

## The Rhetoric and Strategies of Agitation

Todd Gitlin, a former activist leader turned university professor, provided this description of protest by young people during the 1960s:

The young denounced the institutions of their elders, declared that some sort of a different world would be vastly better, tried to jam the old ways and press a huge restart button. . . . It was freedom's revolt against a fossilized culture that stifled the young, the female, the gay, the rambunctious or just the plain different. It was an uneasy amalgam of radicals who wanted a more intense, communal, argumentative way of life and reformers who wanted a more equitable, even meritocratic, order. . . . It cherished the virtue of youth against the fossilized ideologies of the parental generation.<sup>1</sup>

Although Gitlin was writing about the 1960s, his ideas can be generalized to many movements throughout U.S. history.

When agitators propose significant social change and members of the establishment oppose that change, activists are faced with difficult choices about how best to achieve their goals. In this book, general choices available to dissenters and to the establishment are labeled strategies, while more specific choices governed by those strategies are called tactics. Both sides in a conflict choose strategies and tactics that guide the form that their rhetoric or actions will take. The type of rhetoric used, whether written, oral, nonverbal, or mass-mediated, will depend on the goals of the individuals or groups producing the messages. Their public discourse can take a variety of forms: it may be charming, insulting, inviting, condescending, antagonistic, satiric, heroic, belittling, or humorous. Nondiscursive communication can be nonviolent (such as dissenters conducting a peaceful sit-in) or violent (dissenters throwing objects). Studying the interplay between the strategies chosen by agitators and members of the establishment provides a starting point for understanding and then describing the complex process of dissent.

Our definition of rhetoric in chapter 1 highlights instrumental symbolic behavior. This chapter outlines the potential rhetorical strategies—

*instrumental* and *symbolic*—that agitators may choose in their battle with the establishment.

## Strategies of Agitation

For the purposes of discussion, agitators' strategies are labeled as follows: petition, promulgation, solidification, polarization, nonviolent resistance, escalation/confrontation, Gandhi and guerrilla, and revolution. Although there is no determined sequence, these strategies are more or less cumulative and progressive. This progression is not totally predictable because the use of particular strategies depends on the actual and potential membership of the agitating group, the power and ideological strength of the establishment, and the rhetorical sophistication of both agitators and members of the establishment. In some cases, there may be an overlap of strategies. There has been a heated debate among communication scholars about whether dissent runs in predictable patterns or cycles. We acknowledge the debate but also argue that most agitators chose strategies in a somewhat similar sequence and exhaust certain strategies before proceeding to others.

### Petition

During the petition stage, agitators have the ability to use all of the normal discursive means of persuasion. When agitators first propose social change, they will usually approach members of the establishment to present their proposals. In their preparation for discussion with the established hierarchy, activists will discover evidence and arguments to support their positions. When presenting their case, they will state the number of their supporters and provide a description of those followers. Since many communication textbooks devote extensive attention to such discourse, this book will not discuss the strategy in depth.

Petition involves the use of tactics like selection of appeals, target audiences, types and sources of evidence, the appropriate tone of the message, and the style of language that will make the appeal most effective. While the use of petition does not always indicate that agitation exists, it is a crucial part of the process. If the establishment can show that dissenters did not attempt to use petition, it can label them as irresponsible individuals who reject normal decision-making processes in favor of disturbance and disruption. The establishment will then be able to discredit the agitators at this early stage in the process, and the agitation might be diminished or even die. Unless they first attempt to petition the establishment, activists are unlikely to win support from members of society.

## Promulgation

"We do what is right,  
even though we will  
never be recognized"

If petition is not successful, agitators will move to promulgation, the next logical strategy. Promulgation is a strategy where agitators publicly proclaim their goals and it includes tactics designed to win public support for the agitators' positions. No movement can be successful unless it recruits enough members to attract the attention of the establishment. Promulgation is the stage when agitators attempt to recruit the members necessary to mount a successful movement. Among the tactics employed in this strategy are exploitation of mass media, use of technology, use of the Internet, informational picketing, erection of posters, use of bumper stickers, painting messages in prominent locations, distribution of handbills and leaflets, and mass protest meetings. This list is far from complete, but it represents the broad range of tactics that are available to dissenters. These are the tactics that members of the public most commonly associate with dissent.

Promulgation (and all succeeding strategies) includes a tactic that deserves special attention: exploitation of the mass media. The purposes of promulgation include informing the public of the agitators' positions in an effort to win public acceptance of their ideology, value system and beliefs, and policies. These purposes cannot be fulfilled unless the activists can effectively communicate with the public. The most efficient means of reaching a wide number of potential followers is through the mass media. Carl Oglesby explained the effect of the media on the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the 1960s: "Even when it was negative, the publicity helped us recruit new members and raise funds."<sup>2</sup> His statement could apply to the experience of many movements throughout history.

Media owners are establishment members who have specific ideas on how news should be reported. In general, members of the news media do not consider ideologies to be newsworthy. Rather, the media like to report events, particularly unusual events and especially events involving violence and conflict. If no conflict exists, journalists are likely to cover events or individuals where there seems to be a potential for conflict. Leaders of movements know that they are achieving some success when members of the media begin to pay attention to their events and ideas.

Activists are rarely able to explain their ideology through the media. Such explanations seldom fit into sound bites, and lengthy descriptions of ideology are unlikely to hold the interest of audience members. Dissenters cannot expect impartial reporting. Members of the media may have preconceived biases that will affect how a story is reported. Ruth Rosen noted that the media's coverage of the women's movement reported "on stars or the bizarre . . . so the public image of the women's movement invariably came from the way in which popular and political culture translated it to its American audience."<sup>3</sup> She continued by stating that in the 1970s, "the media produced two basic stereotypes of femi-

nists. One was the hairy, man-hating dyke, dressed in overalls and stomping boots, an image mostly confined to college campuses and to the youthful women's culture." The second was the "far more ubiquitous image . . . of a selfish 'superwoman'—who would come to stand for all women in the movement."<sup>4</sup>

The reporting of major networks like CNN or Fox News or newspapers like the *New York Times* or the *New York Post* sometimes present images dissenters themselves do not recognize. Malcolm X outlined his frustration with media bias in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

I don't care what points I made in the interviews, it practically never got printed the way I said it. I was learning under fire how the press, when it wants to, can twist, and slant. If I had said, "Mary had a little lamb," what probably would have appeared was "Malcolm X Lampoons Mary."<sup>5</sup>

One of the most interesting examples of the attempt to attract media coverage and the media's subsequent misrepresentation of the events occurred in the women's movement. In September of 1968, 200 women met in Atlantic City, New Jersey, to protest the Miss America Pageant because "women in our society [are] forced daily to compete for male approval, [and] enslaved by ludicrous 'beauty' standards." Flora Davis describes that protest:

The protestors crowned a live sheep Miss America, to make the point that contestants were being judged like animals in a county fair. They also tossed curlers, girdles, high-heeled shoes, women's magazines, and the odd brassiere into a "freedom trash can," thus symbolically rejecting woman's status as a sex object. Though the press reported that the demonstrators had burned their bras, in fact, no one lit a match to the trash can—America's most famous bonfire was strictly a media invention.<sup>6</sup>

The location of a protest can affect the media's willingness to cover the events. In August 2005, for example, antiwar activists set up a protest camp outside President George W. Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas. Led by Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq, the protest attracted media attention throughout the world because President Bush was on vacation at the ranch at the time. Sheehan and her followers also attracted a significant amount of attention when they demonstrated at the Rose Parade on January 1, 2008. The dissenters "staked out spots across from television cameras, hoisting signs reading, 'Impeachment is Patriotic'" and a large banner that contained quotes from the Constitution of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Individuals may inadvertently attract attention to themselves when they are arrested during demonstrations. During the 2008 Republican National Convention, the host of the radio and television show *Democracy Now!*, Amy Goodman, was arrested when she asked police for informa-



tion about two of her producers who had been detained while they were covering the event. Goodman's arrest attracted a significant amount of attention and enhanced her reputation.<sup>8</sup> Her arrest also increased the amount of media coverage of protest events at the convention. Charges against Goodman were dropped after the conclusion of the convention.

Activists can create similar newsworthy events on a local level. In February of 2007 a group of women in Albuquerque hung "namegrams" for the more than 3,000 American casualties in the Iraq War. Each namegram, "which was handwritten in calligraphy on brown stock paper, bore the name of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq since the war began in March 2003." The organizers said the namegrams "are based on several ancient traditions, including Tibetan prayer flags used for promoting peace and compassion, as well as Jewish ceremonies in which the names of the dead are read aloud."<sup>9</sup> This action is similar in many ways to the candlelight vigils during the Vietnam War in which the names of those killed were read aloud.

In a similar vein, each week groups of women known as Women in Black dress in black clothing and participate in silent nonviolent vigils against war all over the world. In Albuquerque, a group stands in silent vigil in front of the courthouse for an hour every Thursday.<sup>10</sup> Such localized acts are highly visual and emotional events that capture media attention and coverage.

Major media events like the Olympics provide activists a massive worldwide audience that can be exploited in order to get dissenters' messages to the public. In the spring of 2008, several months before the Olympic Games in Beijing, the Chinese government suppressed dissent in Tibet. Photos of the dissent were broadcast throughout the world and caused an outcry against China and the Olympics. There were calls for countries to boycott the Olympics or to at least boycott the opening ceremonies. A convenient avenue of protest was available as the Olympic torch traveled throughout the world. Violent opposition broke out in the streets of London and Paris as protestors attempted to stop the torch from being paraded through the streets. Before the arrival of the torch in San Francisco, three protestors climbed the Golden Gate Bridge and hosted two banners reading "Free Tibet" and "One World One Dream. Free Tibet."<sup>11</sup> A large number of individuals also tried to protest during the torch run, but the city and the Chinese government changed the torch's route and eventually cancelled much of the ceremony.<sup>12</sup> On the same day, Tibetans in Santa Fe shaved their heads in front of the state capital to protest China's treatment of Tibet. This powerful visual ceremony was captured on page one of the *Albuquerque Journal* with a large color photo of one individual having her head shaved.<sup>13</sup>

The protests continued during the Olympic Games. A small group of pro-Tibet protestors succeeded in getting past security and protested in Tiananmen Square, the location of massive, violent protests against the

Chinese government in 1989. They "wrapped themselves in the Tibetan national flag, which is banned in China, and lay down in a part of the square." Protestors also "clasped each others' hands and walked around the square chanting, 'Freedom for Tibet,' and 'One World, One Dream,' 'Free Tibet'—a play off a Beijing Olympics motto." Although the group was small in number, its actions attracted a tremendous amount of publicity because of the world's focus on the Olympics.<sup>14</sup>

In another example of dissent that appealed to the media, an individual climbed the 52-story building that houses the *New York Times* in Manhattan. As he climbed, Alain Robert unfurled a banner that said "Global warming kills more people than a 9/11 every week." The media covered Robert's action extensively, and his message was broadcast throughout the world.<sup>15</sup>

If agitators have a problem gaining media attention, they have an even greater problem obtaining favorable coverage. Both economic and political factors create obstacles. The principal media in the United States are profit-making businesses. A few large corporations own most of the newspapers, television stations, and radio stations in the United States. In recent years there has been a consolidation that puts control of the media in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations. In order to make profits, the media must take into consideration that advertisers, one of their main sources of revenue, do not see favorable treatment of agitators as an acceptable background for selling products.

The media must also be concerned with pleasing their audiences. The public generally accepts the value system of the culture, which often is the value system of the establishment. Attacks on that value system make many people uncomfortable, and they are likely to ignore or reject the medium that continually carries such attacks. The system is stacked against agitators who would like to have the media carry their message fully and favorably. The problem is especially severe for agitating groups that deviate from the establishment laterally as well as vertically because such groups question the system's very foundations.

There are two promulgation tactics that can exploit the mass media. First, to secure favorable treatment from at least some media, agitators should seek legitimizers—individuals within the establishment who endorse some parts of the agitators' ideology. During the 1960s individuals like Dr. Benjamin Spock (pediatrician), Jane Fonda (actress), and Senator J. William Fulbright and Senator Eugene McCarthy were invited to participate in dissent against the war in Vietnam because they had instant access to the media and could help disseminate the message of the dissenting group. The author Norman Mailer wrote about his experience as a legitimizer during the 1967 march on the Pentagon in his book *The Armies of the Night*.<sup>16</sup>

These legitimizing tactics continue today. In order to attract attention, dissenters invite individuals like Bono, Susan Sarandon, Jesse Jack-

son, Sean Penn, Martin Sheen, and George Clooney to endorse their causes. Endorsements from individuals the media cannot afford to ignore partially counteract the media's built-in bias against agitation ideologies.

Agitators can also successfully exploit the media if they stage news-worthy events that are unusual or involve conflict. In covering those events, the media will furnish some rationale for the story, and the rationale may at least partially explain the agitators' ideology. Sometimes the agitation may be naturally related to the ideology, so that when the media cover the conflict they also expose the agitating message to the public. Sometimes an agitator can exploit the media's presence at other events to achieve media coverage. For example, actors and actresses have delivered numerous acceptance speeches at the Academy Awards in which they criticize the establishment. At the 2008 Republican National Convention three activists received a significant amount of attention when they interrupted the acceptance speech of the party's presidential nominee, John McCain. Chapters 5 (women in the civil rights movement) and 6 (the 1968 Democratic convention) illustrate how activists can exploit the public's interest in political conventions to their advantage.

Similarly, agitators are often called to appear before establishment groups like congressional committees. The media traditionally cover such events, so agitators can use their testimony as a means of securing coverage for their beliefs and ideology. A prime example of such coverage was Jerry Rubin's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) after the demonstrations at the University of California, Berkeley in 1964. That hearing gave Rubin a stage on which he could attract attention to himself and his ideas. He spoke with Rennie Davis of the San Francisco Mime Troupe in preparation for the hearings:

Davis recommended that Rubin be theatrical. . . . Rubin appeared before HUAC wearing a rented American Revolutionary War soldier's uniform. . . . Rubin's appearance was so startling that when it was his turn to testify, the proceedings were stopped. As marshals carried him out, he screamed, "I want to testify." He became a media celebrity; HUAC never recovered. Rubin returned to Berkeley a radical hero.<sup>17</sup>

Agitators must learn to adapt their messages in order to attract the attention of the media. As new media are developed, radicals must adapt their tactics and messages to those media. Abbie Hoffman describes how radicals in the 1960s learned to use television, then a relatively new medium, to their advantage:

America has more television sets than toilets. I began to understand those little picture tubes. If the means of production were the underpinnings of industrial society, then the means of communication served that function in a cybernetic world. And if labor was the essential ingredient for production, then information was that ingre-

dient for mass communication. A modern revolutionary group heads for the television station, not the factory. It concentrates its energy on infiltrating and changing the image system.<sup>18</sup>

The United Mine Workers of America's strike against the Pittston Coal Company in 1989–1990 also illustrates adaptation to changes in technology. The miners, under the leadership of President Richard Trumka and Vice President Cecil Roberts, carefully merged the tactics of the civil rights movement with technology, adapting their dissent to the situation they faced. The miners were trained in nonviolence, used scanners to monitor the activities of the police, and communicated (with cell phones and walkie talkies) with each other to track and then confront the police and guards hired by the coal company.<sup>19</sup>

With the rise of the Internet, cell phones, and other personal electronic devices, agitators have discovered many new ways to get their messages to the public. Organizations like MoveOn.org have shown how the Internet can be an effective device to contact and mobilize a large audience: "The Internet, not the street, not the campus, is the fundamental component of today's antiwar movement—a force for organizing, raising money and influencing politicians and the media via blogs and e-mail messages."<sup>20</sup> Large numbers of bloggers have set up online sites where they argue for and against change.

Sophisticated activists use technology to communicate their views to Congress generally and to protest specific federal acts and commissions. A group known as Free Press has been actively lobbying Congress and members of federal commissions concerning "multi-billion-dollar battles involving corporate titans, regulators and consumers debating policies over who controls the media and the Internet." The battle over control of the Internet has "given rise to a new political constituency raised on text messaging and social networking and relies on e-mail blasts and online video clips in its advocacy."<sup>21</sup>

A prime example of the use of technology in dissent occurred during 2007 in Myanmar (also known as Burma). News about significant dissent against the government was sent to the rest of the world through cell phones and the Internet. Those images were replayed on television, reaching a very large audience. Cell phones and text messages were used extensively inside the country "to set up demonstrations or to tell each other where [the] soldiers [were]." The students also knew "how to take pictures and video with their phones and download those and send them on the Internet." The establishment tried to limit communication but they were unable to "control the technology totally, and it's a huge difference to deliver the information fast."<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, activists must work to keep the attention of the media and the public. They must continually invent new ways to build and to hold the media's interest. AIDS activists at an international conference in Mexico City in 2008 were concerned with maintaining attention in their



fight against AIDS because the public and the media were losing interest in the issue. Activists dressed in "condom costumes and T-shirts that asked not 'Got milk?' but 'Got AIDS?'" They also displayed posters with "condom-shaped superheroes sailing through the air and oversize insects, representing the virus, having sex with unsuspecting victims." A French group called AIDES started a campaign titled, "If I were H.I.V. positive. . . ." In order to achieve its goals, the campaign placed pictures of prominent people "above questions meant to challenge stereotypes about infected people." During the conference they tried to get former president Bill Clinton to agree to appear on a poster, but without a definitive answer from him, they hoped to earn the support of potential legitimizers such as Madonna or actress Sharon Stone.<sup>23</sup>

Once activists attract followers, they must move to unite them into a functioning organization. Such unity is created through the strategies of solidification and polarization.

### Solidification

Solidification occurs mainly within the agitating group. Although some solidification tactics also serve promulgating and polarizing functions, they are primarily used to unite followers—to create a sense of community that may be vital to the success of the movement. Solidification includes the rhetorical processes by which an agitating group produces or reinforces the cohesiveness of its members, thereby increasing responsiveness to group beliefs, values, and ideologies. This is a difficult task because the type of individuals who are willing to join dissent movements are often easily energized but difficult to control. They must be molded into a functioning group in which leaders energize and motivate members to work in unison.

Solidification includes a number of tactics that are mainly reinforcing rather than persuasive. The tactics in this strategy include the use of *plays, funerals and other rituals, songs, art and poetry, slogans, comic books and cartoons, bumper stickers, expressive and esoteric symbols, clothing, creation of positive terms, consciousness-raising groups, and in-group publications*. This list is not exhaustive but only suggests the many tactics that are available to dissenters.

#### The Arts as Solidification Rhetoric

The agitating play is an interesting form of American drama. Usually, the play is a simple dramatization of the agitating group's grievances. The play illustrates a conflict between agitators (who are portrayed as the personification of good) and members of the establishment (who are portrayed as the personification of evil). Plays involve simple situations, stereotyped characters, the use of humor and ridicule, and language that both existing and potential members can easily understand. The plays are not meant to appeal to the audience's intellect but to their emotions. The play may include solidarity-building language that the in-group

understands and shares. For example, a labor play will use in-group language like "scab" or "goon" to attack individuals who do not support a strike. These words evoke a great deal of emotion that labor can effectively use to solidify its members during a strike.

Revolutionary theatre is an effective tool because it not only entertains but can be used to raise consciousness: "it can reflect, interpret, convey, record, and sometimes even lead a revolution." The plays arouse people, motivate them to action, and organize them into an efficient unit. Effective theatre points out problems in society and then offers solutions. They are "semi-spontaneous characterizations within a situation, ending with a solution to the dramatic problem."<sup>24</sup>

Sally Belfrage described a powerful theatrical experience in Mississippi in 1964: "The Free Southern Theatre, a traveling interracial band of performers . . . put on *In White America* in a church one night. More than a play, it was a series of readings and dramatizations from Negro history—and the most exciting theatre I had ever seen; it was about the people for whom it was performed, who had never seen a play before. They spoke back to it when they were moved, and joined the songs they knew: the drama went in two directions."<sup>25</sup>

The United Farm Workers (UFW) effectively used a series of plays to build solidarity. In 1965 the UFW formed El Teatro Campesino "to teach and organize farm workers."<sup>26</sup> The plays originally focused on the UFW's problems, the strike the union was currently waging, and the problems migrant workers faced. The group was formed in the following manner:

Luis Valdez, who became our director, was trying to explain theatre to a group of farm workers, most of whom had never seen a play. He hung signs around people's necks, with the names of familiar character types: scab, striker, boss, etc. They started to act out everyday scenes on the picket line. These improvisations quickly became satirical. More people gathered around and started to laugh, to cheer the heroes and boo the villains; and we had our first show.<sup>27</sup>

These plays are designed to appeal to those who already accept the agitators' ideology or those open to persuasion if given an effective appeal. Individuals involved in such plays assume that their audience is familiar with the situations, conflicts, and resolutions enacted. The plays are most effective in the community where the problem exists and needs to be solved.

Activists are aware of the power of funerals and other rituals as a way of building solidarity. Cesar Chavez used the funerals of workers who had been killed while working for the UFW as a vehicle to spread the union's message and to build solidarity. Chavez "extended his rhetorical campaign to convert an audience of mourners into . . . a cohesive group of activist supporters who would work hard and sacrifice" for the union. Like many movement leaders, Chavez "organized public ceremonies like

funerals and rallies that 'cement' the members of the organization together" and turn the individual being honored into "a mythical martyred hero." Such martyrs become powerful figures for solidification within an organization.<sup>28</sup>

A similar tactic is the use of symbolic events that contain a message. In September of 2007 a group of veterans staged a "die-in" in Washington, D.C., "which was meant to represent Americans, Iraqis and others who have died in the war" in Iraq. The group organizing the event hoped their action would encourage individuals who opposed the war to "perform acts of civil disobedience" to stop the war.<sup>29</sup> On the same day members of a group of dissenters in San Francisco laid in the street on white sheets to symbolize Iraq's war dead. The "die-in" stopped traffic, including the city's famous streetcars.<sup>30</sup>

Agitation songs, like plays, serve powerful rhetorical functions. Movements that sing songs are described as being more unified and powerful than those that don't. "Beware [of] that movement . . . which generates its own songs."<sup>31</sup> Songs are more varied in content and form than agitating plays, but they share some of the same characteristics. In his discussion of the role of music in dissent, Ralph E. Knupp argued that the driving force behind "protest songs seems to be the need for in-group solidarity . . . [protest music creates] a social reality through language, rhythm, and tone."<sup>32</sup>

In his book *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control*, Stephen A. King detailed how reggae music played a powerful role in the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica:

The Jamaican masses use music to counteract oppression and degradation. In fact, music is one of the few avenues for the Jamaican poor both to create a distinctly black Jamaican identity and to vent "years of pent-up suffering, dehumanization and frustration under the white man's hegemony."<sup>33</sup>

Because of its link to the Rastafarian movement and its popularity with the people of Jamaica, reggae "became more than a mode of entertainment; it became perhaps the chief medium of political and social commentary and, ultimately, a threat to the government."<sup>34</sup>

Charles J. Stewart proposes that music is a method that agitators use to affirm commitments and intentions publicly. Songs are created and designed for repetition, serving as a form of self-persuasion for those singing. Singing is useful because it tends "to give courage and vigor to carry on."<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Stewart describes protest songs as "a way to establish, define, and affirm one's selfhood in social movements."<sup>36</sup>

Stewart clustered the themes of protest music into five groups:

1. *Innocent Victim versus Wicked Victimizer*: Songs often claim that individuals are being repressed by "circumstances and forces beyond their control."

2. *Powerful and Brave versus Weak and Cowardly*: Songs describe the movement and the individuals in the movement as being strong and powerful while referring to the opposition as being cowardly and weak. They stress how the opposition fears the movement's growth and strength.
3. *United and Together versus Separate and Divided*: Songs appeal for "unity, organization, and commitment" to the organization. Unity is necessary to fight the movement's powerful foes. Singing together is a means of building the needed unity.
4. *Important and Valuable versus Unimportant and Worthless*: Protestors describe themselves as being valuable and important contributors to society as opposed to other members of society whom they see as worthless.
5. *Righteous and Moral versus Sinful and Immoral*: Protestors portray themselves and their causes as being righteous and moral. The opposition is portrayed in extremely negative terms so that the agitators can look better by comparison.<sup>37</sup>

Knapp outlines three rhetorical characteristics of songs:

1. *Reactive Dimensions*: The agitators react to problems they perceive in the world. The songs describe the agitators' enemies and the problems of society. The movement is legitimized by identifying a problem that it can overcome.
2. *Simplistic Dimensions*: Songs portray the world in a simplistic manner by relying on "ambiguities, sweeping assertions, and panoramic criticisms rather than on specific issues, policies, and arguments." The music appeals to activity rather than intellectual reflection. Protest music does not deal with complexities of history but is based in the present so it can create a sense of immediacy as well as eliminate material that could confuse or bore people.
3. *Expressive Dimensions*: Activist songs focus more on social relationships than on content or ideology. Songs "provide a forum in which a movement can talk about itself at its best and its opponents at their worst, without accountability to provide reasons."<sup>38</sup>

Some songs have become anthems of protest. For example, "We Shall Overcome" (which began as an anthem of the civil rights movement) has become so well known that it has been used in a wide variety of movements. It originated from an African American hymn "dating to the pre-gospel era of the early twentieth century that had been transported by South Carolina tobacco workers to Highlander Folk School [in Tennessee], where it had been adapted for protest." Taylor Branch described the song's appeal: "Simple strains and dogged sincerity made the hymn suitable for crisis, mourning, and celebration alike, as many adults discovered when they heard the song for the first time."<sup>39</sup> The

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Social media  
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labor song "Solidarity Forever" has been used in many movements throughout the world. Helen Reddy's 1973 song "I Am Woman" became "a kind of informal anthem" for the women's movement.<sup>40</sup>

Other creative works are also powerful rhetorical tools. Art is an attempt to deal with reality as the artist sees it. In dealing with reality, the artist "writes a poem, a play, a song . . . paints a picture, a mural, or models clay or wax."<sup>41</sup>

The photographer Pirkle Jones created a powerful protest rhetoric in "his stirring images of migrant workers, endangered landscapes and social movements, including a controversial series on the Black Panthers at the height of their activism in the late 1960s." His photos were used on Panther posters. In response to critics who argued that he should not photograph groups like the Panthers, Jones argued that the act of taking a photograph made a political statement. He continued by saying that there "is no such thing as objectivity" and that he did his "talking through the photographs."<sup>42</sup> Those photos helped in the solidification among the Panthers and their supporters.

Another prime example of the rhetorical power of art was the poetry written by the Chicano poet, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. Gonzales' poem "Yo Soy Joaquin" (I Am Joaquin) became a powerful piece of movement rhetoric after it was written in 1967.<sup>43</sup> Over 100,000 copies of the poem were distributed. The poem was reprinted in Chicano newspapers, quoted in numerous books, "performed by theatre groups, young Chicanos at speech meets, beauty contests, and dramatic readings; and cited in speeches and essays by various Chicano leaders." The Chicano historian Rodolfo Acuna called the poem "the most inspiring piece of movement literature written in the 1960s. Its impact was immeasurable."<sup>44</sup>

### Slogans as Solidification Rhetoric

Another method of achieving solidification is the use of slogans. Slogans have been a powerful part of agitational rhetoric throughout history. George E. Shankle defines a slogan as "some pointed term, phrase, or expression, fittingly worded, which suggests action, loyalty, or which causes people to decide on and to fight for the realization of some principle or decisive issue."<sup>45</sup>

Robert E. Denton, Jr., has argued that slogans "may have a great impact upon the success of a movement in terms of expressing ideology as well as membership affiliation."<sup>46</sup> Slogans create definite impressions and elicit emotional reactions. They often justify actions but also have a powerful effect emotionally and as propaganda.

According to Denton, slogans are a means of organizing groups and reflect a group's norms and values. He outlines the following eleven purposes of slogans:

1. Slogans simplify the group's ideology so it can be easily understood.
2. Slogans emphasize a particular point, issue, or message.



3. Slogans create attention, interest, and serve to raise consciousness about an issue or a group.
4. Slogans convert people to an agitational group.
5. Slogans inspire people to join or support a movement as well as inducing individuals to spread the group's message.
6. Slogans create strong identification, reinforcement, and solidarity.
7. Slogans help people rationalize actions, attitudes, and beliefs.
8. Slogans call for specific action.
9. Slogans discredit the establishment and other opponents of the movement.
10. Slogans polarize the positions between the establishment and the movement.
11. Slogans redefine, counter, or play down the opponent.

Effective slogans promote the acceptance of an organization, identify enemies, and express ideologies. They contain active verbs, are brief, and use striking images. Slogans are often witty and rhyme, making them easy to remember. Designed to be chanted, they provide a release for pent-up emotions and frustrations, serving as a verbal alternative to physical aggression. They often characterize an issue or a person as either good or bad and build group solidarity by uniting members in their commitment to a cause. Slogans do not provide alternative conclusions; they reflect the core beliefs of a group.<sup>47</sup>

Slogans often consist of statements that groups can shout in unison, like "Power to the People" or "Black Power." One particularly powerful slogan in opposition to the war in Vietnam during the 1960s was "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" During the war in Iraq, dissenters have used slogans such as, "Support the troops, end the war," "Support Our Troops—Bring Them Home," "End the war now," "Impeach W., impeach Cheney too," "Wall Street Gets Rich, Iraqis and GIs Die," "Drop Tuition, Not Bombs," and "Bush Lied, They Died." In complex and prolonged agitational situations, the slogans may be used in the form of a cheer with the agitator serving as cheerleader. During a protest against the Iraq War, protestors marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. carrying banners and chanting, "What do we want? Troops out. When do we want it? Now."<sup>48</sup> During the Democratic National Convention in 2008, members of the Iraq Veterans Against the War chanted, "We are the veterans! The Iraq War veterans! The anti-war veterans! We are soldiers! Anti-war soldiers!"<sup>49</sup>

During President Obama's visit to Europe in April of 2009, protestors chanted slogans opposing U.S. military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The chants were paraphrases of Obama's message when he ran for president: "Quit Iraq and Afghanistan. Yes We Can." The crowds also

showed their frustration with the financial activities of the British government: "The Government Lies. The Banks Steal."

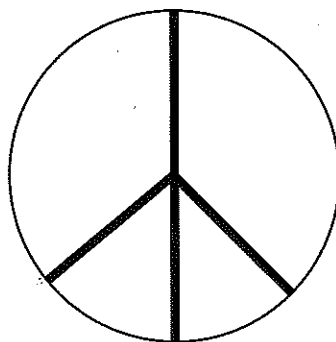
### Symbols as Solidification Rhetoric

Agitators often create expressive and esoteric symbols to accompany songs, plays, and slogans. These symbols are among the most powerful and interesting agitation artifacts. Sometimes the symbols have a complicated mythology, and sometimes they become accepted simply because they are either appropriately powerful, ambiguous, or well-designed. For example, on Mother's Day in 1967, "At the exact spot where a group of suffragists had chained themselves to a White House fence fifty years earlier, activists ceremoniously dumped a huge pile of aprons. Nothing reflected the rejection of the fifties housewife more starkly than that pile of aprons."<sup>50</sup>

The peace symbol was created by a British designer, Gerald Holtom, in 1958 as "a visual plea for nuclear disarmament."<sup>51</sup> It was derived from the semaphore signals for "N" and "D."

The symbol became the symbol of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s and 1970s. When looking at the symbol, an individual sees the circle, which is the old religious sign of eternity and unity; the inverted cross; and three branches from a single stem (the number three has special significance in several religions). The design is simple and easily reproducible in posters, cartoons, sculptures, and medallions. The symbol has a certain richness of ambiguity, prompting alternate versions of its origins. In one story, the design was scratched into the dust next to a child killed by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Another theory is that it represents a cancellation sign, a downward slash through an atomic bomb cloud. Others assert that its origin is in Norse runes (alphabet). The symbol has a tremendous amount of power; it has been a popular representation of contemporary dissent for more than fifty years.

The thunderbird became an important symbol for farm workers in their agitation against growers. The UFW's flag was introduced at the union's first convention. Manuel Chavez, Cesar Chavez's cousin, designed the flag, which was to serve as a symbol of the farm workers' struggle. The flag was a large red banner "with a black Aztec



eagle on a white circle. Since he was not an artist, Manuel had used a straight edge to design a symbolic eagle that could be easily reproduced—even on a typewriter."<sup>52</sup> Cesar Chavez described the process of designing the flag:

Gilbert

Social Movement

-weak ties

-low risk

-locks structure

leadership

New has

social movement

Chavez

improves

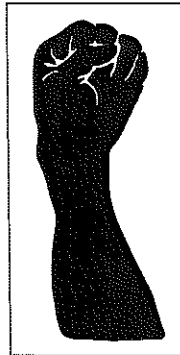
use of

see med

We needed an emblem for the Union, a flag that people could see. . . . We wanted something that the people could make themselves, and something that had some impact. We didn't want a tractor or a crossed shovel and hoe or a guy with a hoe or pruning shears. I liked the Mexican eagle with a snake in its mouth, but it was too hard to copy. . . . I chose the colors, red with a black eagle on a white circle. Red and black flags are used for strikes in Mexico. They mean a union.<sup>53</sup>

Some agitational groups choose their symbols because they have natural relationships to what the group represents. When Huey Newton and Bobby Seale sought a name for their militant black party, they found a natural connection with the black panther, a sleek and dignified animal that attacks only in self-defense but responds ferociously. The symbol had previously been used by a political party in Alabama, so it was recognized as having power among black activists.

Another powerful symbol of the 1960s that many groups accepted is the upraised fist. It was originally associated with the black movement, but other groups have adopted the symbol. It also has a long and rich tradition in labor unions.



Ambiguous symbols like the peace symbol have broad appeal. The symbol-user is allowed to discover an interpretation that fits his or her own value system. The symbol is similar to an abstract word in that it can stand for a variety of referents, any one of which may have special appeal for a given individual. While the UFW's thunderbird is more natural and less arbitrary than the peace symbol, there is no direct connection between it and agricultural workers. However, the shape is reminiscent of Aztec architecture and mythology and thus appropriate for a union composed largely of Mexican-Americans. Finally, the upraised black fist is highly natu-

ral. It is a nonverbal symbol in which part of something stands for the whole. It retains some ambiguity because "black power" can be defined differently depending on the individual; the allure of the symbol appeals to a more specific range of values than does, say, the peace symbol.

The role of symbols in solidification is highly significant. The wearing or display of symbols readily identifies members of an agitating group. Hence the symbol is a nonverbal, sometimes dramatic way of saying to those who hold a particular position, "You have my support." The establishment recognizes this potency. When two black athletes from the United States bowed their heads and raised black-gloved fists during the

awards ceremony at the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968, an enraged establishment quickly forced them to leave the city. All they had done was exhibit one symbol—the raised fist. While their symbol could have been interpreted as either supporting or competing with the other symbols at the ceremony, such as the American flag and the national anthem, the establishment obviously interpreted the athletes' gesture as a sign of disrespect.

Other symbols that may be important in social movements include badges, T-shirts, bumper stickers, and bulletin board messages. There is a constant battle over the use of such symbols in certain situations, such as in schools. Two students in New Jersey wore controversial buttons to protest the school's rule that all students from kindergarten through eighth grade had to wear uniforms. The buttons "featured the words, 'No School Uniforms' in a slashed red circle of young boys in Hitler Youth uniforms." A judge ruled that the buttons were protected speech. In a similar case, a middle school student in Vermont regularly wore a T-shirt that read "'George W. Bush, Chicken-Hawk-in-Chief,' with a picture of the president's face superimposed on the body of a chicken. The image was surrounded by oil rigs and dollar signs. One wing held a straw near three lines of cocaine and a razor blade. The other held a martini glass with an olive." The student was told to turn the shirt inside out and put tape over the images of drugs and alcohol because the shirt was offensive. The case went to court and the court found in favor of the student, stating "that a broad reading of offensive materials is needed, because almost anything is offensive to someone."<sup>54</sup>

Some symbols are recycled. They are used in one movement and then adopted by later movements. For example, during the American Revolution, the agitators threw tea into Boston Harbor to protest a tax on tea. During the grape boycott of the late 1960s there was a Boston Grape Party where grapes were thrown into Boston Harbor. In 1988, once again the tea bag became a powerful symbol of a taxpayer revolt when announcers on radio stations asked their listeners to send tea bags to members of Congress as a way of protesting congressional actions.

In 2009, dissenters used tea bags and organized tea parties as a way of focusing "on what organizers see as frightening fiscal folly in Washington, D.C."<sup>55</sup> The tea parties took the form of rallies that were scheduled throughout the country on April 15, the day that income taxes were due. Individuals were encouraged to send tea bags to members of Congress in addition to attending and participating in the rallies. Organizers believed that their action was the beginning of a new national movement.<sup>56</sup>

Some solidifying symbols are kinetic, requiring the symbol-user to physically participate. The Chicano movement used a rhythmic clapping in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while arm-in-arm swaying often accompanies the singing of songs like "We Shall Overcome." Eldridge Cleaver described another kinetic symbol and its effect:

[The Muslim handshake] is so popular that one sometimes grows weary of shaking hands. If a Muslim leaves a group for a minute to go get a drink of water, he is not unlikely to shake hands all around before he leaves and again when he returns. But no one complains and the convention is respected as a gesture of unity, brotherly love, and solidarity—so meaningful in a situation where Muslims are persecuted and denied recognition and right to function as a legitimate religion.<sup>57</sup>

Think of the number and types of handshakes or other forms of greeting that occur on campus, in the workplace, or on the street to see the power and significance of such common gestures.

### Terminology as Solidification Rhetoric

The creation of positive terms is another means of building solidarity. Stokely Carmichael emphasized this power when he proposed that "I believe that people who define are masters."<sup>58</sup>

Ruth Rosen agreed with Carmichael when she stated that women "in the early sixties still lacked a language with which to express their inchoate yearnings and fears." She argued that the women's movement had to "name and reinterpret customs and practices that had long been accepted, but for which there was no language." Ultimately, "they began circulating the exhilarating idea that women could define themselves."<sup>59</sup>

A group often deliberately chooses a word with negative connotations and promotes its use as a positive attribute. During the 1960s, a prime example of this tactic was the use of the word "black." The term had previously been associated with negative images, but black power activists made it into a term of pride. During the same period, young members of the Mexican-American community turned the historically negative term "Chicano" into a positive one. Vocabulary becomes a verbal symbol of support. Only members will recognize the new meaning; the members of the establishment will tend to retain the outdated usage until they convert to the cause or at least agree to a part of the desired change.

There are other examples. "Gay" was converted to a label of pride, even though it had a history of being used by the establishment as a derogatory term for a homosexual. Julia Penelope Stanley described how she used the label: "I wasn't 'homosexual' or 'queer.' I was 'gay.' It's hard to explain now the tremendous freedom that word bestowed. . . . I now knew that I was not alone, that I wasn't the only 'one' in the world."<sup>60</sup>

The lesbian poet Susan Sherman provides a description of how terms evolved over time: "'Lesbian' was a label used to make women afraid to fight for their rights, so it was a term that had to be 'demystified' and embraced as a form of defiance. 'Dyke' and 'queer' were later used when the term 'lesbian' was felt to be too mild."<sup>61</sup>

By taking a pejorative term from mainstream society and turning it into a badge of honor, the agitating group asserts its power. It assumes the labeling (defining) function of the establishment. For example, the



words "woman" and "girl" were both mainstream terms. The women's movement insisted on using the first term to confront the issues of male superiority and female belittlement that the usage of "girl" suggests. Many blacks now prefer the designation African American. Similarly, Asian-Americans and Native Americans (American Indians) have seized the opportunity to define themselves as they prefer to be seen. Each of these terms can become a powerful symbol around which a group can unite, create a positive identity, and judge whether or not their message is being assimilated by others in society.

In contemporary antiwar protest, the women who are members of the group CODEPINK, "an international women-initiated peace and social justice movement working to end the war in Iraq," based the group's name on the "color-coded homeland security system." Members of the group felt that the "alerts were a way to manipulate people's post-9/11 fears to justify invading Iraq." So the group used the concept of alert to indicate compassion and as "a feisty call for women and men to wage peace."<sup>62</sup>

#### **In-Group Communication to Solidify Commitment**

Consciousness-raising (C-R) groups contribute to solidification. By participating in these groups, women learned to trust their "inner feelings" and "to see the world through women's experiences."<sup>63</sup> Flora Davis described the process: "In the late 1960s and early 70s, thousands of C-R groups formed around the country. The women who joined them found that consciousness-raising challenged many of their basic assumptions about themselves and their relations to men."<sup>64</sup>

C-R groups are vehicles for discovering shared problems and for seeking ways to improve self-images. Once individuals enhance their self-image, they can move on to action.

The confidence gained from C-R groups encouraged women to engage in public "speak-outs" in which they "admitted to illegal abortions and explained why they had made this choice" in order to educate the public about abortion. These actions "brought abortion out of the closet where it had been hidden in secrecy and shame. It informed the public that most women were having abortions anyway. People spoke from their hearts."<sup>65</sup>

Another type of consciousness raising was the use of "teach-ins" during the Vietnam War. The teach-ins were "marathon events in which educators and experts taught a generation of students, many of whom would be hard-pressed to find Vietnam on a map, the history of America's ongoing intervention in Southeast Asia."<sup>66</sup> C-R groups, like the teach-ins, are an effective means of recruiting new members to a movement or organization.

Creating in-group newspapers and other publications is another method of solidification. The underground press was a hallmark of the 1960s. Papers like the *Berkeley Barb* became powerful vehicles for spread-

ing the message of those without legitimate power. Today, blogs on the Internet serve a similar function. The content of agitating newspapers and magazines stresses in-group symbols, stories, and biases. For example, in 1968–69, a syndicate circulated a series of articles to leftist newspapers on gathering provisions and defending against sieges from law enforcement agencies (or “pigs” in the jargon of the group). Probably only a few readers ever put the instructions into practice. Still, the articles served a solidifying function by stressing the need for vigilance and devotion to the cause even to the extent of undergoing tear gas, beatings, and partial starvation at the hands of authorities.

In-group newspapers also serve the functions of promulgation (especially in giving credence to rumors) and polarization. In the 1960s, publications like *Liberation*, *Ramparts*, *New York Free Press*, *Village Voice*, and *Seed* played a leading role in polarizing the city of Chicago in such a way that city officials would vigorously try to suppress dissent at the Democratic Convention in 1968.

During times of marginal dissent, in-group publications serve a vital function of keeping people interested and informed. For example, in the 1950s, an era of little public dissent, a series of “little journals” kept radical ideas alive despite their small readership of like-minded individuals. These journals raise issues and ideas that may be helpful to agitators during later eras of dissent.<sup>67</sup>

### Polarization

Almost every agitation movement uses the strategy of polarization once it has attracted a substantial following. Polarization assumes that any individual who has not committed to the agitation supports the establishment. To some extent, this assumption is probably a valid one. An individual who has not committed to the proposed change can be assumed to accept the status quo. Commitment is what agitators seek. Painting issues as black and white—for and against—defines this stage.

Chapter 7 outlines the opposition by a variety of groups to current global economic issues and policies. In 2009 The Group of Twenty (G-20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors met in London. Protests were held throughout the world against the plans that governments had created to solve the economic crisis in the world. The protestors marched “to demand jobs, economic justice, and environmental accountability.”<sup>68</sup> Demonstrators in London showed their frustration by breaking windows in the Royal Bank of Scotland and painted slogans on the building’s walls.<sup>69</sup>

The strategy of polarization encompasses tactics designed to move the individual into the agitation ranks—to force a conscious choice between agitation and control. Eldridge Cleaver uttered the classic statement of polarization: “You are either part of the problem or part of the

solution." At the polarization stage, agitators are no longer interested in addressing nuances. The fact that the uncommitted might agree with their ideology but resist their tactics (e.g., someone who opposes abortion but does not agree with picketing a clinic) is not of interest. In using polarization, the agitator forces individuals to choose between the agitator and the establishment. Two major tactics are the exploitation of **flag issues** and **flag individuals**. Attacking these issues or individuals (sometimes a group or an organization, rather than a person) attracts media attention. The targets of attack generally make it easier for potential converts to choose the agitators rather than the establishment.

A number of complicated issues were involved in the agitation against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, including long-term national policies and the distribution of legitimate power nationally and internationally. In their demonstrations and in much of their verbalization against the war, the agitators chose to concentrate on one issue: Is it right for the United States to kill Vietnamese civilians, including women and children? In a similar vein, those opposing abortion have consistently argued that abortion is the murder of a fetus. In both movements, murder is the flag issue.

When Dow Chemical Company, a manufacturer of napalm, sent recruiting representatives to campuses during the Vietnam War, they were frequently met by demonstrations that included pictures of napalmed children, the burning of dolls, and orderly or disruptive attempts to prevent employment interviews. Military recruiters were likely to encounter similar treatment, as were ROTC units on campuses. Likewise, demonstrators against abortion clinics show pictures of aborted fetuses in their attempts to prevent women from keeping their appointments for abortions.

The choice of flag individuals is important to the success of a movement. In the 1960s, the flag individual very often was a president of a university or a governmental figure. In order for this tactic to be effective, members of the dissenting group must view the chosen flag individual as being worthy of attack. For example, during the Vietnam War, flag individuals were those public officials who were perceived as having the most to do with the forming and perpetuating of American foreign policy. Those individuals included both Presidents Johnson and Nixon, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. During the Iraq War, President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld served that role.

Although the demonstrations were undoubtedly painful for the target group and/or individuals, the agitators' primary purpose was not to cause pain. Rather, they were intent on polarizing uncommitted individuals. The agitators hoped to accomplish the polarization by forcing such a strong negative reaction to the emotionally charged flag individual or issue that condemnation of those flag individuals and groups would fol-

low. Once such condemnation had occurred, recruitment to the more complex and general ideology might be easier. A choice would be forced because neutrality would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. Polarization occurs in virtually every instance of agitation. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote: "Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is more bewildering than outright rejection."<sup>70</sup> Action is the criterion for membership in an agitating group; inactive members are counted as siding with the establishment.

Another polarizing tactic is the *invention of derogatory jargon* for establishment groups. This specialized vocabulary attacks the establishment while at the same time building internal cohesiveness. Words are chosen for the powerful images or sentiments they evoke. For example, unions often use the word "scab" to refer to individuals who replace workers while they are on strike. Historically, the most potent insult for a union person is to call someone a scab—an ugly crust on a sore. To a union member, a scab is the lowest form of life on earth. The civil rights movement referred to pro-establishment or uncommitted blacks as "Uncle Toms." Because of the power of that symbol, other minority groups created similar terms. Chicanos called individuals Tio Tacos (Uncle Tacos). Blacks and Chicanos labeled establishment sympathizers "oreos" (black or brown on the outside and white on the inside). American Indians used the term "apples" (red on the outside and white on the inside), and Asian-Americans used "bananas" (yellow on the outside and white on the inside). Women referred to men as "male chauvinists."

One of the most potent and common symbols of the 1960s was a reference to police as "pigs." Once that symbol became accepted it was applied to other individuals who held positions of power, including college presidents.

### Nonviolent Resistance

Once polarization and solidification have been used to recruit members and transform them into a cohesive, functioning organization, the agitators face choices about what tactics to use next. One popular strategy in recent years has been the use of nonviolent resistance. This strategy has been employed by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, abolitionists, pacifists, suffragettes, and trade unionists. The leaders of movements like the civil rights movement realized that nonviolence had to be "modified for American culture."<sup>71</sup> The strategy of nonviolent resistance employs two principal tactics. The first is to use the physical presence of the agitators to produce what Dr. King called "creative tension."<sup>72</sup> The sit-down strike that American trade unionists devised in the early twentieth century is one example of such a tactic. The second uses the physical and/or economic absence of the agitators to create tension leading to negoti-



ation and adjustment. The Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955 was one example; conventional labor strikes also use this tactic.

When practicing nonviolence, agitators violate laws or customs they consider to be unjust and destructive of human dignity. Usually, the agitators simply do what they would be permitted to do if the laws they were violating had been changed. Arthur I. Waskow called such activities "creative disorder."<sup>73</sup> This strategy involves tactics like sit-ins, school boycotts, economic boycotts, rent strikes, fasts, blocking entrances to buildings, chaining oneself to a tree in order to prevent the tree from being cut down, lying down in front of bulldozers to prevent roads from being built, forming picket lines, holding prayer meetings outside fields that are being picketed, chaining oneself to the fence surrounding the White House, and a variety of other such tactics. These tactics have become an integral part of American dissent.

If the establishment agrees to the agitators' nonviolent demands, the disorder ends. If the establishment resists, it must do so by physical suppression. Often, the main recourse available to the establishment is to physically remove the agitators. Such removal has often worked against the establishment because police have acted violently and have further energized the activists. Also, the press covers such removal, eliciting sympathy for the activists. In recent decades, many establishments have effectively waited out agitators rather than risk the potentially harmful symbols of physical removal.

Resisters often anticipate that physical suppression of their protests will be violent. In the civil rights movement, resisters were carefully trained in nonviolent tactics, including how to respond to violence. Their theory was that if suppression occurred, and if they did not react to violence with violence, members of the community would pressure the establishment for legal remedies to end the protests. If the larger community reacts as the nonviolent resister predicts, then the agitation has succeeded without destroying trust, which is critical to the existence of the community. In a sense, the agitator has won victory without a war.

Dr. King's views on nonviolence are important to understanding the dissent in Birmingham, Alabama, that is outlined in chapter 4. His ideas are also reflected in other examples of nonviolent protest in American history. In 1958, Dr. King provided insights into some aspects of the non-violent philosophy:

First, it must be emphasized that nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. If one uses this method because he is afraid or merely because he lacks the instruments of violence, he is not truly nonviolent. . . . This is ultimately the way of the strong man. . . . The phrase . . . "passive resistance" often gives the false impression that this is a sort of "do-nothing method" in which the resister quietly and passively accepts evil. But nothing is further from the truth. For while the nonviolent resister is passive in the sense that he is not physically



aggressive toward his opponent, his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponent that he is wrong. The method is passive physically, but strongly active spiritually. It is not passive nonresistance to evil, it is active nonviolent resistance to evil.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, all the energy of the nonviolent resister is directed at the policy he or she is violating. No energy is used in attempting to destroy the perpetrators and preservers of the policy.

The second aspect of nonviolence is that it does not seek to humiliate opponents but to win their friendship and understanding:

The nonviolent resister must often express his protest through non-cooperation or boycotts, but he realizes that these are not ends themselves, they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in an opponent. . . . The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.<sup>75</sup>

Dr. King emphasized a third aspect of nonviolence: the impersonal nature of the resistance, or rather, the extra-personal nature of it. The attack is directed against the forces of evil rather than against the people who commit the evil:

It is evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil. . . . I like to say to the people in Montgomery: "The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is, at bottom, between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory, it will be a victory, not merely for fifty thousand Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light. We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may be unjust."<sup>76</sup>

The fourth aspect builds on the impersonal nature of nonviolent protest and is key for nonviolent resisters:

[Nonviolent resistance requires] a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. . . . The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it. He does not seek to dodge jail. . . . Suffering, the nonviolent resister realizes, has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities. "Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering," said Gandhi.<sup>77</sup>

The fifth aspect of the philosophy concerns the internal state of the resister:

[Nonviolent resistance] avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him. . . . Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality

enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of ourselves.<sup>78</sup>

The sixth aspect is an optimistic conviction about the nature of life:

[Nonviolent resistance] is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. Consequently, the believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future. This faith is another reason why the non-violent resister can accept suffering without retaliation. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship.<sup>79</sup>

Dr. King's aspects of nonviolent resistance are a mixture of pragmatic directions and philosophical generalizations. The strategy consists of actively resisting laws or customs in such a way that the establishment must either succumb to or remove the resisters. Assuming that the establishment chooses removal, the resisters must not react aggressively no matter what provocation occurs. Their reaction must be the result of their training and their sincere desire to win through nonviolence.

Nonviolent resistance differs from the other agitation strategies discussed in this book because, in the polarization stage, it does not attempt to denigrate establishment individuals. That is, a nonviolent resister focuses all attention on flag issues and none on flag individuals.

Often the term "civil disobedience" is used in conjunction with nonviolence. Civil disobedience occurs when an agitator deliberately breaks a law considered to be unjust and destructive. Nonviolent resistance is not always civilly disobedient, but it often is. When it is not, the agitators are violating custom rather than law. Changing a law requires a formal process while changing a custom does not.

The following questions might be raised: (1) Is nonviolent resistance consummatory rather than instrumental? (2) Is it referential rather than symbolic?

Clearly, in almost all cases, nonviolent resistance to customs and laws is instrumental rather than consummatory. A sit-in at a lunch counter or a boycott of a bus system does not always accomplish the integration of the lunch counter or the bus system. If the establishment is sufficiently resistant, the business may close. If the agitation is weak, the establishment will succeed in suppressing the agitators. Whatever the outcome, nonviolent resistance is instrumental rather than consummatory. Most often, it involves civil disobedience, which implies that the agitators' (consummatory) goal is the repeal of a law or the enactment of new laws—ends that differ from the resistance itself.

Is nonviolent resistance symbolic? It is almost always symbolic. The agitators use the presence (or, in the case of boycotts, the absence) of their bodies as symbols of their strong convictions about laws and customs. This book has already made the distinction between arbitrary symbols (such as the relationship between a word and its referent) and more natural symbols (such as the relationship between an upraised fist and

its referent). The dominant symbol in nonviolent resistance, the body of the agitator, is on the natural continuum. However, it is not meaningful in itself; it must be interpreted. The agitators typically do not have the opportunity to make their message verbally explicit through the media. The target audience must ask themselves: What would cause people to put their physical selves in jeopardy and without retaliation for physical harm? The audience must infer its own answer to the question. According to the theory of the agitators, supplying answers should result in the involvement of the audience in the movement. The study in chapter 4 of the agitation in Birmingham, Alabama, shows how accurate the theory can be, given a strong agitation group wholly committed to nonviolence and a resistant and suppressive establishment.

Nonviolent resistance requires, probably more than any other agitation strategy, the tactic of **persistence**. A nonviolent resister poses no threat of physical destruction to the establishment; it cannot act as though a war exists. However, the establishment cannot ignore the nonviolent agitator. The agitator's presence is a nuisance, preventing the establishment from making money or doing business as usual. The typical response of the establishment is to remove the agitators. Once that task is accomplished, the establishment has suppressed the agitation, unless another group continues the action. Some nonviolent resisters furnish a new kind of nuisance while in jail by staging hunger strikes, prayer meetings, songfests, and other such actions. The agitators must have enough supporters to continue their actions persistently until social change occurs.

The nonviolent resister must exhaust all avenues of petition and verbal rhetoric before beginning physical resistance to the laws or customs. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his defense of the Birmingham agitation, had the foresight to see that the exhaustion of the verbal means of persuasion would be necessary if the movement were to influence others:

In . . . negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants—such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises Rev. Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstrations. As the weeks and months unfolded we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences of the past, we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community.<sup>80</sup>

Later in the same document, Dr. King wrote, "History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily."<sup>81</sup>

## Escalation/Confrontation

Agitators may also choose to use strategies of escalation/confrontation. Such strategies are based on the belief that when the establishment becomes sufficiently apprehensive, it will overprepare for agitation. That overpreparation will result in such confusion among establishment groups that security forces will turn on themselves and on nonagitators. The establishment will be made to look foolish, and its flaws will be exposed.

The strategy consists of a series of tactics, each of which is designed to escalate the tension until establishment representatives finally resort to violent suppression. The first tactic can be labeled *contrast*. The objective is to lead the establishment to expect the participation of large numbers of agitators—whether this expectation has any objective reality or not. The agitators realize that the establishment must prepare for the worst conceivable outcome. This tactic involves the use of rumor and the underground press to give hints to the establishment that, in terms of numbers, the worst conceivable outcome might be very bad indeed.

The second tactic in the escalation (still preceding the actual agitation) is *threatened disruption*. Building on the establishment's specter of large numbers of agitators, this tactic again uses rumors and the underground press to increase establishment tension with alleged information about the attitudes and objectives of the agitators. These threats force the establishment to prepare to combat deliberate disregard of laws and the destruction of establishment property by the agitators. Agitators may also employ the tactic of *nonnegotiable demands*. The use of such demands allows the establishment no room to maneuver; it is forced to move against the activists, therefore escalating the battle between the two groups.

Once the agitation begins, the agitators may employ the tactic of being *nonverbally offensive*. They are likely to dress in strange ways, to display or carry posters/signs scornful of establishment values, to sing offensive songs, and to make gestures offensive to the establishment. The activists may simultaneously or subsequently use *verbal obscene deprecation*. In Chicago in 1968, for example, two of the most frequent agitative chants were "Fuck LBJ" and "Fuck Daley." Police were addressed in terms considered taboo and insulting at the time. Verbal obscenity may also be used in conjunction with *nonverbal obscenity*. In Chicago, activists allegedly threw bags of feces and urine at police. These objects were symbolically aggressive. They were not actually aggressive because feces and urine are not weapons designed to cause physical harm; the activities were, however, psychologically confrontational. Agitators also spit at police, and some disrobed or exposed parts of their bodies to establishment representatives.

These agitative tactics are likely to lead to the violent confrontation the agitators desire. However, if they are not successful, the agitators can resort to *token violence*. This involves actual, but minor, attacks on repre-

sentatives of the establishment by a few of the agitators. The strategy assumes that the establishment will respond to such attacks with counterattacks far out of proportion to the original provocation. Confrontation will have occurred. The establishment will have revealed itself in what the agitators consider its true colors. If the establishment overreacts, it may lose credibility.

### Gandhi and Guerilla

The strategy of Gandhi and guerrilla confronts the establishment with a large group of agitators committed to the strategy of nonviolent resistance and another group committed to the physical destruction of the establishment. The first group is rhetorical because its behavior is instrumental and symbolic. The second group is mainly nonrhetorical. Their behavior, although instrumental, is aggressive. The strategy assumes that the activities of each group will contribute to the achievement of common goals.

An example of the use of the combination of these strategies occurred in a massive march on the Pentagon on October 21, 1967. Although most of the marchers were nonviolent, several thousand demonstrators physically confronted federal marshals and military police. Some were able to break through the lines and enter the building. Over 600 were arrested and many injured. One of the leaders, David Dellinger, stated that "the mixture of Gandhi and guerrilla was planned in advance. . . . One of the lessons of the weekend was that it was indeed practical to forge a creative synthesis of Gandhi and guerrilla."<sup>82</sup>

The strategy of *guerrilla* is symbolic only to the extent that physical attacks on an unpopular establishment—if successful—will align disaffected members of society with the cause of the agitators. If the very real physical attacks generate polarization that prompts separation from the establishment and commitment to the agitators, the attacks serve as symbols for those who witnessed the behavior and were persuaded to endorse the cause.

### Revolution

The strategy of *revolution* is not symbolic. It is war.

### Conclusion

This chapter has briefly described the principal strategies agitators employ. *Petition* and *promulgation* are generally more verbal than some of the other tactics. *Solidification* and *polarization* reinforce members of the movement and attract those who are sympathetic but uncommitted. *Non-violent resistance* results in "creative tension," which may lead to the reso-



lution of grievances by negotiation. *Escalation/confrontation* is designed to goad the establishment into disproportionate violence, prompting the larger society to institute reforms. *Gandhi and guerrilla, guerrilla, and revolution* are increasingly nonrhetorical, involving actual physical attacks on the establishment in a win-lose frame of reference, rather than from a compromise and reform point of view.

## Notes

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- <sup>3</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000): 295.
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- <sup>5</sup> *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Alex Haley, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1964): 243.
- <sup>6</sup> Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991): 107.
- <sup>7</sup> Solvej Schou, "Morphing Truck Thrills Rose Parade Viewers," *Albuquerque Journal*, January 2, 2008, A8.
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- <sup>10</sup> "Silent Protest," *Albuquerque Journal*, April 4, 2008, C-2. See the Women in Black Web site: <http://www.womeninblack.org>
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- <sup>12</sup> Juliana Barbassa and Marcus Wohlsen, "Game of Hide the Torch," *Albuquerque Journal*, April 10, 2008, A-6.
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- <sup>19</sup> For a discussion, see Richard A. Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike: Law and Resistance During the Pittston Coal Strike of 1989–1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2006).
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- <sup>37</sup> Stewart, 243-250.
- <sup>38</sup> Knupp, 384-387.
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- <sup>67</sup> For a discussion of such journals see Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer. . . . The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987): 77-124.
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- <sup>82</sup> David Dellinger, quoted in Daniel Walker, *Rights in Conflict* (New York: Signet, 1968): 9-10.