

Document 0290

[20290001]

Hardly a day passes without news photos of the police dragging limp protesters from some building or thoroughfare in one of our cities .

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Maybe he did n't start it , but Mohandas Gandhi certainly provided a recognizable beginning to non-violent civil disobedience as we know it today .

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The Mahatma , or " great souled one " , instigated several campaigns of passive resistance against the British government in India .

[20290005]

Unfortunately , according to Webster 's Biographical Dictionary , " His policies went beyond his control and resulted ... in riots and disturbances " and later a renewed campaign of civil disobedience " resulted in rioting and a second imprisonment . "

[20290008]

Where truly representative governments are safeguarded by constitutional protections of human rights and an independent judiciary to construe those rights , there is no excuse for breaking the law because some individual or group disagrees with it .

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The case of Rosa Parks , the black woman who refused to sit at the back of the bus , comes to mind as an illustration .

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But most cases of non-violent civil disobedience are not nearly so benign .

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The public has a tendency to equate lawful demonstrations with non-violent civil disobedience .

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It is true that both are non-violent , but there is a fundamental difference between them .

[20290014]

Lawful demonstrations , such as peaceful picketing and other assemblages that do not disturb the peace or cause a public nuisance or interfere with the rights of others , are rights guaranteed by any truly free system of government .

[20290015]

Civil disobedience , violent or non-violent , is intentional law breaking .

[20290016]

The subject of this discussion is non-violent civil disobedience ; but , before we get on with that , let me make just a few tangential remarks about lawful demonstrations .

They are useful to call public attention to grievances , but they have little value in educating anyone about the issues in dispute .

The delight of television in dramatic confrontation encourages overuse of slogans chanted through bullhorns , militant gestures , accusatory signs and other emotionally inspired tactics .

Civilized discourse and an environment where compromise can begin are lost in a hostile posture abetted by superficial media interviews .

At best , demonstrations are overused and boringly uninformative ; at worst , they can become the stimuli that lead to law breaking .

Demonstrations are particularly apt to degenerate into criminal conduct when they leave the site of the grievance and become mobile .

Soon the whole purpose of the demonstration is lost in mob mania .

There are better ways to promote a cause .

Some find no harm in the misdemeanors of trespass , minor property destruction , blocking traffic and the like .

They say these are small prices to pay for galvanizing action for the all-important cause .

The crimes may appear small , but the prices can be huge .

Here are two cases to illustrate .

Assume a neighborhood demonstration to protest speeding on a certain road or a careless accident involving a police car .

The protesters lie down in the street , blocking traffic , and will not move until the authorities carry them away .

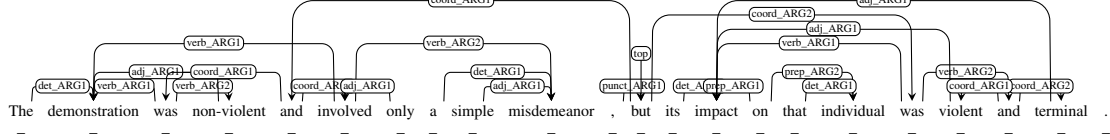
Assume that someone caught in the jam has a heart attack .

There is no way to get an ambulance in quickly to move him to a hospital .

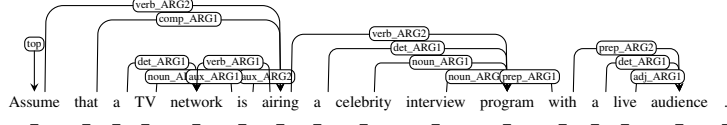
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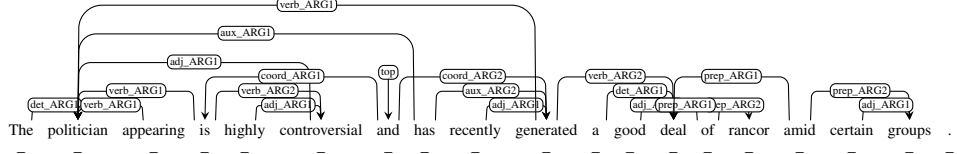
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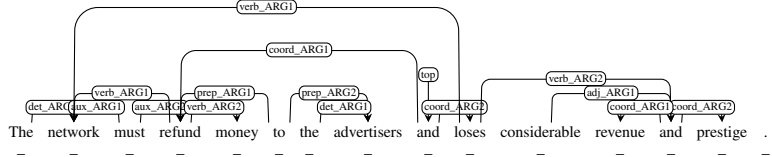
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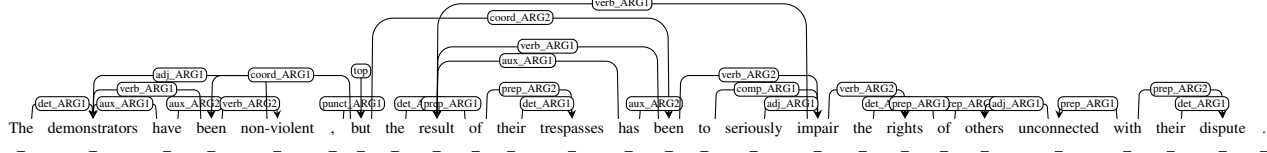
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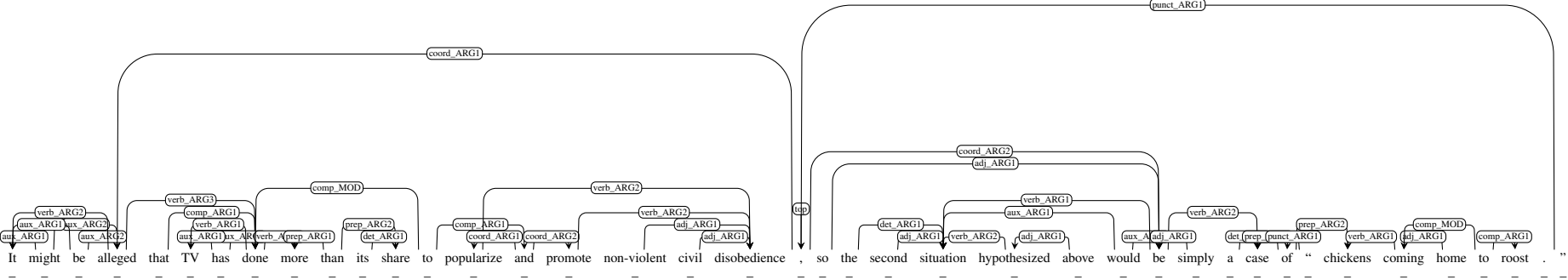
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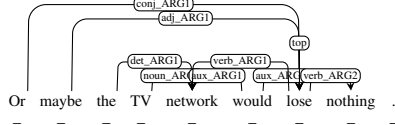
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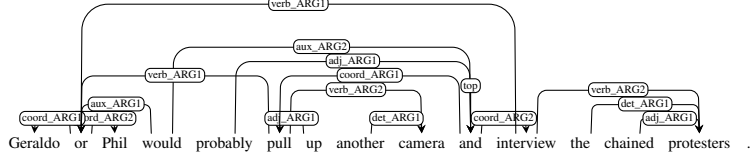
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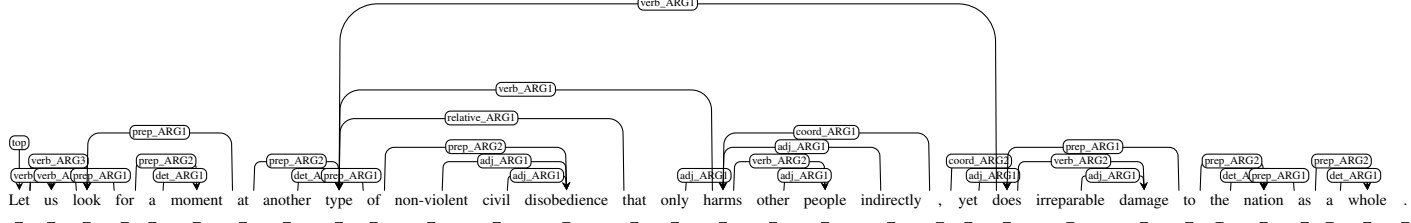
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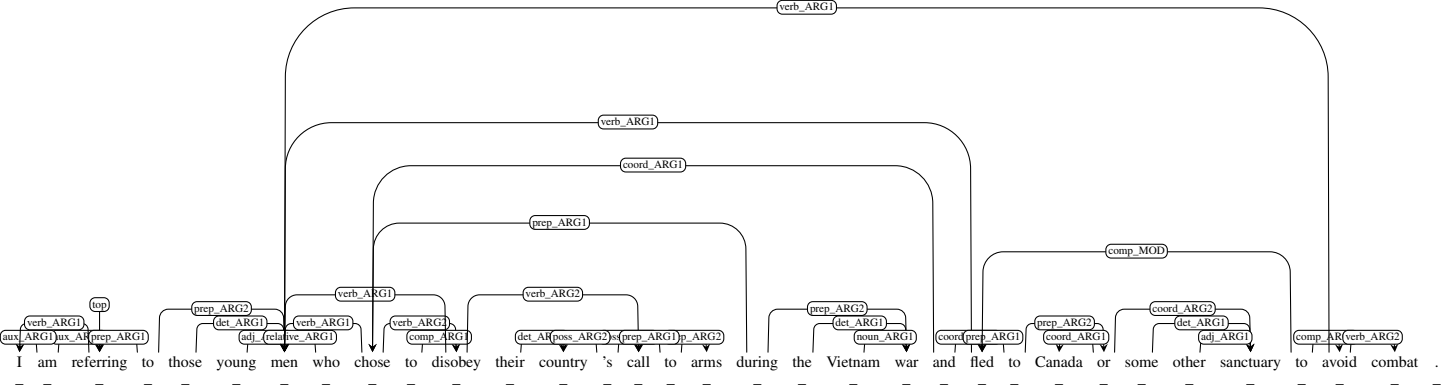
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