The Bernie Sanders Value  
Negative Case by Chris Jeub

  
Bernie Sanders being arrested in the 60s when protesting segregation. (Chicago Tribune)

Even some of the most loyal Bernie Sanders followers are not aware of his history of civil disobedience. In his early years in the 1960s, Sanders participated in successful protests and peaceful civil disobedience. But eventually Bernie left the realm of protest and got involved in politics.

This case makes the argument that diplomatic change — contrary to civil disobedience — brings about the steady progressivism that Bernie Sanders and his followers believe in. The most convincing negative argument is in Sanders’ recent condemnation of his own followers in their attempt to overthrow the Democratic National Committee’s nomination of Hillary Clinton. Civil disobedience was formally condemned by Bernie Sanders.

The applications put forth are reflective of Bernie Sanders’ history of civil *obedience*, the steady progressivism of his civil service in government. Overall, it can be argued that civil disobedience has not been a cornerstone of the modern *Feel the Bern* movement.

To learn more about this case, study Bernie’s early days of civil disobedience and familiarize yourself with his time in Congress. You should start to notice a pattern in Bernie’s life that is mirrored in the maturation of socialism: from the early days of violent revolution in Asia and South America to the modern version, which uses peaceful democracy to create successful socialist societies like Norway, France, and Canada.

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I quote from a 2015 TIME magazine article:

By his 23rdbirthday, [he] had worked for a meatpackers union, marched for civil rights in Washington D.C., joined the university socialists and been arrested at a civil rights demonstration. He delivered jeremiads to young crowds. The police called him an outside agitator, ~~Sanders said~~. He was a sloppy student, and the dean asked him to take a year off. ~~He inspired his classmates.~~ ~~“He knows how to talk to people now,” said Robin Kaufman, a student who knew Sanders in 1960s Chicago, “and he knew how to do it then.”~~ He was a radical before it was cool.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Who was this radical? It was none other than Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, a young man who, you would *think,* would affirm the resolution.

However, something changed in the mind of Bernie Sanders. He distanced himself from his younger days of civil disobedience and began embracing civil *obedience.* This is why I stand opposed to the resolution.

# Value: Progressivism

Progressivism is operationally defined as: “The principle that society can be improved by individual, technological, and ideological progress, and that such progress is vital to the human condition.”

In other words, progressivism means believing that if we work together, we can make the future a brighter place for ourselves and our children. Here’s why:

## Reason to Prefer: Foundation of Modern Society

Every positive change in modern society is thanks to progressivism. It teaches that our best days are ahead of us if we make it so. It teaches that we don’t have to accept the status quo. We don’t have to be a society that tolerates slavery, or the subjugation of women, or discrimination against minorities based on skin color or sexual orientation. We can be a society of opportunity, not aristocracy. Responsibility, not greed. Love, not hate. While it’s a slow and difficult journey, progressivism is making our society better one small victory at a time. We mustn’t ever lose hope in it.

Now let’s turn to my final point.

# Contention: Civil Disobedience Undermines Progressivism

Progressivism teaches us that civil disobedience is not justified - *especially* in a democracy. The only way to solve the problems we’re facing is to tackle them together. Bernie Sanders would agree.

# Sub-point A) Few Results

Civil disobedience means rejecting the will of the people and the rule of law – trying to cause change through chaos. This is sometimes appealing because democracy can move frustratingly slowly. But trying to bypass it doesn’t help things.

Bernie Sanders learned this the hard way. He started his fling with civil disobedience at a college sit-in in 1962. A year later, things had escalated so much that he was arrested protesting school segregation in Chicago. Bernie’s fight for justice was marked by altercations with police, arrests, and fines.[[2]](#footnote-2)

But Bernie Sanders soon discovered that disobedience didn’t bring about the results that he wanted. Schools weren’t being desegregated; police violence wasn’t going down. From the inside of a jail cell, he learned a valuable lesson: that you cannot change a system from outside it.

So he decided to try something new.

# Sub-point B) Obedience Works

Obedience doesn’t mean blind acceptance – it means cooperation and compromise, the two pillars of a progressive society. In a democracy, everyone is invited to the table to have their say and change things for the better. We don’t always get what we want, and we rarely get it as soon as we like. But we know from millennia of history that participating in democracy – rather than throwing rocks at it – is the best way to bring progress.

With the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, Bernie Sanders saw that civil legislation could be far more effective than disobedience at protecting the rights of the downtrodden. He worked peacefully as a documentary filmmaker, working to educate voters to cause change inside the system.

In 1980, Bernie stepped into politics. He served four terms as the mayor of Burlington, defeating challengers from both major parties. Eventually, he went to Congress.

During his years of civil disobedience, Bernie Sanders accomplished absolutely nothing.

During his years of public service, Bernie Sanders accomplished quite a bit. He has been a champion for veterans and affordable health care, and was a voice for sanity in the middle east, fair trade, and marriage equality back when such things were politically dangerous.He sponsored over six thousand bills in congress, and passed major environmental protections that fight climate change and water pollution. He helped pass funding for low income housing and spearheaded an audit of the Federal Reserve. He stopped bailed-out corporations from outsourcing American jobs after taking taxpayers money. He made major changes to Obamacare to make sure as many people as possible could be covered by health insurance.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Then he ran for president. And though his presidential aspirations have come to an end, he accomplished something unforgettable for our country. This is his legacy: Bernie Sanders taught us to hope. The whole political landscape has changed as people who had lost interest in the political process learned that change can come from within; that progress is possible; that we can make the world better. We ought to be inspired by this great man and follow his example by voting against this resolution. Thank you.

Affirmative Brief: The Bernie Sanders Value

The core of this case is not easy to find. There are two potential pitfalls that can waste a lot of your time:

First, you may be tempted to get tangled in a debate over the merits of Bernie Sanders or his ideas. Bernie is the figurehead of this case, but he is not the case itself. Even if you thoroughly defeat the man, the idea keeps marching. Talk about Bernie Sanders as little as possible.

Second, you may be tempted to debate the merits of progressivism. If your affirmative case is value-centric, you probably have to – but remember, this case isn’t fundamentally about progressivism. The heart of the case, the part that is truly dangerous, lies elsewhere.

The real core of this case is the contention sub-points, which argue that civil disobedience is irrational because it doesn’t work. You should have some examples and evidence ready to go to contradict this. Try to argue against this part of the case, while accepting as much of the rest as possible.

Good cross-examination questions:

* “Let’s imagine an alternate universe where civil disobedience works better than obedience at causing progress. In that world, is it justified?”
* “Is it ever, under any circumstances, okay to engage in civil disobedience?”

“Do you have any reservations in your support of Bernie Sanders?”  
Your opponent then either gives you arguments against Bernie, or you get this follow-up: “So just to be clear, you support Bernie 100% in all things, right?”

1. Sam Frizell. “The Radical Education of Bernie Sanders.” TIME, May 26, 2015. <http://time.com/3896500/bernie-sanders-vermont-campaign-radical/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Miles Kampf-Lassin. “WATCH: Viral Video Shows Bernie Sanders Being Arrested at a 1963 Civil Rights Action.” Alternet, February 18, 2016. <http://www.alternet.org/election-2016/viral-video-shows-bernie-sanders-being-arrested-1963-civil-rights-action> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Madonna Gauding, “Bernie Sanders’ accomplishments,” Occasional Planet, March 4, 2016.

   <http://www.occasionalplanet.org/2016/03/04/a-list-of-bernie-sanders-accomplishments/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)