"THERE WILL BE FIGHTING IN THE STREETS": THE DISTORTING LENS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

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We argue that the disproportionate attention accorded the struggles of the sixties has created a stylized image of social movements that threatens to distort our understanding of popular contention, not only in earlier periods and in nondemocratic contexts, but also in the contemporary U.S. This stylized view tends to equate movements with (a) disruptive protest in public settings, (b) loosely coordinated national struggles over political issues, (c) urban and/or campus based protest activities, and (d) claim making by disadvantaged minorities. Drawing on a larger study of trends and patterns in collective civic engagement in metropolitan Chicago, we employ new data on some 1,000 protest events between 1970 to 2000 to assess these four stylized views and address a number of related questions. The data do not support the common imagery of social movements—since 1980 there has been a marked transformation of the movement form to the point where public protest is now largely peaceful, routine, suburban, local in nature, and initiated by the advantaged. We discuss the implications of these findings for the rise of a "movement society" in the U.S. and suggest directions for future research.

Few subfields within sociology have grown as much over the past three decades as the study of social movements. In fact, thirty years ago there was no recognizable social movement subfield. What little work was done on the topic tended to fall under the general heading of collective behavior; that odd collection of social phenomena—crazes, fads, panics, disasters, social movements—thought to represent the unusual or irrational in social life (Lang and Lang 1960; Smelser 1961; Turner and Killian 1957). But the turbulence of the 1960s and early 1970s renewed interest in social movements and sparked something of a revolution in the field. This paradigm shift was championed by those whose own experiences convinced them, not only of the importance of the phenomena, but of the need to jettison the collective behavior framework in favor of perspectives that stressed the link between movements and more routine forms of political and organizational life. The rise of these alternative perspectives in the 1970s and 1980s—most notably resource mobilization and political process in the U.S. and new social movements in Europe—fueled the emergence of a recognizable social movement subfield and the proliferation of work that continues unabated today.

We have little doubt that the scholarly developments described above moved the field forward in a number of important ways. Redefining the study of social movements as the proper province of political and organizational sociologists (and their ilk in other disciplines) was, by itself, an important analytic development that accorded better with the significant role played by movements in contemporary social and political life. That said, we worry that some

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© *Mobilization: An International Journal 10(1): 1-18*

of the same real-world influences that motivated this paradigm shift may now be blinding scholars to important changes that have taken place in recent decades in the nature, locus, and form of social movements, especially in the United States. The movements of the 1960s and early 1970s greatly increased interest in the field but their own particular forms and processes have tended to dominate contemporary social movement scholarship and theory. The danger is that the disproportionate attention accorded the struggles of the sixties has created a stylized image of movements that threatens to distort our understanding of popular contention, not only in earlier periods and in nondemocratic contexts, but also in the contemporary U.S. and, to a lesser extent, other Western democracies. This stylized view tends to equate movements with:

- Disruptive protest in public settings
- Loosely coordinated national struggles over political issues
- Urban and/or campus-based protest activities
- Claim making by disadvantaged minorities

Though not all movement activity, even in the sixties, fits this image, it is certainly true that the iconic movements of that period—civil rights, antiwar, women's, and student—accord reasonably well with the stylized portrait. But what of today? As Tilly (1977, 1995a) has made us aware, popular contention is a moving target, evolving over time in response to a host of political, economic, cultural, and demographic trends. How has the movement form changed, if at all, over the past three decades? Does the stylized sixties view of movements match the contemporary reality of popular contention? Or have movements perhaps gone the way of bowling leagues, mirroring Putnam's (1995, 2000) claims of an overall decline in collective civic life?

Drawing on a much larger study of trends and patterns in collective civic engagement in and around Chicago, we employ new data on protest events between 1970 to 2000 to assess these four stylized facts and address a number of related questions.

SITUATING MOVEMENTS HISTORICALLY

Like most of sociology, much of the social movement literature is ahistorical, suggesting a certain constancy to the dynamics and forms of popular contention. There is, however, a significant strand of scholarship devoted to the study of the evolution of popular contention and, more narrowly, the rise of the social movement form. As with so many other aspects of social movement study, the influence of Charles Tilly is evident in this particular corner of the field.

Tilly first introduced the concept of the *repertoire of contention* in a 1977 article in *Theory and Society*, entitled "Getting Together in Burgundy." More recently, he defined the concept simply as "the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interest" (Tilly 1995b: 41). For all its simplicity, the concept is important for its powerful assertion of the historically variable nature of contentious politics. As Tarrow (1998: 30) notes: "the repertoire is at once a structural and a cultural concept, involving not only what people *do* when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they *know how to do* and what others *expect* them to do" (emphasis in original). The point is that the knowledge to which Tarrow refers varies considerably from place to place and over time within a given locale. As such, the concept invites scholars to investigate, both the changing forms of popular contention and the dynamic processes that shape these changes.

Of particular interest to social movement scholars has been the gradual displacement of the traditional contentious repertoire of seventeenth and eighteenth century Western Europe by the modern social movement form. In some ways, Tilly has spent much of his career

documenting and theorizing this change. "If," as he says, "we push back into the strange terrain of Western Europe and North America before the end of the nineteenth century, we soon discover another world [of popular contention]" (Tilly 1995b: 463). The repertoire of contention we find in this "strange world" is, in Tilly's account, "parochial," "bifurcated," and "particular."

> It was *parochial* because most often the interests and interaction involved were concentrated in a single community. It was *bifurcated* because when ordinary people addressed local issues and nearby objects they took impressively direct action to achieve their ends, but when it came to national issues and objects they recurrently addressed their demands to a local patron or authority . . . . [and it] was *particular* because the detailed routines of action varied greatly from group to group, issue to issue, locality to locality. (1995b: 45)

Among the specific forms of contention that defined the traditional repertoire were the bread riot, land seizure, *charivari*, and attacks on the houses or persons of local officials or other enemies. Reflecting Tilly's characterization, in most such instances "contention was violent and direct, brief, specific, and parochial" (Tarrow 1998: 36). Starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing well into the nineteenth, however, these traditional forms of contention gave way gradually to a newer, markedly different repertoire.

> They were *cosmopolitan* in often referring to interests and issues that spanned many localities or affected centers of power whose actions touched many localities. They were *modular* in being easily transferable from one setting or circumstance to another. . . . They were *autonomous* in beginning on the claimants' own initiative and establishing direct contact between claimants and nationally significant centers of power. (Tilly 1995b: 46)

What factors and processes shaped this evolution? In *Power in Movement*, Tarrow (1998) offers a comprehensive and compelling account of the rise of the modern social movement form. His account stresses three main engines of change: "the consolidation of national states, the expansion of roads and printed communications, and the growth of private associations" (Tarrow 1998: 36). The argument is straightforward. As power came to reside in large centralized states, the focus of popular contention became increasingly national too. The improvements in transportation and communication reinforced this trend while simultaneously aiding the diffusion of standardized forms of action. Finally as new kinds of private association (e.g. political parties, unions, etc.) emerged, more proactive and organized forms of contention replaced the more reactive and spontaneous actions of the earlier period.

The modern social movement form was born of these changes. The mass labor movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the clear harbingers of the trend, but were quickly joined by a host of other national struggles both in the U.S. and Western Europe. Focusing only on the U.S., the early decades of the last century saw the rise of woman's suffrage, temperance, and the Townsend Movement, among other movements. World War II and the immediate Cold War period constituted something of a hiatus in movement activity in the U.S. But the onset of the civil rights movement in the 1950s changed all of that, birthing one of the most intensive and discernible "protest cycles" in U.S. history (McAdam 1988, 1995). Indeed, the emergence of the new left in the U.S. set in motion a diffusion process that helped give rise to similar new-left "movement families" in various European countries in the late 1960s and 1970s (della Porta and Rucht 1991; McAdam and Rucht 1993). Among the nominally separate movements that comprise this family are: the women's movement, the environmental movement, the Vietnam antiwar struggle, the anti-nuclear movement, and the gay and lesbian movement.

We recount this history to make a simple point: the renaissance in social movement studies that began in the 1970s and continues to flourish today was itself set in motion by the new-left protest cycle of the 1960s and 1970s. More importantly, contemporary social movement scholarship is overwhelmingly rooted in and shaped by empirical work on the cluster of movements identified above. No movement has been more intensively studied than the American civil rights struggle. But all of the others listed above have undergone exhaustive study as well. It is not too much to say that contemporary social movement theory is essentially based on an intensive interrogation of this new-left "movement family."

The practical implication of this should be clear. Even as we celebrate these movements for the role they played in establishing the significance of the field, we worry that their features and the general dynamics of contention typical of the period are often represented as a set of universals applicable to contentious episodes in all (or most) times and places. Needless to say, this presumption contradicts Tilly's fundamental insight regarding the historically contingent nature of collective action. More importantly, it may well blind researchers to subtle, but clearly, discernible changes in the action forms, claims, and loci of contemporary social movements.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A "MOVEMENT SOCIETY"

Speculation that such changes have and continue to occur is at the heart of recent work on the "institutionalization of movements." In their influential volume, David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (1998) coin the term "movement society" to refer to what they see as the increasing incidence and narrow institutional form of social movements in Western democratic politics. Largely gone, in their view, are the often disruptive and generally noninstitutionalized forms of contention characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s, replaced in the U.S. and Western Europe, by a far more routine and quasi-institutionalized movement repertoire. Research on the evolution of "protest policing" in the West over the past three to four decades has yielded results that are fully consistent with the view that contention has become more institutionalized over the past quarter century.

Having traditionally eschewed systematic research on agents and systems of social control, a number of social movement analysts have recently turned their attention to this general topic. One of the pioneers of this research is Donatella della Porta whose 1995 book, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State,* represents a landmark publication in this developing subfield. The book summarizes della Porta's comparative research on the evolution of political violence and the policing of protest in Germany and Italy between 1960 and 1990. Among the central findings she reports in the book are: (1) a marked tendency toward less political violence over time, and (2) convergence and increased professionalization of protest policing in both countries. The two trends are clearly related. If political violence was more common in Germany and Italy in the late 1960s and early to mid-70s, it is—at least in part—because the actions of police and other control agents encouraged violence. The increased professionalization and routinization of protest policing have served, in turn, to tame and civilize movement activity.

The work of John McCarthy, Clark McPhail, and colleagues (McCarthy and McPhail 1998; McCarthy, McPhail, and Schweinberger, 1997) on the development by the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) police of a registration system designed to routinize political demonstrations on the Mall in Washington, D.C., is consistent with della Porta's findings. Like their counterparts in Germany and Italy, the Park Service police have endeavored to institutionalize protest, in large part, to reduce the likelihood of disruption and violence. Nor, according to the authors, is this trend confined to these three countries alone. Just as movement researchers have come to recognize the ubiquity of inter- and intra-movement diffusion processes (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Soule 1997), McCarthy, McPhail, and colleagues report

proactive efforts by the NPS police to make their policing repertoire available to law enforcement personnel in many other localities in the U.S. and abroad.

In contrast to the systematic empirical data on the evolution of protest policing, almost all of the work on the changing nature of movement activity has been speculative in nature. While researchers have invested heavily in assembling time-series data sets on movement activity, the lion's share of this work has, once again, focused on the 1960s and 1970s (Andrews 1997, 2001; Burstein and Freudenburg 1978; Costain 1992; Jenkins 1985; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1983, 1999 [1982]; McAdam and Su: 2002; Rosenfeld and Ward 1996; Tarrow 1989). If we are to systematically assess the speculative claims that the nature, forms, and loci of movement activity have changed over the past few decades, we will need time series data that extends more or less to the present. Fortunately, that data is now available.

THE STUDY

Since 2000 we have been working to assemble what we believe is a novel set of data on "collective civic engagement" in and around Chicago over the thirty year period, 1970-2000. A detailed description of these data and the theoretical framing of the larger project—the Chicago Collective Civic Participation Study (CCCP)—may be found elsewhere (Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, and Weffer 2005). One of our major objectives in the project is to recast the dominant perspectives on the decline in American civic life and the causes of community-level variations in collective action. Shifting the debate from individuals to public occasions that bring two or more people together to realize a common purpose, our data are based on the collection and coding of more than 4,000 collective civic events and public protests as reported over three decades in the Chicago metropolitan area by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Event research has, for a long time, been one of the methodological staples of social movement research (Andrews 1997, 2001; Burstein and Freudenberg 1978; Jenkins 1985; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Koopmans 1993, 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1983, 1999 [1982]; McAdam and Su 2002; Olzak 1992; Tarrow 1989). The frequency of its use, however, has not insulated the method from periodic criticism by movement scholars (Danzger 1975; Franzosi 1987; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Mueller 1997; Oliver and Myers 1999; Snyder and Kelly 1977). At the heart of these critiques is skepticism that newspapers represent anything like an unbiased source of information on collective action events. This skepticism is reinforced by at least some systematic evidence attesting to various forms of bias in newspaper accounts of protest or other movement events. For example, McCarthy et al. (1996), show that size, location, and violence predict newspaper coverage of protest events. In their study of collective action in Madison, Wisconsin, Oliver and Myers (1999) find several sources of bias in the coverage of "public events." They find that large events, or those involving conflict, are more likely to be covered by local newspapers. In addition, business-sponsored events and those taking place in more central locations in Madison were more likely to be reported in the papers.

We take this and other evidence of newspaper bias very seriously. Absent attention to these findings and properly moderated claims regarding the limits of event data, we believe the method is subject to serious misuse. That said, we think the technique still has real value for those interested in the systematic, quantitative analysis of political contention. It is also worth noting that the limits of the method vary considerably depending on the specifics of the research. One conclusion, in particular, bears favorably on the present study of Chicago-area activism. All things being equal, the more localized the focus of attention, the more credible the use of newspapers as a source of event data. So, while researchers—including the first author of this article—have used accounts of protest events in a single newspaper (e.g., *The*

New York Times) as a proxy for movement activity at the national level, it should be obvious that the resulting sample of events represents an infinitesimal percentage of the underlying phe-nomenon. Just as obviously, the more localized the focus of attention, the higher the overall percentage of all such events that get reported in the paper. In a very small town, few move-ment events would likely escape the attention of the local paper. Obviously, this is not the case in a city the size of Chicago. Still, we can be sure that the method produces a much larger sample—albeit a nonrandom one—of all events at the city level than when used as a proxy for national—or even international—protest. This does not mean that use of the method, at the city level, is nonproblematic. On the contrary, there are distinctive methodological issues that come into play when the method is employed locally. We will return to one key issue—neighborhood bias in newspaper coverage—below.

Identifying Events

When doing "event research," social movement scholars tend to collect events in one of two ways. The first approach relies on keyword searches of the published index of the newspaper in question (see McAdam 1999 [1982]; Olzak 1992). The second strategy involves reading the newspaper page by page to identify "candidate" events (see Soule et al. 1999; McAdam and Su 2002). Because we are interested in *all* manner of civic events on *all* pos-sible issues, keyword searches were quickly ruled out as impractical. We therefore relied on the more labor-intensive second method of identifying events to be coded. Below we briefly summarize the procedures used to identify events, as well as the operational definitions used to measure various aspects of these events (for details on the larger project see Sampson et al. 2005).

Relevant events were distinguished from other news items on the basis of the following three criteria:

- Events must be public
- Involve two or more individuals, and
- Must not be initiated by state or commercial actors

If an event mets these three criteria, we then categorized it as a *protest*, *civic*, or *hybrid* event. This was done by examining the *claims* at issue in the event, as well as the *forms of action* relied on by participants (e.g. fundraiser, protest march, street festival, etc.). We define a *claim* as *a demand for either a change in society or an avowed desire to resist a proposed change*. *Forms*, for this study, are defined as the manner in which action is undertaken by event initiators.

We, in turn, use these two concepts to classify events in terms of our tripartite schema. We focus in this article on *protest* events, defined as any event "in which individuals collectively make a claim or express a grievance on behalf of a social movement organization or social category" (Uhrig and Van Dyke 1996). A protest event thus must involve an explicit expression of a claim that includes a desire to bring about or prevent a change in policy or service delivery. Furthermore, protest events often take, but are not limited to, traditional forms of movement activity. Examples of these forms would be rallies, sit-ins, and marches, but also petitioning, letter writing campaigns, and class-action lawsuits.

Civic events, the main focus of our independent analysis in Sampson et al. (2004), do not involve claims so much as general purposes. Though civic events share some of the same issue areas as protest (such as education or health care), the civic event does not involve an implicit or explicit change-oriented claim. Likewise, civic forms are distinct for the most part from protest events. Examples of civic forms would be a rummage sale for a local church, a community breakfast, a local clean-up day, or a charity ball.

What is directly relevant to present purposes, however, is the intersection of protest with

traditional civic engagement, what we term hybrid social action. As the name implies, *hybrid* events blend elements of both protest and civic events. These events exhibit a clear claim and/or grievance. However, these events exhibit a form that is not typically associated with protest so much as civic action. An example would be a neighborhood art fair where the goal is to raise money for AIDS activism.

Claims/Purpose

As noted above, information about the claims and purposes of an event has been crucial for event researchers. Here we attempted to capture the claim of the protest events and the purpose/goals of the civic events. We allowed for up to three claims that could be assigned to any event, as many events use multiple frames to articulate their grievances. We attempted to rank them in the order of most to least prominent. This code allowed for much of the substance of an event to be coded. It also provided a method for distinguishing between types of events. We generated a list of fifty-six claims/purposes of an event, and include "a claim not else-where classified," which allowed for claims to be coded that we did not anticipate during the initial construction of the code.

Forms

Again, like the claim code, forms are a key variable for event researchers. In general, this code allowed us to examine the tactics used in collective action. The types of forms can vary from a sit-in, to a march, to a community breakfast, to a fundraiser. Along with claims/ purposes, these forms of action enabled us to distinguish between our types of events. We also allowed for up to three forms to be coded. Particularly in protest events we often see the use of multiple forms, as, for example, when a rally includes some sort of dramaturgical component—such as songs or street theater—or begins or ends with a march.

Location

Event researchers have long sought to characterize the general location of the events in their data sets. Still, "city" is about as fine-grained as the location code for event research tends to get. In this research, however, we were centrally concerned with being able to place our events in their proper neighborhood location. Further we wanted to differentiate between two meanings of "location." The first simply refers to the geographic location where the event took place (hereafter *event location*). The second concerns the neighborhood where those responsible for initiating the event (usually an organization) resided (hereafter *initiator location)*. Event location tells us something about the shifting ecology of protest activity. Initiator location speaks to variable neighborhood capacity for mobilizing such action.

To measure both of these location variables we geocoded all events in the city of Chicago to one of 77 well-defined neighborhoods described in the *Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990*. The neighborhood's areas were first described in the *Local Community Fact Book* published in 1938, and were created based on five considerations (p. xvii):

1. The settlement, growth, and history of the area
2. Local identification with the area
3. The local trade area
4. Distribution of membership of local institutions
5. Natural and artificial barriers such as the Chicago River, railroad lines, local transportation systems, parks, and boulevards

Although there have been changes in the social composition of every neighborhood, rather than redraw the areas every ten years in keeping with the census, the areas have been consistently defined in the same manner. This ensures the usefulness of the areas for those of us interested in studying community patterns of change over time. A long tradition of sociological research has relied on these seventy-seven community areas, and they continue to be used by institutional actors as well, including the *Tribune* (Suttles 1990). Unlike the City of Chicago, however, the suburbs have witnessed rapidly changing borders and populations, due to the out-migration from the city and the general rise of the suburbs in the post-World War II era. In order to create consistent criteria of inclusion, we decided to use only those suburbs whose population exceeded 10,000 or greater during all three decades of our study. This takes into account the fact that some suburbs rose de novo in the latter part of the century, precluding the study of change from 1970 to 2000. This cut point also allows for compatibility with Chicago's seventy-seven neighborhoods, as the overwhelming majority of Chicago neighborhoods have a population greater than 10,000.

Our ability to place events and initiators in their specific neighborhood (or suburban) location allows us to take up a host of interesting but heretofore unaddressed research questions. For example, has the social ecology of protest activity changed over the course of the study period? Are particular neighborhoods more likely to initiate protest events and is this variation consistent over time? What are the sociodemographic correlates (e.g., poverty) of such protest? Are there some urban neighborhoods (or suburban areas) that are consistently unable to mobilize action on their own behalf? We take up these questions directly in Sampson et al. (2005). Here, however, we are less interested in neighborhood variation in protest than in documenting aggregate changes in the locus, forms, and character of Chicago-area protest activity between 1970 to 2000.

Intensity Measures

Given our interest in assessing the accuracy of the image of movements as relying heavily on threatening or disruptive forms of action, it is imperative that we build proxies for these forms into our coding scheme. This we have done by employing five measures of the disruptive "intensity" of each event. Taken from the work of McAdam and Su (2002), these five variables are:

- *Number of participants* involved in the event
- *Injuries* attributed to the event
- *Deaths* attributed to the event
- *Arrests* attributed to the event
- *Property Damage* attributed to the event

In collecting and coding these data, our procedures were subject to intensive reliability and validity checks (see Sampson et al., 2005). Overall our inter-rater reliability for coding the constructs analyzed in this article was in the range of 90-93% agreement.

RESULTS

We have argued that a certain stylized conception of social movements is discernible in the scholarly literature on the topic. We identified four features that tend, in our view, to be equated with contemporary social movements:

- *Disruptive protest* in public settings
- Loosely coordinated *national* struggles over political issues
- *Urban* and/or campus based protest activities
- Claims-making by *disadvantaged minorities*

This list reproduces the one with which we opened the article, except that here we have italicized the specific dimensions of movement activity we intend to focus on in the remainder of this section. The central empirical question we take up here is whether time-series data on Chicago area protest activity from 1970 to2000 confirms the importance typically assigned to these dimensions by movement scholars. We begin with the strong conceptual link in the literature between disruption and movement activity.

Disruption as Emblematic of Movement Activity

For many social movement scholars, noninstitutionalized or disruptive protest action is the *sine qua non* of the form. Indeed, this association is reflected in the typical definitions of social movements given by leading scholars in the field. Dieter Rucht (1999: 207), for instance, defines a social movement as "an action system comprised of mobilized networks of individuals, groups, and organizations which, based on a shared collective identity, attempt to achieve or prevent social change, *predominantly by means of collective protest"* (emphasis added). Reflecting this preoccupation with disruptive protest, a number of studies have sought to assess the relationship between dimensions of disruption (e.g. injuries, arrests, property damage, violence) and the impact or outcomes of movement activity. In what proved to be the empirical centerpiece of his classic study of *The Strategy of Social Protest,* Gamson (1975 [1990]: ch. 5) demonstrated a positive relationship between movement violence and the acquisition of "new advantages" by "challenging groups." In their comparative city-level study of homeless mobilization, Cress and Snow (2000) include disruptive protest in their list of factors affecting the overall success of the movement. More recently, McAdam and Su (2002) sought to predict the pace and outcome of congressional voting on Vietnam War-related measures using Poisson regression models, featuring various measures of antiwar protest activity, including a number of proxies for the "disruptive intensity" of the event.

All of this conceptual and empirical attention to the issue of disruption and its effects has created a close association in the minds of most researchers between movements and extreme forms of protest. But is this close association warranted, especially in the more recent period, when movements have seemingly evolved into a quasi-institutionalized form of civic activity? Our results suggest a clear answer to the question. Table 1 reports the percentages of *protest* and *hybrid* events that featured any one of the following three disruptive dimensions: injuries, property damage, arrests. Findings are presented for each of the four years 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000—representing each of the four decades from the end of the 1960s to the turn of the millennium.

The results are stark. Only a very small number of the 995 protest events coded for these four years include any of the aforementioned disruptive features. For 1970-2000 in the aggregate, the most common form of disruption is arrest and yet it occurs in less than five percent of all events. Two percent or less feature injuries and property damage. As low as these percentages are, there is good reason to suspect that they still overstate the actual incidence of disruptive movement activity. We know, from prior research, that newspapers report only a fraction of all protest events in a given locale (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996). From these studies, we also know something about the factors that predict whether a movement event will make it into the paper. Not surprisingly, among the strongest predictors of newspaper coverage is disruption itself (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Oliver and Myers 1999; Snyder and Kelly 1977). That is, to the extent that an event features violence,

Table 1. Prevalence of Disruption in Chicago-Area Protest Events, 1970-2000 (Event-Level N in Parentheses)

	Year				
Disruption Type	*1970*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*Total*
Injuries	5.6% (14)	2.2% (2)	0.3% (1)	0.9% (3)	2.0% (20)
Property Damage	5.1% (13)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (2)	1.5% (15)
Arrests	11.1% (28)	5.5% (5)	2.3% (8)	2.2% (7)	4.8% (48)
Total	(252)	(87)	(342)	(314)	(995)

arrests, and the like, it is much more likely to be covered. Our nondisruptive protests should thus be regarded as an under-sample, which of course only serves to further reinforce the emerging pattern.

There is a second finding encoded in table 1 that also bears on the central concerns of this article. Besides comparing the stylized scholarly view of movements to the empirical reality, we are also interested in discerning *trends* along the various dimensions of movement activity stressed here. In fact, the two issues are very much related in our minds. Though we suspect the stylized view of movements has never matched all that well to the empirical reality of contention, we hypothesize that recent trends have only widened this gap. Table 1 confirms this impression. The percentage of events displaying any of our disruptive features is much higher in 1970 than for any of the later years. Over eleven percent of the events reported for 1970 involved arrests, as compared to less than three percent for 1990 and 2000. Nearly six percent of all events in 1970, but less than one percent in the later years, feature injuries. The suggestion is clear: to the extent that movement theory is largely based on studies of contention during the 1960s and early 1970s—an era in which violent or otherwise disruptive events, though still rare, occurred with some frequency—it may be inadequate to capture the more routinized, less disruptive forms of claim making characteristic of the recent period.

National Movements as the Dominant Form of Contention

A second feature of the movement literature that bears closer scrutiny is the locus and/or geographic scale of movement activity. National movements—that is, loosely coordinated struggles that are generally national in scope and orientation—tend to be the modal object of study for movement analysts. So, for example, for the U.S. we have extensive literatures on such national struggles as: African-American civil rights, women's, environmental, pro-choice, prolife, among others. Does the empirical attention accorded national movements match their actual proportion in the population of all contentious events? Table 2 reports results that bear on this question.

Table 2 reports the geographic, or jurisdictional, "frame of reference" of all protest and hybrid events for each decade year. By "frame of reference" we mean the general geographic unit—world, nation, state, city, neighborhood—to which those initiating the protest appear to be oriented. For each event we categorized the "frame" or purpose of the event that in most cases could be classified in terms of its geographical or substantive reach. Needless to say, the distribution of events across these geographic/jurisdictional units does not mirror the privilege of place most movement scholars have accorded national movements. A scant six percent of all such events were coded as "national" in their focus. Among the designated "frames of reference," "international" is the only one that commands fewer events than "national." In contrast to these "nationally" or "internationally" oriented events (e.g., a march against apar-

Table 2. Geographic Substantive Orientation of Chicago-Area Protest Events, 1970-2000 (Event-Level N in Parentheses)

	Year				
Frame of Event	*1970*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*Total*
International	10.3% (26)	3.4% (3)	3.8% (13)	1.6% (5)	4.7% (47)
National	5.2% (13)	10.3% (9)	5.0% (17)	5.4% (17)	5.6% (56)
State	9.1% (23)	11.5% (10)	16.7% (57)	19.7% (62)	15.3% (152)
City	31.7% (80)	36.8% (32)	21.9% (75)	39.8% (125)	31.4% (312)
Local/ Neighborhood	43.7% (110%)	37.9% (33)	52.6% (180)	33.4% (105)	43.0% (428)
Total	(252)	(87)	(342)	(314)	(995)

theid in South Africa), nearly three-quarters of the total were judged to be focused on "city" (e.g., rally to protest unequal distribution of city services) or "neighborhood" issues (e.g., a protest to demand a neighborhood school playground).

Table 3 adds substantive texture to our understanding of the predominantly local character of most movement activity. In the table, we provide an aggregate census of the general issues motivating all protest and hybrid events for the four decade years in question. Two local issues—local/city government policy and education—top the list, together accounting for better than a quarter of all movement events. Five other issues were implicated in at least fifty events (which, in turn, represents roughly five percent of all protests in our study). Four of these remaining issues—housing, transportation, community preservation, and NIMBY opposition to the siting of various facilities—were also local in nature. Environment was the lone national issue to generate more than fifty events over these four years, again underscoring the distorting quality of contemporary movement theory. In its privileging of national movements (and the recent attention accorded "transnational contention"), the social movement literature has obscured the overwhelming local character of most contentious politics.

Moreover, the trend data suggest that the issues motivating protest have, if anything grown more, rather than less, local over time. Table 4 reports the absolute number and percentage of protests in our four decade years that were associated with the nine issues that ranked in the top five in at least one of these four years. In 1970 two of the top five claims areas—"environment" and "African-American civil rights"—were associated with national movements. And the sixth ranked claim for that year, "peace," was also linked to the national antiwar movement. So three of the top six claims in 1970 were linked to national struggles. In the other three years, no more than one claim in the top five was national in focus. Once again, it appears that movement scholars have allowed the features of the new-left "protest cycle" to color their view of contention ever since.

Table 3. Partial List of Claims of Chicago Area Protest Events, 1970-2000

Claim Area	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Local/City Government	132	13.3	13.3
Education	125	12.6	25.9
Environment	92	9.2	35.1
NIMBY	53	5.4	40.5
Housing	52	5.3	45.8
Transportation	51	5.2	51.0
Community Preservation	50	5.1	56.1

Table 4. List of Claims in Chicago-Area Protest Events, 1970-2000

	1970			1980			1990			2000		
Protest Claim	*%*	*Rank*	*N*	*%*	*Rank*	*N*	*%*	*Rank*	*N*	*%*	*Rank*	*N*
Education	24	1	(37)	17	1	(2)	16	2	(42)	12	2	(30)
Housing	12	2	(19)	13	2	(9)	3	9	(8)	0	20	(1)
Environment	11	3	(17)	3	9	(2)	11	3	(28)	12	3	(29)
African-American Civil Rights	8	4	(13)	3	9	(2)	4	8	(10)	2	12	(4)
Local/City Government	8	4	(13)	7	5	(5)	25	1	(64)	18	1	(44)
Community Preservation	0	--	(0)	11	3	(8)	7	5	(17)	12	3	(29)
National Government	0	--	(0)	10	4	(7)	3	10	(7)	1	15	(2)
Transportation	4	7	(6)	1	13	(1)	7	4	(18)	9	6	(22)
NIMBY Issues	2	13	(3)	3	9	(2)	5	6	(14)	11	5	(26)

Table 5. Percentage of Protest/Hybrid Events in Chicago Area by Location, 1970-2000 (Event-Level N in Parentheses)

	Year				
Event Location	*1970*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*Total*
Suburbs	29.4% (74)	19.5% (17)	60.5% (207)	75.5% (237)	53.8% (535)
City of Chicago	54.8% 138	74.7% (65)	33.9% (116)	19.7% (62)	38.3% (381)
Not Mentioned	15.9% (40)	5.7% (5)	5.6% (19)	4.8% (15)	7.9% (79)
Total	(252)	(87)	(342)	(314)	(995)

Table 6. Rates Per 100,000 of Protest for Chicago and Suburbs, 1970-2000

A. Descriptive Statistics for Initiator Rates, Chicago Only

	Initiator Rates			
	1970	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Community N	77	77	77	77
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Maximum	74.12	31.15	83.65	18.31
Mean	3.18	.56	2.23	.65
S.D.	10.14	3.59	10.36	2.62

B. Descriptive Statistics for Initiator Rates for Suburbs Population 10,000 or Greater

	Initiator Rates			
	1970	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Community N	101	116	122	138
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Maximum	8.64	4.36	23.78	19.25
Mean	.79	.09	1.34	.75
S.D.	2.02	.56	3.53	2.31

The Urban Bias in Movement Studies

If movement researchers have privileged national struggles over more locally focused contention, they have also tended to represent movements as primarily urban and/or campus-based phenomena. This, of course, mirrors the settings in which most academics find themselves. But it remains an empirical question whether the preoccupation with urban and/or campus-based protest is actually warranted by the data. A related question concerns the trend in the locus of movement activity. That is, even if urban areas have seen the lion's share of protest in the past, is there any evidence that this is changing? In Table 5 we offer data that speaks to both of these questions.

Table 5 reports the percentage of protest/hybrid events that took place within Chicago and the surrounding suburban ring in 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000. Two findings strike us as significant. The first is the preponderance of suburban, as opposed to urban, contention. Excluding the 79 events for which location could not be determined, nearly 60 percent of all protest/hybrid events in these four years took place in the suburbs. The second finding of note concerns the trend over the three decades. In 1970, nearly two-thirds of the events occurred in metro Chicago. By 2000, less than 20 percent were located in the city. Some of this shift is, of course, attributable to population growth and decline in the Chicago Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). But even when we convert these absolute numbers into per capita protest rates, we quickly discover that population change alone cannot fully account for the

shifting locus of movement activity.

In table 6 we compare per capita rates of protest initiation for the city of Chicago (Panel A) and surrounding suburbs (Panel B) from 1970-2000. Not surprisingly, the normed rates for 1970 clearly favor urban areas over suburban, with the city rate some four times higher than the suburbs. Thus protest was primarily confined to the city in 1970 (and 1980 as well). By 1990, however, the urban/suburban gap had narrowed considerably. And by 2000, the rate was actually higher for the suburbs than Chicago.

In summary, the suburbanization of contention appears to be real. Indeed, given the increasingly routine, quasi-institutional character of contemporary movement activity, this trend should come as no real surprise. Protest (and its hybrid variant) has become part of the routine kit-bag of civic life. Indeed, the fact that "hybrid" events increase at a faster rate over our four time points than either "protest" or "civic" events underscores this point. As the movement form has migrated to the suburbs and been routinized over the past 30 years, the line between protest and civic has grown increasingly blurry. Unfortunately, movement scholars—still largely focused on the urban and campus-based movements of the 1960s and 1970s—have been slow to recognize and acknowledge this trend.

Disadvantaged Minorities as Principal Movement Actors

The final component of the stylized conception of social movements we consider concerns the general socioeconomic identity of those most often involved in protest activity. The explicit assumption in the social movement literature is that disadvantaged minorities are more apt to take advantage of this "alternative" form of politics than those whose favorable political and economic circumstances grant them routine access to institutionalized political channels. As McAdam argued in his formulation of "political process" theory:

> Social movements. . . are not a form of irrational behavior but rather a tactical response to the harsh realities of a closed and coercive political system. Viewed in this light, the distinction between movement behavior and institutionalized politics disappears. Both should be seen as rational attempts to pursue collective interests. Differences in behavior between movement participants and institutionalized political actors are attributable . . . to the different strategic problems confronting each. . . . Social movements [should be] seen as rational attempts by *excluded groups* to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized politics (1999: 20, 35, emphasis added).

The empirical questions are: (1) do various forms of "exclusion" or disadvantage, in fact, predict reliance on movement activity, and (2) has this relationship changed over time? We address these issues in table 7.

Before turning to these results, we take up a methodological issue critical both to the study as a whole and to our immediate concern with socioeconomic variation in protest activity. The issue concerns variable newspaper coverage of neighborhoods, especially as that variation is related to dimensions of disadvantage. For instance, one could imagine the *Tribune* doing a good job of covering protest in predominantly white or at the very least, middle class to affluent neighborhoods, while systematically undercounting similar events in, minority neighborhoods.

To assuage our concern we undertook a separate methodological project to code events from the *Chicago Defender*, the nation's (and thereby Chicago's) oldest African-American newspaper. We collected data from 1970 to 2000 to compare to that of the *Chicago Tribune* across all event types (protest, civic, and hybrid). Here we summarize the main finding that, much to our relief (and to a certain extent, surprise), broadly affirms use of the *Tribune* as a source of generally unbiased data on the neighborhood location of protest events.[1]

Table 7. Correlations of Selected Community Characteristics with Protest Rates Per 100,000 by Initiator Location: Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1970-2000

	Protest Initiator Location			
	1970	1980	1990	2000
Percent African American	.235**	.097	- .022	-.081
Percent Unemployed	.159**	.073	.004	-.113
Percent Below Poverty	.249**	.092	.037	-.046
Log of Median Income	.112	-.079	.017	.166*
Protest Event Location	.770**	.732**	.528**	.613**
N of Community Areas	(178)	(193)	(199)	(215)

*p<.05, **p<.01

The important result is that the correlation between the logged rates of events reported per month for each of our neighborhoods is very high across the two newspapers. For 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 the correlation coefficients are .843, .788, .851, and .664, respectively. Although a bit lower for 2000, the results for all decades are highly significant and impressive. The two papers do, indeed, seem to be reflecting the same general level of protest activity across neighborhoods and suburban areas. This does not mean the same events are appearing in both papers; but that matters little for our analysis. It is enough simply to know that the *general* distribution of events across neighborhoods is similar across the two papers.

Buoyed by these reassuring findings, we return to the issue of "disadvantage." Table 7 presents simple correlations between three traditional measures of concentrated disadvantage—percent black, percent poverty, and percent unemployed—and the initiator location of protest events in 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. We also examine an indicator of median income that taps the upper part of the distribution—in other words, concentrated advantage. The results apply to all of our Chicago metro and suburban community areas.[2] The findings tell a clear and interesting story. In 1970—at the close of the era that has most informed social movement scholarship—protest activity was, indeed, highly correlated with all three measures of disadvantage but not income. That is, protest was more likely to be initiated by those living in predominantly African-American neighborhoods, and/or in areas of high unemployment and high poverty rates. After 1970, however, all three variables ceased to be significant predictors of initiator location. Indeed, in 2000 all three variables were negatively related to the location of event initiators. What's more, while our income variable was unrelated to protest between 1970 and 1990, in 2000 it showed a significant positive relationship with initiator location. That is, higher income areas were more likely to initiate and sustain protest activity than were lower income neighborhoods. Providing another reassuring check on the quality of our data, the last row of coefficients also indicates the strong stability of the initiator-event correlation over time.

Clearly, the main picture is that the material correlates of protest have changed significantly over the course of the period in question. If socioeconomic disadvantage increased the likelihood of protest in 1970, the reverse is true today even though the relationship between protest event location and initiator location has remained stable. Consistent with the shift of protest from urban to suburban areas, socioeconomic advantage is now positively related to public protest activity.

CONCLUSION

Together the results presented here tell a clear and theoretically important story about the changing nature of movement activity in Chicago over the past thirty years, one that increasingly departs from the stylized image of protest activity conveyed by social movement schol-

arship. Protest, the literature suggests, is typically the province of disadvantaged minorities, living in urban areas, who rely on disruptive forms of action to overcome their traditional powerlessness in institutional politics. Though mounted locally these protests often combine into loosely coordinated national movements to secure broader rights for the group in question. In defense of movement scholars, this image of protest activity accords reasonably well with our data for 1970. In that year, protest activity in Chicago *was* more apt to be initiated by the poor, the nonwhite, and the excluded. Given these characteristics, it will come as no surprise that it was more often an urban, than suburban, phenomenon. And although disruption, threat, and violence were hardly the norm in 1970, these characteristics were far more common then than at any time thereafter. If our current understanding of social movements—and public protest in particular—still rests substantially on the pioneering scholarship focused on the movements of the sixties and early seventies, we should commend those scholars for having gotten it right. Their account of protest activity accords reasonably well with data for 1970.

Just as clearly, however, our data for 1980-2000 tell of a marked transformation of the movement form since 1970. These data lend empirical weight to those who have theorized about the "institutionalization" of protest and the rise of a "movement society" in the U.S. If the modal protest in 1970 was initiated by African-Americans living in relatively high poverty/low income areas, its counterpart in 2000 was organized by relatively well-off white suburbanites. The chance that the former protest would be marked by violence or arrests was dramatically higher than in the latter case. Indeed, by 2000, disruption had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to be a feature of public protest.

Our results, of course, only apply to Chicago and rest on decade endpoints alone. Is it possible that in other cities public protest has continued to look more like the Chicago-area norm for 1970 rather 2000? Or that the recent decade end points are not representative of the data for the intervening years? In future work we hope to address both of these possibilities, but we doubt whether data from other cities or other years in Chicago will fundamentally change the empirical picture sketched here. We are convinced that these data speak to a clear change in the movement form as manifest in the contemporary U.S. The bigger question is whether or not the change is consequential. That is, clarity aside, is there reason to think the change has, in some significant way(s), altered the role of social movements in American politics? A complete answer to this question is beyond the scope of this article, but we suspect the answer is "yes."

We close our article on an intentionally provocative note. We offer but a single concrete example of how our findings might be cited in support of the view that the role of social movements in the U.S. has changed significantly over the past few decades. The example concerns the almost total disappearance of "disruptive protest" after 1970. Needless to say, this statistical "fact" has implications well beyond the issue of whether or not social movement theory accurately reflects the empirical reality of contemporary social movements. If, as a number of studies suggest (Gamson 1990 [1975]; McAdam and Su 2002), the impact of movements often turns on their ability to generate bargaining leverage through disruption or the threat of same**,** then the "taming" of the form over the past two to three decades would seem to signal a clear decline in the effectiveness of movements as vehicles of social and political change. We do not pretend to have systematically assessed this conclusion. We offer it only as a reminder of what the analytic stakes are. Bottom line: it is incumbent on scholars to more thoroughly interrogate the changing nature of the social movement form in the U.S. and to assess the significance of these changes in light of social movement theory. Ours represent only the most preliminary steps in this direction.

NOTES

[1] For full discussion of the methodology and results comparing the *Tribune* and *Defender,* see Sampson et al., 2005.
[2] Measures of disadvantage in the U.S. census are decade-specific. We examine the logged rates per 100,000 in order to take into account the skewedness of the data, as the majority of communities did not yield any protest events. In order to assess the robustness of these correlations we reran all analyses by creating a dichotomous measure of whether a community produced a protest event (yes or no). Using logistic regression, the results replicated the patterns in table 7. These further results are available upon request.

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