process, of letters to *The Times*, to stop a series of especially brutal acts against the Vietnamese and against our own sons. Even the protests and demonstrations of the past few years have only brought small steps towards stopping the war. When people like Dr. Spock and Rev. Coffin engaged in rather mild acts of dissent, on the border of civil disobedience, they were prosecuted and convicted by a judge who spoke of "anarchy."

That judge and others who would bar acts of civil disobedience forget that democracy, historically, has always been criticized for its inclination to anarchy. They might do well to listen to Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* on this issue. He pointed out that privileged groups in society always "identify the particular organization or society, of which they are the beneficiaries, with the peace and order of society in general and to appoint themselves the apostles of law and order." His words, written in 1932, fit today:

> Since every society has an instinctive desire for harmony and avoidance of strife, this is a very potent instrument of maintaining the unjust status quo. No society has ever achieved peace without incorporating injustice into its harmony. Those who would eliminate the injustice are therefore always placed at the moral disadvantage of imperiling its peace. The privileged groups will place them under that moral disadvantage even if the efforts toward justice are made in the most pacific terms. They will claim that it is dangerous to disturb a precarious equilibrium and will feign to fear anarchy as the consequence of the effort. . . . So persistent is the cry of peace among the ruling classes and so strong the seeming abhorrence of every form of violence and anarchy that one might imagine them actuated by the purest pacifist principles, were it not for the fact that they betray no pacifist scruples when they consider international affairs.[1]

The great danger for American democracy is

[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), pp. 129–139.

rebels—as the chief problem. Its fulfillment re- ness, to join the protest.

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Elitist and Pluralist Theories

3 THE IRONY OF DEMOCRACY

Thomas R. Dye and L. Harmon Zeigler

Dye and Zeigler suggest that elites are necessary to maintain American democracy. Elites comprise the educationally, socially, and economically advantaged groups in society. They are the leadership corps responsible for preserving government by the people. In contrast, the masses have a relatively weak commitment to democratic values. Self-government and popular participation do not occur spontaneously but require motivation by elites. Most people are not interested in public life, vote infrequently, and are not concerned with policy issues. The authors also define "pluralism" as "a system of multiple, competing elites who determine public policy," by bargaining, negotiation, and accommodation of competing objectives. They also consider mass and elite threats to democracy. The masses may tend toward "left" or "right" extremist movements led by demagogues who promote communism or fascism. Extremists reject democratic values in seeking to correct serious economic or political problems. They argue that "the ends justify the means." The overthrow of existing political regimes considered oppressive may lead to equally repressive dictatorships which deny political liberties. Elite threats to democracy may also reduce liberty and freedom by imposing police or military forces as instruments of "law and order" or "national security" in the face of mass threats. Many questions are left unanswered by this essay: Are self-restraints by elites a sufficient protection to maintain democratic values? Can we always depend on elites to recognize the existence of public problems that they will respond to? Or, do elites cause as many problems as they solve? And, what about the double standards in treating different groups in society, such as those discussed by Zinn in the preceding article?

Elites, not masses, govern America. In an industrial, scientific, and nuclear age, life in a democracy, just as in totalitarian society, is shaped by a handful of men. In spite of differences in their approach to the study of power in America, scholars—political scientists and sociologists alike—agree that "the key political, economic, and social decisions are made by 'tiny minorities.' "[1]

An *elite* is the few who have power; the *masses* are the many who do not. Power is deciding who gets what, when, and how; it is participation in the decisions that allocate values for a society. Elites are the few who participate in the decisions that shape our lives; the masses are the many whose lives are shaped by institutions, events, and leaders over which they have little direct control. Harold Lasswell writes, "the division of society into elite and mass is universal," and even in a democracy "a few exercise a relatively great weight of power, and the many exercise comparatively little."[2]

Elites are not necessarily conspiracies to oppress or exploit the masses. On the contrary, elites may be very "public-regarding" and deeply concerned with the welfare of the masses. Membership in an elite may be relatively open to ambitious and talented individuals from the masses, or it may be closed to all except top corporate, financial, military, civic, and governmental leaders. Elites may be competitive or consensual; they may agree or disagree over the direction of foreign and domestic policy. Elites may form a pyramid, with a top group exercising power in many sectors of the society; or plural elites may divide power, with separate groups making key decisions in different issue areas. Elites may be responsive to the demands of the masses and influenced by the outcome of elections, or they may be unresponsive to mass movements and unaffected by elections. But whether elites are public-minded or self seeking, open or closed, competitive or consensual, pyramidal or pluralistic, responsive or unresponsive, it is elites and not the masses who govern the modern nation.

Democracy is government "by the people," but the responsibility for the survival of democracy rests on the shoulders of elites. This is the irony of democracy: Elites must govern wisely if government "by the people" is to survive. If the survival of the American system depended upon an active, informed, and enlightened citizenry, then democracy in America would have disappeared long ago; for the masses of America are apathetic and ill-informed about politics and public policy, and they have a surprisingly weak commitment to democratic values—individual dignity, equality of opportunity, the right to dissent, freedom of speech and press, religious toleration, due process of law. But fortunately for these values and for American democracy, the American masses do not lead, they follow. They respond to the attitudes, proposals, and behavior of elites. V. O. Key wrote:

> The critical element for the health of the democratic order consists of the beliefs, standards, and competence of those who constitute the influentials, the political activists, in the order. That group, as has been made plain, refuses to define itself with great clarity in the American system; yet analysis after analysis points to its existence. If democracy tends toward indecision, decay, and disaster, the responsibility rests here, not with the mass of people.[3]

Although the symbols of American politics are drawn from democratic political thought, the reality of American politics can often be better understood from the viewpoint of *elite theory*. The questions posed by elite theory are the vital questions of politics: Who governs America? What are the roles of elites and masses in American politics? How do people acquire power? What is the relationship between economic and political power? How open and accessible are American elites? How do American elites change over time? How widely is power shared in America? How much real competition takes place among elites? What is the basis of elite consensus? How do elites and masses differ? How responsive are elites to mass sentiments? How much influence do masses have over policies decided by elites? How do elites accommodate themselves to mass movements?

This book, *The Irony of Democracy*, is an attempt to explain American political life on the basis of elite theory. It attempts systematically to organize the evidence of American history and contemporary social science in order to come to grips with the central questions posed by elite theory. But before we turn to this examination of American political life, it is important that we understand the meaning of *elitism*, *democracy*, and *pluralism*.

THE MEANING OF ELITISM

The central proposition of elitism is that all societies are divided into two classes—the few who govern and the many who are governed. The Italian political scientist Gaetano Mosca expressed this basic concept as follows:

> In all societies—from societies that are very underdeveloped and have largely attained the dawnings of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all of the political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent.[4]

For Mosca it was inevitable that elites and not masses would govern all societies, because elites possess organization and unity of purpose.

> An organized minority, obeying a single impulse, is irresistible against an unorganized majority in which each individual stands alone before the totality of the organized minority. A hundred men acting uniformly in concert, with a common understanding, will triumph over a thousand men who are not in accord and can be dealt with one by one.[5]

Contemporary writers generally attribute elitism to the impact of urbanization, industrialization, technological development, and the growth of the social, economic, and political organizations in modern societies. Robert Dahl writes, "The key political, economic, and social decisions . . . are made by tiny minorities. . . . It is difficult—nay impossible—to see how it could be otherwise in large political systems."[6] Sociologist Suzanne Keller writes, "The democratic ethos notwithstanding, men must become accustomed to bigger, more extensive and more specialized elites in their midst as long as industrial societies keep growing and becoming more specialized."[7] And according to Harold Lasswell, "The discovery that in all large-scale societies the decisions at any given time are typically in the hands of a small number of people" confirms a basic fact: "Government is always government by the few, whether in the name of the few, the one, or the many."[8]

Elitism also asserts that the few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites possess more control over resources—power, wealth, education, prestige, status, skills of leadership, information, knowledge of political processes, ability to communicate, and organization—and elites (in America) are drawn disproportionately from among wealthy, educated, prestigiously employed, socially prominent, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant groups in society. In short, elites are drawn from a society's upper classes, which are made up of those persons in a society who own or control a disproportionate share of the societal institutions—industry, commerce, finance, education, the military, communications, civic affairs, and law.

On the other hand, elite theory admits of some social mobility that enables non-elites to become elites; elitism does not necessarily mean that individuals from the lower classes cannot rise to the top. In fact, a certain amount of "circulation of elites" (upward mobility) is essential for the stability of the elite system. Openness in the elite system siphons off potentially revolutionary leadership from the lower classes, and an elite system is strengthened when talented and

ambitious individuals from the masses are permitted to enter governing circles. However, it is important that the movement of individuals from non-elite to elite positions be a slow and continuous assimilation rather than a rapid or revolutionary change. Moreover, only those non-elites who have demonstrated their commitment to the elite system itself and to the system's political and economic values can be admitted to the ruling class.

Elites share in a *consensus* about fundamental norms underlying the social system. They agree on the basic "rules of the game," as well as on the continuation of the social system itself. The stability of the system, and even its survival, depends upon this consensus. According to David Truman, "Being more influential, they (the elites) are privileged; and being privileged, they have, with few exceptions, a special stake in the continuation of the system in which their privileges rest."[9] Elite consensus does not mean that elite members never disagree or never compete with each other for preeminence; it is unlikely that there ever was a society in which there was no competition among elites. But elitism implies that competition takes place within a very narrow range of issues and that elites agree on more matters than they disagree on. Disagreement usually occurs over *means*, rather than *ends*.

In America, the bases of elite consensus are the sanctity of private property, limited government, and individual liberty. Richard Hofstadter writes about American elite struggles:

> The fierceness of political struggles has often been misleading; for the range of vision embodied by the primary contestants in the major parties has always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man.[10]

Hofstadter's analysis of consensus among leaders in American history echoes a central principle of elitism.

Elitism implies that public policy does not reflect demands of "the people" so much as it reflects the interests and values of elites. Changes and innovations in public policy come about as a result of redefinitions by elites of their own values. However, the general conservatism of elites—that is, their interest in preserving the system—means that changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary. Public policies are frequently modified but seldom replaced.

Basic changes in the nature of the political system occur when events threaten the system. Elites, acting on the basis of enlightened self-interest, institute reforms to preserve the system and their place in it. Their motives are not necessarily self-serving; the values of elites may be very "public-regarding," and the welfare of the masses may be an important element in elite decision making. Elitism does not mean that public policy will ignore or be against the welfare of the masses but only that the responsibility for the mass welfare rests upon the shoulders of elites, not upon the masses.

Finally, elitism assumes that the masses are largely passive, apathetic, and ill-informed. Mass sentiments are manipulated by elites more often than elite values are influenced by the sentiments of the masses. For the most part, communication between elites and masses flows downward. Policy questions of government are seldom decided by the masses through elections or through the presentation of policy alternatives by political parties. For the most part, these "democratic" institutions—elections and parties—are important only for their symbolic value. They help tie the masses to the political system by giving them a role to play on election day and a political party with which they can identify. Elitism contends that the masses have at best only an indirect influence over the decision-making behavior of elites.

Naturally, elitism is frequently misunderstood in America, because the prevailing myths and symbols of the American system are drawn from democratic theory rather than elite theory. Therefore, it is important here to emphasize what elitism is *not*, as well as to briefly restate what it *is*.

Elitism does not mean that those who have power are continually locked in conflict with the masses or that powerholders always achieve their goals at the expense of the public interest. Elitism is not a conspiracy to oppress the masses. Elitism does not imply that powerholders constitute a single impenetrable monolithic body or that powerholders in society always agree on public issues. Elitism does not pretend that power in society does not shift over time or that new elites cannot emerge to compete with old elites. Elites may be more or less monolithic and cohesive or more or less pluralistic and competitive. Power need not rest exclusively on the control of economic resources but may rest instead upon other leadership resources—organization, communication, or information. Elitism does not imply that the masses *never* have any impact on the attitudes of elites but only that elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

Elitism can be summarized as follows:

1. Society is divided into the few who have power and the many who do not. Only a small number of persons allocate values for society; the masses do not decide public policy.
2. The few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society.
3. The movement of non-elites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only non-elites who have accepted the basic elite consensus can be admitted to governing circles.
4. Elites share a consensus on the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system. Disagreement is confined to a narrow range of issues.
5. Public policy does not reflect demands of masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
6. Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses. Elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that affect one's life. John Dewey wrote, "The keynote of democracy as a way of life may be expressed as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together."[11] In other words, democracy means popular participation in the allocation of values in a society.

In traditional democratic theory, popular participation has been valued as an opportunity for individual self-development: Responsibility for the governing of one's own conduct develops one's character, self-reliance, intelligence, and moral judgment—in short, one's dignity. Even if a benevolent despot could govern in the public interest, he would be rejected by the classic democrat. The English political philosopher J. S. Mill asks, "What sort of human beings can be formed under such a regime? What development can either their thinking or active faculties attain under it?" The argument for citizen participation in public affairs is based not upon the policy outcomes it would produce but on the belief that such involvement is essential to the full development of human capacities. Mill argues that man can know truth only by discovering it for himself.[12]

Procedurally, popular participation was to be achieved through majority rule and respect for the rights of minorities. Self-development means self-government, and self-government can be accomplished only by encouraging each individual to contribute to the development of public policy and by resolving conflicts over public policy through majority rule. Minorities who have had the opportunity to influence policy but

whose views have not succeeded in winning majority support would accept the decisions of majorities. In return, majorities would permit minorities to openly attempt to win majority support for their views. Freedom of speech and press, freedom to dissent, and freedom to form opposition parties and organizations are essential to insure meaningful individual participation. This freedom of expression is also necessary for ascertaining what the majority views really are.

The procedural requirements and the underlying ethics of democracy are linked. Carl Becker writes about democracy:

> Its fundamental assumption is the worth and dignity and creative capacity of the individual, so that the chief aim of government is the maximum of individual self-direction, the chief means to that end, the minimum of compulsion by the state. . . . Means and ends are conjoined in the concept of freedom: freedom of thought so that the truth may prevail; freedom of occupation, so that careers may be open to talent; freedom of self-government, so that none may be compelled against his will.[13]

The underlying value of democracy is, as we have noted, individual dignity. Man, by virtue of his existence, is entitled to life, liberty, and property. A "natural law," or moral tenet, guarantees to every man both liberty and the right to property; and this natural law is morally superior to man-made law. John Locke, the English political philosopher whose writings most influenced America's founding elites, argues that even in a "state of nature"—that is, a world in which there were no governments—an individual possesses inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke meant that these rights were antecedent to government, that these rights are not given to the individual by governments, and that no governments may legitimately take them away.[14]

Locke believed that the very purpose of government was to protect individual liberty. Men form a "social contract" with each other in establishing a government to help protect their rights; they tacitly agree to accept governmental activity in order to better protect life, liberty, and property. Implicit in the social contract and the democratic notion of freedom is the belief that governmental activity and social control over the individual be kept to a minimum. This involves the removal of as many external restrictions, controls, and regulations on the individual as is consistent with the freedom of his fellow citizens.

Moreover, since government is formed by the consent of the governed to protect individual liberty, it logically follows that government cannot violate the rights it was established to protect. Its authority is limited. Locke's ultimate weapon to protect individual dignity against abuse by government was the right of revolution. According to Locke, whenever governments violate the natural rights of the governed, they forfeit the authority placed in them under the social contract.

Another vital aspect of classic democracy is a belief in the equality of all men. The Declaration of Independence expresses the conviction that "all men are created equal." Even the Founding Fathers believed in equality for all men *before the law*, notwithstanding the circumstances of the accused. A man was not to be judged by social position, economic class, creed, or race. Many early democrats also believed in *political equality*—equal access of individuals to political influence, that is, equal opportunity to influence public policy. Political equality is expressed in the concept of "one man, one vote."

Over time, the notion of equality has also come to include *equality of opportunity* in all aspects of American life—social, educational, and economic, as well as political. Roland Pennock writes:

> The objective of equality is not merely the recognition of a certain dignity of the human being as such, but it is also to provide him with the opportunity—equal to that guaranteed to others—for protecting and advancing his interests and developing his powers and personality.[15]

Thus, the notion of equality of opportunity has been extended beyond political life to encompass equality of opportunity in education, employment, housing, recreation, and public accommodations. Each person has an equal opportunity to develop his individual capacities to their natural limits.

It is important to remember, however, that the traditional democratic creed has always stressed *equality of opportunity* to education, wealth, and status and not *absolute equality*. Thomas Jefferson recognized a "natural aristocracy" of talent, ambition, and industry, and liberal democrats since Jefferson have always accepted inequalities that are a product of individual merit and hard work. Absolute equality, or "leveling," is not a part of liberal democratic theory.

In summary, democratic thinking involves the following ideas:

1. popular participation in the decisions that shape the lives of individuals in a society;
2. government by majority rule, with recognition of the rights of minorities to try to become majorities. These rights include the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and petition and the freedom to dissent, to form opposition parties, and to run for public office;
3. a commitment to individual dignity and the preservation of the liberal values of life, liberty, and property;
4. a commitment to equal opportunity for all men to develop their individual capacities.

THE MEANING OF PLURALISM

Despite political rhetoric in America concerning citizen participation in decision making, majority rule, our protection of minorities, individual rights, and equality of opportunity, no scholar or commentator, however optimistic about life in this country, would contend that these conditions have been fully realized in the American political system. No one contends that citizens participate in *all* the decisions which shape their lives, or that majority preferences *always* prevail. Nor do they argue that the rights of minorities are *always* protected, or that the values of life, liberty, and property are *never* sacrificed, or that *every* American has an equal opportunity to influence public policy.

However, modern *pluralism* seeks to reaffirm the democratic character of American society by asserting that:

1. Although citizens do not directly participate in decision making, their many leaders do make decisions through a process of bargaining, accommodation, and compromise.
2. There is competition among leadership groups which helps to protect the interests of individuals. Countervailing centers of power—for example, competition between business leaders, labor leaders, and governmental leaders—can check each other and keep each interest from abusing its power and oppressing the individual.
3. Individuals can influence public policy by choosing between competing elites in elections. Elections and parties allow individuals to hold leaders accountable for their action.
4. While individuals do not participate directly in decision making, they can join organized groups and make their influence felt through their participation in these organizations.
5. Leadership groups are not closed; new groups can be formed and gain access to the political system.
6. Although political influence in society is unequal, power is widely dispersed. Frequently, access to decision making is based on the level of interest people have in a particular decision, and because leadership is fluid and mobile, power depends upon one's interest in public affairs, skills in leadership, information about issues, knowledge of democratic processes, and skill in organization and public relations.
7. There are multiple leadership groups within society. Those who exercise power in one kind of decision do not necessarily exercise power in others. No single elite dominates decision making in all issue areas.

8. Public policy is not necessarily majority preference, but it is an equilibrium of interest interaction. Such equilibrium is the approximate balance of competing interest group influences and is therefore a reasonable approximation of society's preferences.

Pluralism, then, is the belief that democratic values can be preserved in a system of multiple, competing elites who determine public policy through a process of bargaining and compromise, in which voters exercise meaningful choices in elections and new elites can gain access to power.

But pluralism, even if it accurately describes American society, is *not* the equivalent of democracy. Let us explain why. First of all, the pluralist notion of decision making by elite interaction is not the same as the democratic ideal of direct *individual* participation in decision making. Pluralists recognize that mass participation in decision making is not possible in a complex, urban, industrial society and that decision making must be accomplished through elite interaction, rather than individual participation. But a central value of classical democratic politics is *individual* participation in decision making. In modern pluralism, however, individual participation has given way to interaction—bargaining, accommodation, and compromise—between leaders of institutions and organizations in society. Individuals are represented in the political system only insofar as they are members of institutions or organizations whose leaders participate in policy making. Government is held responsible not by individual citizens but by leaders of institutions, organized interest groups, and political parties. The principal actors are leaders of corporations and financial institutions, elected and appointed government officials, the top ranks of military and governmental bureaucracies, and leaders of large organizations in labor, agriculture, and the professions.

Yet, decision making by elite interaction, whether it succeeds in protecting the individual or not, fails to contribute to individual growth and development. In this regard, modern pluralism diverges sharply from classic democracy, which emphasizes as a primary value the personal development that would result from the individual's actively participating in decisions that affect his life.

Pluralism stresses the fragmentation of power in society and the influence of public opinion and elections on the behavior of elites. But this fragmentation of power is not identical with the democratic ideal of political equality. Who rules, in the pluralist view of America? According to political scientist Aaron Wildavsky, "different small groups of interested and active citizens in different issue areas with some overlap, if any, by public officials, and occasional intervention by a larger number of people at the polls."[10] This is not government by the people. While citizen influence can be felt through leaders who anticipate the reaction of citizens, decision making is still in the hands of the leaders—the elites. According to the pluralists, multiple elites decide public policy in America, each in their own area of interest.

Traditional democratic theory envisions public policy as a rational choice of individuals with equal influence, who evaluate their needs and reach a decision with due regard for the rights of others. This traditional theory does not view public policy as a product of elite interaction or interest group pressures. In fact, interest groups and even political parties were viewed by classical democratic theorists as intruders into an individualistic brand of citizenship and politics.

There are several other problems in accepting pluralism as the legitimate heir to classical democratic theory. First of all, can pluralism assure that membership in organizations and institutions is really an effective form of individual participation in policy making? Robert Presthus argues that the organizations and institutions on which pluralists rely "become oligarchic and restrictive insofar as they monopolize access to government power and limit individual participation."[11] Henry Kariel writes, "The voluntary organization or associations which the early theorists of pluralism relied upon to sustain the individual against a unified omnipotent government, have themselves become oligarchically governed hierarchies."[12] The individual may provide the numerical base for organizations, but what influence does he have upon the leadership? Rarely do corporations, unions, armies, churches, government bureaucracies, or professional associations have any *internal* mechanisms of democracy. They are usually run by a small elite of officers and activists. Leaders of corporations, banks, labor unions, churches, universities, medical associations, and bar associations remain in control year after year. Only a small number of people attend meetings, vote in organizational elections, or make their influence felt within their organization. The pluralists offer no evidence that the giant organizations and institutions in American life really represent the views or interests of their individual members.

Also, can pluralism really assume that the dignity of the individual is being protected by elite competition? Since pluralism contends that different groups of leaders make decisions in *different* issue areas, why should we assume that these leaders compete with each other? It seems more likely that each group of leaders would consent to allow other groups of leaders to govern their own spheres of influence without interference. Accommodation, rather than competition, may be the prevailing style of elite interaction.

Pluralism answers with the hope that the power of diverse institutions and organizations in society will roughly balance out and that the emergence of power monopoly is unlikely. Pluralism (like its distant cousin, the economics of Adam Smith) assures us that no interests can ever emerge the complete victor in political competition. Yet inequality of power among institutions and organizations is commonplace. Examples of narrow, organized interests achieving their goals at the expense of the broader but unorganized public are quite common. Furthermore, it is usually producer interests, bound together by economic ties, which turn out to dominate less organized consumer groups and groups based upon non-economic interests. The pluralists offer no evidence that political competition can prevent monopoly or oligopoly in political power, any more than economic competition could prevent monopoly or oligopoly in economic power.

Finally, pluralism must contend with the problem of how private non-governmental elites can be held accountable to the people. Even if the people can hold governmental elites accountable through elections, how can corporation elites, union leaders, and other kinds of private leadership be held accountable? Pluralism usually dodges this important question by focusing primary attention on *public* decision making involving governmental elites and by largely ignoring *private* decision making involving non-governmental elites. Pluralists focus on rules and orders which are enforced by *governments*, but certainly men's lives are vitally affected by decisions made by private institutions and organizations—corporations, banks, universities, medical associations, newspapers, and so on. In an ideal democracy, individuals would participate in *all* decisions which significantly affect their lives; but pluralism largely excludes individuals from participation in many vital decisions by claiming that these decisions are "private" in nature and not subject to public accountability.

In summary, the pluralism diverges from classical democratic theory in the following respects:

1. Decisions are made by elite interaction—bargaining, accommodation, compromise—rather than by direct individual participation.
2. Key political actors are leaders of institutions and organizations rather than individual citizens.
3. Power is fragmented, but inequality of political influence among powerholders is common.
4. Power is distributed among governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations, but these institutions and organizations

are generally governed by oligarchies, rather than by their members in democratic fashion.

5. Institutions and organizations divide power and presumably compete among themselves, but there is no certainty that this competition guarantees political equality or protects individual dignity.
6. *Governmental* elites are presumed to be accountable to the masses through elections, but many important decisions affecting the lives of individuals are made by *private* elites, who are not directly accountable to the masses.

Frequently confusion arises in distinguishing *pluralism* from *elitism*. Pluralists *say* that the system they describe is a reaffirmation of democratic theory in a modern, urban, industrial society. They offer pluralism as "a practical solution" to the problem of achieving democratic ideals in a large complex social system where direct individual participation and decision making is simply not possible. But many critics of pluralism assert that it is a covert form of elitism—that pluralists are closer to the elitist position than to the democratic tradition they revere. Thus Peter Bachrach describes pluralism as "democratic elitism":

> Until quite recently democratic and elite theories were regarded as distinct and conflicting. While in their pure form they are still regarded as contradictory, there is, I believe, a strong if not dominant trend in contemporary political thought incorporating major elitist principles within democratic theory. As a result there is a new theory which I have called democratic elitism.[19]

MASS THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

Democratic theory assumes that liberal values —individual dignity, equality of opportunity, the right of dissent, freedom of speech and press, religious toleration, and due process of law—are best protected by the expansion and growth of mass political participation. Historically, the masses and not elites were considered the guardians of liberty. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the threat of tyranny arose from corrupt monarchies and decadent churches. But in the twentieth century, it has been the masses who have been most susceptible to the appeals of totalitarianism.

It is the irony of democracy in America that elites, not masses are most committed to democratic values. Despite a superficial commitment to the symbols of democracy, the American people have a surprisingly weak commitment to individual liberty, toleration of diversity, or freedom of expression for those who would challenge the existing order. Social science research reveals that the common man is not attached to the causes of liberty, fraternity, or equality. On the contrary, support for free speech and press, for freedom of dissent, and for equality of opportunity for all is associated with high educational levels, prestigious occupations, and high social status. Authoritarianism is stronger among the working classes in America than among the middle and upper classes. Democracy would not survive if it depended upon support for democratic values among the masses in America.

Democratic values have survived because elites, not masses, govern. Elites in America—leaders in government, industry, education, and civic affairs; the well-educated, prestigiously employed, and politically active—give greater support to basic democratic values and "rules of the game" than do the masses. And it is because masses in America respond to the ideas and actions of democratically minded elites that liberal values are preserved. In summarizing the findings of social science research regarding mass behavior in American democracy, political scientist Peter Bachrach writes:

> A widespread public commitment to the fundamental norms underlying the democratic process was regarded by classical democratic theorists as essential to the survival of democracy . . . today social scientists tend to reject this position. They do so not only because of their limited confidence in the commitment of non-elites to freedom, but also because of the growing awareness that non-elites are, in large part, politically activated by elites. The empirical finding that mass behavior is generally in response to the attitudes, proposals and modes of action of political elites gives added support to the position that responsibility for maintaining "the rules of the game" rests not on the shoulders of the people but on those of the elites.[20]

In short, it is the common man, not the elite, who is most likely to be swayed by anti-democratic ideology; and it is the elite, not the common man, who is the chief guardian of democratic values.

Elites must be insulated from the anti-democratic tendencies of the masses if they are to fulfill their role as guardians of liberty and property. Too much mass influence over elites threatens democratic values. Mass behavior is highly unstable. Usually, established elites can depend upon mass apathy; but, occasionally, mass activism will replace apathy, and this activism will be extremist, unstable, and unpredictable. Mass activism is usually an expression of resentment against the established order, and it usually occurs in times of crisis, when a counter-elite, or demagogue, emerges from the masses to mobilize them against the established elites.

Democracies, where elites are dangerously accessible to mass influence, can survive only if the masses are absorbed in the problems of everyday life and are involved in primary and secondary groups which distract their attention from mass politics. In other words, the masses are stable when they are absorbed in their work, family, neighborhood, trade union, hobby, church, recreational group, and so on. It is when they become alienated from their home, work, and community—when existing ties to social organizations and institutions become weakened —that mass behavior becomes unstable and dangerous. It is then that the attention and activity of the masses can be captured and directed by the demogague, or counter-elite. The demagogue can easily mobilize for revolution those elements of the masses who have few ties to the existing social and political order.

These ties to the existing order tend to be weakest during crisis periods, when major social changes are taking place. According to social psychologist William Kornhauser:

> . . . communism and fascism have gained strength in social systems undergoing sudden and extensive changes in the structure of authority and community. Sharp tears in the social fabric caused by widespread unemployment or by major military defeat are highly favorable to mass politics.[21]

Counter-elites are mass-oriented leaders who express hostility toward the established order and appeal to mass sentiments—extremism, intolerance, racial identity, anti-intellectualism, equalitarianism, and violence. Counter-elites can easily be distinguished from elites: *Elites*, whether liberal or conservative, support the fundamental values of the system—individual liberty, majority rule, due process of law, limited government, and private property; *counter-elites*, whether "left" or "right," are anti-democratic, extremist, impatient with due process, contemptuous of law and authority, and violence-prone. The only significant difference between "left" and "right" counter-elites is their attitude toward change: "right" counter-elites express mass reaction against change—political, social, economic, technological—while "left" counter-elites demand radical and revolutionary change.

All counter-elites claim to speak for "the people." Both "left" and "right" counter-elites assert *the supremacy of "the people"* over laws, institutions, procedures, or individual rights. Right-wing counter-elites, including fascists, justify their policies as "the will of the people," while left-wing radicals cry "all power to the people" and praise the virtues of "people's democracies." In describing this populism, sociologist Edward Shils writes:

> the will of the people as such is supreme over every other standard, over the standards of traditional institutions, over the autonomy of institutions, and

over the will of other strata. Populism identifies the will of the people with justice and morality.[22]

Extremism is another characteristic of mass politics—the view compromise and coalition-building is immoral. Indeed "politics" and "politicians" are viewed with hostility, because they imply the possibility of compromising mass demands.[23] Occasionally counter-elites will make cynical use of politics, but only as a short-term tactical means to other goals. A commentator on radical student activists observes that they are

> indistinguishable from the far right. . . . They share a contempt for rational political discussion and constitutional legal solutions. Both want to be pure. They know nothing about the virtue of compromise. They know nothing about the horror of sainthood or the wickedness of saints.[24]

Counter-elites frequently charge that a *conspiracy* exists among established elites to deliberately perpetuate evil upon the people. The "left" counter-elite charges that the established order knowingly exploits and oppresses the people for its own benefit and amusement; the "right" counter-elite charges that the established order is falling prey to an international communist conspiracy whose goal is to deprive the people of their liberty and property and to enslave them. Richard Hofstadter refers to this phenomena as "the paranoid style of politics."[25] A related weapon in the arsenal of the counter-elite is *scapegoatism*—the designation of particular minority groups in society as responsible for the evils suffered by the people. Throughout American history various scapegoats have been designated—Catholics, immigrants, Jews, blacks, communists, intellectuals, "Wall Street Bankers," munitions manufacturers, etc.

The masses define politics in *simplistic* terms. The masses want simple answers to all of society's problems, regardless of how complex these problems may be. Thus, black counter-elites charge that "white racism" is responsible for the complex problems of under-education, poverty, unemployment, crime, delinquency, ill-health, and poor housing of ghetto dwellers. In a similar fashion the white counter-elites dismiss ghetto disturbances as a product of "communist agitation." These simplistic answers are designed to relieve both black and white masses of any difficult thinking about social issues and to place their problems in simple, emotion-laden terms. Anti-intellectualism and antirationalism are an important part of mass politics.

Counter-elites often reflect mass *propensities toward violence*. Rap Brown inspired black masses in Cambridge, Maryland, in 1967 with:

> Don't be trying to love that honky to death. Shoot him to death. Shoot him to death, brother, cause that's what he's out to do to you. Like I said in the beginning, if this town don't come around, this town should be burned down, it should be burned down, brother.[26]

Early in his political career, George C. Wallace's references to violence were only slightly more subtle:

> Of course, if I did what I'd like to do I'd pick up something and smash one of these federal judges in the head and then burn the courthouse down. But I'm too genteel. What we need in this country is some Governors that used to work up here at Birmingham in the steel mills with about a tenth-grade education. A Governor like that wouldn't be so genteel. He'd put out his orders and he'd say, "The first man who throws a brick is a dead man. The first man who loots something what doesn't belong to him is a dead man. My orders are to shoot to kill."[27]

The similarity between the appeals of black and white counter-elites is obvious.

In summary, elite theory views the critical division in American politics as the division between elites and masses. "Left" and "right" counter-elites are similar. Both appeal to mass sentiments; assert the supremacy of "the people" over laws, institutions, and individual rights; reject compromise in favor of extremism; charge that established elites are a conspiracy; designate scapegoat groups; define social problems in simple emotional terms and reject rational thinking; express equalitarian sentiments and hostility toward men who have achieved success within the system; and express approval of mass violence.

ELITE THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

While elites are relatively more committed to democratic values than masses, elites themselves frequently abandon these values in crisis periods and become repressive. Anti-democratic mass activism has its counterpart in elite repression. Both endanger democratic values.

Mass activism and elite repression frequently interact to create multiple threats to democracy. Mass activism—riots, demonstrations, extremism, violence—generate fear and insecurity among elites, who respond by curtailing freedom and strengthening "security." Dissent is no longer tolerated, the news media is censored, free speech curtailed, potential counter-elites jailed, and police and security forces strengthened—usually in the name of "national security" or "law and order." Elites convince themselves that these steps are necessary to preserve liberal democratic values. The irony is, of course, that the elites make society less democratic in trying to preserve democracy.

In short, neither elites nor masses in America are totally and irrevocably committed to democratic values. Elites are generally more committed to democratic procedures than the masses. This is true for several reasons. In the first place, persons who are successful at the game of democratic politics are more amenable to abiding by the rules of the game than those who are not. Moreover, many elite members have internalized democratic values learned in childhood. Finally, the achievement of high position may bring a sense of responsibility for, and an awareness of, societal values. However, elites can and do become repressive when they perceive threats to the political system and their position in it.

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