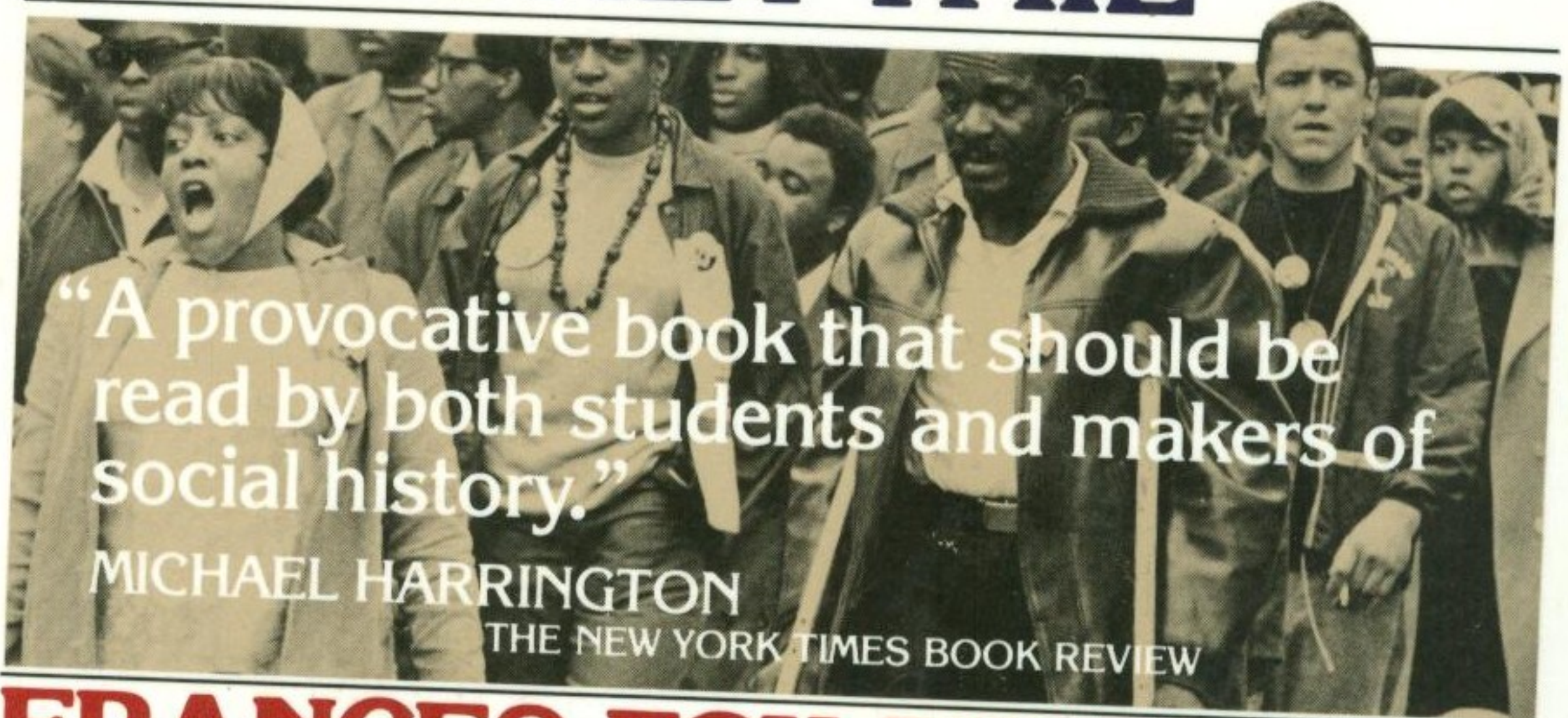# POOR PEOPLE'S MOVE- MENTS

WHY THEY SUCCEED, HOW THEY FAIL

"A provocative book that should be read by both students and makers of social history."

MICHAEL HARRINGTON
THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

FRANCES FOX PIVEN AND RICHARD A. CLOWARD

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHORS

examined here varied greatly—some were white men, some were black women; some were displaced southern agricultural workers, some were urban immigrant industrial workers—we consider that all of the protest movements we analyze arose among sectors of the working class, including the protest of welfare mothers in the 1960s. Our usage deviates from sociological custom but it is consistent with classical Marxist definitions of the working class. Our usage also deviates from the current fashion on the left of referring to impoverished and underemployed working-class groups as "lumpen proletarians," a fashion we find not only offensive for its denigrating implications but also an abuse of Marx, who meant the term to refer to deviant and criminal elements from all classes.

F.F.P.
R.A.C.

March 1977

CHAPTER
1

The Structuring of Protest

Common sense and historical experience combine to suggest a simple but compelling view of the roots of power in any society. Crudely but clearly stated, those who control the means of physical coercion, and those who control the means of producing wealth, have power over those who do not. This much is true whether the means of coercion consists in the primitive force of a warrior caste or the technological force of a modern army. And it is true whether the control of production consists in control by priests of the mysteries of the calendar on which agriculture depends, or control by financiers of the large-scale capital on which industrial production depends. Since coercive force can be used to gain control of the means of producing wealth, and since control of wealth can be used to gain coercive force, these two sources of power tend over time to be drawn together within one ruling class.

Common sense and historical experience also combine to suggest that these sources of power are protected and enlarged by the use of that power not only to control the actions of men and women, but also to control their beliefs. What some call superstructure, and what others call culture, includes an elaborate system of beliefs and ritual behaviors which defines for people what is right and what is wrong and why; what is possible and what is impossible; and the behavioral imperatives that follow from these beliefs. Because this superstructure of beliefs and rituals is evolved in the context of unequal power, it is inevitable that beliefs and rituals reinforce inequality, by rendering the powerful divine and the challengers evil. Thus the class struggles that might otherwise be inevitable in

sharply unequal societies ordinarily do not seem either possible or right from the perspective of those who live within the structure of belief and ritual fashioned by those societies. People whose only possible recourse in struggle is to defy the beliefs and rituals laid down by their rulers ordinarily do not.

What common sense and historical experience suggest has been true of many societies is no less true of modern capitalist societies, the United States among them. Power is rooted in the control of coercive force and in the control of the means of production. However, in capitalist societies this reality is not legitimated by rendering the powerful divine, but by obscuring their existence. Thus electoral-representative arrangements proclaim the franchise, not force and wealth, as the basis for the accumulation and use of power. Wealth is, to be sure, unequally distributed, but the franchise is widely and nearly equally distributed, and by exercising the franchise men and women presumably determine who their rulers will be, and therefore what their rulers presumably must do if they are to remain rulers.

Since analysts of power also live within the boundaries of ritual and belief of their society, they have contributed to this obfuscation by arguing that electoral arrangements offset other bases of power. Even the most sophisticated American political scientists have begun with the assumption that there are in fact two systems of power, one based on wealth and one based on votes, and they have devoted themselves to deciphering the relative influence of these two systems. This question has been regarded as intricate and complicated, demanding assiduous investigations in a variety of political settings, and by methods subject to the most rigorous empirical strictures. ("Nothing categorical can be assumed about power in any community" was Polsby's famous dictum.) The answer that emerged from these investigations was that electoral-representative procedures accomplished a substantial dispersal of power in a less-than-perfect world. It followed that those who struggled against their rulers by defying the procedures of the liberal democratic state were dangerous troublemakers, or simply fools.

In the 1960s the dominant pluralist tradition was discredited, at least among those on the ideological left who were prodded by outbreaks of defiance among minorities and students to question this perspective. In the critique that emerged it was argued that there were not two systems of power, but that the power rooted in wealth and force overwhelmed the power of the franchise. The pluralists

had erred, the critics said, by failing to recognize the manifold ways in which wealth and its concomitants engulfed electoral-representative procedures, effectively barring many people from participation while deluding and entrapping others into predetermined electoral "choices." The pluralists had also erred by ignoring the consistent bias toward the interests of elites inherent in presumably neutral governing structures, no matter what the mandate of the electorate.

We do not wish to summarize the critique, which was by no means simple, or all of a piece. We wish only to make the point that the challenge rested in large part on the insight that modes of participation and nonparticipation in electoral-representative procedures were not, as the pluralists had implied by their narrow empirical strictures, the freely made political choices of free men and women. Rather, modes of participation, and the degree of influence that resulted, were consistently determined by location in the class structure. It was an important insight, and once it had been achieved the conclusion followed not far behind that so long as lower-class groups abided by the norms governing the electoral-representative system, they would have little influence. It therefore became clear, at least to some of us, that protest tactics which defied political norms were not simply the recourse of troublemakers and fools. For the poor, they were the only recourse.

But having come this far, we have gone no further. The insights that illuminated the critiques of electoral-representative processes have been entirely overlooked in the few studies that have been done of the nature of protest itself. From an intellectual perspective, it is a startling oversight; from a political perspective, it is all too easily explained by the overwhelming biases of our traditions. Briefly stated, the main argument of this chapter is that protest is *also* not a matter of free choice; it is not freely available to all groups at all times, and much of the time it is not available to lower-class groups at all. *The occasions when protest is possible among the poor, the forms that it must take, and the impact it can have are all delimited by the social structure in ways which usually diminish its extent and diminish its force.* Before we go on to explain these points, we need to define what we mean by a protest movement, for customary definitions have led both analysts and activists to ignore or discredit much protest that does occur.

The emergence of a protest movement entails a transformation both of consciousness and of behavior. The change in consciousness has at least three distinct aspects. First, "the system"—or those

aspects of the system that people experience and perceive—loses legitimacy. Large numbers of men and women who ordinarily accept the authority of their rulers and the legitimacy of institutional arrangements come to believe in some measure that these rulers and these arrangements are unjust and wrong.[1] Second, people who are ordinarily fatalistic, who believe that existing arrangements are inevitable, begin to assert "rights" that imply demands for change. Third, there is a new sense of efficacy; people who ordinarily consider themselves helpless come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot.

The change in behavior is equally striking, and usually more easily recognized, at least when it takes the form of mass strikes or marches or riots. Such behavior seems to us to involve two distinguishing elements. First, masses of people become defiant; they violate the traditions and laws to which they ordinarily acquiesce, and they flaunt the authorities to whom they ordinarily defer. And second, their defiance is acted out collectively, as members of a group, and not as isolated individuals. Strikes and riots are clearly forms of collective action, but even some forms of defiance which appear to be individual acts, such as crime or school truancy or incendiarism, while more ambiguous, may have a collective dimension, for those who engage in these acts may consider themselves to be part of a larger movement. Such apparently atomized acts of defiance can be considered movement events when those involved perceive themselves to be acting as members of a group, and when they share a common set of protest beliefs.

Prevailing definitions, by stressing articulated social change goals as the defining feature of social movements, have had the effect of denying political meaning to many forms of protest. Thus while the impulse to proliferate idiosyncratic usages ought ordinarily to be resisted, we believe that the difference between our definition and those generally found in the fairly extensive sociological literature on social movements is no mere definitional quibble. Joseph Gusfield,

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[1] In this connection Max Weber writes: "The degree in which 'communal action' and possibly 'societal action,' emerges from the 'mass actions' of the members of a class is linked to general cultural conditions, especially to those of an intellectual sort. It is also linked to the extent of the contrasts that have already evolved, and is especially linked to the *transparency* of the connections between the causes and the consequences of the 'class situation.' For however different life chances may be, this fact in itself, according to all experience, by no means gives birth to 'class action . . .'" (184, emphasis in the original).

for example, defines a social movement as "socially shared activities and beliefs directed toward the demand for change in some aspect of the social order. . . . What characterizes a social movement as a particular kind of change agent is its quality as an articulated and organized group" (2, 453). Similarly John Wilson says: "A social movement is a conscious, collective, organized attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by noninstitutionalized means" (8).

The stress on conscious intentions in these usages reflects a confusion in the literature between the mass movement on the one hand, and the formalized organizations which tend to emerge on the crest of the movement on the other hand—two intertwined but distinct phenomena.[2] Thus formalized organizations do put forward articulated and agreed-upon social change goals, as suggested by these definitions, but such goals may not be apparent in mass uprisings (although others, including ourselves as observers and analysts, may well impute goals to uprisings). Furthermore our emphasis is on collective defiance as the key and distinguishing feature of a protest movement, but defiance tends to be omitted or understated in standard definitions simply because defiance does not usually characterize the activities of formal organizations that arise on the crest of protest movements.

Whatever the intellectual sources of error, the effect of equating movements with movement organizations—and thus requiring that protests have a leader, a constitution, a legislative program, or at least a banner before they are recognized as such—is to divert attention from many forms of political unrest and to consign them by definition to the more shadowy realms of social problems and deviant behavior. As a result such events as massive school truancy or rising worker absenteeism or mounting applications for public welfare or spreading rent defaults rarely attract the attention of political analysts. Having decided by definitional fiat that nothing political has occurred, nothing has to be explained, at least not in the terms of political protest. And having contrived in this way not to recognize protest or to study it, we cannot ask certain rather obvious and important questions about it.

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[2] Thus, Zald and Ash use the term "social movement organizations" to encompass both forms of social action. Roberta Ash does, in her later work, distinguish between movements and movement organizations, but she continues to stress articulated goals as a defining feature of a movement.

Institutional Limits on the Incidence
of Mass Insurgency

Aristotle believed that the chief cause of internal warfare was inequality, that the lesser rebel in order to be equal. But human experience has proved him wrong, most of the time. Sharp inequality has been constant, but rebellion infrequent. Aristotle underestimated the controlling force of the social structure on political life. However hard their lot may be, people usually remain acquiescent, conforming to the accustomed patterns of daily life in their community, and believing those patterns to be both inevitable and just. Men and women till the fields each day, or stoke the furnaces, or tend the looms, obeying the rules and rhythms of earning a livelihood; they mate and bear children hopefully, and mutely watch them die; they abide by the laws of church and community and defer to their rulers, striving to earn a little grace and esteem. In other words most of the time people conform to the institutional arrangements which enmesh them, which regulate the rewards and penalties of daily life, and which appear to be the only possible reality.

Those for whom the rewards are most meager, who are the most oppressed by inequality, are also acquiescent. Sometimes they are the most acquiescent, for they have little defense against the penalties that can be imposed for defiance. Moreover, at most times and in most places, and especially in the United States, the poor are led to believe that their destitution is deserved, and that the riches and power that others command are also deserved. In more traditional societies sharp inequalities are thought to be divinely ordained, or to be a part of the natural order of things. In more modern societies, such as the United States, riches and power are ascribed to personal qualities of industry or talent; it follows that those who have little or nothing have only what they deserve. As Edelman observes in his study of American political beliefs:

> The American poor have required less coercion and less in social security guarantees to maintain their quiescence than has been true in other developed countries, even authoritarian ones like Germany and notably poor ones like Italy; for the guilt and self-concepts of the poor have kept them docile (1971, 56).

Ordinarily, in short, the lower classes accept their lot, and that acceptance can be taken for granted; it need not be bargained for

by their rulers. This capacity of the institutions of a society to enforce political docility is the most obvious way in which protest is socially structured, in the sense that it is structurally precluded most of the time.

Sometimes, however, the poor do become defiant. They challenge traditional authorities, and the rules laid down by those authorities. They demand redress for their grievances. American history is punctuated by such events, from the first uprisings by freeholders, tenants, and slaves in colonial America, to the postrevolutionary debtor rebellions, through the periodic eruptions of strikes and riots by industrial workers, to the ghetto riots of the twentieth century. In each instance, masses of the poor were somehow able, if only briefly, to overcome the shame bred by a culture which blames them for their plight; somehow they were able to break the bonds of conformity enforced by work, by family, by community, by every strand of institutional life; somehow they were able to overcome the fears induced by police, by militia, by company guards.

When protest does arise, when masses of those who are ordinarily docile become defiant, a major transformation has occurred. Most of the literature on popular insurgency has been devoted to identifying the preconditions of this transformation (often out of a concern for preventing or curbing the resulting political disturbances). Whatever the disagreements among different schools of thought, and they are substantial, there is general agreement that the emergence of popular uprisings reflects profound changes in the larger society. This area of agreement is itself important, for it is another way of stating our proposition that protest is usually structurally precluded. The agreement is that only under exceptional conditions will the lower classes become defiant—and thus, in our terms, *only under exceptional conditions are the lower classes afforded the socially determined opportunity to press for their own class interests.*

The validity of this point follows from any of the major theories of civil disorder considered alone. When the several theoretical perspectives are considered concurrently and examined in the light of the historical events analyzed in this book, the conclusion is suggested that while different theories emphasize different kinds of social dislocations, most of these dislocations occurred simultaneously in the 1930s and 1960s. One does not have to believe that the various major theoretical perspectives are equally valid to agree that they may all cast at least some light on the series of dislocations that preceded the eruption of protest, at least in the periods we study. This

argues that it not only requires a major social dislocation before protest can emerge, but that a sequence or combination of dislocations probably must occur before the anger that underlies protest builds to a high pitch, and before that anger can find expression in collective defiance.

It seems useful to divide perspectives on insurgency according to whether the emphasis is on pressures that force eruptions, or whether the emphasis is on the breakdown of the regulatory capacity of the society, a breakdown that permits eruptions to occur and to take form in political protest. Thus among the "pressure" theorists one might include those who emphasize economic change as a precondition for civil disorder, whether economic improvement or immiseration. Sharp economic change obviously disturbs the relationship between what men and women have been led to expect, and the conditions they actually experience. If people have been led to expect more than they receive, they are likely to feel frustration and anger.[3] Some analysts, following de Tocqueville, emphasize the frustration produced by periods of economic improvement which may generate expectations that outpace the rate of actual economic gain.[4] Others, following more closely in the tradition of Marx and Engels,[5] emphasize that it is new and unexpected hardships that generate frustration and anger, and the potential for civil strife. However, this disagreement, as others have noted, is not theoretically irreconcilable.

[3] Perhaps the best known exponent of this widely held "relative deprivation" theory of civil strife is Ted Robert Gurr (1968, 1970). See also Feierabend, Feierabend, and Nesvold. For an excellent critique of the political theorists who base their work on this theory, see Lupsha.

[4] Both de Tocqueville and his followers include conditions of political liberalization, and the rising political expectations that result, as possible precursors of civil strife. Probably the most well-known of the contemporary "rising expectations" theorists is James C. Davies, who, however, argues a variant of the theory known as the "J-Curve." According to Davies, it is only when long periods of improvement are followed by economic downturns or political repression that civil strife results (1962).

[5] The views of Marx and Engels are, however, both more historically specific and comprehensive than the relative deprivation theory, and might be better described as not inconsistent with that theory. Economic crises, and the attendant hardships, activate proletarian struggles not only because of the extreme immiseration of the proletariat at such times, and not only because of the expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed at such times, but because periods of economic crisis reveal the contradictions of capitalism, and particularly the contradiction between socialized productive forces and the anarchy of private ownership and exchange. In Engels' words, "The mode of production rises in rebellion against the form of exchange. The bourgeoisie are convicted of incapacity further to manage their own social productive forces" (1967). Deprivation, in other words, is only a symptom of a far more profound conflict which cannot be resolved within the existing social formation.

Whether one stresses that it is good times or bad times that account for turmoil among the lower orders may be more a reflection of the empirical cases the author deals with, and perhaps of the author's class sympathies, than of serious conceptual differences.[6] Both the theorists of rising expectations and those of immiseration agree that when the expectations of men and women are disappointed, they may react with anger. And while sudden hardship, rather than rising expectations, is probably the historically more important precondition for mass turmoil, both types of change preceded the eruptions noted in the pages that follow.[7]

Still other pressure theorists focus not on the stresses generated by inconsistencies between economic circumstance and expectation, but follow Parsons (1951) in broadening this sort of model to include stresses created by structural changes generally, by inconsistencies between different "components of action" leading to outbreaks of what Parsons labels "irrational behavior" (1965). The breadth and vagueness of this model, however, probably make it less than useful. As Charles Tilly comments, "there is enough ambiguity in concepts like 'structural change,' 'stress' and 'disorder' to keep a whole flotilla of philologists at sea for life" (1964, 100).

The major flaw, in our view, in the work of all pressure theorists is their reliance on an unstated and incorrect assumption that economic change or structural change is extraordinary, that stability and the willing consensus it fosters are the usual state of affairs. Economic change, and presumably also structural change, if one were clear as to what that meant, are more the usual than the occasional features of capitalist societies. Nevertheless, historical evidence suggests that extremely rapid economic change adds to the frustration and anger that many people may experience much of the time.

The other major set of theoretical perspectives on popular uprising emphasizes the breakdown of the regulatory capacity of social institutions as the principle factor leading to civil strife. These explanations also range broadly from social disorganization theorists

[6] Geshwender points out that rising expectations and relative deprivation hypotheses (as well as status inconsistency hypotheses) are theoretically reconcilable.

[7] Barrington Moore asserts bluntly that the main urban revolutionary movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "were all revolutions of desperation, certainly not of rising expectations, as some liberal theorists of revolution might lead one to anticipate." Snyder and Tilly, however, seem to disagree, and report that at least short-term fluctuations in prices and industrial production did not predict the incidence of collective violence in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France (1972).

such as Hobsbawm, who emphasizes the breakdown of the regulatory controls implicit in the structures and routines of daily life; to those such as Kornhauser, who argues that major societal changes—depression, industrialization, urbanization—break the ties that bind people to the multiple secondary associations that ordinarily control political behavior (1959); to those who focus on divisions among elites as the trigger that releases popular discontents. Taken together, these social disorganization perspectives provide a major insight, however general, into the links between societal change, the breakdown of social controls—what Ash calls the "deroutinization" of life (164–167)—and the eruption of protest.[8] The disorganization theories suggest that periods of rapid change tend, at the same time as they build frustration, to weaken the regulatory controls inherent in the structures of institutional life.

More specifically, economic change may be so jarring as to virtually destroy the structures and routines of daily life. Hobsbawm points to the impact of just such conditions in accounting for the rise of "social banditry" among the Italian peasantry in the nineteenth century:

> [Social banditry] is most likely to become a major phenomenon when their traditional equilibrium is upset: during and after periods of abnormal hardship, such as famines and wars, or at the moments when the jaws of the dynamic modern world seize the static communities in order to destroy and transform them (1963, 24).

Barrington Moore stresses a similar theme:

> The main factors that create a revolutionary mass are a sudden increase in hardship coming on top of quite serious deprivations,

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8 Just as the relative deprivation theories are not inconsistent with a Marxist interpretation of the origins of working- and lower-class protest, neither is the emphasis on social disorganization necessarily inconsistent (although most of the proponents of that perspective are clearly not Marxists). Thus a Marxist interpretation of protest would acknowledge the significance of both relative deprivation and social disorganization, but as treating these however not as historically generalizable causes of uprisings, but as symptoms of historically specific contradictions in capitalist society. Bertell Ollman's work on character structure as inhibiting class consciousness and class action contributes to making explicit the link between social disorganization and mass uprisings from a Marxist perspective. Ollman argues that the "proletariat's 'fear of freedom' and their submissiveness before authority . . . are, after all, simply attempts to repeat in the future what has been done in the past" (42). But clearly, periods of major social dislocation may force a break in these character patterns, if only by precluding the possibility of repeating in the future what has been done in the past.

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together with the breakdown of the routines of daily life—g[e]... food, going to work, etc.—that tie people to the prevailing order.

The significance of economic change is, in other words, not simply that people find their expectations frustrated and so feel anger. It is also that when the structures of daily life weaken, the regulatory capacities of these structures, too, are weakened. "A revolution takes place" says Lefebvre "when and only when, in such a society, people can no longer lead their everyday lives; so long as they can live their ordinary lives relations are constantly re-established" (32).

Ordinary life for most people is regulated by the rules of work and the rewards of work which pattern each day and week and season. Once cast out of that routine, people are cast out of the regulatory framework that it imposes. Work and the rewards of work underpin the stability of other social institutions as well. When men cannot earn enough to support families, they may desert their wives and children, or fail to marry the women with whom they mate. And if unemployment is longlasting entire communities may disintegrate as the able-bodied migrate elsewhere in search of work. In effect daily life becomes progressively deregulated as what Edelman calls the "comforting banalities" of everyday existence are destroyed (95). The first signs of the resulting demoralization and uncertainty are usually rising indices of crime, family breakdown, vagrancy, and vandalism.[9] Barred from conforming to the social roles they have been reared to live through, men and women continue to stumble and struggle somehow to live, within or without the rules.

Thus it is not only that catastrophic depression in the 1930s and modernization and migration in the 1960s led to unexpected hardships; massive unemployment and the forced uprooting of people and communities had other, perhaps equally traumatic effects on the lives of people. The loss of work and the disintegration of communities meant the loss of the regulating activities, resources, and relationships on which the structure of everyday life depends, and thus the erosion of the structures that bound people to existing social

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9 It ought to be noted that Charles Tilly, in his influential work on collective violence in nineteenth-century France, does not confirm the generally accepted view that there is a relationship between crime and collective violence, or between either of these variables and the presumably disorganizing impact of urban growth. However, the evidence suggests that these relationships did hold in the periods which we investigate in the twentieth-century United States, and we do not consider the issue yet settled. In other respects, as we will note, we agree with Tilly's alternative emphasis on resource shifts as a precondition for collective struggle. See Tilly (1964), and Lodhi and Tilly (1973).

arrangements. Still, neither the frustrations generated by the economic change, nor the breakdown of daily life, may be sufficient to lead people to protest their travails. Ordinarily, when people suffer such hardships, they blame God, or they blame themselves.

For a protest movement to arise out of these traumas of daily life, people have to perceive the deprivation and disorganization they experience as both wrong, and subject to redress.[10] The social arrangements that are ordinarily perceived as just and immutable must come to seem both unjust and mutable. One condition favoring this transvaluation is the scale of distress. Thus in the 1930s, and again in the postwar years, unemployment reached calamitous proportions. Large numbers of people lost their means of earning a livelihood at the same time. This was clearly the case in the 1930s when unemployment affected one-third of the work force. But among blacks the experience in the post–World War II period was equally devastating, for millions were forced off the land and concentrated in the ghettos of the cities. Within these central city ghettos, unemployment rates in the 1950s and 1960s reached depression levels. The sheer scale of these dislocations helped to mute the sense of self-blame, predisposing men and women to view their plight as a collective one, and to blame their rulers for the destitution and disorganization they experienced.

This transvaluation is even more likely to take place, or to take place more rapidly, when the dislocations suffered by particular groups occur in a context of wider changes and instability, at times when the dominant institutional arrangements of the society, as people understand them, are self-evidently not functioning. When the mammoth industrial empires of the United States virtually ground to a halt in the early 1930s and the banks of the country simply closed their doors, the "American Way" could not be so fully taken for granted by the masses of impoverished workers and the unemployed. Similarly, while the institutional disturbances that preceded the black movements of the 1960s were not dramatically visible to the society as a whole, they were to the people who were uprooted by them. For blacks, changes in the southern economy meant nothing

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[10] "The classical mob," writes Hobsbawm, "did not merely riot as protest, but because it expected to achieve something by its riot. It assumed that the authorities would be sensitive to its movements, and probably also that they would make some sort of immediate concession . . ." (111). Rudé's account of the food riots among the urban poor in the eighteenth century makes the same point (1964).

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less than the disintegration of the *ancien régime* of the feudal plantation, just as the subsequent migratory trek to the cities meant their wrenching removal into an unknown society.

Finally, as these objective institutional upheavals lead people to reappraise their situation, elites may contribute to that reappraisal, thus helping to stimulate mass arousal—a process that has often been noted by social theorists. Clearly, the vested interest of the ruling class is usually in preserving the status quo, and in preserving the docility of the lower orders within the status quo. But rapid institutional change and upheaval may affect elite groups differently, undermining the power of some segments of the ruling class and enlarging the power of other segments, so that elites divide among themselves. This dissonance may erode their authority, and erode the authority of the institutional norms they uphold. If, in the ensuing competition for dominance, some among the elite seek to enlist the support of the impoverished by naming their grievances as just, then the hopes of the lower classes for change will be nourished and the legitimacy of the institutions which oppress them further weakened.[11]

Indeed, even when elites play no actual role in encouraging protest, the masses may invent a role for them. Hobsbawm describes how peasants in the Ukraine pillaged the gentry and Jews during the tumultuous year 1905. They did so, however, in the firm conviction that a new imperial manifesto had directed them to take what they wanted. An account by a landowner makes the point:

"Why have you come?" I asked them.
"To demand corn, to make you give us your corn," said several voices simultaneously. . . .
I could not refrain from recalling how I had treated them for so long.
"But what are we to do?" several voices answered me.
"We aren't doing this in our name, but in the name of the Tsar."
"It is the Tsar's order," said one voice in the crowd.
"A general has distributed this order of the Tsar throughout the districts," said another (187).[12]

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[11] Roberta Ash ascribes the politicization of Boston mobs during the revolutionary period to this process. As the discontented wealthy sought allies among the poor, street gangs were transformed into organized militants in the political struggle (70–73).

[12] Hobsbawm and Rudé make the same point about the English farm laborers' protests against enclosure: "[T]hey were reluctant to believe . . . that the King's government and Parliament were against them. For how could the format of justice be against justice?" (65).

Nor is this tendency only observable among Russian peasants. Crowds of welfare recipients demonstrating for special grants in New York City in May 1968 employed a similar justification, inciting each other with the news that a rich woman had died and left instructions that her wealth be distributed through the welfare centers. These events suggest that people seek to legitimate what they do, even when they are defiant, and the authority of elites to define what is legitimate remains powerful, even during periods of stress and disorder.

Our main point, however, is that whatever position one takes on the "causes" of mass unrest, there is general agreement that extraordinary disturbances in the larger society are required to transform the poor from apathy to hope, from quiescence to indignation.[13] On this point, if no other, theorists of the most diverse persuasions agree. Moreover, there is reason to think that a series of concurrent dislocations underlay the mass protests of the 1930s and 1960s. And with that said, the implication for an understanding of the potential for political influence among the poor becomes virtually self-evident: *since periods of profound social dislocations are infrequent, so too are opportunities for protest among the lower classes.*

The Patterning of Insurgency

Just as quiescence is enforced by institutional life, and just as the eruption of discontent is determined by changes in institutional life, the forms of political protest are also determined by the institutional context in which people live and work. This point seems self-evident to us, but it is usually ignored, in part because the pluralist tradition defines political action as essentially a matter of choice. Political actors, whoever they may be, are treated as if they are not con-

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13 Rosa Luxemburg's discussion of the profound and complex social upheavals that lead to mass strikes makes the same point: "[I]t is extremely difficult for any leading organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and to calculate which occasions and moments can lead to explosions and which cannot . . . because in each individual act of the struggle so many important economic, political, and social, general and local, material and psychological moments are brought into play that no single act can be arranged and resolved like a mathematical problem. . . . The revolution is not a maneuver executed by the proletariat in the open field; rather, it is a struggle in the midst of the unceasing crashing, crumbling, and displacing of all the social foundations" (245).

stricted by a social environment in deciding upon one political strategy or another; it is as if the strategies employed by different groups were freely elected, rather than the result of constraints imposed by their location in the social structure. In this section, we turn, in the most preliminary way, to a discussion of the ways in which the expression of defiance is patterned by features of institutional life.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AS A STRUCTURING INSTITUTION

In the United States the principal structuring institution, at least in the early phases of protest, is the electoral-representative system. The significance of this assertion is not that the electoral system provides an avenue of influence under normal circumstances. To the contrary, we shall demonstrate that it is usually when unrest among the lower classes breaks out of the confines of electoral procedures that the poor may have some influence, for the instability and polarization they then threaten to create by their actions in the factories or in the streets may force some response from electoral leaders. But whether action emerges in the factories or the streets may depend on the course of the early phase of protest at the polls.

Ordinarily defiance is first expressed in the voting booth simply because, whether defiant or not, people have been socialized within a political culture that defines voting as the mechanism through which political change can and should properly occur. The vitality of this political culture, the controlling force of the norms that guide political discontent into electoral channels, is not understood merely by asserting the pervasiveness of liberal political ideology in the United States and the absence of competing ideologies, for that is precisely what has to be explained. Some illumination is provided by certain features of the electoral system itself, by its rituals and celebrations and rewards, for these practices help to ensure the persistence of confidence in electoral procedures. Thus it is significant that the franchise was extended to white working-class men at a very early period in the history of the United States, and that a vigorous system of local government developed. Through these mechanisms, large proportions of the population were embraced by the rituals of electoral campaigns, and shared in the symbolic rewards of the

electoral system, while some also shared in the tangible rewards of a relatively freely dispensed government patronage. Beliefs thus nurtured do not erode readily.

Accordingly, one of the first signs of popular discontent in the contemporary United States is usually a sharp shift in traditional voting patterns.[14] In a sense, the electoral system serves to measure and register the extent of the emerging disaffection. Thus, the urban working class reacted to economic catastrophe in the landslide election of 1932 by turning against the Republican Party to which it had given its allegiance more or less since 1896.[15] Similarly, the political impact of the forces of modernization and migration was first evident in the crucial presidential elections of 1956 and 1960. Urban blacks, who had voted Democratic in successively larger proportions since

[14] The tendency for popular discontent to lead to third-party efforts is of course also evidence of the force of electoral norms. Thus as early as the depression of 1828–1831, labor unrest was expressed in the rise of numerous workingman's political parties, and late in the nineteenth century as the industrial working class grew, much labor discontent was channeled into socialist political parties, some of which achieved modest success at the local level. In 1901 the Socialist Party came together as a coalition of many of these groups, and by 1912 it had elected 1,200 party members to local public office in some 340 cities and towns, including the mayor's office in 73 cities (Weinstein, 7). Similarly the agrarian movements of the late nineteenth century were primarily oriented toward the electoral system. Nor is this tendency only evident in the United States. In Europe, for example, with the disillusionment of the failed revolution of 1848, and with the gradual extension of the franchise to workers, socialist parties also began to emphasize parliamentary tactics. The classical justification for this emphasis became Engels' introduction to *Class Struggles in France*, in which Engels writes of the successes achieved by the German party through the parliamentary vote: "It has been discovered that the political institutions in which the domination of the bourgeoisie is organized offer a fulcrum by means of which the proletariat can combat these very political institutions. The Social Democrats have participated in the elections to the various Diets, to municipal councils, and to industrial courts. Wherever the proletariat could secure an effective voice, the occupation of these electoral strongholds by the bourgeoisie has been contested. Consequently, the bourgeoisie and the government have become much more alarmed at the legal than at the illegal activities of the labor party, dreading the results of elections far more than they dread the results of rebellion." Some years later, Kautsky published a letter from Engels disavowing the preface and blaming it on the "timid legalism" of the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party who were committed to the parliamentary activities through which the party was thriving, and fearful of the threatened passage of antisocialist laws by the Reichstag (see Howard, 383; Michels, 370 fn 6).

[15] Burnham's well-known theory of "critical elections" resulting from the cumulative tension between socio-economic developments and the political system is similar to this argument (1965, 1970). The relationship between economic conditions and voter responses has been subjected to extensive empirical study by American political scientists. These studies generally tend to confirm the proposition that deteriorating economic conditions result in voter defections from incumbent parties. See for example Bloom and Price; Kramer; and Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes.

the election of 1936, began to defect to Republican columns or to stay away from the polls.

These early signs of political instability ordinarily prompt efforts by contending political leaders to placate the defecting groups, usually at this stage with conciliatory pronouncements. The more serious the electoral defections, or the keener the competition among political elites, the more likely that such symbolic appeasements will be offered. But if the sources of disturbance and anger are severe— and only if they are severe and persistent—conciliations are likely merely to fuel mass arousal, for in effect they imply that some of the highest leaders of the land identify with the indignation of the lowly masses.

Moreover, just as political leaders play an influential role in stimulating mass arousal, so do they play an important role in shaping the demands of the aroused.[16] What are intended to serve as merely symbolic appeasements may instead provide a focus for the still inchoate anxieties and diffuse anger that drive the masses. Thus early rhetorical pronouncements by liberal political leaders, including presidents of the United States, about the "rights" of workers and the "rights" of blacks not only helped to fuel the discontents of workers and blacks, but helped to concentrate those discontents on demands articulated by leading officials of the nation.[17]

[16] Edelman ascribes the influence of public officials as "powerful shapers of perceptions" to their virtual monopoly on certain kinds of information, to the legitimacy of the regime with which they are identified, and to the intense identification of people with the state (101–102).

[17] Our conviction that the demands of the protestors, at least for the periods we examine, are shaped as much by their interaction with elites as by the structural factors (or contradictions) which produced the movements is one difference between this analysis and some Marxist interpretations. Thus if one explains the origins of protest not by the breakdown of social controls, or by relative deprivation, but by the basic and irreconcilable contradictions that characterize capitalist institutions, then the political agenda the movement evolves ought to reflect those basic and irreconcilable contradictions. Hence it would follow that working-class and lower-class movements arising in a corporate capitalist society are democratic and egalitarian or, in an older terminology, progressive, and not ultimately cooptable. Manuel Castells, for example, who has done some of the best work on social movements from a Marxist perspective, defines a movement as "a certain type of organization of social practices, the logic of whose development contradicts the institutionally dominant social logic" (93). By his definition Castells thus minimizes a host of problems in evaluating the political directions of social movements that historical experience unfortunately does not minimize. See also Useem (1975, 27–35). Or, in another terminology, we do not take it for granted that conscious (or subjective) orientations of action approximate objective class interests (see Dahrendorf (174–176) and Balbus for a discussion of this distinction).

But when people are thus encouraged in spirit without being appeased in fact, their defiance may escape the boundaries of electoral rituals, and escape the boundaries established by the political norms of the electoral-representative system in general. They may indeed become rebellious, but while their rebellion often appears chaotic from the perspective of conventional American politics, or from the perspective of some organizers, it is not chaotic at all; it is structured political behavior. When people riot in the streets, their behavior is socially patterned, and within those patterns, their actions are to some extent deliberate and purposeful.

SOCIAL LOCATION AND FORMS OF DEFIANCE

In contrast to the effort expended in accounting for the sources of insurgency, relatively little attention has been given to the question of why insurgency, when it does occur, takes one form and not another. Why, in other words, do people sometimes strike and at other times boycott, loot, or burn? Perhaps this question is seldom dealt with because the defiant behavior released often appears inchoate to analysts, and therefore not susceptible to explanation, as in the nineteenth-century view of mental illness. Thus Parsons characterizes reactions to strain as "irrational" (1965); Neil Smelser describes collective behavior as "primitive" and "magical"; and Kornhauser attributes unstable, extremist, and antidemocratic tendencies to mass movements. Many defiant forms of mass action that fall short of armed uprisings are thus often simply not recognized as intelligent political behavior at all.

The common but false association of lower-class protest with violence may also be a residue of this tradition and its view of the mob as normless and dangerous, the barbarian unchained. Mass violence is, to be sure, one of many forms of defiance, and perhaps a very elemental form, for it violates the very ground rules of civil society. And lower-class groups do on occasion resort to violence—to the destruction of property and persons—and perhaps this is more likely to be the case when they are deprived by their institutional location of the opportunity to use other forms of defiance. More typically, however, they are not violent, although they may be mili-

tant. They are usually not violent simply because the risks are too great; the penalties attached to the use of violence by the poor are too fearsome and too overwhelming.[18] (Of course, defiance by the lower class frequently *results* in violence when more powerful groups, discomfited or alarmed by the unruliness of the poor, use force to coerce them into docility. The substantial record of violence associated with protest movements in the United States is a record composed overwhelmingly of the casualties suffered by protestors at the hands of public or private armies.)

Such perspectives have left us with images which serve to discredit lower-class movements by denying them meaning and legitimacy, instead of providing explanations. While the weakening of social controls that accompanies ruptures in social life may be an important precondition for popular uprisings, it does not follow either that the infrastructure of social life simply collapses, or that those who react to these disturbances by protesting are those who suffer the sharpest personal disorientation and alienation. To the contrary it may well be those whose lives are rooted in some institutional context, who are in regular relationships with others in similar straits, who are best able to redefine their travails as the fault of their rulers and not of themselves, and are best able to join together in collective protest.[19] Thus while many of the southern blacks who participated in the civil rights movement were poor, recent migrants to the southern cities, or were unemployed, they were also linked together in the

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[18] Gamson argues convincingly that rational calculations of the chances of success underlie the use of violence: "Violence should be viewed as an instrumental act, aimed at furthering the purpose of the group that uses it when they have some reason to think it will help their cause. . . . [It] grows from an impatience born of confidence and rising efficacy rather than the opposite. It occurs when hostility toward the victim renders it a relatively safe and costless strategy" (81).

[19] It may be for this reason that the extensive data collected after the ghetto riots of the 1960s on the characteristics of rioters and nonrioters provided little evidence that the rioters themselves were more likely to be recent migrants or less educated or suffer higher rates of unemployment than the ghetto population as a whole. But while there are data to indicate that the rioters did not suffer higher indices of "rootlessness," little is known about the networks or structures through which their defiance was mobilized. Tilly speculates interestingly on the relation between integration and deprivation by suggesting that the more integrated shopkeepers and artisans of Paris may have led the great outburst of the French Revolution precisely because they were in a better position to do so, and because they had a kind of leadership role, and were therefore responsive to the misery of the hordes of more impoverished Parisians (1964). Hobsbawm and Rudé ascribe a similar role to local artisans in the English farm laborers' protests of the early nineteenth century (1968, 63–64).

southern black church, which became the mobilizing node of movement actions.[20]

Just as electoral political institutions channel protest into voter activity in the United States, and may even confine it within these spheres if the disturbance is not severe and the electoral system appears responsive, so do other features of institutional life determine the forms that protest takes when it breaks out of the boundaries of electoral politics. Thus, it is no accident that some people strike, others riot, or loot the granaries, or burn the machines, for just as the patterns of daily life ordinarily assure mass quiescence, so do these same patterns influence the form defiance will take when it erupts.

First, people experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end product of large and abstract processes, and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances against specific targets. Workers experience the factory, the speeding rhythm of the assembly line, the foreman, the spies and the guards, the owner and the paycheck. They do not experience monopoly capitalism. People on relief experience the shabby waiting rooms, the overseer or the caseworker, and the dole. They do not experience American social welfare policy. Tenants experience the leaking ceilings and cold radiators, and they recognize the landlord. They do not recognize the banking, real estate, and construction systems. No small wonder, therefore, that when the poor rebel they so often rebel against the overseer of the poor, or the slumlord, or the middling merchant, and not against the banks or the governing elites to whom the overseer, the slumlord, and the merchant also defer.[21] In other words, it is the daily experience of

people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the targets of their anger.

Second, institutional patterns shape mass movements by shaping the collectivity out of which protest can arise. Institutional life aggregates people or disperses them, molds group identities, and draws people into the settings within which collective action can erupt. Thus factory work gathers men and women together, educates them in a common experience, and educates them to the possibilities of cooperation and collective action.[22] Casual laborers or petty entrepreneurs, by contrast, are dispersed by their occupations, and are therefore less likely to perceive their commonalities of position, and less likely to join together in collective action.[23]

Third, and most important, institutional roles determine the strategic opportunities for defiance, for it is typically by rebelling against the rules and authorities associated with their everyday activities that people protest. Thus workers protest by striking. They are able to do so because they are drawn together in the factory setting, and their protests consist mainly in defying the rules and authorities associated with the workplace. The unemployed do not and cannot strike, even when they perceive that those who own the factories and businesses are to blame for their troubles. Instead, they riot in the

than into the pockets of the manufacturers or the business executives" (186). Michael Schwartz illustrates this point in a study of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. The Texas members of the alliance singled out landlords and merchants as the target of their demands, and not the banks, speculators, and railroads who were ultimately responsible for their plight, because the tenant farmers had direct experience with the landlords and merchants.

[22] Marx and Engels made a similar argument about the conditions for the development of a revolutionary proletariat: "But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels its strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level" (1948, 17–18). By contrast, peasants were not likely to be mobilized to enforce their own class interest, for their "mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse . . ." (1963, 123–124). This view of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat did not anticipate the ability of employers to manipulate the institutional context of factory work, to divide those they had brought together by, for example, elaborating job titles and hierarchies within the work place so as to "balkanize" the proletariat. See Gordon, Edwards, and Reich for a discussion of the significance of this development.

[23] Useem, in his study of the draft-resistance movement that arose during the Vietnam War, concludes that the absence of an institutional setting that united the men subject to the draft severely hampered The Resistance in mobilizing its constituency (1973).

[20] Tilly, reviewing the literature on the French Revolution, makes a similar argument about the structuring of the great outbursts of collective violence among the sans-culottes: "[T]he insurrection was a continuation, in an extreme form, of their everyday politics" (1964, 114). See also the account by Hobsbawm and Rudé of the role of the "village parliaments" and churches in English agricultural uprisings (1968, 59–60).

[21] Max Weber makes the similar point "that the class antagonisms that are conditioned through the market situation are usually most bitter between those who actually and directly participate as opponents in price wars. It is not the *rentier*, the share-holder, and the banker who suffer the ill will of the worker, but almost exclusively the manufacturer and the business executives who are the direct opponents of workers in price wars. This is so in spite of the fact that it is precisely the cash boxes of the *rentier*, the share-holder, and the banker into which the more or less 'unearned' gains flow, rather

streets where they are forced to linger, or storm the relief centers, and it is difficult to imagine them doing otherwise.

That they should do otherwise, however, is constantly asserted, and it is in such statements that the influence (as well as the absurdity) of the pluralist view becomes so evident. By denying the constraints which are imposed by institutional location, protest is readily discredited, as when insurgents are denounced for having ignored the true centers of power by attacking the wrong target by the wrong means. Thus welfare administrators admonish recipients for disrupting relief offices and propose instead that they learn how to lobby in the state legislature or Congress. But welfare clients cannot easily go to the state or national capital, and when a few do, they are of course ignored. Sometimes, however, they can disrupt relief offices, and that is harder to ignore.

In the same vein, a favorite criticism of the student peace movement, often made by erstwhile sympathizers, was that it was foolish of the students to protest the Vietnam War by demonstrating at the universities and attacking blameless administrators and faculties. It was obviously not the universities that were waging the war, critics argued, but the military-industrial complex. The students were not so foolish, however. The exigencies of mass action are such that they were constrained to act out their defiance within the universities where they were physically located and could thus act collectively, and where they played a role on which an institution depended, so that their defiance mattered.

Since our examples might suggest otherwise, we should note at this juncture that the tendency to impute freedom of choice in the evolution of political strategies is not peculiar to those who have large stakes in the preservation of some institution, whether welfare administrators or university professors. Nor is the tendency peculiar to those of more conservative political persuasion. Radical organizers make precisely the same assumption when they call upon the working class to organize in one way or another and to pursue one political strategy or another, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that social conditions preclude the exercise of such options. Opportunities for defiance are not created by analyses of power structures. If there is a genius in organizing, it is the capacity to sense what it is possible for people to do under given conditions, and to then help them do it. In point of fact, however, most organizing ventures ask that people do what they cannot do, and the result is failure.

It is our second general point, then, that the opportunities for defiance are structured by features of institutional life.[24] *Simply put, people cannot defy institutions to which they have no access, and to which they make no contribution.*

The Limited Impact of Mass Defiance

If mass defiance is neither freely available nor the forms it takes freely determined, it must also be said that it is generally of limited political impact. Still, some forms of protest appear to have more impact than others, thus posing an analytical question of considerable importance. It is a question, however, that analysts of movements, especially analysts of contemporary American movements, have not generally asked. The literature abounds with studies of the social origins of protestors, the determinants of leadership styles, the struggles to cope with problems of organizational maintenance. Thus protest seems to be wondered about mainly for the many and fascinating aspects of social life which it exposes, but least of all for its chief significance: namely, that it is the means by which the least-privileged seek to wrest concessions from their rulers.[25]

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[24] This is perhaps what C. L. R. James means when he writes: "Workers are at their very best in collective action in the circumstances of their daily activity or crises arising from it" (95). Richard Flacks has also made a related argument regarding the importance of what he calls "everyday life" in shaping popular movements.

[25] Michael Lipsky's work is in a way an exception to these assertions, for he sets out specifically to evaluate protest as a strategy for achieving political goals (1968, 1970). The flaw in Lipsky's work is not in his intellectual objective, which is important, but in his understanding of what it is that he is evaluating. Protest strategies, in Lipsky's view, consist primarily of "showmanship" by powerless groups to gain the attention of potential sympathizers or "reference publics." But by this definition, Lipsky rules out the historically most important forms of lower-class protest, such as strikes and riots. Lipsky was led to define protest so narrowly by the New York City rent strike on which his analysis is based, for that particular event, as Lipsky clearly shows, did consist primarily of speeches and press releases, and very little rent striking. Small wonder, therefore, that the outcome of the rent strike was determined by a scattering of liberal reform groups, provoked as they always have been by scandalous stories of slum housing, and appeased as they always have been by purely symbolic if not sentimental gestures. And small wonder that the slums remained and worsened. Lipsky concludes from this experience that protest is a weak and unstable resource, and that whatever responses are made by government will depend wholly on whether significant third parties share the protestors' objectives. But this conclusion, while valid for the particular case Lipsky studied, seems to us unwarranted as a generalization about protest. In our view, protest

It is our judgment that *the most useful way to think about the effectiveness of protest is to examine the disruptive effects on institutions of different forms of mass defiance, and then to examine the political reverberations of those disruptions.* The impact of mass defiance is, in other words, not so much directly as indirectly felt. Protest is more likely to have a seriously disruptive impact when the protestors play a central role in an institution, and it is more likely to evoke wider political reverberations when powerful groups have large stakes in the disrupted institution. These relationships are almost totally ignored in the literature on social movements; there are no studies that catalogue and examine forms of defiance, the settings in which defiance is acted out, the institutional disruptions that do or do not result, and the varying political reverberations of these institutional disruptions.

THE LIMITS OF INSTITUTIONAL DISRUPTION

To refer to an institutional disruption is simply to note the obvious fact that institutional life depends upon conformity with established roles and compliance with established rules. Defiance may thus obstruct the normal operations of institutions. Factories are shut down when workers walk out or sit down; welfare bureaucracies are thrown into chaos when crowds demand relief; landlords may be bankrupted when tenants refuse to pay rent. In each of these cases, *people cease to conform to accustomed institutional roles; they withhold their accustomed cooperation, and by doing so, cause institutional disruptions.*

By our definition, disruption is simply the application of a negative sanction, the withdrawal of a crucial contribution on which others depend, and it is therefore a natural resource for exerting power over others. This form of power is, in fact, regularly employed by individuals and groups linked together in many kinds of coopera-

tive interaction, and particularly by producer groups. Farmers, for example, keep their products off the market in order to force up the price offered by buyers; doctors refuse to provide treatment unless their price is met; oil companies withhold supplies until price concessions are made.[26]

But the amount of leverage that a group gains by applying such negative sanctions is widely variable. Influence depends, first of all, on whether or not the contribution withheld is crucial to others; second, on whether or not those who have been affected by the disruption have resources to be conceded; and third, on whether the obstructionist group can protect itself adequately from reprisals. Once these criteria are stated, it becomes evident that the poor are usually in the least strategic position to benefit from defiance.

Thus, in comparison with most producer groups, the lower classes are often in weak institutional locations to use disruption as a tactic for influence. Many among the lower class are in locations that make their cooperation less than crucial to the operation of major institutions. Those who work in economically marginal enterprises, or who perform marginally necessary functions in major enterprises, or those who are unemployed, do not perform roles on which major institutions depend. Indeed, some of the poor are sometimes so isolated from significant institutional participation that the only "contribution" they can withhold is that of quiescence in civil life: they can riot.

Moreover, those who manage the institutions in which many of the lower classes find themselves often have little to concede to disruptors. When lower-class groups do play an important role in an institution, as they do in sweatshops or in slum tenements, these institutions—operated as they often are by marginal entrepreneurs—may be incapable of yielding very much in response to disruptive pressure.

Finally, lower-class groups have little ability to protect themselves against reprisals that can be employed by institutional managers.

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that consists merely of what Lipsky calls "noise" is hardly a resource at all, because it is hardly protest at all. Moreover, the responses that reference publics make to showmanship are of course weak and tokenistic. Reference publics do play a crucial role in determining responses to protest, not when they are provoked by "noise," but when they are provoked by the serious institutional disruptions attendant upon mass defiance.

[26] Spencer, McLoughlin, and Lawson, in their historical study of New York City tenant movements, provide an interesting example of the use of disruption, not by the tenants, but by the banks. Thus when Langdon Post, the Tenement House Commissioner under LaGuardia, tried to initiate a campaign to force compliance with the housing codes, "five savings banks owning 400 buildings on the Lower East Side threatened to vacate rather than comply. The president of the New York City Taxpayers' Union warned that 40,000 tenements would be abandoned." Post withdrew his threat (10).

The poor do not have to be historians of the occasions when protestors have been jailed or shot down to understand this point. The lesson of their vulnerability is engraved in everyday life; it is evident in every police beating, in every eviction, in every lost job, in every relief termination. The very labels used to describe defiance by the lower classes—the pejorative labels of illegality and violence—testify to this vulnerability and serve to justify severe reprisals when they are imposed. By taking such labels for granted, we fail to recognize what these events really represent: a structure of political coercion inherent in the everyday life of the lower classes.

We can now comment on the association of disruption with spontaneity, perhaps another relic of traditional ways of thinking about lower-class uprisings, although here the issue is a little more complicated. Disruption itself is not necessarily spontaneous, but lower-class disruptions often are, in the sense that they are not planned and executed by formal organizations. In part, this testifies to the paucity of stable organizational resources among the poor, as well as to the cautious and moderate character of such organizations as are able to survive. But even if formal organizations existed, and even if they were not committed by the exigencies of their own survival to more cautious tactics, the circumstances that lead to mass defiance by the lower class are extremely difficult to predict; and once defiance erupts, its direction is difficult for leaders to control. Rosa Luxemburg's discussion of the mass strike is pertinent:

> . . . the mass strike is not artificially "made," not "decided" out of the blue, not "propagated," but rather it is an historical phenomenon which at a certain moment follows with historical necessity from the social relations. . . . If anyone were to undertake to make the mass strike in general, as one form of proletarian action, the object of methodical agitation, and to go house to house peddling this "idea" in order gradually to win the working class to it, it would be as idle, as profitless, and as crazy an occupation as it would be to seek to make the idea of the revolution or of the barricade struggle into the object of a particular agitation . . . (231–245).

Still, if the lower classes do not ordinarily have great disruptive power, and if the use of even that kind of power is not planned, it is the only power they do have. Their use of that power, the weighing of gains and risks, is not calculated in board rooms; it wells up out of the terrible travails that people experience at times of rupture

and stress.[27] And at such times, disruptions by the poor may have reverberations that go beyond the institutions in which the disruption is acted out.

THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL DISRUPTION

It is not the impact of disruptions on particular institutions that finally tests the power of the poor; it is the political impact of these disruptions. At this level, however, a new set of structuring mechanisms intervenes, for the political impact of institutional disruptions is mediated by the electoral-representative system.

Responses to disruption vary depending on electoral conditions. Ordinarily, during periods of stability, governmental leaders have three rather obvious options when an institutional disruption occurs. They may ignore it; they may employ punitive measures against the disruptors; or they may attempt to conciliate them. If the disruptive group has little political leverage in its own right, as is true of lower-class groups, it will either be ignored or repressed. It is more likely to be ignored when the disrupted institution is not central to the society as a whole, or to other more important groups. Thus if men and women run amok, disrupting the fabric of their own communities, as in the immigrant slums of the nineteenth century, the spectacle may be frightening, but it can be contained within the slums; it will not necessarily have much impact on the society as a whole, or on the well-being of other important groups. Similarly, when impoverished mobs demand relief, they may cause havoc in the relief offices, but chaotic relief offices are not a large problem for the society as a whole, or for important groups. Repression is more likely to be employed when central institutions are affected, as when railroad workers struck and rioted in the late nineteenth century, or

[27] Rosa Luxemburg's comments are again persuasive: "At the moment that a real, earnest period of mass strikes begins all these 'calculations of costs' change into the project of draining the ocean with a water glass. And it is an ocean of frightful privations and sufferings which the proletarian masses buy with every revolution. The solution which a revolutionary period gives to these seemingly invincible difficulties is that along with them such an immense amount of mass idealism is let loose that the masses are insensitive to the sharpest sufferings. Neither revolution nor mass strikes can be made with the psychology of a trade unionist who will not cease work on May Day unless he is assured in advance of a determined support in the case of measures being taken against him" (246).

when the police struck in Boston after the First World War. Either way, to be ignored or punished is what the poor ordinarily expect from government, because these are the responses they ordinarily evoke.[28]

But protest movements do not arise during ordinary periods; they arise when large-scale changes undermine political stability. It is this context, as we said earlier, that gives the poor hope and makes insurgency possible in the first place. It is this context that also makes political leaders somewhat vulnerable to protests by the poor.

At times of rapid economic and social change, political leaders are far less free either to ignore disturbances or to employ punitive measures. At such times, the relationship of political leaders to their constituents is likely to become uncertain.[29] This unsettled state of political affairs makes the regime far more sensitive to disturbances, for it is not only more likely that previously uninvolved groups will be activated—the scope of conflict will be widened, in Schattschneider's terminology—but that the scope of conflict will be widened at a time when political alignments have already become unpredictable.[30]

When a political leadership becomes unsure of its support, even disturbances that are isolated within peripheral institutions cannot be so safely ignored, for the mere appearance of trouble and disorder is more threatening when political alignments are unstable. And when the disrupted institutions are central to economic production or to the stability of social life, it becomes imperative that normal operations be restored if the regime is to maintain support

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[28] Disruptions confined within institutions have the characteristics that Schattschneider attributes to small conflicts: "It is one of the qualities of extremely small conflicts that the relative strengths of the contestants are likely to be known in advance. In this case the stronger side may impose its will on the weaker without an overt test of strength because people are not apt to fight if they are sure to lose" (4).

[29] Lodhi and Tilly, in arguing against the social disorganization perspective, suggest that the amount of collective violence should be related to "the structure of power, the capacity of deprived groups for collective action, the forms of repression employed by the authorities, and the disparities between the weak and the powerful in shared understandings about collective rights to action and to use of valued resources . . ." (316). It is our point that each of these factors changes, at least temporarily, during periods of serious and widespread instability. Most importantly, the resources available to the regime decline (316).

[30] "To understand any conflict it is necessary, therefore, to keep constantly in mind the relations between the combatants and the audience because the audience is likely to do the kinds of things that determine the outcome of the fight. . . . The stronger contestant may hesitate to use his strength because he does not know whether or not he is going to be able to isolate his antagonist" (2).

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among its constituents. Thus when industrial workers joined in massive strikes during the 1930s, they threatened the entire economy of the nation and, given the electoral instability of the times, threatened the future of the nation's political leadership. Under these circumstances, government could hardly ignore the disturbances.

Yet neither could government run the risks entailed by using massive force to subdue the strikers in the 1930s. It could not, in other words, simply avail itself of the option of repression. For one thing the striking workers, like the civil rights demonstrators in the 1960s, had aroused strong sympathy among groups that were crucial supporters of the regime. For another, unless insurgent groups are virtually of outcast status, permitting leaders of the regime to mobilize popular hatred against them, politically unstable conditions make the use of force risky, since the reactions of other aroused groups cannot be safely predicted. When government is unable to ignore the insurgents, and is unwilling to risk the uncertain repercussions of the use of force, it will make efforts to conciliate and disarm the protestors.

These placating efforts will usually take several forms. First and most obviously, political leaders will offer concessions, or press elites in the private sector to offer concessions, to remedy some of the immediate grievances, both symbolic and tangible, of the disruptive group. Thus mobs of unemployed workers were granted relief in the 1930s; striking industrial workers won higher pay and shorter hours; and angry civil rights demonstrators were granted the right to desegregated public accommodations in the 1960s.

Whether one takes such measures as evidence of the capacity of American political institutions for reform, or brushes them aside as mere tokenism, such concessions were not offered readily by government leaders. In each case, and in some cases more than in others, reform required a break with an established pattern of government accommodation to private elites. Thus the New Deal's liberal relief policy was maintained despite widespread opposition from the business community. Striking workers in the mid-1930s succeeded in obtaining wage concessions from private industry only because state and national political leaders abandoned the age-old policy of using the coercive power of the state to curb strikes. The granting of desegregated public accommodations required that national Democratic leaders turn against their traditional allies among southern plantation elites. In such instances concessions were won by the protestors only when political leaders were finally forced, out of a concern for

their own survival, to act in ways which aroused the fierce opposition of economic elites. In short, under conditions of severe electoral instability, the alliance of public and private power is sometimes weakened, if only briefly, and at these moments a defiant poor may make gains.[31]

Second, political leaders, or elites allied with them, will try to quiet disturbances not only by dealing with immediate grievances, but by making efforts to channel the energies and angers of the protestors into more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behavior, in part by offering incentives to movement leaders or, in other words, by coopting them. Thus relief demonstrators in both the 1930s and the 1960s were encouraged to learn to use administrative grievance procedures as an alternative to "merely" disrupting relief offices, while their leaders were offered positions as advisors to relief administrators. In the 1960s civil rights organizers left the streets to take jobs in the Great Society programs; and as rioting spread in the northern cities, street leaders in the ghettos were encouraged to join in "dialogues" with municipal officials, and some were offered positions in municipal agencies.[32]

Third, the measures promulgated by government at times of disturbance may be designed not to conciliate the protestors, but to undermine whatever sympathy the protesting group has been able to command from a wider public. Usually this is achieved through new

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[31] The rapidly growing Marxist literature on the theory of the capitalist state stresses legitimation or social cohesion as one of the two primary functions of the state (the other being the maintenance of the conditions for capitalist accumulation). The interpretation of electoral-representative institutions presented here is consistent with that general perspective. As noted earlier, we view the wide distribution and exercise of the franchise as an important source of the legitimacy of state authority. Electoral activities generate a belief in government as the instrument of a broad majority rather than of particular interests or a particular class. It is this phenomenon which Marx defined as the false universality of the state. (See also Poulantzas and Bridges for a discussion of suffrage, and political parties based on suffrage, from this perspective.) We argue further that the franchise plays a major role in protecting the legitimacy of the state against periodic challenges. Electoral contests serve as a signal or barometer of discontent and disaffection, and the threat of electoral defeat constrains state officials to promulgate measures that will quiet discontent and restore legitimacy.

[32] The newcomers to officialdom were by and large absorbed into local agencies that made relatively insignificant decisions about service delivery to the insurgent population. The analogy to the use of natives by colonial administrations is obvious. Anderson and Friedland say in general of such agencies and their activities that they "encourage citizen participation at a local level insulated from national politics . . . " (21). See also Katznelson for a discussion of "state-sponsored creation of client-patron/broker links" (227).

programs that appear to meet the moral demands of the movement, and thus rob it of support without actually yielding much by way of tangible gains. A striking example was the passage of the pension provisions of the Social Security Act. The organized aged in the Townsend Movement were demanding pensions of $200 a month, with no strings attached, and they had managed to induce some 25 million people to sign supporting petitions. As it turned out, the Social Security Act, while it provided a measure of security for many of the future aged, did nothing for the members of the Townsend Movement, none of whom would be covered by a work-related insurance scheme since they were no longer working, and most of whom would in any case be dead when the payments were to begin some seven years later. But the pension provisions of the Social Security Act answered the *moral* claims of the movement. In principle, government had acted to protect America's aged, thus severing any identification between those who would be old in the future and those who were already old. The Social Security Act effectively dampened public support for the Townsend Plan while yielding the old people nothing. Other examples of responses which undermine public support abound. The widely heralded federal programs for the ghettos in the 1960s were neither designed nor funded in a way that made it possible for them to have substantial impact on poverty or on the traumas of ghetto life. But the publicity attached to the programs—the din and blare about a "war on poverty" and the development of "model cities"—did much to appease the liberal sympathizers with urban blacks.

Finally, these apparently conciliatory measures make it possible for government to safely employ repressive measures as well. Typically, leaders and groups who are more disruptive, or who spurn the concessions offered, are singled out for arbitrary police action or for more formal legal harassment through congressional investigations or through the courts. In the context of much-publicized efforts by government to ease the grievances of disaffected groups, coercive measures of this kind are not likely to arouse indignation among sympathetic publics. Indeed, this dual strategy is useful in another way, for it serves to cast an aura of balance and judiciousness over government action.

The main point, however, is simply that *the political impact of institutional disruptions depends upon electoral conditions.* Even serious disruptions, such as industrial strikes, will force concessions

only when the calculus of electoral instability favors the protestors. And even then, when the protestors succeed in forcing government to respond, they do not dictate the content of those responses. As to the variety of specific circumstances which determine how much the protestors will gain and how much they will lose, we still have a great deal to learn.

THE DEMISE OF PROTEST

It is not surprising that, taken together, these efforts to conciliate and disarm usually lead to the demise of the protest movement, partly by transforming the movement itself, and partly by transforming the political climate which nourishes protest. With these changes, the array of institutional controls which ordinarily restrain protest is restored, and political influence is once more denied to the lower class.

We said that one form of government response was to make concessions to the protestors, yielding them something of what they demanded, either symbolic or material. But the mere granting of such concessions is probably not very important in accounting for the demise of a movement. For one thing, whatever is yielded is usually modest if not meager; for another, even modest concessions demonstrate that protest "works," a circumstance that might as easily be expected to fuel a movement as to pacify it.

But concessions are rarely unencumbered. If they are given at all, they are usually part and parcel of measures to reintegrate the movement into normal political channels and to absorb its leaders into stable institutional roles. Thus the right of industrial workers to unionize, won in response to massive and disruptive strikes in the 1930s, meant that workers were encouraged to use newly established grievance procedures in place of the sit-down or the wildcat strike; and the new union leaders, now absorbed in relations with factory management and in the councils of the Democratic Party, became the ideological proponents and organizational leaders of this strategy of normalcy and moderation. Similarly, when blacks won the vote in the South and a share of patronage in the municipalities of the North in response to the disturbances of the 1960s, black leaders were absorbed into electoral and bureaucratic politics and became the

ideological proponents of the shift "from protest to politics" (Rustin).[33]

This feature of government action deserves some explanation because the main reintegrative measures—the right to organize, the right to vote, black representation in city government—were also responses to specific demands made by the protestors themselves. To all appearances, government simply acted to redress felt grievances. But the process was by no means as straightforward as that. As we suggested earlier, the movements had arisen through interaction with elites, and had been led to make the demands they made in response to early encouragement by political leaders. Nor was it fortuitous that political leaders came to proclaim as just such causes as the right to organize or the right to vote or the right to "citizen participation." In each case, elites responded to discontent by proposing reforms with which they had experience, and which consisted mainly of extending established procedures to new groups or to new institutional arenas. Collective bargaining was not invented in the 1930s, nor the franchise in the 1960s. Driven by turmoil, political leaders proposed reforms that were in a sense prefigured by institutional arrangements that already existed, that were drawn from a repertoire provided by existing traditions. And an aroused people responded by demanding simply what political leaders had said they should have. If through some accident of history they had done otherwise, if industrial workers had demanded public ownership of factories, they would probably have still gotten unionism, if they got anything at all; and if impoverished southern blacks had demanded land reform, they would probably have still gotten the vote.

At the same time that government makes efforts to reintegrate disaffected groups, and to guide them into less politically disturbing forms of behavior, it also moves to isolate them from potential supporters and, by doing so, diminishes the morale of the movement. Finally, while the movement is eroding under these influences, its

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[33] James Q. Wilson seems to us to miss the point when he ascribes the demise of SNCC and CORE to failure and rebuff, and the intolerable strain this exerted on these "redemptive" organizations which required a total transformation of society on the one hand, and extraordinary commitments from their members on the other hand. First, and most important, by no stretch of the reasonable imagination can SNCC and CORE be said to have failed, as we will explain in chapter 4. Second, while these may have been redemptive organizations, their demise was most specifically the result of the impact of government measures on both cadres and constituency. It was government responses that generated factionalism and disillusionment, and not simply "the disillusionment that inevitably afflicts a redemptive organization" (180–182).

leaders attracted by new opportunities, its followers conciliated, confused, or discouraged, the show of repressive force against recalcitrant elements demolishes the few who are left.

However, the more far-reaching changes do not occur within the movement, but in the political context which nourished the movement in the first place. The agitated and defiant people who compose the movement are but a small proportion of the discontented population on which it draws. Presumably if some leaders were coopted, new leaders would arise; if some participants were appeased or discouraged, others would take their place. But this does not happen, because government's responses not only destroy the movement, they also transform the political climate which makes protest possible. The concessions to the protestors, the efforts to "bring them into the system," and in particular the measures aimed at potential supporters, all work to create a powerful image of a benevolent and responsive government that answers grievances and solves problems. As a result, whatever support might have existed among the larger population dwindles. Moreover, the display of government benevolence stimulates antagonist groups, and triggers the antagonistic sentiments of more neutral sectors. The "tide of public opinion" begins to turn—against labor in the late 1930s, against blacks in the late 1960s. And as it does, the definitions put forward by political leaders also change, particularly when prodded by contenders for political office who sense the shift in popular mood, and the weaknesses it reveals in an incumbent's support. Thus in the late 1960s, Republican leaders took advantage of white resentment against blacks to attract Democratic voters, raising cries of "law and order" and "workfare not welfare"—the code words for racial antagonism. Such a change is ominous. Where once the powerful voices of the land enunciated a rhetoric that gave courage to the poor, now they enunciate a rhetoric that erases hope, and implants fear. The point should be evident that as these various circumstances combine, defiance is no longer possible.

THE RESIDUE OF REFORM

When protest subsides, concessions may be withdrawn. Thus when the unemployed become docile, the relief rolls are cut even though many are still unemployed; when the ghetto becomes quiescent,

evictions are resumed. The reason is simple enough. Since the poor no longer pose the threat of disruption, they no longer exert leverage on political leaders; there is no need for conciliation. This is particularly the case in a climate of growing political hostility, for the concessions granted are likely to become the focus of resentment by other groups.

But some concessions are not withdrawn. As the tide of turbulence recedes, major institutional changes sometimes remain. Thus the right of workers to join unions was not rescinded when turmoil subsided (although some of the rights ceded to unions were withdrawn). And it is not likely that the franchise granted to blacks in the South will be taken back (although just that happened in the post-Reconstruction period). Why, then, are some concessions withdrawn while others become permanent institutional reforms?

The answer, perhaps, is that while some of the reforms granted during periods of turmoil are costly or repugnant to various groups in the society, and are therefore suffered only under duress, other innovations turn out to be compatible (or at least not incompatible) with the interests of more powerful groups, most importantly with the interests of dominant economic groups. Such an assertion has the aura of a conspiracy theory, but in fact the process is not conspiratorial at all. Major industrialists had resisted unionization, but once forced to concede it as the price of industrial peace, they gradually discovered that labor unions constituted a useful mechanism to regulate the labor force. The problem of disciplining industrial labor had been developing over the course of a century. The depression produced the political turmoil through which a solution was forged. Nor was the solution simply snatched from the air. As noted earlier, collective bargaining was a tried and tested method of dealing with labor disturbances. The tumult of the 1930s made the use of this method imperative; once implemented, the reforms were institutionalized because they continued to prove useful.

Similarly, southern economic elites had no interest in ceding southern blacks the franchise. But their stakes in disfranchising blacks had diminished. The old plantation economy was losing ground to new industrial enterprises; plantation-based elites were losing ground to economic dominants based in industry. The feudal political arrangements on which a plantation economy had relied were no longer of central importance, and certainly they were not of central importance to the new economic elites. Black uprisings, by forcing the extension of the franchise and the modernization of

southern politics, thus helped seal a fissure in the institutional fabric of American society, a fissure resulting from the growing inconsistency between the economic and political institutions of the South.

What these examples suggest is that *protesters win, if they win at all, what historical circumstances has already made ready to be conceded*. Still, as Alan Wolfe has said, governments do not change magically through some "historical radical transformation," but only through the actual struggles of the time (154). When people are finally roused to protest against great odds, they take the only options available to them within the limits imposed by their social circumstances. Those who refuse to recognize these limits not only blindly consign lower-class protests to the realm of the semirational, but also blindly continue to pretend that other, more regular options for political influence are widely available in the American political system.

A Note on the Role
of Protest Leadership

The main point of this chapter is that both the limitations and opportunities for mass protest are shaped by social conditions. The implications for the role of leadership in protest movements can be briefly summarized.

Protest wells up in response to momentous changes in the institutional order. It is not created by organizers and leaders.

Once protest erupts, the specific forms it takes are largely determined by features of social structure. Organizers and leaders who contrive strategies that ignore the social location of the people they seek to mobilize can only fail.

Elites respond to the institutional disruptions that protest causes, as well as to other powerful institutional imperatives. Elite responses are not significantly shaped by the demands of leaders and organizers. Nor are elite responses significantly shaped by formally structured organizations of the poor. Whatever influence lower-class groups occasionally exert in American politics does not result from organization, but from mass protest and the disruptive consequences of protest.

Finally, protest in the United States has been episodic and transient, for as it gains momentum, so too do various forms of institu-

tional accommodation and coercion that have the effect of restoring quiescence. Organizers and leaders cannot prevent the ebbing of protest, nor the erosion of whatever influence protest yielded the lower class. They can only try to win whatever can be won while it can be won.

In these major ways protest movements are shaped by institutional conditions, and not by the purposive efforts of leaders and organizers. The limitations are large and unyielding. Yet within the boundaries created by these limitations, some latitude for purposive effort remains. Organizers and leaders choose to do one thing, or they choose to do another, and what they choose to do affects to some degree the course of the protest movement. If the area of latitude is less than leaders and organizers would prefer, it is also not enlarged when they proceed as if institutional limitations did not in fact exist by undertaking strategies which fly in the face of these constraints. The wiser course is to understand these limitations, and to exploit whatever latitude remains to enlarge the potential influence of the lower class. And if our conclusions are correct, what this means is that strategies must be pursued that escalate the momentum and impact of disruptive protest at each stage in its emergence and evolution.

With these propositions in mind, we now turn to an analysis of recent protest movements.

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CHAPTER
2

The Unemployed Workers' Movement

The depression movements of the unemployed and of industrial workers followed a period of economic breakdown that produced distress and confusion in the daily lives of millions of people, and produced contradiction and confusion in the posture of elites. For those still working, the discontents released by economic collapse during the 1930s were expressed in struggles within the factory system, which we will turn to in the next chapter. But the men and women for whom life had changed most drastically and immediately were no longer in the factories. They were among the masses of the unemployed, and their struggle had to take another form, in another institutional context. The depression saw the rise and fall of the largest movement of the unemployed this country has known, and the institution against which the movement was inevitably pitted was the relief system.

At the time of the Great Depression, formal arrangements for relief of the indigent were sparse and fragmented. In many places, including New York City and Philadelphia, there simply was no "outdoor" relief (the term used to describe aid given to people who were not institutionalized). Even where public relief agencies existed, what little was actually given was usually provided by private charities. But niggardly aid and fragmented adminstration did not signify an underdeveloped institution. To the contrary, a national relief system did exist. Despite the diversity of administrative auspices, the norms that guided the giving of relief were everywhere quite similar. The dole was anathema to the American spirit of work and self-sufficiency. Therefore, it should be dispensed to as few as pos-