The Sociological Quarterly ISSN 0038-0253

LIBERATION FREQUENCY: The Free Radio Movement and Alternative Strategies of Media Relations

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A crucial element of struggle for any social movement is the ability to convey its message to both movement participants and the broader public. Movements frequently deal with problems of reframing and reinterpretation of their messages by mainstream media by trying to build relationships with mainstream media actors. But this is not the only way that movements can gain positive media coverage. This article reveals two little-discussed media strategies that movements may adopt in order to mitigate the problem of how to best get sympathetic news coverage. First, movements can circumvent mainstream media altogether by using alternative media. Second, movements can work to reform the media, thereby changing the rules and structures that govern movement–media relationships. I use data from interviews with participants in the free radio movement to illustrate these two media strategies and how their use helped the movement achieve moderate successes. I argue that control of (or access to) alternative media can help a social movement overcome the difficulties of gaining sympathetic mainstream media coverage. I also argue that the media reform movement, if successful, could further help social movements overcome this problem. This case study suggests that scholars' preoccupation with mainstream media coverage may have caused us to underestimate the power of social movements to generate positive media coverage.

Integral to any attempt made by social movements to gain access to the polity, to put issues that concern the movement on the public agenda, or to work for social change is the ability of the movement to communicate. Processes of communication—both internally, among social movement organizers and movement participants, and externally, between the movement and the broader public composed of adherents, bystanders, elites, and opponents—have direct effects on all aspects of social movement struggle, from early mobilization to final outcome. If a movement is unable to communicate information and viewpoints effectively, it loses a critical resource in its struggle.

The movement's communication can be greatly hindered by commercial mass media in the United States, which, taken as a whole, exhibits a structural bias against information and viewpoints that inherently challenge the status quo (e.g., Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Bennett [1983] 1996; Bagdikian [1983] 2000; Smith et al. 2001). Frequently, mass media coverage of social movement activities is not only unsympathetic to a movement's goals but often may even undermine a movement (Gitlin 1980; Smith et al. 2001). Thus, the ways that social movements attempt to gain positive media

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coverage are of critical importance, not only to movement participants themselves, but also to sociologists seeking to understand social movement outcomes. Some attention has been devoted in the literature to the ways that social movements are portrayed in mainstream media, although seeking mainstream news coverage is not the only way that social movements can try to get their messages into mass media.

This article is intended to contribute to the sociological understanding of media–movement relationships by theorizing two little-discussed media strategies that social movements may adopt in order to communicate their views to broader publics. First, rather than "working within the system," accepting the existing conditions governing media coverage, and tailoring movement actions and discourses to court mass media attention, movements can circumvent mainstream media altogether by using alternative media to communicate. Second, movements can make the mass media itself a target of social protest; that is, they can work to reform the media, thereby changing the rules and structures that govern movement–media relationships.

In this article, I first outline the problem of media–movement relations and the strategies available to movements that desire media coverage, as discussed in the literature on media and social movements. Next, I use the case study of the free radio movement to illustrate the ways in which the alternative media and media reform strategies can be employed by movements, and I discuss the extent to which the movement was successful in achieving its goals. The case study suggests that the use of alternative media and attempts to reform media regulations have the *potential* to enhance the ability of a social movement to communicate its message to an audience. Finally, I explore some limitations and tensions inherent in the two strategies, and I discuss their implications for social movements. In the final analysis, this article suggests that alternative media and media reform represent two media strategies that could significantly mitigate the "fundamental asymmetry" in media–movement relations (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The continuing neglect of these two media strategies by social movement scholars may lead us to underestimate the power and resources available to social movements to generate favorable media coverage.

THE PROBLEM: MEDIA–MOVEMENT RELATIONS

The literature on social movements is filled with studies confirming that the amount and type of media coverage of social movements affect these movements in a variety of positive and negative ways. First, media coverage of a social movement or a controversial issue can aid or deter the mobilization of potential participants (Gitlin 1980; Roscigno and Danaher 2001). Second, media coverage of issues or debates within the institutional political structure can provide opportunities for social movements to enter the public debate on that issue (Klandermans and Goslinga 1996; Sampedro 1997; Oliver and Maney 2000). Third, when there is little opportunity for social movements to be heard in the public arena, movements often adopt particular tactics or stage protest events so that they will get media coverage for their issues (Barker-Plummer 1995; Carroll and Ratner 1999; Rohlinger 2002). Fourth, movements' strategic framing activities can be facilitated by the media (Gamson and Meyer 1996), and the media can affect movement dynamics depending on the frames that appear in news broadcasts (Gitlin 1980; Gamson 1992). Fifth, media coverage can alter the internal dynamics of a social movement organization (SMO) and the relationships among social movement participants (Gitlin 1980). Sixth, movement trajectories and cycles of protest are affected by media coverage of social movements (Gitlin 1980; Ellingson 1995). Finally, media coverage of protests and social movements can constrain the repressive capacity of authorities wishing to counteract movement activity (Wisler and Giugni 1999). In short, the amount and type of media coverage that a social movement receives can be critical to whether or not it succeeds in its goals. The assertion that media coverage is important for social movements is not only a recurring theme in social movement literature, but it is also so intuitive that it is taken for granted by many social movement researchers (e.g., Molotch 1979; Smith et al. 2001).

The unanimity of these various studies highlights a central problem facing social movements: How do movements convey their ideas and perspectives to a mass audience containing (to adopt the terminology of McCarthy and Zald 1977) adherents, constituents, bystanders, and potential movement participants? Since media coverage can affect social movements on so many levels, the amount and type of media coverage that a social movement receives are important variables that sociologists should consider when explaining movement outcomes. Gaining favorable media coverage for social movement activities is by no means certain.

Synthesizing the literature on media coverage of social movements with the literature confirming a pro-status quo bias in mainstream media (e.g., Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Bennett [1983] 1996; Bagdikian [1983] 2000; Smith et al. 2001), one arrives at the conclusion that media coverage of social movements that facilitates movement goals is difficult to come by. A short list of causes of a pro-status quo bias in media collected from this literature include the profit motive, economic dependence on advertising, journalists' perceptions of "newsworthiness," journalists' "enduring values," norms of professionalism and objectivity, time constraints facing journalists, reliance on "official" sources for information, geographic location of stories, journalistic routines or "beats," and story selection processes. Studies of media coverage of social movements (e.g., Gitlin 1980) confirm many of these causes of bias.

Smith et al.'s (2001) study of media coverage of protests in Washington, DC, poignantly illustrates the problems facing social movements that seek positive news coverage of their activities. Echoing Oliver and Myers (1999), the authors find that social movements are much more likely to receive media attention through drama, confrontation, or conflict. Social movements therefore often engage in confrontational protests and stage dramatic media events in an effort to influence the public debate. News stories covering such protest events are more likely to focus on the details of the drama rather than on the issues at stake or on the motivations of the protesters. The coverage also tends to be framed in ways that favor the authorities. The authors find that "Stories relying on neutral sources or on authorities were nearly three times more likely to provide extensive discussion of the issue as were stories relying on protester sources," which suggests that movement sources are rarely able to have their own framing of the issue adopted by the mainstream news outlets (Smith et al. 2001:1414). Thus, "even when movement organizers succeed at obtaining the attention of mass media coverage, the reports represent the protest events in ways that neutralize or even undermine social movement agendas" (p. 1398).

Given these systematic disadvantages that social movements face in gaining favorable attention in mass media, what can social movements do to get their messages out? How can social movements inform the broader public of their points of view, add issues to the public debate, and call attention to the problems that they are mobilizing against? One might conceive of three possible ways to accomplish this.

First, social movements can adopt strategies for working with the mainstream media, strategies that Barker-Plummer (1995) calls "media pragmatism" (p. 312). Movements seek to develop relationships with journalists and alter their messages in order to gain more attention from mainstream media. This solution is widely adopted by SMOs, and this form of media–movement relations is well studied in the literature. For example, Rohlinger (2002) argues that the different media strategies of National Organization of Women (NOW) and Concerned Women for America were partially responsible for the different amounts of success that each organization experienced in how the abortion issue and their organizations were portrayed in mass media. Other studies of the women's movement (Tuchman 1978; Barker-Plummer 1995) and comparisons of social movements' media strategies (Carroll and Ratner 1999) show how building relationships with journalists and engaging in protests to gain media attention can enhance a movement's coverage in the mainstream press. Such studies seem to share Gamson and Wolfsfeld's (1993) hypothesis that "the greater the resources, organization, professionalism, coordination, and strategic planning of a movement, the greater its media standing and the more prominent its preferred frame will be in media coverage of relevant events and issues" (p. 121).

A second option available to movements desiring positive media coverage—although less studied in social movement literature—is simply to bypass mainstream media and use alternative media to publicize movement issues. Many alternative media outlets are owned and controlled by particular SMOs, and an even larger number are likely to be sympathetic to social movements, given their mutual oppositional stances. Social movement actors who use alternative media do not necessarily have to rely on journalists to interpret their actions and issues in a sympathetic way; rather, social movement actors can actually produce the media coverage themselves and frame the story in whatever way they choose. For example, Klandermans and Goslinga (1996) point out that the union newspapers they studied adopted a social movement viewpoint of disability payment issues completely and gave no space for the government's viewpoint. Additionally, Hadden (1987:5) names media access as a "critical resource" for any social movement and emphasizes the importance of religious broadcasting and televangelism (movement-controlled media) for the success of the "New Christian Right" in the United States. Thus, either controlling an alternative media outlet or getting attention from a sympathetic one can help SMOs out of the dilemma of how to best gain positive media coverage.

The impact of the Internet on social movements is suggestive of the importance of alternative media for social movements. Many authors have hypothesized that social movements' ability to disseminate their message on the Internet will facilitate mobilization efforts, enhance collective identity, enable activists to more easily participate in the public debate, allow unpopular opinions to be expressed with less fear of repercussions, expand the number and type of people who receive movement messages, and expand the networking capabilities of movements (Diani 2000; Kreimer 2001; Postmes and Brunsting 2002). Similarly, by using alternative media, social movements can simply circumvent the problems posed by their dependence on mainstream media for coverage and speak for themselves (Carroll and Ratner 1999; Atton 2002).

The third strategy that could be adopted by social movements seeking to solve the problem of how to best gain positive news coverage is to reform the mainstream media itself in such a way that mainstream media will provide a broader range of viewpoints and less "biased" news coverage to the public. Through this strategy, social movements seek to change the structure of mainstream media such that media institutions would be more receptive to movement messages. One might think of this solution as getting to the root of the problem. The media would be reformed so that, for example, there would not be an overreliance on authorities as sources of news and information, and that the viewpoints and activities of ordinary citizens would be considered newsworthy as well. To be sure, this is a long-term strategy and may not be appealing to many social movements; understandably, it has received virtually no attention in the social movement literature. But this strategy has become increasingly prominent in recent years since the rise of the "media reform movement" (McChesney 1999; Opel 2001). The free radio (or microradio) movement is part of this movement.

What is significant about the free radio movement and its successes is that the movement combined the alternative media strategy and the media reform strategy (strategies 2 and 3 discussed above) by employing alternative media *as a tactic* in order to reform dominant media policies and practices. First (strategy 3), free radio became a tactic of a social movement that had reform of U.S. radio regulations as its target. By altering the rules governing the mainstream radio industry, the activists hoped to allow a wider range of voices access to the airwaves, thereby including (but not limited to) voices sympathetic to or controlled by social movements. Second (strategy 2), free radio was used as a form of alternative media through which people could express information, viewpoints, and music not normally represented on mainstream radio. This was an end in itself, allowing the broadcasters to mitigate the problem of having their cultures and messages framed and interpreted in ways that were beyond their control. Because of this dual strategy, the free radio movement was successful not only in giving members of local communities the ability to express themselves through mass media but also in achieving some limited reforms of radio ownership and licensing procedures.

This case study is atypical because, unlike most social movements, the free radio movement is both an example of the media reform movement and a collection of alternative media outlets. In the same sense that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1964), the alternative media broadcasts were the tactic of the movement, and the content did not necessarily have to do with the movement's goals of reforming the media. The alternative media content was considered an end in itself, as will be shown later, but the *message* sent by the free radio movement, *as a result of the very existence* of the stations, was that of media reform. I use this case study to shed light on the potential impacts of the alternative media strategy and the media reform strategy on the problem of social movements' dependency on mainstream media coverage. Although the free radio movement differs from other social movements in the way that both strategies are used, the case study shows that there is *potential* for these two strategies to result in positive outcomes for social movements. This is because alternative media can help a social movement overcome the "fundamental asymmetry" in media–movement relations by giving movement actors a greater chance of having alternative messages heard in mass media. In addition, the media reform movement, if successful, can also make the media environment more open to alternative (or social movement) perspectives.

THE FREE RADIO MOVEMENT

In the 1990s, in cities and small towns across the United States, a large number of activists, music enthusiasts, and ordinary citizens started their own low-power radio stations without the legal sanction of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). This trend comprised the latest episode in a long history of political contestation over the authority of the federal government to regulate radio broadcasts, a history that includes both legal and illegal challenges to regulatory authority (McChesney 1993; Soley 1999; Riismandel 2002). Much unlicensed broadcasting activity in the United States during the 1980s and the 1990s centered around the unavailability of low-power radio licenses and a concern for the increasing concentration of radio ownership. Since 1978, when the FCC eliminated the Class D license,[1] the FCC had not given broadcast licenses to radio stations operating with less than 100 watts of power. Additionally, throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the U.S. government passed a series of laws, culminating in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which significantly deregulated the radio industry and allowed an individual to greatly increase the number of radio stations that he or she could own (Fairchild 1999). Because of the de facto ban on low-power radio, combined with the increasing concentration of ownership in radio (Drushel 1998; McChesney 1999; Bagdikian [1983] 2000; FCC 2001), *and* combined with concerns that there was a lack of diversity in radio programming, many citizens decided to start their own radio stations without a license from the FCC. They simply inserted their tiny radio stations into unused bandwidths on the FM dial. Such microradio stations were both inexpensive and relatively simple to construct as they could be assembled for less than $1,000, and a station broadcasting with a mere 100 watts of power and with an antenna 100 feet above the ground could attain a broadcast radius of three to four miles, depending on the topography and proximity to a larger competing radio station (FCC 2000:7). Thus, being accessible to ordinary citizens, unlicensed FM radio was an efficient and exciting way for someone with a message to speak to an audience.

As I will show later through an analysis of in-depth interviews that I conducted with two dozen unlicensed free radio operators, even though the broadcast content and identities of each station differed greatly, a large number of stations were united in their goals:

First, to challenge the FCC's radio ownership and licensing regulations, which were perceived as exclusionary and unduly strict; and second, to provide an outlet for voices and cultures not normally heard on mainstream media. These broadcasters were committing acts of "electronic civil disobedience," broadcasting illegally in order to make the point that rules regulating the radio industry, even the medium itself, needed to be changed (Soley 1999). More than this, broadcasting was viewed by the activists as an end in itself, giving a voice to people who, because of their beliefs, cultural tastes, or socioeconomic status, were not normally heard on the radio. The actions of these free radio activists achieved limited successes both in providing an alternative radio outlet in their communities and in altering the licensing structure of the FCC.

The modern "free radio or the 'microradio' " movement is considered by almost all authors to have begun in 1987 in the John Jay Homes public housing project in Springfield, IL. A one-watt radio station named WTRA, operating at 107.1 FM, was originally used by the local tenants' rights activist group as an attempt to address the problem of unsatisfactory media coverage that the group was receiving. Broadcasting out of the apartment of Mbanna Kantako, one of the group's organizers, the station operated for over a decade under a variety of names (most recently Human Rights Radio) and was intended to be a voice for the poor black population of Springfield. The threat of legal action against Kantako's station by the FCC in the late 1980s led the National Lawyer's Guild's Committee for Democratic Communications (NLG-CDC) to come to Kantako's defense. This legal organization came to play a pivotal role in the free radio movement because the NLG-CDC represented Stephen Dunifer and Free Radio Berkeley in their court battle against the FCC. The FCC's refusal to grant low-power, affordable radio licenses was challenged on constitutional grounds as a violation of the freedom of speech of those who could not afford the high costs of applying for a radio station. Dunifer's court case—which caught the attention of activists across the country[2]—and his efforts to promote microradio provided the opening for literally hundreds of other activists to create their own low-power free radio stations.[3]

While many broadcasters challenged the FCC overtly, as did Free Radio Berkeley, untold numbers of radio stations were broadcasting covertly. The free radio movement encompassed a wide variety of people, demographically and politically. These stations served everyone from anarchists to religious conservatives, from Spanish-speaking migrant farm workers to squatters in New York City. Despite the diversity and geographical dispersion of radio stations across the country, participants in the movement established nationwide organizations (e.g., Micropower Bust Response Network), held conferences for networking and the sharing of skills and information (e.g., First East Coast Microbroadcasting Conference), established Web sites and e-mail listservs (e.g., http://www.radio4all.org), and united for protests against the FCC and the National Association of Broadcasters. Although the precise size of the movement may never be known, it has been estimated that there were as many as 1,000 illegal radio stations on the air throughout the United States in the late 1990s (Coopman 1999).

In the following discussion of the free radio movement, the claims made about the goals and practices of the free radio movement are derived largely from the ways that participants understood and talked about the movement. I conducted a series of 19 semistructured intensive interviews with 24 past and present free radio operators around the country. Overall, these 24 informants were involved in 8 different radio stations, 3 of which were still broadcasting at the time of the interviews (summer 2001), and 5 of which had already been shut down. In addition, I drew on my experience and personal connections from my previous activity in the movement.[4] In each city where I conducted interviews, I typically had one contact person, whom I either contacted via Internet Web sites or whom I knew personally. I then employed snowball sampling to locate other individuals in each city with whom I could conduct interviews. Because of the covert nature of many stations and the illegality of the movement's activities, the portrait of the free radio movement presented here does not necessarily represent all free radio broadcasters, still less all unlicensed broadcasters. The locations of stations still broadcasting at the time of the interviews are omitted to protect the informants and their stations, and the names of informants used in succeeding discussion are either their on-air names or some other name that they requested be used.

In the following analysis, I first show the ways in which the free radio stations in my study exemplified alternative media. Then, I analyze the extent to which they were successful in providing an alternative to mainstream media and the extent to which they provided a media outlet for other social movements. After this analysis, I examine the justifications for free radio offered by movement participants in order to show that media reform was an important goal of the free radio movement, and I analyze the extent to which the new low-power FM (LPFM) service represents a success of the media reform strategy.

STRATEGY 2: FREE RADIO AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Free radio activists saw their radio stations as fundamentally different from mainstream radio stations. Although they hoped to change the regulations and policies that shaped the medium as a whole (as will be discussed later), the activists also saw their free radio stations as representing an alternative voice on the airwaves, providing a community with an authentic, participatory media outlet (see also Dick and McDowell 2000). The organization of the radio stations, the emphasis on underrepresented information, viewpoints, and music in the broadcast content of their stations, and the emphasis on representing local community interests in broadcast content all show the ways in which the free radio activists distinguished their stations as "alternative," in contrast to mainstream radio stations, both commercial and noncommercial.

First, the organizational structure of the free radio stations created by the activists is one way that the free radio stations were distinguished from mainstream and corporate radio stations. With one exception (Grid Radio), all free radio stations in my study were run by a sort of collective decision-making process and were characterized by varying degrees of decentralization and hierarchy. Stations like Radio One and Free Radio New Orleans were primarily controlled by only a couple of people. Mr. Fang, a disc jockey (DJ) at Radio One Austin, explained:

> Even though there were some key people who had set up the station and, you know, who were the founders, they didn't act like they were the station's management. I mean, it was all a collaborative effort; everyone took it on a volunteer basis and pitched in their time doing things other than their shows.

Stations like Free Radio Memphis, Radio Mutiny, and Radio Community Power Radio (CPR) were run by a formal "collective" structure according to democratic (sometimes consensus) decision-making procedures. Describing the consensus model of decision making at Free Radio Memphis, Jac presented a hypothetical situation:

> We put it to a vote, and let's say there were ten people for it and two against it; well those two were not willing to, you know, just stop the process, although they could have. . . . It was almost like someone had to convince one of the people that disagreed.

Stations like Anti-Watt and Free 103 exhibited an extreme degree of decentralization in the organizational structure and the decision-making process. At Anti-Watt, a college-based free radio station, the organization of the station changed from semester to semester, depending on which students expressed an interest in taking charge of the station. Thus, many free radio activists wanted their stations to be run as democratically and as nonhierarchically as possible.

Second, the station's format or broadcast content is an important indicator of the alternative to mainstream radio that the free radio movement represented. Most of the free radio stations examined in this study, in contrast to most mainstream radio stations, do not have identifiable formats. Only Free 103 and Grid Radio had specific types of music that they sought to present on their stations. The other six stations in my study were open to almost all genres of music. The stations emphasized music not normally heard on the radio, from punk rock to trova (Latin American protest music), from independent hip-hop to folk. The mix of music would be different, depending on what hour of what day the listener tuned in. Anne at Radio One Austin described their station's broadcast content this way:

> We were very interested in playing a lot of rhythm-based types of music: Hip-hop, jazz, blues, you know, a lot of techno and ambient music. Those types of music weren't really being presented [on mainstream radio]. And then also world music, Native American music and news. You know, having a local green program I think was something that we didn't get anywhere on the airwaves. We had a libertarian that had a show—that wasn't something that was available anywhere else.

The news and information offered on each of these stations also emphasized those perspectives not normally heard in mainstream media. On Radio Mutiny, for example, Morgan LaFey did a weekly live poetry show called "Poetry Sauce." Another DJ, The Condom Lady, did a show on public health issues, featuring such topics as sexual health and needle exchange, mixed with music that a fellow DJ, Pete Tridish, described as "sort of K-Tel classic disco of the 70s." The Condom Lady explained that her show provided information that could not be found anywhere else on the radio:

> I discovered that I could do some talking and play a little music and do some stuff about health that you weren't really hearing on the dial anywhere—talking about gynecology, sexually transmitted diseases, how to examine your breasts, how to put

> on a condom, that kind of stuff. Things related to harm reduction, needle exchange. . . . I had guests from like all these different organizations in the city that, you know, couldn't get air time on, through normal channels.

At Free Radio Memphis, there were shows on labor issues, anarchism, queer culture, radical education, and feminist issues. Radio CPR carried some programs in foreign languages, including one program that was broadcast in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Thus, the broadcast content of the free radio stations exemplified the members' commitment to providing an alternative to what was currently offered by mainstream radio stations.

Finally, the broadcasters in the free radio movement distinguished themselves from their corporate counterparts by bringing local control and a focus on local issues to the medium. As recent trends in radio ownership show (FCC 2001), mainstream radio stations are increasingly owned and controlled by large companies based in faraway places. Further, the local staff of radio stations has been shrinking drastically as content streaming via satellite and computer automation have started to replace workers (Huntemann 1999). By contrast, the free radio movement hoped to restore a local orientation to radio. Grid Radio, for example, was consciously attempting to serve the needs of the local "community." The station's mission statement declares that Grid Radio "is dedicated to enlightening and activating the citizens of Cleveland by promoting local theater, politics, news, music, alternative view points and other 'real' issues that affect our community." Anti-Watt, the college station, began as a way for students to have a media outlet that was responsive to their college's culture and issues.

Radio CPR exemplifies this localized approach to radio. The station grew out of the community organizing efforts of a local neighborhood organization, and many of the station operators and DJs are employed in social service agencies in the area. At the time of the interviews, the station was broadcasting out of a spare room of a neighborhood church. The neighborhood is unusually diverse, composed of refugees from Central America, African Americans, whites, and "hipsters," all of whom have very different cultures and lifestyles. Many in the stations expressed a desire to break down barriers between the residents of the neighborhood and begin building "real relationships." Two DJs explained the local orientation of Radio CPR this way:

> Hopefully we have a radio station where anyone [elsewhere] in the world would have no interest in what we're talking about. (DJ Aphrodite)
>
> We are very locally oriented, and we are focusing on this pretty small geographical area where our community is and where we've been living and working for so long. . . . It's about people physically coming to this studio and meeting each other and doing stuff together. (Maude Ontario)

This local focus is reflected in Radio CPR's programming, which features shows such as the "Neighborhood Power Hour," containing local music, interviews with local people, and information about community activism. Thus, Radio CPR's activities are firmly grounded in the institutions, interests, and activism in the neighborhood.

Free 103 also exemplifies the local orientation to alternative content provided by microradio. The operators of this station promote the underground DJ community in their city by broadcasting live shows and giving DJs an outlet for spinning records on the air, which results in a unique blend of music, mixed live, on the spot. Free 103 practices frequency sharing with other microradio stations nearby; each station broadcasts at different times of the week on the same frequency. This practice exhibits the belief that low-power radio is perfectly suited for use by small communities or neighborhoods since several small radio stations could all share the same space on the airwaves. As DJ Dizzy explained it:

> We're telling people, you know, "Tune in almost any evening, and if you're not hearing us, you're going to hear some other pirate. . . ." It's such a low-power thing that they could all be sharing somewhat the same frequencies, you know, if they're scattered around. And the technologies and what I have seen and heard over the couple of years in [this city] listening to the airwaves, listening to the pirates, there's plenty of room to space a bunch of little community stations on the air.

The view that each community and each neighborhood could potentially have their own microradio station is a vision that is at odds with the current practice of mainstream stations, which strive to be as powerful as possible and to reach as many people as possible so as to help meet the financial interests of each station. Participants in the free radio movement placed more emphasis on localism, cultural diversity, and the depth and breadth of public debate in the medium, compared with the current practices of mainstream radio stations. In these ways, the free radio movement exemplified an alternative to mainstream media.

SUCCESSES OF THE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA STRATEGY FOR THE FREE RADIO MOVEMENT

In order to determine whether or not the alternative media strategy was *successful*, three questions must be addressed: First, to what extent did the broadcasts reach a receptive audience? Second, to what extent did the broadcasts provide an "alternative"? Third, to what extent was the free radio movement itself affected by its choice of atternative media as a tactic?

Regarding the audience, to my knowledge, no research exists on the size or nature of the audience of microradio stations, and my informants had no knowledge of how many people actually listened to their stations. Instead, participants would offer stories or anecdotes about the ways their station received public attention. First, many informants shared anecdotes about listeners who phoned the station or chance encounters with strangers who knew of the station. They also talked about how they got their friends to tune in to the station or told stories of getting a place of business to change their radio so that it was tuned to the illegal broadcast. Thus, listenership likely spread through informal networks, although some stations actually advertised themselves to the general public. Second, at least four of the eight stations in my study (Grid Radio, Radio One Austin, Radio Mutiny, and Free Radio Memphis) received local press coverage, both on television and in newspapers. It can be reasonably inferred that some portion of the audience of those mainstream media outlets at least knew of the free radio stations in their cities. Grid

Radio was actually well known enough to appear in the Arbitron ratings (a measure of radio listenership) in Cleveland (Interview with Jerry Szoka, July 3, 2001). Third, Anderson (2004) reports that some microradio stations—namely radio free brattleboro and San Francisco Liberation Radio—obtained support from local governments in the form of resolutions and ballot initiatives, although this was not true for any of the stations in my study. Given only this information, we must remain skeptical that these examples of listener support are truly indicative of "success" until a more thorough evidence of audience can be presented. The extent to which each free radio station can be considered successful in garnering a receptive audience is debatable and likely varies from one station to another.

In response to the second question, aside from their alternative content, some free radio stations were successful in providing an alternative in that they facilitated the efforts of other social movements to communicate their views directly to the radio audience. The fact that the free radio stations in this study exhibited alternative organizational structures and featured broadcast content that was both alternative and locally oriented means that these media outlets were particularly conducive to sympathetic coverage of social movement activities and views. First, these stations often grew out of preexisting activist communities or organizations. WTRA in Springfield, IL, was started as part of the tenants' rights organization in the John Hay Homes Housing Project. Radio CPR was started by members of neighborhood organizing groups to contribute to their organizing efforts. Radio Mutiny and Free Radio Memphis grew out of the anarchist communities in the two cities, and in Memphis, at least, was intended originally to be a tool for propagating the anarchist/activist community's views. Many free radio activists hosted shows about issues of other social movements, such as feminist and labor movements.

The stations were also used to mobilize support for social movements, to encourage people to attend demonstrations, and to report on specific protest activities. For example, David at Anti-Watt recalled that the station was used by some students to promote various political causes: "There were some attempts to use it for organizing. . . . I think one group used it for a Mumia march that was done in town and against prisons, and used the radio as a way to let everyone know and kind of prep everyone." Additionally, news coverage of protest events by these free radio stations could be very different from the coverage by mainstream news outlets. Eli of Free Radio Memphis recounted how this was true for a counterprotest of a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) rally in which a riot erupted after the police fired tear gas into the crowd in an effort to disperse the anti-KKK demonstrators:

> We were probably the only media outlet in the entire city that reported the truth, as far as I'm concerned. Most of the media recorded the truth initially; they did a pretty good job because their reporters were down there getting gassed by the cops, and they saw firsthand what exactly happened. But within 12 hours, pretty much all the media outlets had run through their filtering process, and now it went from being the police provoking the crowd into a riot to the gangs provoking an incident. The transformation was amazing. . . . I think that was probably one of our shining moments, because we, for a full week or two after, we kept on it, and we kept talking about the truth of what happened, the fact that it was a police-provoked riot.

In Eli's account, mainstream news outlets reported that the aggressiveness of anti-KKK demonstrators caused the police to use tear gas to disperse the crowd, whereas Free Radio Memphis reported that the counterdemonstration was peaceful and that the police provoked the riot. Some DJs at Free Radio Memphis went to great lengths to ensure that the protesters' account of the incident was broadcast to its listeners.

The available evidence suggests that some free radio stations were successful in providing an alternative to mainstream radio in the cities where they operated, both because of their content and local orientation and because of their efforts to help other social movements. To a limited extent, they facilitated the mobilization and promotion of other social movements, gave activists a chance to communicate directly to an audience, and provided a more sympathetic view of some social movement activities than did mainstream media outlets. However, it is difficult to say the extent to which the alternative messages broadcast by the free radio stations actually influenced broader publics.

Finally, by choosing to do unlicensed radio broadcasting, activists not only practiced a sort of "prefigurative politics" by enacting alternative radio, but also the practice of microbroadcasting helped to sustain the free radio movement itself (Breines 1980). The short-term survival of each station can be considered a success not only because each day on the air constituted another day of broadcasting alternative music and views, but also because the activity of broadcasting seemed to increase the chances that the free radio movement would succeed in its goal of reforming the regulatory structure of radio. Ironically, this can most clearly be seen in the repressive tactics used by the FCC against the movement. The FCC's campaign of repression only began to succeed when it started taking the microradio stations off the air.

Initially, the FCC chose to deal with the problem presented by the free radio movement through the time-consuming legal system. Not only did the requirements of the court cases *not* prevent the broadcasters from continuing to operate during the legal process, but also the FCC's initial legal setbacks in the Free Radio Berkeley case proved embarrassing to the agency and gave scores of other groups across the country the courage to join the movement. Because the FCC initially seemed unable to shut down or successfully prosecute the free radio broadcasters, the movement participants could continue to broadcast and the stations could continue to serve as working examples of how micropower radio should operate. In short, the FCC's inability to shut down the free radio movement's media outlets allowed the movement to continue to thrive. The case of Grid Radio in Cleveland is instructive since the FCC pursued the legal case against the owner, Jerry Szoka. After sending a cease and desist letter in 1997, the FCC was not able to shut down the station until January 1999. The appeals process lasted until February 2002. Although the FCC eventually shut down the station, the effort no doubt cost the agency a good deal of time and money. And because Grid Radio continued to broadcast through 1999, it inspired many other individuals in the Cleveland area to start unlicensed stations (Interview with Jerry Szoka, July 3, 2001).

However, a change of tactics starting in 1996 (adopted at different times by various regional FCC branches) proved much more effective in slowing down the free radio movement, successfully pacifying (though by no means eliminating) much of the movement by 2000. Starting in early 1996, FCC agents began enlisting the help of law enforcement officials (usually federal marshals) for raiding free radio stations and confiscating the broadcasting equipment. This change in strategy put the FCC in the best of all possible positions: "By seizing the transmitters, the FCC immediately put the free radio broadcasters off the air and on the defensive, requiring them to go to court to get their transmitters back, where they would be required to show that they had a legal right to operate the transmitters. Proving this to a court would be very difficult" (Soley 1999:122). This tactic gave the FCC the upper hand in the legal arena and silenced the unlicensed broadcasters. By taking the free radio stations off the air, many movement participants either were unable to find the necessary resources to continue operating or lost the will to do so. It became apparent that the FCC could rather easily undo all the work that the broadcasters did to build the station, simply by confiscating the broadcast equipment. And without the media outlet, the act of broadcasting, which was so central to the tactics and the identity of the movement, was eliminated.

Thus, the raid on Radio Mutiny on June 22, 1998, succeeded in putting the station off the air permanently. At Free Radio New Orleans, merely the threat of a bust, after a first visit to the station by police officers, was enough to scare most of the DJs away, thereby shutting down the station. Free Radio Memphis managed to survive the first FCC raid against the station because surviving members of the now-defunct Free Radio New Orleans gave the Memphis activists their broadcasting equipment. However, the second raid, on November 18, 1998, shut Free Radio Memphis down permanently, thanks in part to the fact that three operators were arrested and prosecuted for "theft of services under $500."[5] Finally, in the case of Radio One Austin, not only was the station's equipment confiscated, but also a $1,400 fine was levied against Rob, one of the station's founders. In all of these cases, the elimination of the alternative media outlet by confiscation of the broadcasting equipment was integral to the success of the FCC's repression. It should also be noted here that the FCC's long process of planning the LPFM service (to be discussed below) also encouraged some activists to turn to lobbying for the legal low-power radio rather than continue to broadcast illegally. For example, after Radio Mutiny's equipment was confiscated, some of the broadcasters decided to form Prometheus Radio Project, an organization devoted to lobbying for LPFM and helping people become *legal* low-power broadcasters. Thus, the combined strategy of repression and co-optation—both taking the stations off the air and promising to provide a new *legal* avenue for alternative voices on the radio—proved remarkably successful for the FCC.

STRATEGY 3: MEDIA REFORM AS THE GOAL OF PROTEST

As the free radio movement grew in the mid- and late 1990s, the young microradio stations came to share the goal of Kantako, Dunifer, and the NLG-CDC of altering the underlying structure of the radio industry and the FCC's regulation of the radio waves. While broadcasters disagreed about whether the regulation of the airwaves should be reformed or eliminated, they all agreed that some underlying structural changes to the organization and regulation of radio in the United States was necessary. The fact that the regulatory structure was the target of protest is evident in the three main justifications that microradio broadcasters offered for their activities.

First, movement participants challenged the regulatory authority of the FCC by adopting the rhetoric of free speech and making the claim that all people have both a constitutional right and a human right to communicate via radio. Many of the legal battles that arose from the microradio movement focused on alleged violations of the broadcasters' First Amendment right to free speech as a result of the FCC's ban on issuing low-power radio licenses.[6] For Kantako, Dunifer, and other early movement activists, "The air belongs to everyone who breathes it" (Kantako, quoted in Soley 1999:73). Many of my informants echoed this frame, arguing that being able to express oneself on the air is a human right, an issue of freedom of speech:

> I've always been a proponent of free speech and believed that communication is a key to a free society. And when such a large portion of the communication methods of our society are owned by private industry, it really inhibits the ability for the people . . . to get a message out. And it was really about providing an outlet for those people. (Kevin, Free Radio New Orleans)

Furthermore, free radio activists considered the airwaves to be publicly owned and therefore should be open for anyone to have their voice heard:

> From day one, you know, the broadcast was an act of civil disobedience. And the thing that we were saying was that, you know, no one can have ownership of the airwaves; they're a resource that belongs to everyone. . . . We felt like we were taking, you know, what rightfully belongs to us. And the whole idea behind the station was to get the public charged up about this issue, to say, you know, "Look we're going to take what's ours and we want you to be a part of it. . . ." (Rob, Radio One Austin)

The mission statements of Free Radio Memphis and Grid Radio in Cleveland also declared free speech to be an important reason for their activities. Thus, the free radio movement was originally framed as an issue about freedom of speech and the denial of free-speech rights to the poor and disenfranchised mandated by current radio regulations.

Second, movement participants saw as unjust the extremely high barriers of entry to the medium put in place because of the dominance of corporate, for-profit radio stations and the power of the commercial broadcast lobby over FCC policy. In a brief prepared by the NLG-CDC, Alan Korn criticizes the FCC's requirement that radio station applicants be able to "construct and operate a radio station for three months, without relying upon advertising or other revenue to meet these costs" (p. 50).[7] Korn estimated that $50,000 to $100,000 would be necessary for such an undertaking and argued that the poor legally could not be excluded from owning a radio station based on such financial criteria. Radio is one of the cheapest and simplest technologies of all mass media, and movement participants believed it to be unjust that only the richest members of society could even consider having a radio station. They criticized the current regulatory practices as a violation of "the public interest":

> Micro radio broadcasts are perfectly in line with responsible use of the public airwaves and perfectly in line with the mission of the FCC, which specifies the use of

> minimum power. In fact it might be said that micro radio broadcasters set a better example in their use of the public's airwaves than the megawatt broadcasters which are currently "regulated" by the FCC. (Eli, Free Radio Memphis, in a letter to the FCC)

Thus, the FCC's licensing policies were a target of the social movement because they prevented large segments of the population from even having the opportunity to broadcast over the radio.

Third, the free radio broadcasters believed that there was a large variety of cultures and viewpoints that were being denied access to the airwaves because of corporate dominance of the medium. As a result, microradio activists argued, the medium needed to be changed to allow for a greater diversity of people to be represented on the radio. Free radio was a means of counteracting what they perceived as the homogenization and increased corporate control of culture and points of view expressed via radio:

> I did feel like . . . Austin was threatened by the monoculture that was being presented in that form of media, radio. I was concerned that there was just, you know, one type of music that was being presented and didn't have anything to do with real people in Austin. The news that was presented was very watered-down and extremely biased by corporate interests. (Anne, Radio One Austin)

Others echoed the point that radio was not representative, and Morgan LaFey of Radio Mutiny believed that the desire to increase the diversity of radio helped their station grow:

> There's not anything on the radio that really celebrates the diversity of our culture. Mostly what's on the radio is, you know, carefully prescribed, selected music that's targeting a particular market. . . . There was really, you know, nothing to listen to, and it was pretty amazing how quickly people signed up to be DJs . . . And it wasn't just like lefty radical activists like myself; it was regular people who had never been active before on any level; like they just loved music and they loved radio and . . . they wanted to get some music and the information out to people that they knew about, that they knew other people didn't know about. And that's what really was the driving force.

Free radio activists thought that it was necessary to add their viewpoints and cultures to the public debate to ensure that democracy would be allowed to take into account all viewpoints and opinions. As the mission statement of Free Radio Memphis noted, this desire to expand the public discourse and their criticisms of the mainstream media were central to their justification for broadcasting without a license:

> Our intention is to motivate ourselves and others to be fully liberated and to also work towards the creation of a truly democratic society. As a collective, our contribution to this work is to offer alternative views and information which is being deliberately filtered out by mainstream media. In doing so, we consistently strive to broaden the parameters of what is publicly debated and to provide a space for voices of dissent as well as to provide a space to express our passion for life.

Thus, free radio activists attributed the lack of diverse content on radio to the dominance of large, for-profit broadcasters in the medium. The structure of mainstream radio was such that it prevented many cultures and perspectives from being expressed on the radio, and the free radio movement sought to change this structural bias.

SUCCESSES OF THE MEDIA REFORM STRATEGY

These three main reasons offered by free radio broadcasters for operating their unlicensed stations illustrate the media reform strategy, that is, they hoped to change the medium itself in order to allow a wider diversity of people to express their viewpoints and share their music with an audience. And to a degree, the free radio movement succeeded in this goal. These microradio activists were significant actors in bringing about tangible policy changes in the FCC's licensing structure. The free radio movement generated a significant amount of news coverage sympathetic to the movement, and this put pressure on the FCC to account for the increasing corporate dominance and concentration of ownership in radio to which the free radio movement was calling attention. Speculating about the role of the free radio movement on what happened next, Pete Tridish of Radio Mutiny said, "I think that we made it very uncomfortable for the FCC. The FCC does not want to be regarded like the IRS or something like that. . . . They knew that they couldn't really beat us in a public relations war without at least to some extent joining us. And that's what they did."

Partially as a result of the tremendous enforcement burden created by the free radio movement and the pressure put on the FCC by the movement to ensure that content and ownership diversity remain in radio, on January 20, 2000, the FCC issued a Report and Order No. 99-25, which established guidelines for the creation of a new LPFM class of radio stations (FCC 2000). In the previous year, the FCC had received thousands of comments and studies about the merits and demerits of a similar LPFM proposal from (among others) individual microradio activists and organizations like the NLG-CDC and the Prometheus Radio Project. Opel (2001) shows that the FCC adopted much of the discourse used by the free radio movement in the final document, and the form of the LPFM service was compatible with some of the goals of the movement.

The Report and Order established two classes of licenses, for 100-watt and 10-watt power levels.[8] The LPFM stations were to be strictly noncommercial; they were to be owned and operated by preexisting nonprofit organizations; and they were required to be located in the same market as the station owner. No individual or organization could own more than one LPFM station, and current radio station owners (in addition to known, active pirate broadcasters) were forbidden from applying for an LPFM station license. The application process was greatly streamlined, and many of the fees waived, so that the barriers to applying for a station would be as low as possible. Before the service could be fully implemented, however, the Republican-controlled Congress intervened on behalf of established radio broadcasters and significantly cut the number of LPFM stations that could be licensed.[9]

There is wide disagreement among microradio activists about whether or not LPFM is a good thing. While many free radio activists claim victory, pointing out that they helped to open the door to small groups and communities to own a radio station, others argue that the FCC simply co-opted the movement and made it more difficult for microradio activists to establish stations (see also Dick and McDowell 2000). As David, an Anti-Watt activist, explained:

> [LPFM] is an effective tool for dividing the movement. . . . Licensing sucks, but on the other hand, it opened up doors to a lot of people that couldn't take risks. . . . Some people seem to be doing microradio to build momentum to put pressure on the government to allow this space to open up, because there was none. And so by [the FCC] opening up the space, then that kind of . . . it totally kills a huge part of the freedom of speech argument that Stephen Dunifer used and a lot of radio stations used. . . . So yeah, it's a really strange thing for the activist, like if what you're fighting for actually happens, then what do you do?

Does LPFM represent a success for the free radio movement? By judging the new LPFM service according to the three main justifications for broadcasting that the free radio activists offered, it is apparent that LPFM takes important steps toward rectifying some of the activists' criticisms. Although there is disagreement among movement participants about whether or not LPFM improves conditions for free speech on the radio (reason #1), the FCC *did* lower barriers to entry in the medium (reason #2), and they *did* open the airwaves to a more diverse group of station owners and more diverse broadcast content (reason #3). Thus, despite the uncertainties and the disagreement among movement participants, the implementation of LPFM should be considered a significant, if partial, victory by the free radio movement. As of this writing, there are 675 licensed LPFM radio stations across the United States, many of which are owned and operated by organizations that likely would have never been able to afford to own a radio station under the old licensing structure. One such example is WCTI 107.9 FM, Radio Consciencia in Immokalee, FL, owned and operated by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, an organization of migrant farm workers who have been organizing for better pay and working conditions since 1996 and is best known for its recent boycott of Taco Bell.

At this point, it is unclear precisely what sort of impact LPFM stations will have on the medium of radio or on communities across the United States. The scope of the LPFM service is still being debated in Congress,[10] and there are hundreds of outstanding LPFM applications still being processed by the FCC. Furthermore, many activists and media analysts speculate that radio may soon become obsolete. With the rise of the Internet, e-mail, blogging, and "webcasting," communication and social movement mobilization via the Internet may soon be more effective than using older media technologies like radio. Nevertheless, one hypothetical consequence of LPFM is that, by legalizing and institutionalizing the style of broadcasting that the free radio movement advocated, the number of participants and the potential audience for alternative radio is increased.

THE LIMITS OF ALTERNATIVE RADIO AND LPFM

The preceding discussion of the successes of the alternative media strategy illustrates a fundamental tension inherent in both the free radio movement and the alternative media strategy generally. Both social movements and alternative media outlets are torn between two conflicting goals: first, to create internal group solidarity by communicating the views and cultural orientations of its constituents (in essence, "preaching to the choir"), and second, to make a broad public impact, either by attempting to alter the status quo or by reaching a large audience with its alternative message. Thus, the paradox of alternative media is that by being *alternative* an alternative media outlet simultaneously limits its potential audience *and* strives to have a significant impact on society.

In the case of the free radio movement, all evidence suggests that free radio stations succeeded more in building internal group solidarity and providing an alternative perspective for a relatively small audience, whereas their efforts to reach a large audience and to have a broad public impact were less successful. The tension exhibited itself in the free radio movement in the ways that participants talked about the goals and practices of their stations. The ways that Radio CPR broadcasters spoke of building "real relationships" and the ways that Free 103 broadcasters spoke of providing a forum for underground DJs to hone their skills indicate that some of the main beneficiaries of their activities were themselves. Similarly, the broadcasting of less popular musical genres appeals to a much smaller audience than would playing mainstream music. Finally, given the lack of evidence that most free radio stations reached a large audience, we must assume that the listenership of each microradio station was smaller than that of mainstream stations because of the smaller broadcast area and the nature of the station.

The broad public impact made by the free radio movement, then, was not the alternative perspective provided by the stations; rather, it was the adoption of the LPFM program by the FCC. But in making this observation, the exceptional nature of this case study is clear. Any movement can use alternative media in the service of their cause, but only for the "media reform movement" is the media reform strategy directly beneficial. Other social movements would see media reform as merely a development that could facilitate the achievement of their own movement objectives (e.g., to save the environment). Thus, the broad public impact of a successful media reform strategy may be to facilitate the other two media strategies. The media reform strategy is important to most social movements mainly because, if effective, media reform can make mass media more open to alternative perspectives and to a more diverse group of actors, as previously illustrated by LPFM.

These points are consequential for our analysis of how effective the alternative media strategy or the media reform strategy can be. For the alternative media strategy, the tension between providing an alternative and reaching a large audience with one's message would be a difficult balance to strike. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the ways that this tension is resolved by different social movements or alternative media outlets. However, I would hypothesize that the way this tension is resolved by each social movement or media outlet likely affects the size and composition of the audience and the extent to which the alternative media strategy is "successful" in helping a movement achieve its goals. As for the media reform strategy, it may be unwise or inefficient for most social movements to choose this strategy to achieve their goals since reform of the media may not be a primary movement objective. However, a successful media reform may benefit all social movements in the long term because it can help undermine the problem of gaining sympathetic media coverage of social movements via mass media.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

The free radio movement began by seeking to change the underlying policies and practices that govern mainstream radio because the activists believed that mainstream radio did not represent their interests and did not provide the diversity of information, views, and culture necessary for democratic participation in society. They adopted the alternative media itself as the tactic for lobbying for these changes, and in the process, they provided local individuals, groups, and social movements with the opportunity to speak for themselves through the mass media. The free radio movement, which exemplifies both the alternative media strategy and the media reform strategy for dealing with the problem of media–movement relations, met with limited success in both of its media strategies. First, microradio stations successfully broadcast alternative news, information, and culture for their listeners, providing a unique local focus that the activists believed was lacking in mainstream radio, and providing a voice for social movements—both the free radio movement itself and other social movements to which the broadcasters were sympathetic. Second, the movement provided the impetus for media reform—the FCC's establishment of a new class of noncommercial, LPFM radio stations that could be owned and controlled by SMOs, community groups, educational organizations, and religious groups. These successes must be described as limited, however, because the size and composition of the audience of these microradio stations is unknown, as is the extent to which the alternative media messages were positively received by listeners. Further, many stations in my case study are no longer broadcasting, and the new LPFM service established by the FCC is unlikely to fully rectify the problems with radio (in both content and regulatory structure) pointed to by the free radio movement. However one characterizes the successes or failures of the movement, it is important to note that unlicensed microradio broadcasting continues to this day, suggesting that the movement has survived and may only be in a period of abeyance.

At a general level, the case of the free radio movement suggests that the existence of an alternative media outlet (whether controlled by an SMO or merely sympathetic to social movement messages), depending on the size and nature of the audience, can be an important element of the repertoire of protest and can increase a movement's chances of success. As one of my informants put it, "it doesn't matter how noble your cause, it doesn't matter how well-produced your story; if you don't have control of access [to media], or ability to access [media], none of the rest of it matters" (Interview with Joan D'Arc, June 30, 2001).

This brings us back to Gamson and Wolfsfeld's (1993) insight about the "fundamental asymmetry" in media–movement relations. They argue that media have more power than movements in their interactions because "movements need the media far more than the media need them" (p. 117). This case study reveals that this insight is based on an assumption that movements will employ only the first strategy discussed earlier for gaining media coverage, which is working through mainstream media. A social movement with control of an alternative media outlet is no longer dependent on elite support for media coverage; the tremendous difficulties facing movements that desire positive media coverage from mainstream media become less of a problem. The analysis of this case study is thus analogous to McAdam's (1982) critique of the resource mobilization theory (Jenkins and Perrow 1977) in that it reveals that resources indigenous to a movement, and not elite resources, can be crucial to a movement's mobilization. Indeed, members of the free radio movement mobilized almost exclusively using indigenous resources to create free radio stations, rendering the elite control over mainstream media only of secondary importance in the movement's successes. Thus, this case study highlights the potential importance of *indigenous media resources*, as opposed to *elite media resources*, for analyses of social movement mobilization and success. Social movement scholars, by focusing on relations with mainstream media, may have underestimated the power and resources of social movements to generate positive media coverage.

Because this article considers only one case study, though, no strong conclusions should be drawn regarding precisely what effects alternative media might have on social movement outcomes. However, this article does point toward several questions that future research should consider when trying to understand the use of alternative media by social movements and the impact of alternative media on social movement struggles.

First, as discussed in the previous section, how a social movement balances the tension inherent in alternative media between providing an alternative perspective and reaching a large audience should prove consequential for social movement outcomes. A conceptual distinction between internal movement communication and external movement communication may prove useful here. An alternative media outlet that provides a forum for communication among movement participants (i.e., internal communication) but does not extend to broader publics may help to increase a sense of collective identity among movement participants and may help a movement to survive periods of abeyance (Taylor 1989) because of increased opportunities for internal communication among movement participants and sympathizers. Conversely, an alternative media outlet that is focused primarily on communicating alternative views to broader publics (i.e., external communication) may have more success in framing its issues in the broader media landscape, and the social movement can count its alternative media outlet as part of its tactical repertoire since it can explicitly offer an alternative view to that of its opponents. Whether a movement focuses on internal or external communication also might affect the movement's mobilization: internal communication may increase the activity of existing participants while external communication might increase the number of people who are aware of the movement by increasing the number of people who are targets of mobilization attempts via media, thereby removing a barrier to participation (Klandermans and Oegema 1987).

Second, I agree with Downing (2003) that the nature of the audience of alternative media is both consequential and understudied. In this case study, the lack of information about the audience of the free radio movement is a serious limitation to our understanding of the extent to which the movement and its media strategies were successful. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully address considerations of audience that would have a bearing on the effect of alternative media on social movements. However, I hypothesize that the size and composition of the audience, the other media messages to which the audience is exposed, and the type of alternative media are all important variables that would affect the reception and interpretation processes of media messages. The ability of an alternative media outlet to help a social movement succeed in its goals probably depends greatly on its audience.

Finally, there is an important distinction between alternative media outlets controlled by a social movement (e.g., a union newsletter) and alternative media outlets that are merely sympathetic to social movements (e.g., community radio). To my knowledge, the difference that this makes for social movements has not been studied. Also, the way that the existence of an alternative media outlet affects other social movements is an important question, as is the question of the impact of media reform. This case study suggests that both the presence of an alternative media outlet and successful media reform can be beneficial for other social movements, a point also made in reference to Radio Popolare in Italy (Diani 1997). In other words, alternative media and successful media reform opens the *political opportunity structure* for social movements because a more conducive media environment exists to accommodate movement messages (McAdam 1982). As Gamson and Meyer (1996) point out, "The media system's openness to social movements is itself an important element of political opportunity" (p. 287).

To sum up, this case study illustrates both the alternative media strategy and the media reform strategy and the *potential* for these two strategies to help movements overcome the obstacles they face in gaining sympathetic media coverage. The existence of an alternative media outlet directly mitigates this problem (and may therefore increase the probability of realizing social movement goals) because the movement does not have to rely on the power or interests of elite media organizations. Instead, using *indigenous media resources*, a social movement can control its media representation directly, or at least count on the perspective of the alternative media outlet to be sympathetic to its message. Additionally, a successful media reform may, in the long run, be helpful for social movements that seek sympathetic media coverage because, as with the new LPFM radio service, media reform alters the media landscape and the conditions under which journalists and media outlets operate. To use a simple metaphor, media reform can change the playing field on which actors compete for media attention, strengthening the positions of some actors (in this case, social movement actors) relative to others.

Finally, this analysis suggests that the ability of a social movement to *control* the means of communication can be a valuable asset for social movements seeking to accomplish their goals. Movement-controlled alternative media outlets allow social movements to directly construct their own public image and to disseminate information and views to a broader public rather than being subject to the interpretation and selection processes of mainstream media that are beyond the social movement's control. Assuming that they have an audience, alternative media outlets can weaken the elite's control over the terms of public debate, thereby diminishing the inequalities of power between the social movement and its more powerful opponents. Social movements, by employing the alternative media strategy and the media reform strategy, can shift the balance of power (relatively, not absolutely) away from the status quo and more toward the movement, thereby increasing their chances of success.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank numerous friends and colleagues for their feedback and support: Pamela Oliver, Lew Friedland, Matt Desmond, John Anderson, David Brain, Sarah Hernandez, Keith Fitzgerald, Uzi Baram, and the anonymous reviewers for this and previous versions of this article. In addition, I want to thank all of my informants who shared their experiences with me, as well as The Refused, whose music has not only been an inspiration but from whom the title of this article is borrowed.

NOTES

[1] Riismandel's (2002) account of the battle to eliminate the Class D license places the current struggles over low-power FM (LPFM) radio in its proper historical context. In many ways, the arguments of contemporary free radio and LPFM advocates mirror the arguments of those who struggled unsuccessfully to preserve the Class D license, thus illustrating the historical continuity of the fight for low-power, community radio.

[2] The initial refusal by Judge Claudia Wilken in a California court to grant a temporary injunction against Dunifer on January 20, 1995, constituted a moment of "cognitive liberation" (McAdam 1982) for the movement. As one of my informants, Pete Tridish of Radio Mutiny, put it, "the Dunifer case created the opening that we needed to create a mass movement. . . . People had a real comfort zone during the Dunifer decision to start a station, 'cause they were like, 'Well, they're certainly not going to bust me if they haven't even finished with Dunifer yet.' " This perception by movement activists that they might be able to "win," combined with the technical skills and equipment that Dunifer and others were spreading around the United States, resulted in tremendous growth of the movement.

[3] For more information about Kantako's station, Free Radio Berkeley, and the NLG-CDC, see Coopman (1995), Howley (2000), Opel (2001), Shields and Ogles (1995), Soley (1999), Sakolsky (1998), and Walker (2001).

[4] I was a DJ and a collective member at Free Radio Memphis from 1997 to 1998. During this time, I hosted a weekly radio show, staffed the station, participated in decision-making meetings, and otherwise contributed to promoting and maintaining the station.

[5] The broadcasters were charged with stealing electricity from the University of Memphis by plugging their equipment into an outlet at the top of the parking garage from which their mobile station broadcast.

[6] For a thorough discussion of court cases associated with unlicensed broadcasting, focusing on the microradio movement, see Anderson (2004).

[7] http://www.nlgcdc.org/briefs/microradio_mbanna.html, accessed January 2, 2004.

[8] As Riismandel (2002) points out, the new LPFM proposal revives the spirit and function of the Class D license, which the FCC eliminated in 1978.

[9] For an account of Congress' intervention, see Opel (2001).

[10] On February 8, 2005, Senators McCain, Leahy, and Cantwell introduced a bill to the U.S. Senate to reverse the congressional intervention in LPFM, essentially restoring the LPFM service to its original strength. A similar bill was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on September 13, 2005 by Representative Slaughter. This action is based on the results of the congressionally mandated study of LPFM, which found no merit to the interference arguments advanced by commercial broadcasters that were initially used to justify curtailment of LPFM service.

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