EDITED BY

ANNE N. COSTAIN & ANDREW S. McFARLAND

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND AMERICAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

PEOPLE, PASSIONS, AND POWER

Social Movements and American Political Institutions

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ANNE N. COSTAIN
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Social Movements and American Political Institutions

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Anne Costain dedicates this book to Doug and Lynne Costain.

Andrew McFarland dedicates this book to the memory of Susan Mary Sawyer.

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Introduction

Anne N. Costain and Andrew S. McFarland

Social movements—such as those for civil rights, women, the environment, Protestant fundamentalism—are a great force in American politics. Social movements clearly bring about major change in our country. As such, they should be an important area of study for political scientists interested in American politics.

Political institutions shape social movements, and these movements sometimes, in turn, shape the institutions. Most political scientists are generally familiar with how the paradigmatic American social movement, civil rights, was molded by actions of national, state, and local governments, by presidential decrees, by congressional legislation, and by federal court decisions. After a bit of consideration, one also sees that the civil rights movement had a profound impact on political institutions, as in the increased assumption of authority by the federal courts, the altered filibuster rules of the Senate, changes in support for the political parties, and the use of executive power by the president. For a better understanding of politics and political institutions in America, students need to generalize from this and other examples about the role of social movements.

Unfortunately for such an understanding, the relationship between social movements and political institutions has been split between two disciplines. Sociologists study the origin and development of social movements. Political scientists study the eventual effects of movements on politics, such as the passage of legislation or the issuance of judicial decisions. The sociologist rarely looks to see the impact movements have on lobbying, elections, and other political events. The political scientist infrequently generalizes about the relationships between political events and institutional change or how the development of social movements affects such events. The result is a truncated view of the world, a distortion in our understanding of American politics.

Within the last twenty years, the study of social movements has been hugely transformed. Researchers in the social movement field are confident that they are making great advances. Their field is a booming area of research, as evidenced by the long list of references in this volume. Yet, most students of American politics and political institutions know little of this new scholarship, even though it might be usefully applied to American political data.

The purpose of this book is to help correct this problem. We want to bring together the study of social movements with the study of American political institutions. Analyzing the relationships between movements and American political institutions enhances our understanding of politics. In this volume, we have collected a number of essays to demonstrate how this can be done. The authors all participate in the theoretical discourse of applying social movement theory to American politics, although they may emphasize different aspects of these recent theoretical developments. Our purpose is not to endorse one particular theoretical package. Scholars of American politics can deal with such questions later. At this time, we want to demonstrate how social movement theory challenges existing perspectives on the study of American institutions by adding new questions and alternative assumptions to the field.

The chapters in the book are organized to move from examining broad questions about how theoretical understandings of American institutions might be transformed by including movements, to more focused applications of current social movement theory to studies of particular institutions. The first section of the book opens as McFarland (chap. 1) traces the decades-long dialog over the adequacy of pluralism as a theory of American democracy, arguing that incorporation of social movements enriches the debate by recasting some of its key questions. Sidney Tarrow (chap. 2) reaches back into the early period of American state building to offer a reinterpretation of Alexis de Tocqueville's classic book, *Democracy in America*. Tarrow suggests that Tocqueville misjudged the primary character of American politics because he did not recognize that political institutions in the United States were fostering a kind of contentious politics that would frequently result in powerful social movements incubated by the state. Finally, in this section sociologist Paul Burstein (chap. 3), after reviewing the different terminology and questions applied to the study of social movements, interest groups, and political parties by political scientists and sociologists, challenges both groups to admit that much of the behavior they are studying overlaps, that their terms are imprecise and blur more than illuminate differences, and that a common set of questions spanning all three groups may be more productive than the current course of scholarship.

The second section of the book considers how American social movements form and emerge. Claude Dufour (chap. 4) examines the gay rights movement in the competitive contexts of Chicago city and Illinois state politics. He demonstrates how activists used elections and the American federal structure to force recognition from a generally unsympathetic political establishment. In chapter 5, sociologists Daniel Cress and David Snow take one of the groups that would seem least likely to be able to organize effectively, the homeless. They show that although the standard types of resources accepted as increasing political influence (e.g., money, strong organization,

etc.) were significantly related to a group's success, a wide range of other resources can also facilitate mobilization and make success more likely. Last, Lee Ann Banaszak (chap. 6) compares the development of the woman suffrage movements in Switzerland and the United States. She finds that even with similar institutional and tactical opportunities for movements to gain political influence, these may not be sufficient, if activists and leaders fail to perceive circumstances as providing genuine opportunities for success.

In the book's third section, political parties and electoral politics are analyzed as institutionalized parts of American politics that both shape and constrain movement activity. John Green, James Guth, and Clyde Wilcox (chap. 7) use the case of the Christian Right's bid to broaden its influence within state Republican parties to argue how complex and subtle the interaction is between party and movement. Applying a variety of sociological theories of movement development and testing them empirically, they conclude that each reveals part of the experience of the Christian Right but that none adequately models the strengths and limitations that inhere in the political role of movements. Jeffrey Berry and Deborah Schildkraut (chap. 8) trace the electoral activity of citizen movements. Although they use the language of social movement research less than many of the other authors, they describe a relatively successful effort to organize the general public to influence politics. They find that as political opportunities expand, features of the political landscape change in response, with this change producing additional alterations in the institutions of politics.

The presidency and Congress are the focus of Part 4. Douglas Imig (chap. 9) examines another group that is unlikely in conventional political science scholarship to wield much clout: the poor. He shows how, over time, poor peoples' movements interacted with presidential administrations, both seizing and losing initiative, depending on the levels of political opportunity available to them in different periods. The dynamics of social movement activism are such, as Imig reveals them, that both conventionally supportive and hostile executive actions may expand the clout of movement-linked interests. Anne Costain (chap. 10) notes the historic correlation between the appearance of mobilized women's movements in America and national legislation changing public policy toward women. She provides empirical evidence that the level of mobilization of a women's lobby is linked to legislative success and that it is possible to sustain influence even following a fall in movement activity. This suggests that the intensity of social movement politics may provide the wedge to claim a place on the national legislative agenda. Douglas Costain and James Lester (chap. 11) trace the evolution of environmentalism over the past century, focusing on the interactions the movement has with Congress. Environmentalism has emphasized both con-

ventional lobbying tactics and grassroots mobilization, depending upon congressional receptiveness to each set of tactics across time.

Part 5 shifts the focus to the courts. Michael McCann's chapter 12 makes the point that clear victories in court are not necessary for effective legal mobilization to occur. Drawing on evidence from movements ranging from civil rights, women, and wage equity to animal rights, he argues that the power of law to increase a group's leverage can shake existing hierarchies, providing greater opportunity for maneuver by challenging groups. Oneida Meranto in "Litigation as Rebellion" (chap. 13) picks up this theme, examining how courts were used by American Indians after other means of acquiring political power, including violent protest, failed. Tribes have fought to increase their legal sovereignty as a way to protect their interests from state and national intrusion. Laura Woliver (chap. 14) has looked at the amicus curiae (or friend of the court) briefs filed by movement groups favoring legalized abortion and those opposing it. She demonstrates that the language used to influence the court by each side is intended to frame the broad issues at stake in ways compatible with each side's preferences. Because legal language rings so strongly with entitlement to rights and protections, it becomes a logical battlefield for groups struggling to have their understandings of abortion policy prevail.

The concluding section raises several broad implications of integrating social movements into theories of American politics. Doug McAdam (chap. 15) observes that successful social movements jump national boundaries easily. He argues that integrating movements into the study of American politics creates a natural opening to incorporate international interests into this research. Mark Lichbach (chap. 16) groups most current theories into two camps, one offering a more structural and the other a more individualized view of political change. Using the widely studied case of the American civil rights movement, he demonstrates how each side has contributed to understanding this movement. Finally, as a conclusion, we draw together the work presented here and summarize its implications for the integration of research on social movements with study of American political institutions.

Part 1

Theories of American Politics and Social Movements

1

Social Movements and Theories of American Politics

Andrew S. McFarland

The theory of social movements and the study of American politics and political institutions have come together as a recent development in a forty-year-long theoretical dialog, referred to as pluralism. This is the discussion, beginning with the rejection of C. Wright Mills's power elite theory by Dahl and his students in the late 1950s, that has continued in two further stages (Mills 1956; Dahl 1958; Polsby 1963). After the first stage, called simply pluralism, came a second stage, called here multiple-elite pluralism, which itself has been followed by a third stage of discussion, which I call post-pluralism. The study of social movements has become closely tied to the theory of post-pluralism. Here let us review the first two stages of the pluralism discussion to understand this development.

Mills (1956) surprised the academic world with his eloquent statement that America is actually ruled by a power elite, consisting of a few hundred individuals at the top of the national security decision-making apparatus, plus corporate and Pentagon elements referred to by others as "the military-industrial complex." Because these few hundred persons made the life-and-death decisions during a Cold War era, and because they made decisions regarding the potential expansion of American power as a new form of imperialism, they had power over the issues mattering most. A parallel argument was made by Floyd Hunter (1953), who argued that Atlanta was ruled by a corporate elite, and, by implication, so were most other American cities.

Robert Dahl and his students objected that Mills and Hunter had based their observations on analytical criteria extraneous to the political process and that they themselves had not conducted empirical studies of the working of political institutions on important issues (Wolfinger 1960; Dahl 1961; Polsby 1963). Accordingly, Dahl (1961) conducted a study of power in New Haven, Connecticut (published as *Who Governs?*), and found that power on important issues was not controlled by an elite but was instead dispersed, under the control of many persons. Dahl's students conducted similar decision-making studies of other cities and of national political institutions, such

as the U.S. Congress, and came to similar conclusions (Polsby 1963). Dahl's pluralism became something like a paradigm in the study of American politics and political institutions during the 1960s, although some political scientists studying American politics disagreed with this formulation.

However, this paradigm did not last long, and it was overthrown for at least two major theoretical reasons. First, it was almost immediately pointed out that Dahl's studies may have dealt with power on issues on the political agenda, but pluralism did not have a good theoretical approach to explaining why some issues were on the agenda and others were not. To understand power in American politics, the critics Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962) argued, one needed to understand the politics of agenda formation. (Social movement theory obviously does this, but that comes later.)

The other cause for the overthrow of Dahl's paradigm was Mancur Olson's (1965) theory of "the logic of collective action." He observed that public policies offer collective benefits, so that if one person or organization in a collectivity gets a benefit, all such persons or units must do so. If the state provides national security, it benefits all citizens. If the state provides a special benefit by establishing import quotas for sugar, thereby raising the price of sugar, this policy benefits all sugar producers, not just those who may have contributed to a sugar lobby. In other words, it is irrational for a person or an organization to contribute to a lobby, if such persons/organizations will receive the collective benefit from it anyway, even if they do not contribute. It follows that, if one assumes rational self-interest motivation, many lobbies representing widely shared interests will not be organized, because citizens and organizations will prefer the course of being "free riders," benefiting from a collective good without contributing to the interest group lobbying for that good.

But even worse from the standpoint of Dahl's pluralism, small groups of oligopolistic corporations or other units can be expected to organize, because it would be in the rational self-interest of a single unit to contribute, because the cost of the contribution would be offset by the probability of gaining the collective benefit. Further, in the case of a small number of units, the contributors are normally able to pressure a noncontributor to prevent free riding. Olson's theory states, then, that the few, well organized politically, will frequently defeat the many, not well organized politically. The "many," of course, is a synonym for the consumers, or the taxpayers, or the general public.

Making assumptions similar to those of Olson's, writers such as Lowi (1969) or Schattschneider (1960) observed that while power was dispersed in America, Mills hence being incorrect, such dispersed power was not widely shared, as Dahl had argued. Instead, as this new theory of pluralism assumed center stage during the 1970s, it argued that power in America was dispersed into the hands of multiple separate elites, each tending to control a particular

area of public policy, ruling it as a subgovernment, sometimes called an "iron triangle," or referred to as "capturing" a single policy area. In other words, there was a *pluralism of multiple elites*.

Such a particular elite often consisted of a coalition of oligopolistic corporations, a few members of Congress on a key committee, and a governmental agency or regulatory commission. It was not difficult to organize and maintain such a coalition in the pursuit of its own interest, normally contradictory to the purposes of consumers or the general public, which remained largely unorganized as Olson's theory described. Multiple-elite pluralists assumed that such policy areas as trucking, airline commerce, nuclear power generation, banking interest rates, regulation of grazing on government land, the distribution of federal land-conservation funds, the protection of prices of sugar, peanuts, oranges, and other agricultural products, and the acquisition of airplanes and other expensive hardware for the military were each under the control of a separate mini-elite in the overall system of multiple-elite pluralism. Each mini-elite pursued its own self-interest, while the interests of consumers, taxpayers, or the general public were not represented in such systems, known as subgovernments (McFarland 1987; McFarland 1992).

This multiple-elite pluralism was an attractive theory. It postulated a dispersal of power in a fragmented political system, yet it was critical of that system, arguing that major reforms are necessary in the interests of widespread publics. It seemed predictive of outcomes in many areas of the policy-making process. But this theory of pluralism, too, did not hold center stage for a long time, for by 1980 it started to be replaced by observations constituting post-pluralism.

The major problem for multiple-elite pluralism was that indication of subgovernments or iron triangles seemed to be more frequent in the 1950s than in the 1970s (Wilson 1980; Walker 1991; Heinz et al. 1993). Deregulation swept away the iron triangle coalitions in such areas as trucking, airline commerce, and nuclear power policy. In such agricultural areas as tobacco and smoking policy, powerful forces appeared challenging the formerly ruling coalition. And, in such areas as sugar import quotas, in which the quota was abolished and then reinstated, it appeared as if the ruling mini-elite might wax and wane over time, thereby necessitating a theoretical development to account for such fluctuations.

Further, in some new areas of public policy, such as environmental regulation, the multiple-elite hypothesis did not work, for rather than being taken over by an issue-area elite, dominated by corporations, environmental policy has been characterized by continuing battles among businesses and coalitions of environmental and health groups. A typical situation is the regulation of pesticides: scores of interest groups have formed a coalition to oppose the business point of view (Bosso 1987).