II. Collective Behavior: Crowds and Riots

A. Classical Theory: Gustave Le Bon

1. “The Crowd” 1895

2. aristocratic and anti-democratic

3. reactionary: no institutions legitimate

a. violate natural order

b. values and norms

B. Assumptions

1. natural order: God given

2. natural elite should rule: French aristocracy

3. Model: the crowd of the French revolution

4. All crowds are masses, including juries and legislative bodies

5. Crowds are pathological

C. Argument

1 crowds are shaped by “the law of mental unity”

a. people gather in highly emotional state

b. influenced by each other

c. act like a herd of animals stampeding: homogenous entity

2. characteristics

a. inferior races

b. feminine characteristics: emotional, irrational, impulsive

c. actions: disruptive, and inevitably violent

3. members/characteristics

a. scum and rabble

b. lack of individual will

c. lack of reason

d. lack of judgment

e. stupid, suggestibility, impulsive, barbaric

3. cause

a. social change

i. industrialization iii. Mass society

ii. capitalism

b. new ideas: “Enlightenment”

i. considered a craze

ii. challenged “The Great Chain of Being”

society and institutions God given and

not subject to change

authority: The Church

Hierarchy: King and divine right

iii. affirmed

democracy:

people as soveriegn

govern themselves

reason and science were organizing principles

for social institution

iv. craze becomes ideology of Revolution and basis

of Western democracy

c. demagogues : Robespierre, Marat, Danton

d. occasions: weak king Louis XVI

9. Reality: Crowd and the French Revolution

a. bread riots: widespread hunger, but food available

b. Bastille: organized ans sustained project of tearing it down

c. force king to leave Versailles: poor and working class

d. kill prisoners: artisans and shopkeepers

e. National Assembly

f. Reign of Terror: highly organized

i. under martial law

ii. at war

iii.. used fear: enemies within, and without

10. Not very empirical

a. one crowd and it was many

b. ignored:

i. crowds celebrating coronations of elite

ii. crowds celebrating wedding Louis XVI and

Marie Antoinette

11. Missed insight: fear and collective behavior

a. political leaders

b. justify behavior by fear-mongering

c. collective behavior, not violence and destructive, but

i. passive and obedient ii. unquestioned acceptance

III. Collective Behavior: Contagion Theory

A. Gustave Tarde (1843-1904), Robert Park (1864-1944)

B. Assumption:

1. pluralist theory of power

a. no concentration of power

b. power is fluid, different groups at different times

c. democratic institutions provide venues for legitimate social action: electoral process, political groups including parties

d. coalitions form, break up, reform differently

2. Crowd is irrational and ultimately pathological

3. crowd acts in unified way:

E. Theory

1. medical model: disease analogy

2. social strain is initial cause:

a. industrialization: farm to factories

b. urbanization: rural to urban

c. mass society: gemeinshcaft to geselleshaft

3. reaction individuals experience: anomie, alienation, anxiety

4. crowds composed of those more alienated and anxious

4. they become

a. irrationality

b. heightened emotions

c. excitability

4. person or groups of persons “infect” others with mood of excitement

5. infection turns crowd into herd, act as one.

6. herd: disruptive, and irrational, not purposeful

7. Psychological: Acting Out

F. Blumer: Circular Reaction (A variation)

1. Herbert Blumer:

2. Assumptions: the same as Contagion

3. argument:

a. social strain causes problems for individuals

b.. like minded gather and interact

i. milling: moving about among others in aimless and random fashion

ii. collective excitement: symbolic cues

iii. social contagion: circular reaction that

heightens excitement

c. creates: restless crowd: that needs to act

d. action

i. irrational

ii. no purposeful activity

E. Classical theory: summary

1. Common ideas

a. DEVIANT: psychology of the mob

lynch mob)

b. CAUSE: social stress, social strain, breakdown

i. urbanization ii. industrialization

iii. mass society

c. EFFECT: psychic trauma: anxiety, discontent, and alienation

d. shared psychological state leads to collective action

e. collective action is psychological: “ACTING OUT”

i. interchangeable with riots, cults, crazes

ii. psychological not political

social strain--------- ambiguity, alienation, anomie----------collective action

F. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM:

1. Battle in Seattle

a. CNN:

i. WTO represents social change

i. no other reason

b. participants: “old hippies”, anarchist Ninjas, people dressed as Sea turtles

c. frustrated, acting out, no real political purpose

d. who was there? And how did they behave?

2. Conventional wisdom/classical theory vs empirical studies

a. homogenous diverse behavior

diversity of participants

b. destructive most crowds not destructive

conventional behavior

c. alienated less so

d. dregs not necessarily

e. social strain all the time