

Rhetoric, Agitation and Control, and Social Change

Historian David Farber proposed that the “problem of how to effect and contain political change permeates all of American history,”¹ This book provides insights into the struggle Farber discussed by focusing on the interaction between individuals and groups arguing for change in society (agitation) and the response by establishment figures who oppose them (control). This book specifically outlines individuals’ and groups’ rhetorical strategies of agitation and control. Scholars who study rhetoric analyze and evaluate messages (verbal, nonverbal, and mediated) that participants in social movements produce and the responses from members of the establishment. This chapter will provide a framework for the study of agitation and control by defining and explaining terms and concepts and illustrating how they guide research on this fascinating topic.

What Is Rhetoric?

Traditional definitions of rhetoric detail the process by which speakers persuade audience members to strengthen or alter their beliefs or convince them to take a specific action. Many scholars believe that this traditional view of rhetoric is too limited and call for a broadening of the definition. The definition used in this text remains in the spirit of traditional ones but widens the scope by including all forms of communication, not just verbal. In this book, rhetoric will be defined as the rationale of instrumental, symbolic behavior.

A message or act is instrumental if it contributes to the production of another message or an action. An outstanding student essay may be instrumental in persuading a professor to assign an A grade to the paper. A politician’s campaign appeals may be instrumental in persuading members of an audience to vote for her in the next election. In terms of dissent, a bureaucracy’s message may lead to results that the sender could not

have foreseen. In 1964, the administration of the University of California at Berkeley announced that students could no longer use a traditional gathering place to distribute literature and recruit for off-campus political activities. That message infuriated students and led them to participate in a variety of protest actions and to produce messages that rejected the university's demand. The students' behavior resulted in the first major student revolt of the 1960s. Such instrumental behavior is rhetorical.

Instrumental behavior should be [distinguished] from expressive behavior and consummatory behavior. Behavior is expressive if it neither intends to nor succeeds in producing social change. A carpenter's exclamation when he or she strikes his or her thumb is expressive. Purely expressive statements are rare, however. Behavior is consummatory if it is the final step in satisfying a need. No other behavior is necessary to satisfy that need. The professor's assignment of a grade is consummatory. The constituent's vote in an election is consummatory.

This book also distinguishes between [ideological statements and rhetorical statements] A group's ideology may be defined as an "elaboration of rationalizations and stereotypes into a consistent pattern" that details and explains the group's goals.² Ideological statements express a set of values and beliefs rather than being instrumental. A purely ideological statement is not intended to persuade or alter behavior but rather to define an individual's or group's position. In reality, most statements contain both ideological and rhetorical functions. "Capitalism is an evil system" might be defined as an ideological statement and "Capitalism is an evil system that should be replaced by one that is fair to all individuals" as a rhetorical statement. Ideological statements in most contexts imply rhetorical ones or may be an integral part of a rhetorical statement.

Behavior is symbolic if it has a referential function in which it stands for something else. Verbal communication, whether descriptive or persuasive, is almost completely symbolic because no natural or necessary connection exists between sounds produced in speech and the real world. Words used instrumentally fall within the scope of rhetoric. Words may be intentionally or unintentionally rhetorical.

Nonverbal communication is symbolic and therefore appropriate for rhetorical analysis. For purposes of explanation, it may be useful to imagine a continuum of symbolic behavior. On one end of the continuum are words and other kinds of arbitrary symbolic behavior—behavior for which no natural connection exists between the behavior and the referent used to represent it. On the other end of the continuum is more naturally symbolic behavior, behavior in which the observer need go through no arbitrary set of rules to establish the relationship between the sign and its referent. If an agitator says to an establishment spokesperson, "You are disgusting, like urine," she or he is using arbitrarily symbolic behavior that must be decoded using the rules of syntax and semantics. If, instead, the activist throws a plastic bag filled with urine at an estab-

lishment spokesperson, that is more naturally symbolic behavior. Both kinds of behavior are symbolic, since they stand for general concepts that an observer easily infers. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne provide this excellent summary: "To study the rhetoric of social protest is to study how symbols—words, signs, images, music, even bodies—shape our perceptions of reality and invite us to act accordingly."³

This definition of rhetoric applies to any situation in which persuasion occurs or is intended to occur. The rest of this chapter outlines rhetorical situations analyzed throughout this book.

Agitation

Agitation can be defined in many ways. One traditional definition includes the following: Agitation is persistent, long-term advocacy for social change, where resistance to the change is also persistent and long term. This definition applies to the efforts of individuals like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gloria Steinem, and Cesar Chavez, as well as to historical figures like William Wilberforce (who fought to eliminate the British slave trade), William Lloyd Garrison (who battled for the elimination of slavery in the United States), Susan B. Anthony (who fought for women's suffrage), and John B. Gough (who argued for temperance).

Another traditional definition might be: Agitation is a style of persuasion characterized by a highly emotional argument based on the citation of grievances and alleged violation of moral principles. Under this definition would fall agitators like Cindy Sheehan, who was a leading spokesperson of dissent against the Iraq War, Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams during the American Revolution, Dennis Kearney, who led the anti-Chinese crusade in the 1870s and 1880s, and Senator Joseph McCarthy during his anticommunist campaign in the United States in the 1950s.

Both definitions are useful in providing insight into agitation, but they do not describe all examples of agitation. The first definition does not distinguish agitation from other forms of rhetorical discourse, except in stressing persistence. Therefore, it fails to establish agitation as a special kind of persuasion in any significant sense. The second definition includes terms like "highly emotional" and "moral principles." Those terms are extremely difficult to define. Each of these definitions of agitation would include some activists and exclude others, since persistence, emotionality, and moral principles do not necessarily have a great deal in common.

Working Definition

This book proposes a definition of agitation and control that hopes to avoid the ambiguity of earlier definitions.

Agitation exists when (1) *people outside the normal decision-making establishment* (2) *advocate significant social change* and (3) *encounter a degree of*

resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal discursive means of persuasion. Control refers to the response of the decision-making establishment to agitation.

People Outside the Normal Decision-Making Establishment

The notion of an establishment is a relative one. In some social organizations, most decision-making power rests with one individual. In many countries, a dictator holds virtually all political power. In some religious groups, a charismatic leader dominates the members. In most social organizations, however, the establishment is composed of a small group of decision makers who hold the legitimate power of the organization. That power has two parts: (1) *legislation*, the power of deciding policy; and (2) *enforcement*, the power of administering negative and positive sanctions to those who violate or observe the policies. The same group of decision makers may perform these two functions or the functions may be divided among the decision makers.

This book does not generally classify those who attempt to persuade within the establishment as agitators, although there may be cases when an argument could be made that a member of the establishment functions as an agitator. According to this definition, Senator Joseph McCarthy was not an agitator when he carried on his anticommunist hearings in the 1950s, nor was Senator Eugene McCarthy when he opposed President Lyndon B. Johnson's policies as a member of the United States Senate and then challenged Johnson for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968. This is not to say that such dissenting members of the establishment have no role in agitation. Sometimes, as will be illustrated in later chapters, dissenting members of an establishment have a significant effect on the rhetoric used by agitators.

Significant Social Change

✓ Social change is an alteration, written or unwritten, in the way society regulates itself. A change may be substantive (such as higher wages for members of a union) or procedural (such as enacting a collective bargaining agreement for union members). Change may affect the use of power or the distribution of that power; it may affect one group, many groups, or all groups in a culture; it may be political, religious, economic; or it may be all of these things. Change may require enactment of legislation or repeal of legislation and may call for bigger government, smaller government, or no government. All these issues are matters of ideology for the individual or group proposing change.

“Significant” is a difficult word to define. In order to define an object or event as “significant,” an individual must pass it through his or her value system and formulate a reaction like “yes,” “no,” “don’t know,” or “maybe.” Individuals who study protest should be able to decide whether a dissenter or movement is significant and therefore worthy of study.

In 2007 a group of senior citizens in New York demonstrated against a decision that denied them access to free pastries at a senior citizen center each day. The pastries were donated to the center. The administrators of the center felt that they were setting a bad example by providing unhealthy foods to senior citizens. The dissenters were upset because they had not been consulted about the decision and felt that they were capable of deciding whether or not to eat the pastries. They picketed the center carrying signs saying "We're Old Enough to Choose" and "We Want Our Cake and Eat It Too!"⁴ Although the issue was significant for the senior citizens, most people probably would not view the subject as an important one worthy of study.

Many movements or campaigns for social change *are* significant and worthy of rhetorical study. The social change advocated in the cases analyzed in this book are illustrations of significant causes.

Resistance Such as to Require More Than the Normal Discursive Means of Persuasion

Agitators must use forms of persuasion beyond verbal appeals. Speeches provide insight into agitation, but something more is required for agitational rhetoric to exist and to be successful. The primary focus of this book will be the analysis of instrumental, symbolic events that are largely nonverbal or mass mediated. Speeches and essays are important and give voice to the ideologies of agitating groups, but other actions may be more central or important to the agitation. This book will discuss the verbal aspects of agitation but will focus more on the nonverbal and mediated aspects.

Agitation exists when a movement for significant social change meets such resistance within the establishment that agitators must use more than the normal discursive means of persuasion to call attention to their grievances and to achieve their goals. This definition excludes from agitation individuals and groups who do not go beyond the usual discursive means of persuasion, although such individuals and groups often work with agitating groups to achieve similar goals. For example, at the Democratic convention in 1968, the Coalition for an Open Convention (COC) argued that more citizens should have access to and participate in the political convention. Although the COC mainly operated within the normal channels of communication, it worked with agitating groups like the Youth International Party (Yippies) and the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE) to achieve its goals. Organizations like the League of Women Voters, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) often work toward the same goals as agitating groups, but they rely largely on discursive means of persuasion and work within channels prescribed by the establishment. ✓

Why Does Agitation Occur?

Tracing the roots of agitation is helpful in completing a rhetorical analysis. According to Kenneth E. Boulding, agitation occurs under the following circumstances:

↓ There is strongly felt dissatisfaction with existing programs and policies of government or other organizations [establishments], on the part of those who feel themselves affected by these policies but who are unable to express their discontent through regular and legitimate channels, and who feel unable to exercise the weight to which they think they are entitled in the decision-making process. When nobody is listening to us and we feel we have something to say, then comes the urge to shout.⁵

↘ Leland M. Griffin elaborated on that statement by proposing that agitation has occurred when: "1. [people] have become dissatisfied with some aspect of their environment; 2. they desire change—social, economic, political, religious, intellectual, or otherwise—and desiring change, they make efforts to alter their environment; 3. eventually, their efforts result in some degree of success or failure."⁶

↘ Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne offer a more contemporary definition: "Our own age is being shaped decisively by people coming together, debating, designing, and otherwise mobilizing symbolic resources for social change."⁷ Agitation occurs when an individual or group has a significant grievance or grievances and there is no remedy to those grievances other than challenging the social order by using whatever means of persuasion are available or necessary.

On some occasions a dramatic event or a significant establishment action may inspire individuals to dissent. One such event occurred in San Francisco in May of 1960 during hearings held by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Although the sessions were supposedly open to the public, the committee only allowed its supporters into the room. San Francisco police attacked large numbers of students in the halls outside the hearing. Police used high pressure water hoses "that drove people smashing into plate-glass windows. Students were clubbed to the ground, thrown off balconies, and kicked in the face. A pregnant woman was thrown down a flight of stairs."⁸ This event, known as "Bloody Friday," radicalized many individuals and undercut HUAC's credibility.

HUAC compounded its errors by producing a film called *Operation Abolition* that argued that its critics were Communists or "dupes" of Communists. The film was shown on many campuses throughout the country. Rather than convincing audience members of HUAC's message, it served as a recruiting tool for activists, many of whom moved to Berkeley to take part in the protest.⁹

Two Kinds of Agitation

Understanding a group's ideology is useful when exploring why the group chooses to use particular forms of agitation. It is also useful to classify the type of agitation in which the group engages. **Agitation based on vertical deviance** occurs when the agitators accept the value system of the establishment but dispute the distribution of benefits or power within that value system. **Agitation based on lateral deviance** occurs when the agitators dispute the value system itself and seek to change it or replace it with a competing value system.

John Robert Howard explains and illustrates the distinction:

Vertical deviance occurs when persons in a subordinate rank attempt to enjoy the privileges and prerogatives of those in superior rank. Thus, the ten-year-old who sneaks behind the garage to smoke is engaging in . . . vertical deviance, as is the fourteen-year-old who drives . . . despite being too young . . . and the sixteen-year-old who bribes a twenty-two-year-old to buy him a six-pack of beer. . . .

Lateral deviance occurs in a context in which the values of the nondeviant are rejected. The pot-smoking seventeen-year-old, wearing Benjamin Franklin eyeglasses and an earring, does not share his parents' definition of the good life. Whereas value consensus characterizes vertical deviance, there is a certain kind of value dissensus involved in lateral deviance.¹⁰

Agitation based on vertical deviance is likely to be relatively direct and easily understood ideologically. The American labor movement's agitations (except for a few early and unsuccessful activities) were characterized by vertical deviance. The workers and employers both accepted the capitalist system and agreed to work within that system. The disagreement was over how the benefits should be distributed. The unions argued that they should receive higher wages, job security, and ample leisure while the leaders of industry believed that they and they alone should make the decisions on those issues. Even though there were often violent disagreements, the groups continued to work within the boundaries of the established system.

The issues in vertical deviance are easy to understand because they are based on a single value system and focus on the distribution of benefits in that system. The agitator attempts to achieve his/her goals by making her/his case to establishment leaders. Agitation based on vertical deviance usually ends when the establishment makes the appropriate concessions or adjustments to the demands.

In lateral deviance, the ideology and agitation are less direct and more complex. For example, some of the agitators at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 rejected not only the policies and personnel of the Democratic party but also the values of the party and of the entire U.S. political and economic system. This lateral deviance had significant

Know
Apply to
Research

effects on the nature and extent of the agitation. Such agitators are willing to work outside the system and, if necessary, to destroy the system. Working outside the system is often more difficult and complex than working within the system because the rules and channels of communication are not clearly defined.

In agitation based on lateral deviance, the agitators' ideology and demands may be difficult for the establishment and the general public to understand because the agitators will often display symbols, organize events, and behave in unusual ways to symbolize their rejection of society. Establishment members may not be capable of understanding the behavior or language of these agitators. Establishment leaders may create explanations for the dissenters' actions based on their own view of the world, and their conclusions may differ from those the activists intended. Frequently, the establishment rejects the actions and ideas of the agitators without attempting to understand them.

The dissenters believe, however, that potential supporters and the general public will try to understand and therefore will attempt to discover information that would be helpful in making sense of agitation symbols, events, and behaviors. One agitation based on lateral deviance was that of the Yippies during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The rationale for the Yippie demonstrations was quoted in the *New York Free Press*: "We put a finger up their ass and tell them, 'I ain't telling you what I want,' then they got a problem."¹¹

These kinds of statements were not used in many segments of society in 1968, but the Yippies and other agitators believed that people would make an attempt to understand the symbolism in the statement. They rejected those who would not make an effort to understand, viewing them as part of the establishment they were hoping to overthrow.

Control

Once an establishment gains power, its major task from that point forward is to maintain its dominant position. As Andrew King states, "a fact of existence . . . is the desire of groups to hold on to power as long as possible."¹² In the process of maintaining its position, an institution's leaders must be able to repel any attack from the outside. The specific tactics used to fight such external challenges are outlined in chapter 3. Leaders of the establishment must also prove that their abilities to lead internally are superior to the abilities of other members of the group. If they cannot show that they can repel attacks from the outside and that they are the best people to lead internally, they will be replaced by someone who can fill the needed leadership role.

Establishments have a distinct advantage over agitators because of their superior power and their ability to adjust to activists' tactics. Herbert

Simons, Elizabeth Mechling, and Howard Schreier propose that members of the establishment have greater control over language, the mass communication media, and other channels of influence, information, expertise, agendas, and settings because of their wealth, power, and status.¹³

The establishment has control of language through its ability to name and to define what is correct in society, to define the nature of authority, to outline the rules of society, and to specify the terms under which members of society must obey those rules.

The case of Jesselyn Radack, a former Justice Department ethics attorney, illustrates the application of power by the establishment. Radack released materials to the press that showed that the FBI had violated certain ethics in its interrogation of John Walker Lindh, an American who was prosecuted as a terrorist after 9/11. Without her knowledge, her e-mail records of the case had been purged after they were requested by the court. She found a copy and released them to the press. She believes she was placed on the "No Fly List" (a list that contains 44,000 names) as punishment. The list purportedly exists to control individuals who "present a specific known or suspected threat to aviation." Individuals on the list must go through a secondary security screening every time they fly. Radack asserts that those on the list are "unable to use the Internet, kiosk, or curbside check in" and "it means missed flights and checked baggage that is always hand-searched, if it arrives at all," Radack claims that it is impossible for people to discover why they are on the list (or even if they are on the list), nor is there any way to get removed from the list. Radack has complained to the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Ombudsman but has never received an answer. She was told to file a complaint with the Department of Homeland Security's "Travel Redress Inquiry Program." That complaint "entails providing my unlisted home telephone number, my weight, my personal e-mail address and my voter registration card, which reveals my party affiliation." The TSA stated that "this information may be shared for reasons not related to the redress process." Radack was unwilling to provide that information and continues to be singled out. Her treatment could cause other individuals to think carefully about providing information to the press.¹⁴

Through its ability to define, the establishment may label dissenters with negative terms such as "deviants," "outsiders," and "radicals." Betty Friedan outlined the reaction to her book, *The Feminine Mystique*: "I was cursed, pitied, told to get psychiatric help, to go jump in the lake and accused of being 'more of a threat to the United States than the Russians.'"¹⁵

Conservative columnist Cal Thomas illustrated how agitators might be labeled when he wrote about individuals who were present at an anti-war rally in Washington, D.C. in January of 2007. Thomas labeled the older participants as "aging hippies" who were "the pampered generation that eschewed self-control for self-indulgence." He called them "privi-

leged and pampered" fools who "had failed in their opposition to the war in Vietnam, in their fight against racism, and in their proposals to improve the environment."¹⁶ If this kind of rhetoric is successful, members of the larger society (and perhaps even other members of the movement) will not take the agitators seriously. Thomas illustrates how the ability to define is an extremely powerful tool for establishment spokespersons.

An establishment's power to define is amplified through its dominance of mass media outlets. Because of their power and financial superiority, establishment leaders own media outlets that can be used to disseminate messages favorable to the establishment. Alternatively, the establishment can control the media by buying time for advertising, can gain access to channels of influence in government and other organizations where decisions are made, and can deny information to dissenters, thus controlling the flow of information to members of society. David Halberstam illustrated how denial of information worked in the black movement: "The power to deny coverage was a particularly important aspect of white authority. If coverage was denied, blacks would feel isolated and gradually lose heart (for taking such risks without anyone knowing or caring); in addition, the whites would be able to crush any protest with far fewer witnesses and far less scrutiny."¹⁷

Journalists are often not willing to present information that is negative about the establishment because most are not willing to "bite the hand that signs the paycheck."¹⁸ The media create an "industrially produced fiction" that provides instruction on "how to succeed, how to love, how to buy, how to conquer, how to forget the past and suppress the future. We are taught, more than anything else, how not to rebel."¹⁹

The establishment can also exercise control by infiltrating protest organizations to gather information and by planting agent provocateurs to cause incidents that create a negative image of the protestors and to confuse movement leaders with disinformation. During the 1950s, the U.S. government created the COINTELPRO program under the FBI to monitor the lives of Americans, including Communists, civil rights activists, and student activists. COINTELPRO is a contraction of "counterintelligence program" that "entails active disruption of the targets' activities, organizations, and lives."²⁰ The program planted false stories or gossip, used provocateurs to try to get protestors to commit crimes, or used informers who infiltrated dissent groups.²¹ Norman Solomon detailed how the program "violated the constitutional rights of huge numbers of politically active Americans—and sometimes damaged or destroyed their lives—at the behest of the warfare state."²²

In the 1950s, the FBI successfully infiltrated the Communist Party. The party had only 5,000 members at that time. FBI informants made up such a significant number of the remaining members that J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, "briefly entertained a proposal to take control of the party" by supporting one faction over another.²³

Agents
Setting
CIA/Kepner

Carl Oglesby, the former leader of SDS, outlines the widespread monitoring of radicals' lives: "Thanks to the great concern these federal agencies took in me, I can pick almost any date in the period from the summer of 1965 through 1970 and tell you where I was and what I was up to. Not even my mother cared so much."²⁴

The FBI also infiltrated the women's movement in order to "create division and dissension." They did this in the following ways: "Spread false rumors about members. Plant bogus evidence to discredit leaders. Utilize agent provocateurs. Send false letters to intensify fear of infiltration." They also created division by suggesting that some leaders were "informants for the FBI or other law enforcement agencies."²⁵

Leaders of institutions also control information because of their ability to buy expertise through the hiring of lawyers, ghost writers, marketers, advertisers, and lobbyists. The establishment controls the agenda by setting priorities on issues (as a result of its control over language, influence, and information). Finally, the establishment has power because dissent must often occur in the establishment's building and offices or on the establishment's property, where access for dissenters can be limited.²⁶

Most leaders of the establishment believe they have particular skills not possessed by average individuals; as a result, they must take the responsibility of making and implementing decisions for the good of society.²⁷ They believe that once they make decisions, it is the responsibility of others to follow those decisions. People in the establishment who dictated policy during the second war in Iraq believed "the country was basically in good hands controlled by wise minds."²⁸

Because of their role, the leaders of the establishment see any dissent as a challenge to their authority and credibility. According to Theodore Windt, they may argue against protest in several ways:

1. The leaders may transform the particular issue being agitated into a general issue of authority and the credibility of the institution to act in a manner that its officers believe is appropriate.
2. Protestors may be labeled as representing only a small minority whereas the administration must act in the interests of the majority.
3. Establishment leaders may attribute base motives to protestors by labeling them as unsavory characters and by consigning them to undesirable political categories like "outside agitators," "nonstudents," or individuals whose "real purpose" is not to change a particular policy but to destroy American democratic institutions.
4. The leaders present themselves as defenders of civil liberties and law and order while describing protestors as being lawless and irrational.
5. Leaders predict dire and terrible consequences should the protestors win in this symbolic test of power.²⁹

The leaders ultimately believe that authority must be vested somewhere. Attacks on authority undermine respect for high offices and

demoralize society. Because they see their institution under attack, the leaders demand support for their policies. They see themselves defending society itself. If they lose, there will be disastrous consequences for all.³⁰

At some point, the leaders may argue that they have been tolerant in their treatment of dissenters. They claim that even though they have been reasonable, the agitators have responded with intolerance and irrationality. To prove their own tolerance and rationality, the leaders may grant some of the agitators' reforms or alternatives. They may also entice members of the agitation to join the establishment by offering them positions within the institution, or they may co-opt the agitator's ideas or rhetoric. Singer James Taylor illustrated how the establishment can adjust when he described what happened to many of the counterculture's ideas and values: "All the things we considered to be revolutionary were co-opted by the big corporations—our music, our radio, the record companies, our dress."³¹

Solomon provided a similar example:

In the early 1970s, I saw bright-colored billboards done up in unmistakable Peter Max style, advertising "Super Jobs in the Air Force," while B-52s were still dropping enormous loads of explosives on Vietnam. It was a mistake to underestimate the flexibility of institutions we reviled.³²

An establishment may be able to weaken the solidarity of the dissenters by playing factions of the agitating groups against each other. If this tactic is effective, agitators will end up fighting each other rather than the establishment. Cesar Chavez outlined how this tactic was used against the United Farm Workers during its formative years. The union was composed largely of two groups: Mexican-Americans and Filipinos. Chavez explained that employers had used the tactic "for years and years—one group set against the other."³³ One of Chavez's major problems was to keep a united front and not to let the employers play the Mexican-Americans and Filipinos against each other. If the establishment had been able to divide the union into groups suspicious of the goals of other members, the movement might have failed.

The establishment may also receive help from groups that are not affiliated with the establishment yet support its goals. Opponents of abortion, for example, are often given support in their efforts by individuals who threaten or use violence to force doctors not to perform abortions. Others attack clinics that either offer abortions or provide information on family planning. On Christmas morning in 2007 fires were set at two clinics in Albuquerque. Those fires followed an earlier one set on December 6. One doctor stated that the incidents were sending a message "that someone is trying to put us out of business."³⁴

If all else fails, the establishment can practice repressive measures. They must be careful, however, not to go too far or their tactic will back-

fire by energizing activists or offending the public. For example, at the University of California, Berkeley in September of 2007, a group of activists began living in a grove of trees that the university wanted to cut down in order to build a new athletic center. After several months, the university built a 10-foot-high fence around the area so that protestors would be forced to end their occupation of the grove because access to supplies was no longer possible. The university constructed the fence at night when there would be little opposition. The university said the fence was a safety measure to protect dissenters from the football fans who would be coming to the first game of the season. The university's action backfired and only increased opposition to the athletic center. Rather than forcing the activists from the trees, the action united people from many different groups in opposition to the university and reminded activists of the famous battle over People's Park in 1969, when the university built a fence around some vacant university land that had been converted into a park. One person was killed and many others injured in clashes with the police.³⁵ In both instances, the university's image suffered because of its actions.

Social Change

These basic and rather general definitions of agitation and control provide a foundation for an analysis of some of the more important psychological and sociological phenomena that occur in the process of social change. We will pay particular attention to the concepts of social organization, power, and rumor.

Social Organization

The most common example of a social organization is the family. Imagine a family of five: father, mother, teenage son, teenage daughter, and preteen daughter. This section will focus on two aspects that this miniature social organization shares with others: **structure** and **goal orientation**. The third principal characteristic, **power**, will be reserved for the next section.

The family is *structured* with a set of *procedures* by which decisions are made and a set of *positions* in which decision-making power rests. In the typical American family, the father and mother are the decision-making **establishment**. The family's structure invests them with **control**—final decision-making authority. The control may shift from one parent to the other or be shared, depending on the decision to be made. The children's stake in this establishment may be large or small. If important decisions are made by majority vote, their role is relatively important. If those decisions are handed down by the establishment, the children are literally disenfranchised. Members of the family who disapprove of a particular decision in which they did not actively participate are potential agitators.

The complexity of the establishment in social organizations depends on its size and functions. It is unlikely that a family will have annual elections, a constitution, bylaws, and committee meetings. Conversely, an organization like the University of California would be inconceivable *without* its regents, president, chancellors, deans, committee chairpersons, and channels of disseminating information.

Another characteristic of every social organization is *goal orientation*. Every organization has a set of expressed or implied purposes like self-perpetuation, maintenance of a value system, gathering information, disseminating information, enlarging the base of support and power, policy making, policy implementation, and enforcement of policy. The possibility of successfully overcoming the establishment in any organization depends on its goals. In the family, the goal of self-perpetuation is hindered when a sufficient number of members leave home. The goal of maintaining a value system is not achieved if the children reject the parents' system. To thwart other goals requires different measures. Agitation may be used to challenge all goals.

The organization's goal orientation may be expressed in a coherent set of fact and value statements. The statements may be written or unwritten. A set of statements that define the unique characteristics of the organization and express the unique set of beliefs to which the members subscribe is called an *ideology*. Acceptance of an ideology may be only theoretical because members often belong to organizations in name only. In the family, for example, one set of ideological statements might require the members to believe in the tenets of a particular religion. A teenager might internally reject those tenets but continue to attend religious services on Sunday in order to enjoy the benefits (such as meals, housing, and transportation) of belonging to the family.

Bases of Social Power

Besides structure and goal orientation, social organizations distribute social power. An individual has power over another when he or she can influence the other's behavior. Changes in the distribution of power are the main goals of most agitating groups. An understanding of power and its role in society is crucial to an understanding of the rhetoric of agitation and control.

Research has generated several generalizations about power: (1) The need for social power in some form is almost a universal attribute of Western culture. (2) An individual or a group seldom gives up power voluntarily to another individual or group. (3) The exercise of social power is satisfying *in itself* to most individuals in Western culture.

John R. P. French, Jr., and Bertram Raven have analyzed five types of social power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power.³⁶

One individual or group has **reward power** over another when the first can give benefits like money, status, or acceptance to the second. The more rewards the first can give, the more the second is under the influence of reward power. Rewards can be of two types: (1) giving positively perceived things and events, and (2) withdrawing negatively perceived things and events. For example, in a family the father could persuade his preteen daughter that she should do her homework either by promising her a movie (giving) or suspending a rule about bedtime (withdrawing).

Coercive power exists when one individual or group is able to influence another's behavior by the threat of punishment. A person who has coercive power, in effect, says to another individual: "Do as I say or I will deprive you of something you have or prevent you from getting something you want."

Legitimate power is somewhat more complicated than the others. This type of power exists when one individual or group is perceived by another as having an assigned position—somewhat like a charter or social contract—of wielding influence. The strength of this power depends on the degree to which others accept the authority system of the particular organization. In every organization, the establishment holds legitimate power—in fact, determining who holds the power is a key element in defining the establishment. Parents have legitimate power in the family, the hierarchy has legitimate power in churches, and elected officials generally hold legitimate power in the state.

One individual or group has **referent power** over another when the individual influenced is attracted to and identifies with that individual or group. The power comes from the strong desire to have a personal relationship with the attracting personality or group. Although French and Raven do not note the phenomenon, negative referent power can also exist. That is, if the individual or group repels the person who could potentially be influenced, he or she is likely to oppose any action the repelling agency favors. If the parents in a family endorse one of their teenage daughter's boyfriends, they might find that they have exercised negative referent power. People aware of negative referent power can manipulate it to their own ends. For example, in 1969, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina (an avowed conservative) supposedly expressed support for one candidate for the Supreme Court when he actually favored another. He assumed that liberals would automatically disavow any Thurmond-supported candidate.

Finally, **expert power** exists when one individual or group thinks that another has superior knowledge or skill in a particular area in which influence is to be exerted. A person who goes for advice to a psychotherapist, member of the clergy, or lawyer is requesting the exercise of expert power. Insofar as teachers influence their students' behavior in the teachers' areas of specialized knowledge, the influence probably results from expert power.

French and Raven's analysis needs to be qualified in certain ways. All five bases can be reduced to reward and coercive (punishment) power. When individuals succumb to legitimate power, they do so because they perceive negative consequences if they do not succumb and/or positive consequences if they do. People stop their cars at stop signs to avoid paying a traffic fine as well as to obey legitimate authority. Individuals succumb to referent power because the prospect of a personal relationship is positively reinforcing (rewarding) for them or the expectation of losing such a relationship is negative (punishing). Similarly, expert power depends on the influenced person's perception that following an expert's advice will maximize rewards and minimize punishment.

In a situation of agitation and control, power is likely to be distributed in this manner: (1) By definition, the establishment always controls legitimate power. However, legitimate power alone is insufficient to maintain an establishment in its position of control. (2) The establishment normally is capable of exerting coercive power. Only rarely does an agitational group have coercive power, even over its own members. The state, however, can imprison people and make war on them. The administration can fire people. The church can excommunicate. Establishments can always withhold the use of the organization's resources from individual members. The parent, for example, can refuse the use of the family car. (3) Both the establishment and the agitators have some reward power. The establishment has normal means of reward like increased salary, a promotion, and greater recognition. However, the agitators, if they are strong enough, numerous enough, and persistent enough, have the capability of rewarding the establishment and the uncommitted by withdrawing the unpleasant phenomenon of agitation. Within their own ranks, the agitators can reward each other by bestowing high office, respect, and other distinctions. (4) The agitators must depend almost completely on referent power and expert power. The members must like each other; they must also be willing to work to attract more members to the group. The leaders must be able to demonstrate superior knowledge and skills to members and potential members. Unless the leaders of an agitation group are respected and recognized as competent and trustworthy, the membership will decline. The establishment also has access to referent and expert power. The amount of money spent on public relations firms, image makers, and consultants is evidence of the recognized need for maintaining these types of power.

Only the last of these four generalizations requires illustration. An excellent example of the potency of referent power for making converts is Eldridge Cleaver's account of his initial contact with the Black Panther Party. Cleaver was already convinced of the need for new kinds of action, so the exercise of expert power was unnecessary. He was attending a meeting of activists planning a commemoration of the death of Malcolm X when:

Suddenly the room fell silent. . . . From the tension showing on the faces of the people before me, I thought the cops were invading the meeting, but there was a deep female gleam leaping out of one of the women's eyes that no cop who ever lived could elicit . . . the total admiration of a black woman for a black man. I spun around . . . and saw the most beautiful sight I had ever seen: four black men wearing black berets, powder blue shirts, black leather jackets, black trousers, shiny black shoes and each with a gun!

Where was my mind at? Blown! . . . Who are these cats? . . . They were so cool and it seemed to me not unconscious of the electrifying effect they were having on everybody in the room.³⁷

Cleaver's experience is not unusual. Many individuals who are initially drawn to agitation groups are susceptible to the early use of referent power and then become members because of the attractiveness of members of the agitating group. When the appropriate appeal meets the appropriate susceptibility, membership results.

The establishment, to be successful, must also exercise referent and/or expert power. John F. Kennedy's rise to the presidency was also attributable particularly to his referent, as well as to expert and legitimate, power. Lyndon B. Johnson declined to run for president in 1968 when he realized that his referent power had eroded. Barack Obama's effective campaign to become president was largely based on his referent and expert powers based on his promise to end the war in Iraq.

As the next chapter will illustrate, agitators use the strategy of polarization to attack the referent power of the establishment. Similarly, if an establishment loses expert power over its own members, agitation against it is likely to be relatively successful. During the Vietnam War, the Johnson administration became the victim of a "credibility gap" when agitators found it possible to prove discrepancies among "official" statements and actual facts. Still, pro-establishment forces continually argued that the administration was in control of the facts and therefore knew best how to devise policy. When an establishment totally loses its referent and expert power, its only chance for survival is in radical adjustment to agitation demands or in violent suppression of dissent.

Sustained agitation almost always has as its principal demand the redistribution of legitimate power. For example, the American labor movement was not totally a movement for higher pay and better working conditions; rather, it was a movement to secure the legitimate power of collective bargaining and to make legitimate the coercive power of threatened strikes and labor walkouts. The agitation against the war in Vietnam, although it claimed as its goal the end of the war, was also an attempt to curb the exercise of the methods of legitimate power that led to the war. The various student revolts of the 1960s, although all claimed specific goals, were primarily designed to achieve legitimate power for students by forcing university concessions on procedural matters. The

movement for same-sex marriages, although it claims the specific goal of allowing gays and lesbians the legal rights of marriage, is an attempt to achieve equality for all individuals in society.

Rumor

In agitation and control situations, one tactic that both sides frequently use is rumor. A rumor occurs when information is passed from one individual to another without official verification/denial or when information is passed from one individual to another in the absence of any trustworthy official source. Rumor can occur either when those in a position to know remain silent or when those in a position to know the truth cannot be relied on to tell it.

Several conditions are necessary for rumors to occur: (1) The situation must be ambiguous—more than one interpretation must be plausible. (2) The situation must be relevant to the individual expected to start or sustain the rumor. (3) Trustworthy official interpretations must be absent. (4) The situation must be dramatic, preferably involving conflict.³⁸

What happens to a rumor during the course of its life? Three processes have commonly been noted. The first is called **leveling**. Many details get lost as the initial story gets told and retold. The second is **sharpening**, in which the details not eliminated through leveling are exaggerated. The third, and most important, is **assimilation** or **contrast**. Individuals unintentionally distort the rumor to make it fit more neatly into their own system of beliefs and values. When this distortion is in the direction of what he/she would most like to believe, it is assimilation; when it is in the direction of what he or she would least like to believe, it is contrast. As will be discussed in chapter 3, an establishment must always prepare for the worst. Therefore, when rumors occur in a situation of agitation and control, the establishment distorts by contrast rather than by assimilation. In the analysis of the agitation surrounding the Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968, both the agitators and the establishment used contrasting rumors. The agitators spoke about the brutality of the Chicago police; the establishment concentrated on the demeanor of the agitators. Similarly, during the California grape workers' strike and boycott, which took place in the late 1960s, an inaccurate rumor that bartenders were about to boycott Schenley products was probably responsible for that huge corporation's adjustments to the agitators' demands.³⁹ The Internet provides individuals a powerful means to spread rumors through society. Rumors stating that Barack Obama was not an American citizen or rumors that he was a Muslim were quickly spread across the Internet and were believed by many who received the messages.

The ability to spread rumors throughout society in the United States, and indeed the whole world, will only increase as new forms of communication are perfected. Also, the rise of twenty-four-hour television net-

works has increased the need for more and more information to fill the hours dedicated to news. Because of the competition to be the first to report stories, news outlets now have less time to verify information. The potential for rumors to spread has increased dramatically.

Conclusion

This chapter has established a framework for the rhetorical analysis of the social phenomena called agitation and control. Important considerations for such an analysis are the structure and function of social organizations, the bases of social power, and the dynamics of rumor transmission. The following chapters explain the rhetorical strategies and tactics available to agitators and establishments.

Notes

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- ³ Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne, *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2006): 1.
- ⁴ Joe Fitzgerald, "Seniors Picket for Doughnuts," *Albuquerque Journal*, September 24, 2007, A8.
- ⁵ Kenneth E. Boulding, "Toward a Theory of Protest," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in Walt Anderson, ed., *The Age of Protest* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing, 1969): vi.
- ⁶ Leland M. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," in *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth Century Perspective*, Robert L. Scott and Bernard L. Brock, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972): 347.
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- ⁸ Abbie Hoffman, *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980): 40-41. See also, Susan Sherman, *America's Child: A Woman's Journey through the Radical Sixties* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2007): 17-18, 21.
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- ¹⁶ Cal Thomas, "Graying Anti-War Protesters Sing the Same Useless Song," *Albuquerque Journal*, January 31, 2007, A6.
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- ²⁰ Carl Oglesby, *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement* (New York: Scribner, 2008): 162.
- ²¹ Oglesby, 162.
- ²² Solomon, 77.
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- ²⁴ Oglesby, x.
- ²⁵ Rosen, 240. Rosen does a superb job of outlining the FBI's tactics in pp. 239–252.
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- ³³ Cesar Chavez, quoted in Peter Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (New York: Dell, 1969): 131.
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