I. Mass Protest Theory

A. Theorists: Frances Piven and Richard Cloward

B. *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How the Fail*

C. Assumptions

1. Power

a. ruling class or elite

i. controls means of production

ii. controls means of physical coercion

b. most important: control life of people

i. beliefs, ideas, and norms, right and wrong, possible and impossible

ii. routinization: control “everyday life”

iii. rituals of reinforcement

2. Power in America

a. ruling class is political and economic class

i. not homogenous

ii. various groups (sometimes with competing interests)

b. made invisible by electoral process

i. belief in pluralism

ii. in popular power through voting

iii. ruling class controls political system

c. “lower classes” have little or no power

i. excluded from political power

ii. excluded from economic power

iii. class consciousness is fatalism

3. “lower classes” in America

a. only power is to protest

b. possibility and limits determined by historical circumstances

D. Emergence of Protest

1. severe social strain

a. social change/event: “pressures that force eruptions”

b. event undermines normal functioning of institutions: “ breakdown in regulatory capacity”

c. Depression, economic transformation, war

2. social dislocation

a. breakdown in routinization

b. large number of individuals no longer able to “walk through the day.”

c. disruptions in 1930s-1960s

3. transformation of consciousness (cognitive liberation)

a. crisis reveals injustice of system: the normal, the routine is violence

b. end of fatalism

c. possibility of change

4. breakdown in elite control

a. harmony within elite is disrupted

b. elite temporarily unable to function

5. people become defiant engage in protests (riots, strikes, boycotts, sit ins)

E. Forms of protest

1. determined by social location of poor: concrete situation

2. daily experience shapes: grievance, demands, and targets

3. institutional roles determine and limit strategic opportunities for disruption

a. workers: production,

i. 1932 150,000 miners on strike in S. Illinois

ii. by 1934 1,500,000 workers involved in strikes

iii. 4,740 strikes in 1936

iv. 1938 2 million workers in strike

v. sitdown strikes, walkout strkes

vi. successes: shorter hours, higher wages, Wagner Act

v. “the end”: union organization, official procedures

b. unemployed workers (Depression +9 million in two years, Chicago 40% unemployed)

i. “looting” for food

ii. violent protests in major cities

Detroit 50,000 protesters

Cleveland, Milwaukee, Boston

iii. rent riots

iv. occupy relief offices

v. successes: end to evictions, relief to unemployed,

federal assistance, Civilian Conservation Corp, Federal Emergency Relief Act

v. “the end” bureaucratization, formal procedures, change through political system

F. Response to Protest

1. ignore

2. violence

3. conciliation

a. some concessions

b. channel movement into political system

c. undermine sympathy

G. Success/Failure of protests

1. success is early with mass disruptions of central institutions.

2. formal movement organizations lead to cooptation

3. after the protest ends