' limited role in the foreign policymaking apparatus.¹⁹ History, however, proved Metz wrong, and the tactics of the anti-apartheid movement, proven successful during and carried over from the civil-rights movement, were ultimately successful in achieving their goals.

In 1984, Cecelie Counts, an activist with the TransAfrica Forum, a group created by the Congressional Black Caucus, said that "we've done the

traditional lobbying bit, and it's just not working...fast enough."²⁰ In other words, Metz's concept of internal strategies of influence was simply insufficient. Despite years of protest and attempts at persuasion, neither the administration nor Congress could be persuaded to take action against South Africa. TransAfrica, decided to take things to the next level. Doing just that, they succeeded in passing the CAA in 1986 by using civil-rights era tactics.

The most obvious tactic, shared not only by the civil-rights movement but other movements worldwide, was the protest. TransAfrica, for example, organized massive protests outside of the South African Embassy in Washington. Beginning in November 1984, there were daily protests, beginning just outside the embassy and moving toward its doors. Participants in the protests would chant both catchy slogans as well as sing songs reminiscent of the civil-rights movement, including "We Shall Overcome."²¹ At the end of the protest each day, the demonstrators were ordered by the police to vacate the embassy grounds, and after refusing, each of the protestors was peacefully arrested. Between November 1984 and March 1985 alone, 1419 people were arrested for participating.²² While the anti-apartheid was aimed at foreign policy goals, unlike the civil rights movement, the tactic of peaceful protest for the purpose of drawing attention to the cause was similar.

²⁰ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Jackson Arrested in Embassy Protest, *New York Times*, March 12, 1985.

¹⁹ Metz, 381.

Because these parallels to the civil-rights movement were clear, the embassy protests added to the success of the anti-apartheid cause.

Even celebrities got in on the act, putting themselves up for arrest in order to raise the profile of the cause. These arrests became known as “designer arrests” and included such high-visibility names as Harry Belafonte, Arthur Ashe, Paul Newman, and Tony Randall.²³ Each came to the embassy and joined in the march to the front door, where they and all the others in the crowd were, in an orderly fashion, put in D.C. police wagons and taken to the local police station for processing and prompt release. The biggest celebrity to be arrested came in February 1985: Stevie Wonder.²⁴ Wonder was at the peak of his career in 1985, and his arrest created massive publicity. As Counts, one of the protest organizers, put it:

So we got a call that Stevie Wonder wanted to join the protest, and he wanted to be arrested, and would that be ok? *Would that be ok?* Sure, Stevie Wonder can come on in and all these people can move aside and he’ll be right there in front of the cameras.²⁵

The image of the blind, flamboyantly dressed musical icon being gently led to a paddy-wagon created such massive publicity that Wonder managed to get himself named a banned person in

South Africa the next month.²⁶ Clearly, the protests were proving successful as a tactic, and this was not only because of the celebrity attractions: such peaceful protests were inextricably linked to the civil-rights movement in the American imagination, and this message could not be misunderstood.

Beyond the arrests of ordinary celebrities, an even more assertive attempt to link the embassy protests to the civil-rights movement through the arrests of former civil-rights leaders themselves. In November 1984, near the beginning of the protests, the Reverend Joseph E. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (King’s organization) was arrested, as was Michigan congressman John Conyers. The big coup for the movement, however, came with the arrest of Representative Conyers’ understated secretary: Rosa Parks. The civil-rights pioneer, who had led a generally private life since the 1960s, was determined to make a difference in South Africa. After her arrest, 1985 brought the arrests of yet more big names from the civil-rights movement. In March, Jesse Jackson, who had been a close associate of Dr. King, was arrested along with his two college-aged sons. In June, Coretta Scott King, Dr. King’s widow, was arrested outside the embassy.²⁷ All of these arrests underscored the connection between

²³ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

²⁴ “Stevie Wonder Arrested,” *New York Times*, February 14, 1985.

²⁵ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

²⁶ “Stevie Wonder Music Banned in South Africa,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1986.

²⁷ “Congressman and Rights Leader Arrested at South Africa Embassy,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1984; “Conyers Arrested in Racial Protest,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1984; “Mrs. King Arrested in Protest,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1985.

civil-rights and apartheid and kept the movement in the news.

Protests of the Vietnam War were, in many ways, the intermediate step between the civil-rights and anti-apartheid movement, and many of the tactics and much of the legacy that the anti-apartheid movement inherited came from this time. The most obvious evidence of this were the passionate and wide-spread demonstrations in favor of sanctions and divestment and against apartheid on college campuses across the U.S. These protests took their cue from the demonstrations at the embassy, and began in earnest in 1985 at Columbia University. While there had been noise made against apartheid previously, Columbia students completely blockaded the entrance to the administration building, Hamilton Hall, in April of that year.²⁸ They draped it with signs, including one over the nameplate of the building, renaming it Mandela Hall in honor of the jailed African National Congress leader.

These campus protests, reminiscent of the struggles of the 1960s, quickly spread to campuses across the country. Soon Stanford University took up the banner of the anti-apartheid movement, and student groups at other universities stepped up their organizing almost immediately. Within three weeks of Columbia's action, students at schools as far flung as Rutgers, Princeton, Cornell, and the University of California at Berkeley and Santa Cruz were staging major rallies on quads and sit-ins at administration buildings. This quickly spread to dozens

²⁸ "Jackson Praises Columbia Protestors," *New York Times*, April 16, 1985.

of other universities across the country.²⁹ These protests reminded people of the student civil disobedience during the civil-rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.

At both the embassy and campus protests, organizers made a distinct effort to link the anti-apartheid movements to causes of the past. Beyond simply the protests themselves sparking memories from the past, many of the slogans and symbolism employed served the same purpose. At the embassy protests, signs read things such as "From Selma to Soweto," evoking the march for rights in the American south in the name of the oppressed poor of South Africa's townships.³⁰ The song "We Shall Overcome" was heard not only at the embassy, but also on college campuses. When Bishop Tutu came to the U.S. on one of his many speaking tours in 1986, he spoke at the same pulpit in Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church from which Martin Luther King, Jr. had addressed civil-rights supporters.³¹ This was representative of a well-orchestrated public relations campaign designed to link the past and present.

One of the major differences between the civil-rights and anti-apartheid movements was the rift between domestic and foreign policy, and this might have initially seemed to dilute the effectiveness of the protests, especially if foreign policy is indeed immune from such influences, as many have claimed. The protests from the

²⁹ "Other Protests Going On," *New York Times*, April 23, 1985.

³⁰ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Vietnam War era, however, had a transformative effect on America's political culture. Previously, while there had certainly been low-key challenges to the executive authority to prosecute a war, the Truman Commission during World War Two serving as a key example, there were never widespread protests before the war in Vietnam. Vietnam transformed the public's willingness to question foreign policy, and this willingness in turn owed a great deal to the countercultural culture of the civil-rights movement. Consequently, the anti-apartheid movement's success owed a great deal to cultural shifts and foreign policy protest tactics created by the previous two campaigns.

These protests were extraordinarily successful. In September, less than six months after the administration building boycott, the Board of Trustees at Columbia University voted to divest any assets in companies doing business in South Africa, making it the first major American university to do so.³² In quick succession, thereafter, other schools began making the jump. By the end of 1986, less than two years after the beginning of the embassy protests and the university demonstrations, success was clear. The CAA had been passed, and colleges across the country were divesting en masse from companies doing business in South Africa. None of this would have been possible if the tactics of the civil-rights movement had

not been adapted to the anti-apartheid cause.

Leadership

Even more than the tactics and ideology of the civil-rights years, the anti-apartheid movement shared the same leadership with that earlier movement, and this was crucial to the success of the fight to impose sanctions on and disinvest from that repressive South African regime. There were several similarities between the leadership of the two movements. First, there was a history of concern within the leadership of the civil-rights movement for the black South African cause, so even those who did not or could not speak up on apartheid could be easily linked to the anti-apartheid cause. Second, many of the anti-apartheid leaders were the same people who had fought for civil rights, and they brought with them to the new battle legitimacy and organization experience. Third, many of the infrastructures and organizations used by the anti-apartheid movement were precisely the same, and in other cases they derived from those earlier organizations. In these three primary ways, the anti-apartheid leadership was the direct heir of the civil-rights leadership, and this played a major role in the success of the former cause.

Even during the civil-rights movement, in the heat of the battle for basic equality and other rights at home, African American leaders and other notable liberals were already casting their eyes abroad to the injustices being committed in South Africa. The 1960s were the era of so-called Grand Apartheid, during which the white

³² Donald R. Culverson, *Contesting Apartheid: U.S. Activism, 1960-1987* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 143.

Afrikaner leaders of that country were attempting to corral black South Africans into native homelands, circumscribed on the map much like Native American reservations. Additionally, the Sharpeville massacre of peaceful protestors took place in 1960, and international attention turned to South African more than ever before.

It was in this context that Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out against the horrors of this segregationist system. In his 1967 book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. King included a reference to and denunciation of the apartheid system. In it, he foreshadowed the anti-apartheid campaign nearly twenty years before it gain recognizable success:

Racism is no mere American phenomenon ...The classic example of organized and institutionalized racism is the Union of South Africa. Its national policy and practice are the incarnation of the doctrine of white supremacy in the midst of a population which is overwhelmingly black. But the tragedy of South Africa is not simply in its own policy; it is the fact that the racist government of South Africa is virtually made possible by the economic policies of the United States and Great Britain, two countries which profess to be the moral bastions of our Western world.³³

³³ Martin Luther King, Junior, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 173.

These were words which were remembered and recalled during the anti-apartheid campaign, and provided spiritual guidance and a link to the past for those fighting in the 1980s for a similar cause in a different country. Even from the grave, King was in this way able to provide leadership to the anti-apartheid agitators.

Another proponent of civil rights who met an untimely and tragic end also spoke out on apartheid: Robert F. Kennedy. His leadership would serve as an inspiration in the future, and his 1966 trip to South Africa has already been discussed here. Additionally, John F. Kennedy was remembered as the first president to take any action against apartheid when his State Department required that any embassy functions in Pretoria include representatives of the black community.³⁴ This was a controversial decision among Afrikaners, but well remembered in the American civil-rights community. Therefore, when Senator Teddy Kennedy began pressing against apartheid in 1984, it conjured up memories of the devotion of the Kennedy family to equality and strengthened the anti-apartheid cause.³⁵

Some who were leaders themselves in the civil-rights movement were still around to trumpet the South African cause in the 1980s, and their personal gravitas and experience in demonstration against public policy augmented the strength of the anti-

³⁴ Ungar and Vale, 170-1.

³⁵ Ed Magnuson, Johanna McGeary, and Alessandra Stanley, "Fresh Anger Over Apartheid," *Time*, December 17, 1984.

apartheid faction. The Reverend Jesse Jackson, a former protégé of the Reverend King, was the most prominent of these figures. In 1984, after a failed bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, Jackson founded the Rainbow Coalition, an action network of minority groups, and launched himself into the anti-apartheid cause. Initially, he began by speaking out on behalf of the cause and using the infrastructure base of his presidential campaign, as well as his civil-rights experience, to aid in organizing protests and boycotts. He was arrested twice for the cause, once for leading a pray-in at the South African consulate in Los Angeles, and at the embassy protest site.³⁶ Jackson, in making South Africa his “most vocal initiative,” brought legitimacy and logistical expertise to the movement.³⁷

Other leaders of the civil-rights campaign, while perhaps less prominent than Jackson, brought with them similar attributes of leadership the anti-apartheid cause. These included Congressman John Conyers of Michigan. As a historic black leader, he possessed an authenticity of purpose. As a congressman, he possessed a pulpit and a position of power from which to work. Beginning in 1984, Conyers began to devote himself to the cause. He began protesting the sale of nuclear technologies to South Africa, gave statements to committee expressing his

belief that constructive engagement had been a “disaster,” and participating in the embassy protests.³⁸ Conyers and Jackson represented a generation of black American leaders (a generation which included thousands of new black politicians) who were able to connect the civil-rights and anti-apartheid movements with their symbolic importance and practical leadership.

Beyond these individuals, many of the institutions which fought the anti-apartheid campaign were previously involved in the civil-rights movement or in the creation of groups and recruitment of individuals who had fought that fight. As Alex Thomson states, at the core of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement were “religious, college, African-American and trade union groups.”³⁹ Like the individuals listed above, these groups added legitimacy and organizational knowledge to the campaign. Primary among these groups were organized church groups, most notably the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.⁴⁰ The U.S. Council of Churches worked closely with the South African Council of Churches, headed by Tutu.⁴¹ In short, such continuity provided crucial links with the civil-rights movement.

³⁶ *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*; “Jackson Arrested in Embassy Protest,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1985.

³⁷ Karin L. Stanford, *Beyond the Boundaries: Reverend Jesse Jackson in International Affairs* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 137.

³⁸ Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Statement of John Conyers, Jr., a Representative of the 1st Congressional District of Michigan, 97th Cong., 1st Sess., 1985, 72-76; Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

³⁹ Alex Thomson, *Incomplete Engagement: U.S. Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of South Africa, 1981-1988* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), 93.

⁴⁰ Culverson, 44.

⁴¹ Massie, 514.

Other groups were created by civil-rights era veterans. Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, mentioned above, was only one example. Most important among these was the TransAfrica Forum, created in 1978 by leaders from the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). The CBC, itself an important organization and a new entity since the civil-rights movement, lent TransAfrica much of its credibility and institutional support.⁴² Randall Robinson, the head of TransAfrica, was primarily responsible for the organization of the embassy protests.

Universities and organized labor were crucially important in both the civil-rights campaign (and the Vietnam War protests) and the anti-apartheid movement. In universities, students were often the catalyst for protest, and as shown previously, they organized massive protests at campuses across the country. Academics were also important in this work, however. In 1981, even before the anti-apartheid campaign had picked up in earnest, a group of scholars formed themselves into the Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa. This group included the presidents of several major universities, business executives, and Howard Samuel, the president of the AFL-CIO. While the commission did not, at this early point, call for disinvestment or sanctions, they did follow a radical path for the time, stating that "in U.S. domestic politics, unambiguous opposition to apartheid is a

⁴² Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal, An African American Anthology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 551.

prerequisite" for policy in Southern Africa.⁴³ This coalition, by drawing on their experience and position in society, greatly aided the anti-apartheid campaign.

In 1980, Andrew Young, an African-American leader and Carter's ambassador to the United Nations, wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* in which he sagely predicted the course of U.S. policy toward South Africa based the new leadership he saw coalescing around the apartheid issue. He said that this "new constituency" was "born of a merger of civil rights organizations, young black professionals, church groups, some labor unions, college students, and groups which had opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War."⁴⁴ In seeing the gradual conglomeration of these groups into a new voice for African rights in the U.S., Young saw coming something few other Americans could have predicted, particularly at the height of Reagan's popularity and the administration's policy of constructive engagement. Young predicted that "this coalition is likely to respond to events in South Africa with an aggressive strategy calling for the severing of U.S. political and economic ties" and that U.S. corporations would "find it increasingly difficult to reconcile these competing demands."⁴⁵

⁴³ *South Africa: Time Running Out, the Report of the Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California), 410.

⁴⁴ Andrew Young, "The United States and Africa: Victory for Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 59 (1980): 651.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 653.

This prediction was exactly correct, and the coalition, under the leadership of former civil-rights leaders, met with great success. It was this leadership that was most important for the eventual imposition of sanctions, because it brought with it experience with what Metz calls outside strategies of influence, as well as a legitimacy that was impossible for Congress and the public to ignore.

Colgate and the Anti-Apartheid Call for Divestment

The anti-apartheid movement at Colgate University was highly representative of the anti-apartheid movement nationwide. It was in many respects the direct heir of the civil-rights movement, and by extension protests of the Vietnam War. It succeeded, like the anti-apartheid movement as a whole, because it adopted the techniques and leadership of the civil-rights movement, and because it shared the same ideology.

There was a flickering of anti-apartheid sentiment on campus in the late 1970s, as could be expected at any American university which fully contemplated the reality of the South African dilemma. In April 1978, the Board of Trustees, in response to inquiries by faculty and students, directed an evaluation of Colgate's policy toward investments in companies with interests in South Africa. The president of the university at the time, George Langdon, created an on-campus committee of students and faculty to study the issue and present the board with recommendations. By the November board meeting of that same year, they had a report prepared for

presentation to the board. The report, while not advocating full divestment, encouraged strong measures to limit Colgate's exposure to the ethical dilemma of South African investment.⁴⁶ The finance committee of the board took the report into consideration and, not unexpectedly, recommended much weaker measures which were agreed to by the full board at the January 1979 meeting.⁴⁷

It was not until 1985, when the anti-apartheid movement as a whole had gained momentum, that the issue was again considered in earnest at Colgate. As in the past and at other universities, the movement was restarted by an activist group. While there had been some demonstrations at universities across the country in 1984, it took the energy of the national movement to revive the Colgate Corporate Investment Advisory Committee, (CIAC), the successor of the student group which had advised the board of trustees in 1978. This group, which consisted of both students and faculty, had several meetings throughout April, but to the frustration of committed activists, made no proposals. In response, campus activists took advantage of National Anti-Apartheid Day to stage a rally on April

⁴⁶ Memorandum, "Statement of Proposed Policies and Recommendations," from Faculty-Student Advisor Committee on Colgate's Ethical Responsibilities as an Investor in American Companies with Significant Internal Operations in South Africa to Raymond M. Krehel, Treasurer, November 13, 1978.

⁴⁷ "Minutes of the Finance Committee," Colgate University Board of Trustees, January 31, 1979.

24 in front of the campus chapel.⁴⁸ This planned one-day rally, buoyed by the energy of students, quickly turned into five consecutive days of rallies outside of the chapel, followed by teach-ins at the administration building, which found itself packed with anti-apartheid activists at the height of college admissions season.⁴⁹ Protests continued throughout 1985 and into 1986.⁵⁰

By this time, it was impossible for the administration to ignore the calls for change, and slow but quickening policy changes followed. Indeed, during the Board of Trustees meeting which coincided with the protests and teach-ins of April 1985, "The first item of business was a discussion of the campus concern over investments which do business in South Africa."⁵¹ In May, Alan I. Greene, chair of the board's finance committee, met with representatives of the CIAC, and the board made minor changes to Colgate's investment guidelines but still did not divest.⁵² Clearly, this was insufficient for student activists, and as the protests mounted at Colgate and throughout the country in late 1985 and 1986, the board was

finally persuaded to change policy.⁵³ In September 1986, just before Congress passed sanctions and after the second year of National Anti-Apartheid Day protests at Colgate, the board passed a resolution calling for full divestment from South Africa.⁵⁴ This process took place over the span of two years, and in 1988 Colgate was completely divested.⁵⁵

As was true with the national anti-apartheid movement, the ideology of Colgate's activists was similar to that of the civil-rights movement, and this aided its success. The anti-apartheid movement was motivated by the new paradigm in American politics that equal rights everywhere was a moral imperative. As an editorial in *The Colgate Maroon*, as the student newspaper was then called, stated about the students protesting apartheid in April 1985, "their dedication to the cause of racial equality stirs the hearts of all those who want to see an evil system destroyed."⁵⁶ It was difficult for those opposing divestment to deny the truth of this statement, because the goal racial equality had been accepted by all strata of society. Even though the trustees still opposed divestment in 1985, they could not help but find "the apartheid policy of the Republic of South Africa morally and ethically repugnant and at odds with the values

⁴⁸ "Students Plan Anti-Apartheid Rally for this Wednesday," *The Colgate Maroon*, April 2, 1985.

⁴⁹ "Teach-Ins Follows 5 Days of Rallies; 3 Will Meet Trustees," *The Colgate Maroon*, April 30, 1985.

⁵⁰ "Semester Closes on Divestment Issue," *The Colgate Maroon*, May 7, 2008; "200 Gather at Chapel Steps in Rally on Anti-Apartheid Day," *The Colgate Maroon*, October 15, 1986; "Civil Rights Committee Takes Action," *The Colgate Maroon*, September 23, 1986.

⁵¹ "Minutes of the Finance Committee," Colgate University Board of Trustees, April 24, 1985.

⁵² "Minutes of the Finance Committee," Colgate University Board of Trustees, May 10, 1985.

⁵³ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees," Colgate University Board of Trustees, July 10, 1986: 19.

⁵⁴ "South Reviews Its South Africa Investments," *The Colgate Maroon*, September 20, 1986.

⁵⁵ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees," Colgate University Board of Trustees, May 28, 1988: 13.

⁵⁶ "No-conscience University," *The Colgate Maroon*, April 30, 1985.

for which Colgate stands.”⁵⁷ As time went on, the invocation of this ideology of non-prejudice overwhelmed the counterarguments at Colgate against sanctions and divestment, just as it did on a national scale.

The tactics of the apartheid campaign on campus were recognizable from causes past, and this was a boon to its success, as it was nationally. During the civil-rights movement, the Black Student Union staged sit-ins at Merrill House and protests elsewhere on campus, and as discussed above, these tactics were repeated with great success during the 1980s. The most successful of these protests were the well-timed days of teach-ins at the administration building, James B. Colgate Hall. Because these meetings fell during the April 25 meeting of the trustee finance committee meeting and only weeks before the full board meeting, they carried special weight. Three student protestors were even flown to New York City at Colgate expense to meet with the finance committee.⁵⁸ This protest also motivation petition and letter-writing campaigns.⁵⁹ There had been protests on campus before that, but this large scale gathering (surely motivated in part by the success of the national embassy protests) led to the eventual success of the divestment campaign at Colgate.

⁵⁷ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees,” Colgate University Board of Trustees, July 11, 1985: 19.

⁵⁸ “Teach in Follow 5 Days of Rallies; 3 Will Meet Trustees,” *The Colgate Maroon*, April 30, 1985.

⁵⁹ “After Wednesday’s Gathering, Sit-ins and Sleep-ins Followed,” *The Colgate Maroon*, April 30, 1985.

Much like the increased interest in South Africa nationally, represented by the Paul Simon album and *Cry Freedom*, Colgate saw an increased interest in that oppressed nation. In 1986, the Black Student Union organized two South Africa themed plays, “Sizwe Banzi is Dead” and “The Island.” Both of these plays received positive reviews in the *Maroon*.⁶⁰ In April 1987, South African jazz pianist Abdullah Ibrahim performed.⁶¹ Academically, a flurry of lectures emerged on South African issues, and the yearly *Maroon Satire*, a humorous special edition of the paper, featured a front-page picture of a large stuffed bear being threatened by an even larger revolver, with the headline: “Colgate Students Against Apartheid Say: Divest, Or We Shoot the Bear!”⁶² The anti-apartheid campaign had penetrated the campus and national cultures.

While much of the leadership of the anti-apartheid movement on campus had not been around for the civil-rights campaign, it was drawn from the same pool of activists and organizations as the national anti-apartheid campaign, and this augmented its organizational knowledge and credibility. The initial small protests were organized by student representatives of the American Committee on Africa, a national organization that sponsored campus

⁶⁰ “Plays Explore Struggle in South Africa,” *The Colgate Maroon*, October 14, 1986.

⁶¹ “South African Jazz Pianist Performs,” *The Colgate Maroon*, April 21, 1987.

⁶² “National Anti-Apartheid Day is This Friday,” *The Colgate Maroon*, October 8, 1985; *Maroon Satire*, May 7, 1985.

protests elsewhere, as well.⁶³ The Colgate Investment Advisory Committee, after finding its proposals rebuffed by the board, took the lead in organizing the large April 1985 protests and teach-ins. These protests were coordinated personally by Professor Manning Marable, the director and founder of Colgate's Africana and Hispanic Studies department, now known as the Africana and Latina Studies department. Other faculty and students also played organizational roles.⁶⁴ After the April protests, various groups organized into the Colgate Civil Rights Actions Committee, which even in its name made a direct link to the civil-rights movement.⁶⁵ This group would lead the remainder of the anti-apartheid activities for the subsequent years. Just as was true nationally, the campus groups, consisting of those with civil-rights credentials and others new to the movement, consolidated into a successful movement. As was true nationally as well, the link to the civil-rights movement brought credibility and success.

Conclusion

The anti-apartheid movement used what Steven Metz called "outside strategies of influence." He argued that the anti-apartheid movement would not succeed because "world events are far removed from the daily experiences," because one of the essential elements

of political power – information – is much more concentrated in foreign policy formulation than in most forms of domestic policy formulation" and because "congressmen, who are most open to outside strategies of influence, have only limited impact on official U.S. foreign policy..."⁶⁶ This paper has demonstrated, however, that because the anti-apartheid movement was the heir of the civil-rights movement in the United States, it gained legitimacy, credibility, experience, and eventual success that it would not have otherwise had by using the tactics, ideology, and leadership of that earlier cause.

More importantly, the anti-apartheid movement in the U.S. had a definite impact on the end of apartheid in South Africa. The United States was the first major western power to impose sanctions on the white regime. Through its willingness to take the first step, the U.S. led other major western nations – most importantly the United Kingdom, which invested the vast majority of foreign capital into South Africa – into following suit with similar sanctions. Together with other forms of diplomatic pressure and internal unrest, sanctions brought down the apartheid regime and led to the free and democratic, if still troubled South Africa we know today.

⁶³ "Students Protest Investments," *The Colgate Maroon*, April 24, 1984.

⁶⁴ "Teach-ins Follow 5 Days of Rallies; 3 Will Meet Trustees," *The Colgate Maroon*, April 30, 1984.

⁶⁵ "National Anti-Apartheid Day is This Friday," *The Colgate Maroon*, October 8, 1985.

⁶⁶ Metz, 380-1.

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