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The Radical Ally: Anne McCarty Braden and the Fight to Reimagine White Agency in the Civil Rights Era

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Résumé
L'activisme d'Anne McCarty Braden remet en question les récits académiques qui marginalisent ou critiquent l'alliance blanche au sein du mouvement des droits civiques (MDC), dirigé par des Noirs. Cet article soutient que Braden a incarné un modèle transformateur d'alliance qui était stratégique, responsable et indispensable aux succès du mouvement. En convoquant la théorie de l'alliance (Allyship Theory), il analyse sa contribution dans la justice foncière, le journalisme militant et le leadership organisationnel. L'article révèle que Braden a consciemment utilisé son privilège racial pour démanteler la ségrégation, a amplifié les voix noires à travers des médias radicaux, et a apporté un soutien matériel crucial à des groupes comme le SNCC, tout en subordonnant son rôle à la direction noire. Sa carrière démontre qu'une alliance blanche efficace ne déforme pas la mémoire historique mais constitue plutôt une forme vitale d'agence qui a utilisé les outils du privilège pour attaquer de l'intérieur les structures mêmes de la suprématie blanche.

Mots-clés : *Alliance Blanche, Anne* ***McCarty*** *Braden, Mouvement des Droits Civiques, Théorie de l'Alliance.*

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Abstract
Anne McCarty Braden's activism challenges scholarly narratives that marginalize or critique white allyship in the Black-led Civil Rights Movement (CRM). This paper argues that Braden exemplified a transformative model of allyship that was strategic, accountable, and indispensable to the movement's successes. Based on the Allyship Theory, it analyzes her work in housing justice, movement journalism, and organizational leadership. The paper reveals that Braden consciously leveraged her racial privilege to dismantle segregation, amplified Black voices through radical media, and provided crucial material support to groups like SNCC, while subordinating her role to Black leadership. Her career demonstrates that effective white allyship does not distort historical memory but rather constitutes a vital form of agency that used the tools of privilege to attack the very structures of white supremacy from within.

Keywords: *Allyship Theory, Anne McCarty Braden, Civil Rights Movement, White Allyship*

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Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in the United States is often remembered as a Black-led struggle for racial justice, equality, and liberation. However, the role of white allies within the movement has been complex, sometimes contradictory, and frequently peripheral—despite their presence and contributions. From the abolitionist movement to the 20th-century CRM, white allies have participated in various capacities, often occupying supportive rather than leadership roles. Their involvement ranged from socio-economic backing and juridical-political advocacy to direct action.

However, most scholars of the CRM contend that the CRM succeeded because of Black self-determination and not white assistance. Their works challenge narratives that insist on white participation or portray the movement as a collaborative interracial effort rather than a Black-led struggle. Several scholars tend to emphasize the central role of Black American leadership, organization, and sacrifices in the CRM, while critiquing or minimizing the role of white allies. Considering the case of McCarty Braden, a fierce white ally of the CRM, the view of white allies' detractors cannot stand up to the test of concrete evidence. In this respect, to which extent was Anne McCarty Braden instrumental in the CRM's achievements? To answer this question, we go from the assumption that Braden was instrumental in Blacks' housing justice, anti-racism, media representation, and organizational leadership.

An overview of the literature on the CRM permits to classify scholars into four groups: revisionist historians,

critics of the "white ally" narrative, critics of liberal "white saviorism", and Black feminists. Revisionist historians of the CRM relocate Black agency and challenge the white ally narrative. That is the case with Carson (1981) who focuses his praise on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as a Black-led organization, even though a few white allies participated. Payne (2000) pushes too far as he denies the contributions of white activists that he views as marginal in terms of freeing Blacks from racial oppression. For critics of the "white ally" narrative, white allies' involvement was often limited, conditional, or paternalistic. Shapiro (1988) contends that white resistance shaped Black resistance, but white allies' contribution to the CRM cannot be considered as essential. Tyson (1999) argues that armed self-defense led by Black activists like Williams was crucial, contrasting with white liberal nonviolence. Scholars who critique liberal "white saviorism", examine how media and history overstate white ally roles. In this respect, Classen (2004) shows that media narratives about the CRM favor white moderates over Black activists. As far as Black feminists are concerned, they highlight how Black women and radicals led the CRM, often without white support. From this perspective, McGuire (2010) centers on Black women's activism against sexual violence, a struggle largely ignored by white allies.

The aim of this study is to highlight Braden's significant contribution to the CRM and, by so doing, bring white allies from the margin to the center of CRM history. To reach this aim, our whole analysis is based on the Allyship Theory. This theory examines the way individuals or groups with privilege actively support marginalized communities by leveraging their position to challenge systemic oppression.

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Unlike passive solidarity, allyship requires ongoing action, self-education, and accountability to dismantle inequities. According to Martha Minow (in De Silva, 2023, p.3), the Allyship Theory "means [to] stand up against injustice, bigotry, violence, or other wrongdoing." Its proponents seek a "sense of common purpose that makes all of us more likely to stand up against wrongs and on behalf of rights".

The analysis mainly focuses on Braden's contribution at three levels: housing justice and radical desegregation, journalism and movement media, and organizational leadership. Before delving into these contributions, however, it seems important to figure out the socio-cultural roots of Braden's commitment.

1. The Socio-Cultural Roots of Anne McCarty Braden's Commitment

Anne McCarty Braden was born on July 28, 1924, at St. Anthony's Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky where white folks lived (Fosl, 2002, p. 13). At the time of her birth, "The benighted South around her was under sharp outside criticism for […] staggering racial violence" (Fosl, 2002, p. 13). That is to say, Braden was born in an environment which was already promoting brutality among races. That can be noticed in Catherine Fosl's use of the term "staggering racial violence." Being born in such an era, Braden grew up, observing how "her South" dealt with the matter of race. After being sent to a Sunday school where she was supposed to get a religious training (Fosl, 2002, p. 19), Braden got the opportunity to meet people like Rev. Jim Stoney who made her aware of the social injustice that was going around her at the time.

The first figure who influenced Braden was Rev. Jim Stoney. The latter was influenced by the early 20th-century protestant Social Gospel style that developed across the country in response to the abject poverty in cities brought about by the dramatic rise of industrialization. Supporters of the Social Gospel believed that the causes of poverty lay not only in personal failings but also in social circumstances, emphasizing the responsibility of Christians to improve society and seek personal salvation. In harmony with this vision, Stoney established several "missions" to provide medical, social services, and pastoral care to poor whites in Anniston's Mill District and rural suburbs (Fosl 2002, 21). These roles that Stoney played had a great moral influence on Braden. "For [Braden], Stoney was an influential moral presence" (Fosl 2002, 21). In an interview with Thrasher on March 9, 1989, Braden (in Thrasher 1989, Tape 4) said:

> I adored Jim Stoney. He always let them [well-to-do people] know they weren't the only people in the world by trying to give those wealthier people an awareness of what poverty was like. He didn't have any kind of radical social program; he was really just suggesting giving to the poor, but there was enough of a caring atmosphere [that] it influenced me because I'd never been around poor people just like I'd never been around Blacks.

What could be kept in mind concerning what Braden said about Stoney is that he was a man with a great heart. The fact of using the gospel to draw the attention of Anniston's wealthier people on the dramatic situations of poor people around them and invite them to share their wealth with those people was something marvelous for Braden. All these satisfactions are condensed in her use of the term "adored". By using this term, Braden endeavored to show the extent to

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which she appreciated Stoney for his well-hearted missions in Anniston. This had a great influence on Braden in the way that it permits her to know that around her there were people who did not have the same advantages and privileges she had (Drabo, 2025, p. 121). Braden sensed "over there was a world where people didn't have as nice a [sic] clothes as I had" (Braden in Thrasher 1989, Tape 4). Braden's words testify to her awareness of the dramatic situation of the poor, both Whites and Blacks, in the American South.

Braden's growing awareness of social injustice was strengthened in 1936 by the arrival of (…) Marshall Seifert to support Stoney in his work. (…) (Fosl, 2002, p. 21). Seifert, not yet ordained as a minister, was in charge of a service-oriented youth group at Grace. He was liberal, youthful, and very energetic. According to Braden (in Fosl, 2002, p. 22), "Seifert had a knack for what she called getting people to think". In that sense, discussions were initiated by the Young People's Service League on moral issues that escalated Braden's developing social consciousness (Fosl, 2002, p. 22). In an interview with Nonnenmacher (1942, p. 18), Braden said, "I remember one night, I might have been 13 or 14. There must have been a discussion of the "colored problem," which is what everybody called it if they talked about it at all. I made some mild comment to the effect that people ought to be treated equally no matter what color they were." Braden's statement shows that, since her early age, she already positioned herself as a fighter for racial equality and social justice. As Brown (2002, p.109) states, "Anne […] resists the white supremacy of her region and her nation," despite the fact that she came from a conservative family

where the white race was considered to be superior to the Black race and the children of her age were encouraged by their parents to endorse that opinion. At this age, Braden already thought that racial equality and social justice were something good for society, because no race is superior to the other as the gospel said. This ideology will be the justification of her actions later in her adulthood, especially during her frequentation of the Grace Episcopal Church (Drabo, 2025, p. 121).

Braden's frequentation of the Grace Episcopal Church and her conversations with Stoney and Seifert were the highwater marks of not only her religious yearnings but also her awareness of racial inequality and social injustice. Her religious beliefs and curiosity set her apart from her mother who had a more practical focus (Fosl, 2002, p. 22). On her thirteenth birthday, Braden wrote a prayer which she let her mother know the content. In the letter, she (1937) said,

> Dearest Lord Jesus […] Today I have entered my "teens." Childhood is behind me; girlhood is before me […] I have had such […] carefree, hilarious times in work and play […] It is, therefore, with sadness that I step from it for I do not want to go […] I cannot see what may come upon me in the next hour, Lord Jesus, but I pray you give me courage to meet whatever it may be. Grant me hope and optimism in trouble, faith in sorrow, strength in temptation, courage in defeat and humiliation, love when people hate me, joy with thee in happiness, and mostly give me the grace to live a selfless life—willing to serve thee and my fellowman with no thought for myself or my safety. With Thee […] as my support, no matter how deep my trouble or how great my joy, I shall be able to […] always feel that ahead, no matter how dark it seems, there is light around the next bend and somewhere off down that road a palm of victory.

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This prayer symbolizes Braden's "death" as a child and her "rebirth" as an adult ready to embrace the world with its ups and downs. It was a way for her not only to separate herself from what her mother wanted her to be in life, but also to disassociate herself from the racial views of her society. She was determined to be true to herself and not to be guided by anyone. Considering religion as her motivating force, she never forgot to base her visions on whom she called "Dearest Lord Jesus." The use of the superlative here in "dearest" shows the important place she gave to religion and especially to the Almighty. She believed that anything was possible if it is backed by Jesus. That's why before emitting a goal, she first referred back to Jesus. This can be noticed throughout her prayer. Therefore, she used religion as a source of strength. When she says in her prayer, "I cannot see what may come upon me in the next hour, Lord Jesus, but I pray that you will give me the courage to face whatever it may be", one can understand by her use of the word "whatever" that she had become resolute, radical and determined to face any difficulties on her way to racial equality and social justice (Drabo, 2025, p. 122).

Braden's radicalism took shape that day when she said, "Give me the grace to live a selfless life willing to serve Thee and my fellow man without thought for myself or my safety." This prayer-like statement shows that she was willing to fully and actively engage herself in the struggle and defy everything in the course of serving her "Lord" and "the other". In her mind, serving "the other" is serving her "Lord" because this "Lord" has made it the duty of Christians to care for "the other" and to improve society.

Now that she had made her position clear to her mother, time had passed and she had grown up, but the issues of racial inequality and social injustice were still present in the Confederacy and throughout the United States. It was time for her to do something to change the Confederacy culture by integrating notions of racial equality and social justice that were far from being understood and accepted by that culture (Drabo, 2025, p. 122).

In an interview with Thrasher, Braden (1981, Tape 6, Side 1, 161) said, "In anybody's life there is a time that's a turning point, and this was the turning point in my life. Everything else is [sic] anticlimactic. I hope I've grown since then, but for me the real change was from being a woman of the white privileged class in the South to being what I consider a revolutionary." From this assertion, we can understand that Braden was well aware of what her life is going to be since she decided to cut herself from her society's culture and live according to the gospel. The turning point of her life was the time she decided to overtly and radically fight for racial equality and social justice in the South despite the threats that this fight may entail. She always identified herself to be a radical white ally. As her biographer confirms, "Braden has also long identified herself as a radical [white ally], a social indicator that won her intense opprobrium in the South of earlier decades" (Fosl, 1999, p. 25).

In the 1950s, at the onset of the CRM, Braden positioned herself as a radical adept of the movement, ready to do anything to help it reach its goals. In *The Wall Between*, her 1958 memoir, Braden said,

> Finally, I came to realize that [...] no one can go untouched by segregation in the [S]outh. No white person, then as now, can be neutral on this question. Either you find a way to oppose the evil, or the evil

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> becomes part of you and you are a part of it, and it winds itself around your soul like the arms of an octopus [...] if I did not oppose it, I was [...] responsible for its sins. There was no middle ground (Braden, 1958, p. 30-1).

This statement describes Braden's mutation from a passive white ally that she was during her childhood into an active and radical white ally in the CRM during her adulthood. According to Fosl, "Anne McCarty Braden wrote those words in *The Wall Between*, her 1958 memoir, to describe her transformation to what would be known today as a [radical] white anti-racist activist" (Fosl, 1999, p. 24). Braden played a variety of roles on the social level of the movement, which led her to be considered as a blessing to it, despite the fact that she was alien to the culture and reality of African Americans. "Braden was the first white southerner […] who was willing to put (herself) on the line no matter the consequences" (Fosl, 2002, p. X), and because consequences did not matter for her, she radically worked to dismantle the segregationist laws which prevented African Americans from hiring houses in the South.

2. Housing Justice and Radical Desegregation

The hardness of Jim Crow laws in the South forced a huge movement of Black Americans to the North where efforts were being made to turn the states from rural into city life (Ouedraogo, 2022, p.39). As Daniel Letwin reveals, in the 1920s, "approximately half a million African Americans depart[ed] the farmlands and towns of the South for the industrial centers of the North" which experienced the advent of rapid urbanization and offered Blacks a few job opportunities in buildings, industries and railroads

construction (in Ouedraogo, 2022, p.39). However, once in northern industrial cities, "expectations were not met as hoped by the migrants as they largely remained in the margin of a yet rapidly industrializing city" (Ouedraogo, 2022, p.39). Being in the margin included their incapacity to afford for decent houses that could preserve their intimacy and dignity. Considering that house is a symbol of the individual's personal dignity and sovereignty, it could be argued that without house, man is like a wandering animal with no set place of rest or sleep. Yet, this was the experience of many Blacks who lived in the South, a sad reality that Braden strived to change through her personal commitment in designing strategies against racially-motivated housing discrimination in the United States.

Braden's commitment challenged the resistance of various ongoing housing segregations such as the Andrew and Charlotte Wade case. The case involved Andrew and Charlotte Wade, an African American couple who wished to purchase a home in a suburban, all-white neighborhood of Louisville, Kentucky. Unable to buy the property directly due to racially restrictive covenants and pervasive discrimination, they enlisted the help of Anne and Carl Braden, both white anti-racist activists. The Bradens purchased the house on the Wades' behalf and deeded it to them (Fosl, 2002, p. 1). This act of solidarity was met with violent white resistance. The Wades were harassed, their home was shot into, and it was eventually dynamited and firebombed months after they moved in (Fosl, 2002, pp. 2-3, 169). Rather than address the white terrorist violence, the authorities targeted the Bradens. Anne and Carl Braden, along with others, were charged with sedition by the state of Kentucky, accused of fomenting unrest and being agents of

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the Soviet Union as part of a communist plot to destroy southern civilization (Fosl, 2002, p. 3; Huntley, 1999). While Carl was convicted and served time, Anne's case was eventually dismissed, but the message was clear: challenging the racial hierarchy of housing was treated as a subversive anti-American act. The Wade case highlighted that housing segregation was a cornerstone of Jim Crow America, protected not just by custom and violence, but by the legal system itself, just as Critical Whiteness Studies suggest.

Braden's leadership in the Wade case enables us to understand race relations in the United States as conceptualized by Critical Whiteness Studies, an interdisciplinary academic field that examines whiteness as a social, political, and historical construct rather than neutral or natural identity and how white allies navigate their privilege in racial justice movements. Braden sought to deconstruct the invisibility and normalization of whiteness, exposing how it functions as a system of power, privilege, and oppression. To borrow words from Applebaum (2016, p.1), one can argue that Braden's "aim [was] to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege." In other words, she first sought to unveil the hidden facts and beliefs that push Whites to deeply believe in their own superiority and also seek to compel whites to give up such beliefs and rather understand racial identity as a mere social construct.

Whiteness is not just a racial identity but a social construct imbued with privilege and property rights, one that is invisible to those who benefit from it and must be actively dismantled by those who recognize it (Harris, 1993,

p. 1714; Lipsitz, 2006, p. viii). Braden exemplified what scholar and activist Noel Ignatiev later termed "race treason"—the conscious rejection of the privileges of whiteness to align with justice (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996, p. 10). She did not simply hold non-racist views; she actively deployed her whiteness as a strategic tool to disrupt the system of housing apartheid. By using her racial privilege to purchase the home, she temporarily circumvented the barriers erected to maintain segregated space. Her actions strengthen the argument that a key task for white allies is to "break the closed circuit of white solidarity" by refusing to comply with the unwritten rules of white supremacy (Sullivan, 2014, p. 151), even though such a refusal could be liable to sedition charges.

The state's sedition charges against Braden reveal the sad truth that systems of power fiercely protect the "property value of whiteness" (Harris, 1993, p. 1714). The state framed her not as a criminal for violating a law, but as a seditionist for undermining the entire social and economic order built upon racial hierarchy. Her activism went beyond charity; it was a radical attempt to transfer the "property" of whiteness—in this case, access to housing and neighborhood—to a Black family, thereby threatening the very foundation of white privilege. Braden's lifelong work, sparked by the Wade case, was dedicated to convincing other white people to abandon their white-skin privilege and join the freedom fight against racially-motivated practices such as restrictive covenants and redlining.

3. Advocacy Against Restrictive Covenants and Redlining

The white real estate companies established what was known as redlining practices. These practices consisted of

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defining areas reserved exclusively for Whites according to racist norms deriving from Jim Crow laws. Redlining was a pattern of discrimination in which financial institutions refused to make mortgage loans, regardless of the credit record of the applicant, on properties in specified areas because of alleged deteriorating conditions. Official redlining practices began in the 1930s during the Great Depression. A housing bubble and bust preceded the Great Depression. Before mortgage lending became affordable, only wealthy families could buy homes. Black people were, therefore, excluded because they made up the majority of the poor population. The Wade case stands as a powerful illustration of redlining practices.

Following the tumult of the Wade case, Braden cemented her life's work as a formidable advocate against the structural mechanisms of housing segregation, namely restrictive covenants and redlining. While the 1948 Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* had rendered racially restrictive covenants legally unenforceable, the practice persisted through social custom and collusion among white homeowners, real estate agents, and financial institutions (Gotham, 2000, p. 625). Redlining, the federal government-sanctioned practice of denying mortgages and insurance to residents of predominantly non-white neighborhoods, systematically starved Black communities and reinforced geographic segregation (Rothstein, 2017, pp. 63-67). Braden recognized that without confronting these economic and legal tools, desegregation efforts would remain piecemeal. Therefore, she worked tirelessly through organizations like the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) to document, publicize, and challenge these discriminatory

practices. Her advocacy was not confined to courtrooms; it involved organizing white southerners to reject the racist foundations of their communities, educating them on how segregation harmed poor whites and divided the working class (Fosl, 2002, p. 193). Braden's approach was holistic, understanding that housing justice required dismantling both the *de jure* and *de facto* systems that maintained all-white neighborhoods as the exclusive property of whiteness.

Braden's fight against restrictive covenants and redlining can be deciphered when one considers Cheryl Harris's concept of "whiteness as property" (1993, p. 1714). Harris argues that whiteness historically functioned as a form of property—a tangible, valuable asset legally protected and granting rights of disposition, use, and exclusion (Harris, 1993, 1731). Restrictive covenants and redlining were the key legal and financial instruments that constructed and protected this property value of whiteness by ensuring that proximity to Black people would not diminish a neighborhood's social or economic status. Braden's activism was a direct assault on this system. By facilitating Black movement into white neighborhoods and agitating against discriminatory banking practices, she sought to devalue whiteness as property. Her work aimed to dismantle the exclusionary rights that white homeowners believed were inherently theirs. This aligns with any moral and ethical duty to disrupt whiteness from its position of normalized dominance (Sullivan, 2014, p. 6).

Braden did not merely advocate for integration; she challenged the very premise that white spaces were inherently more valuable, a radical notion that threatened the core of white identity and economic investment for many. Braden's focus on organizing poor and working-class

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whites demonstrates an astute understanding of what George Lipsitz (2006) calls the "possessive investment in whiteness" (p. vii). Lipsitz contends that even whites without significant economic power are invested in the racial status quo, because their whiteness offers a "psychological wage" and a perceived stake in a system that ranks them above people of color (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 3). Braden's strategy was to expose this investment as a trick, arguing that segregation ultimately impoverished everyone except the elite by preventing class solidarity. In doing so, her goal was to persuade white people to divest from their psychological investment in whiteness for a more genuine, collective class interest, thereby fracturing the closed circuit of white solidarity that upheld housing discrimination. To achieve that goal, the journalistic or mediatic terrain was no less important for Braden to rally a wider audience to her cause.

4. Journalism and Movement Media

Never had media contributed more to fanning white racist propaganda in the United States than southern American media did in the peak of racial segregation in the United States. Indeed, southern media served as a scaffold on which white supremacists voiced out and legitimated their social, cultural, and political supremacy over Blacks. Becoming aware of the role of media in deconstructing the myth of white superiority and reconstructing a proud Black man who has no inferiority complex before a white man, Black intellectuals such as WEB Du Bois launched Black-led journals. That was the case with *The Crisis*, created in 1910 by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP) under the leadership of Du Bois, which was to become a very influential body in African-American affairs. Through its militant approach to racial affairs, it drew a great deal of attention from Black and white Americans alike, McCarty Braden included. Indeed, Braden followed in the footsteps of Black intellectual civil right activists by getting involved in *The Southern Patriot* in order to further her civil rights claims.

After being faced with sedition trials due to her anti-white supremacy activism, Anne Braden's activism evolved to powerfully leverage the weapon of information. As a journalist and co-editor of *The Southern Patriot*, the monthly newspaper of the SCEF, Braden practiced a form of "movement media" which was vital to the Civil Rights struggle. Founded in 1942, the *Patriot* was not a neutral publication; it was an organizing tool dedicated to promoting racial and economic justice across the South (Bacon, 2007, p. 382). Under Braden's editorial guidance from the 1950s through the 1980s, the newspaper provided crucial coverage that the mainstream, white-owned press ignored. It reported on voter registration drives, labor strikes, student sit-ins, and police brutality, consistently linking the fight against white supremacy to the struggle for economic democracy (Fosl, 2002, p. 238) amid Cold War and McCarthyistic threats.

Operating during the height of the Cold War and McCarthyism, Braden and the *Patriot* faced constant pressure and were frequently labeled subversive for their interracial collaboration and radical critique of capitalism. McCarthyism was named from Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. During the 1950s, a period of swinging Cold War, McCarthyism consisted in organizing a witch hunt

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against communists and their sympathizers in the United States. "Socialism and communism were considered as dangerous for the white American socio-political Establishment and particularly for those who promoted McCarthyism" (Ouedraogo, 2022, p.86). As a result, Braden's socialism-oriented and anti-capitalistic communication in favor of the CRM was put under Intelligence Service surveillance. Nevertheless, the newspaper served as a vital communication network, connecting disparate local movements across the South, offering a counter-narrative to segregationist propaganda, and providing moral and strategic support to activists who were isolated and under attack (Huntley, 1999, p. 45). Braden's journalism was an extension of her on-the-ground organization, using the printed word to build community, validate resistance, and reframe traditional white media representation.

Braden's work with *The Southern Patriot* challenged the way traditional white media presentation of information influenced and even framed audience interpretation (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Braden was a master of **counter-framing**, strategically constructing narratives to challenge the dominant frames perpetuated by the white power structure. The mainstream media and southern officials usually framed civil rights activists as outside agitators, law-breakers, or Communists disturbing the peace of the segregated social order. In stark contrast, Braden's framing in the *Patriot* consistently defined the movement as a moral and patriotic crusade for democracy. She employed what social movement scholars call **injustice frames**, highlighting the systemic and moral wrongs of segregation and economic exploitation (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 200). She also

built **diagnostic frames** that identified the root causes of oppression (e.g., white supremacy, capitalist greed), and **prognostic frames** that proposed solutions through collective action and interracial solidarity (Gamson, 1992, p. 7).

Furthermore, Braden's reporting practiced what Tuchman (1978) might call a challenge to **symbolic annihilation**—the media's erasure of marginalized groups (p. 8). By centering the voices, actions, and leadership of Black activists and ordinary people, the *Patriot* gave them agency and visibility they were denied elsewhere. This framing wasn't merely descriptive; it was motivational. It was designed to empower a targeted audience of sympathetic southern whites and activists, reinforcing their identity as part of a broader movement (a **collective action frame**), reducing their sense of isolation, and compelling them to join the fight (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). In this way, Braden's journalism was a deliberate, theoretical application of framing not just to report news, but to actively make social change. However, surely because attempts to silence anti-capitalistic and anti-racist media were lingering on, Braden extended her struggle to essay writing as a viable fighting weapon.

5. Writings on Structural Racism

Long before the term "structural racism" entered mainstream academic and political discourse, Anne Braden was meticulously documenting its mechanisms and effects through her writing. In the aftermath of the Wade case and throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Braden used pamphlets, essays, and speeches to articulate a sophisticated analysis of racism that moved far beyond individual prejudice. She argued that racism was a systemic feature of

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American society, deeply embedded in its economic, legal, and political institutions to maintain power and privilege for white people (Braden, 1958, p. 15). This perspective was radical in an era where the dominant national narrative often framed racism as a regional "southern problem" or a matter of personal bigotry. Her most famous work, the pamphlet *The Wall Between* (1958), was far more than a memoir of the sedition case; it was a penetrating critique of the system that produced it. Braden detailed how the courts, the press, the political establishment, and the economic structure colluded to punish those who challenged racial boundaries (Braden, 1958, pp. 234-235).

Braden expanded her writing on structural racism in subsequent writings, consistently connecting racial oppression to class exploitation. She argued that the ruling class used racism to divide the working class, preventing a unified challenge to an unjust economic order (Fosl, 2002, 193). Through her work with the SCEF, Braden produced educational materials that deconstructed how institutions like banks (through redlining), schools (through segregated funding), and the justice system created and perpetuated racial caste (Huntley, 1999, p. 28). Her writings provided an essential intellectual framework for activists, offering a clear diagnosis of the structural nature of the problem they were fighting.

Braden's writings on structural racism represent a masterful work designed to reshape how her audience understood the world. She constructed what scholars call a **diagnostic frame** that identified the root cause of social problems not as individual acts of meanness, but as a pervasive, institutionalized system (Snow & Benford, 1988,

p. 200). Braden's central strategic frame was the **injustice frame**. However, she did not merely frame individual acts as unjust; she framed the entire social structure as inherently unjust. For example, in *The Wall Between*, she framed the sedition charges not as a personal misfortune but as a logical outcome of a system designed to protect "the wall between the races" that benefited those in power (Braden, 1958, p. 15). This framing made visible the invisible architecture of racism.

Furthermore, Braden excelled at what Entman (1993) describes as **problem definition** and **causal interpretation (p. 52)**. She consistently defined the problem as structural racism, and she identified its primary cause as the deliberate strategy of economic and political elites to maintain power by dividing people along racial lines. This was a direct counter-frame to the dominant narrative that blamed "outside agitators" or "Black inferiority." Her framing also provided a **prognostic frame**—a solution (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 202). The remedy for structural racism, in Braden's writing, was not diversity training or colorblindness, but multiracial working-class solidarity and radical structural change. By framing the struggle this way, she sought to motivate collective action and build what Gamson (1992) calls "injustice consciousness" (p. 68). She urged her readers, particularly white southerners, to see their own economic struggles not as separate from racial injustice but as intrinsically linked to it. Braden's work was not an academic exercise; it was an essential tool of liberation, designed to dismantle damaging myths and build a movement capable of confronting power. To confront white power, however, Braden needed to develop a strong organizational leadership.

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6. Organizational Leadership: Supporting Non-violent Organizations and Grassroots Black-led Campaigns

Braden's organizational leadership was most profoundly expressed through her decades-long work with the SCEF. Emerging from the earlier Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), the SCEF was founded in 1946 with a radical mission: to eradicate segregation and promote social justice throughout the American South by challenging the entrenched power structures of white supremacy and economic exploitation (Fosl, 2002, p. 124). Unlike many liberal organizations that hesitated to confront the root causes of racism, the SCEF, under the leadership of figures like Braden and her husband, Carl, explicitly linked racial equality with economic justice, arguing that the region's elite used racism to maintain a divided and exploited working class (Klibanoff, 2009, p. 97). As a key leader, editor of its newspaper, *The Southern Patriot*, and a field organizer, Braden was instrumental in shaping the SCEF's direction from the 1950s through the 1970s. The organization operated in a perilous climate, routinely labeled as subversive and communist by white supremacists and government agencies like the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for its interracial composition and its challenge to the southern status quo (Huntley, 1999, p. 22). Such a perilous environment notwithstanding, the SCEF provided a crucial platform, offering financial, legal, and publicity support to local Black-led movements, organizing white southerners who opposed segregation, and publishing hard-hitting reports that exposed the structural nature of racism. Braden's leadership ensured the SCEF remained a steadfast, if often controversial, ally to the broader Civil Rights

Movement, acting as a bridge between racial and economic justice struggles.

Braden's leadership within the SCEF offers a historical blueprint for the principles of transformative allyship. Modern allyship moves beyond simple support to emphasize a continuous process in which individuals with privilege (e.g., white people) work in solidarity with marginalized groups to challenge systemic injustice, centering the leadership of the oppressed and leveraging their privilege responsibly (Reason & Broido, 2005, p. 83). Braden's work epitomized this model. She consistently used her position as a white woman to amplify Black voices and support Black-led initiatives, rather than seeking to lead or control them. This practice aligns with the allyship tenet of **decentering oneself and following the guidance of marginalized communities** (Edwards, 2006, p. 44). For instance, the SCEF under her guidance did not set the agenda for the Civil Rights Movement; it responded to the needs articulated by local Black activists, providing resources and mobilizing sympathetic whites in support.

Furthermore, Braden focused her efforts on **educating and organizing within her own white community**, a core strategy of effective allyship. She understood that the primary responsibility of a white ally was to confront white supremacy among white people (Kendall, 2006, p. 143). Through *The Southern Patriot*, speeches, and organizing, she worked to break the closed circuit of white solidarity by persuading other white southerners to reject racism, arguing that it was also in their economic and moral self-interest to do so. Finally, Braden demonstrated **unwavering accountability and risk-taking**. Allyship is not performative; it requires a willingness to endure criticism

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and sacrifice privilege (Bishop, 2002, p. 118). The sedition charges and lifelong surveillance Braden was faced with were a direct result of her principled allyship. She never retreated from her stance, demonstrating that true allyship is a sustained commitment to justice, even at great personal cost. Her leadership in the SCEF was not about helping from a position of superiority but about solidarity in a shared struggle for liberation. This made of her a paradigmatic example of allyship in action, an example that was further set in the SNCC and other Black-led campaigns.

There would be a huge gap in talking about Braden's organizational leadership without pinpointing her commitment in supporting the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and grassroots Black-led campaigns. Indeed, her commitment to racial justice was most clearly demonstrated through her unwavering support for the SNCC and other grassroots, Black-led campaigns during the 1960s. The SNCC, founded in 1960, emerged as the vanguard of the student-led civil rights movement, prioritizing direct action, voter registration drives in the most dangerous parts of the Deep South, and a philosophy of empowering local Black communities to lead their own struggles (Carson, 1981, p. 19). While many older, more established civil rights organizations and white liberals were sometimes wary of the SNCC's radical and confrontational tactics, Braden recognized its profound significance. She and her husband, Carl, became crucial allies, offering their home as a safe haven for SNCC organizers, providing strategic counsel, and, most importantly, leveraging their extensive networks to raise funds and secure legal aid for arrested activists (Fosl, 2002, p. 238). Braden understood that the role

of white allies was not to lead or dictate but to provide material and moral support to the Black-led movement on its own terms. Her work extended beyond the SNCC to other campaigns, such as supporting the tent city movement in Tennessee, where Black sharecroppers were evicted for attempting to vote. In every instance, Braden's approach was to listen and respond to the needs articulated by Black activists on the ground, using her skills and privilege to boost their work and protect their lives.

Braden's support for the SNCC serves as a canonical historical example of the principles underlying modern **allyship**. Her actions provide a practical model for how individuals with privilege can effectively operate in solidarity with marginalized groups without replicating patterns of dominance. Braden's approach exemplifies what contemporary scholars' term "**allyship in practice,"** which is characterized by centering the voices of the oppressed, leveraging resources, and accepting a subordinate role in the movement (Reason & Broido, 2005, p. 84). She did not attempt to join the SNCC's leadership, an organization that, by the mid-1960s, was questioning the role of whites in the Black freedom struggle, but instead supported it from the outside on its own terms. This demonstrated a deep respect for the self-determination and agency of Black activists, a core tenet of effective allyship (Kendall, 2006, p. 143).

Furthermore, Braden excelled at the allyship function of "bridging" between communities. She used her identity as a respected white southern activist to convey the goals and demands of the SNCC to other white audiences, particularly in the North, to raise funds and generate sympathy (Fosl, 2002, p. 245). She also practiced what could be called accountable allyship by accepting criticism and

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adapting her role as the movement evolved. When the SNCC moved towards a Black Power philosophy that explicitly limited the role of white allies, Braden, though personally challenged, understood the reasoning and redirected her efforts to focus on organizing poor southern whites through projects like the SCEF, recognizing that combating racism within her own community was her primary responsibility (Ransby, 2003, p. 286). This ability to take a step back without taking offense, and to find new ways to contribute without being centered, is the mark of an ally who is invested in liberation rather than in their own self-image.

Conclusion

Anne McCarty Braden's activism from 1954 to 1975 fundamentally challenges the dominant scholarly narratives that minimize, critique, or overlook the role of white allies in the CRM. Through the Allyship Theory, this paper has demonstrated that Braden's contributions were not peripheral, conditional, or paternalistic, but were instead strategic, transformative, and indispensable. Her work provides a powerful counter-argument to the four groups of scholars—revisionist historians, critics of the white ally narrative, scholars of white saviorism, and Black feminists, by exemplifying a model of allyship that centered Black leadership, leveraged privilege subversively, and accepted a subordinate role in the struggle for liberation. Braden's advocacy against restrictive covenants and redlining

extended this fight, targeting the structural mechanisms that upheld white supremacy, and demonstrating a sophisticated understanding that racial and economic justice were inextricably linked.

As a journalist and intellectual, Braden mastered **framing strategies** to wage an ideological battle. Through *The Southern Patriot* and her writings on structural racism, she dismantled the dominant frames of "agitators" and "communists" imposed by the white power structure. She replaced them with powerful injustice, diagnostic, and prognostic frames that defined racism as a systemic ill, identified its roots in elite power, and prescribed solidarity and radical change as the solution. This was not merely reporting; it was a deliberate act of movement-building that provided a crucial intellectual framework for activists and a counter-narrative to segregationist propaganda.

Finally, Braden's **organizational leadership** within the SCEF and her support for the SNCC embodied the highest principles of **Allyship Theory**. She consistently de-centered herself, followed Black-led agendas, and used her privilege to resource and amplify the movement rather than to lead it. Her ability to "bridge" to white communities, her unwavering accountability even when criticized by the very movements she supported, and her lifelong commitment despite immense personal risk, illustrate a model of allyship that was accountable, strategic, and sustained.

By highlighting Braden's instrumental contribution to the CRM, this study hopefully opens up the door to future studies in order to show other forms of white allyship in the CRM and do justice to countless white allies who risked their lives on the side of Blacks to achieve civil rights for all Americans without regard to race. In such a perspective, one

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could look into Eugene Carson Blake, Barbara Henry, John Howard Griffin, who also contributed to the CRM, respectively in religious and academic spheres.

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