campaigns gathered a greater range of active participation and more passive support than had any previous political movement in India." From this, much more so than Gandhi's personal meetings with Irwin, the Raj never recovered.[43]

Of course, for every protest like the Salt March that bursts into popular consciousness and becomes an internationally renowned phenomenon, there are hundreds of others that die out without ever being noticed. What do the explosive ones most frequently have in common? Mainstream political operatives believe they are those backed with the most resources and the strongest organizational coalitions. Strategic nonviolence suggests something else altogether: that even small and unknown groups can capture the public spotlight, provided they are willing to take the right risks.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ACT OF DISRUPTION

FOR PEOPLE TRYING to understand social change—as well as those trying to create it—the question of why some protests are ignored and forgotten while others break out to become sensational public events is a critical one. And it was a particularly pressing concern after the financial meltdown of 2008.

In the years following the crash, the United States entered into its worst economic crisis in seventy-five years. The unemployment rate reached into double digits, which had not happened since the Reagan era. A record number of homeowners entered into foreclosure, and state governments reported skyrocketing demand for food stamps. Yet by 2011 debate in Washington, DC—influenced by the activism of the insurgent Tea Party—revolved around cutting the budget and trimming social programs. "We were basically having an insane national discussion," remarked economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman.[1]

It took an outburst of popular action to change this. And that outburst came in an unexpected form.

In the fall of 2011, three years after the economic downturn had begun, political observers such as Krugman had long wondered when worsening conditions would result in public demonstrations against joblessness and foreclosures. Labor unions and major nonprofit organizations had

attempted to build mass movement energy around these very issues. A year earlier, on October 2, 2010, the "One Nation Working Together" march—initiated primarily by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—drew more than 175,000 people to Washington, DC, with demands to combat rampant inequality. The next year, long-time organizer and charismatic former White House staffer Van Jones launched Rebuild the Dream, a major drive to form a progressive alternative to the Tea Party.[2]

According to the rules of structure-based organizing, these efforts did everything right. They rallied substantial resources, they drew on the strength of organizations with robust membership bases, they came up with sophisticated policy demands, and they forged impressive coalitions. And yet, they made little headway. Even their largest mobilizations attracted only modest press attention and quickly faded from popular memory.

What worked was something different. "A group of people started camping out in Zuccotti Park," Krugman explained just weeks after Occupy launched, "and all of a sudden the conversation has changed significantly towards being about the right things.

"It's kind of a miracle," he added.[3]

For students of civil resistance, the abrupt rise of Occupy Wall Street was certainly impressive, but its emergence was not a product of miraculous, otherworldly intervention. The haphazard assembly of activists who came together under the Occupy banner did not follow the time-honored rules of community organizing, but what they did do was highly relevant to those trying to create momentum-driven campaigns. They were willing to craft protests that were significantly disruptive; they put on display a high level of sacrifice among participants; and they escalated their protests, building to greater levels of activity and involvement. Each of these contributed force to their drive, allowing a loose and underfunded collection of protesters to alter the terms of national debate in ways that those with far greater organizational might had been unable to manage.

Time and again, in uprisings that steal the spotlight and illuminate injustices that are otherwise ignored, we see three elements—*disruption*, *sacrifice*, and *escalation*—combining in forceful ways. The persistent reappearance of these elements provides compelling reason to examine their strange and combustive alchemy.

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Disruption is a first key factor in pushing outbreaks of revolt into the headlines. The amount of momentum that a movement generates can consistently be linked to the level of disruptive unrest its actions cause. The more that a protest directly affects members of the public, and the more it interferes with an adversary's ability to do business, the more likely it is to draw widespread attention. Snarling traffic, interrupting a public event, shutting down a convention, stopping a construction project, making a scene at the mall, or impeding operations at a factory—all of these reflect varying degrees of disruption.

In the corporate-driven media, disenfranchised groups and their social movements are seldom able to make it into the mainstream news cycle at all, and even more rarely are they covered on favorable terms. Moments of unusual unrest provide opportunities for those without money or influence to dispel attitudes of indifference—and to highlight social and political injustices. "Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable," argued prominent civil rights organizer Bayard Rustin. "The only weapon we have is our bodies, and we need to tuck them in places, so wheels don't turn."[4]

Rustin's insight has been echoed in the work of many social movement theorists, notably in Frances Fox Piven's theories of disruptive power. For Piven, disruption occurs when people are willing to "break the rules" of social decorum and step out of conventional roles. In *Poor People's Movements*, she and Richard Cloward explain, "Factories are shut down when workers walk out or sit down; welfare bureaucracies are thrown into chaos when crowds demand relief; landlords may be bankrupted when tenants refuse to pay rent. In each of these cases, people cease to conform to accustomed institutional roles; they withhold

their accustomed cooperation, and by doing so, cause institutional disruptions."[5]

Piven has forcefully argued that such unrest is the engine of social change. In her 2006 book, *Challenging Authority*, she contends that the "great moments of equalizing reform in American political history" have been responses to periods when disruptive power was most widely deployed.[6]

Gene Sharp has emphasized similar aspects of noncompliance and disruption. When he devised his now-famous list of "198 methods of nonviolent action," Sharp divided the tactics into three categories.

The first encompasses methods of "protest and persuasion," including public assemblies, processions, displays of banners, and formal statements by organizations. These make up the bulk of routine protest actions in the United States, and they tend to involve minimal disruption.

Sharp's other two categories, however, involve increasingly confrontational measures.

His second grouping, "methods of noncooperation," encompasses economic boycotts, student walkouts, and workplace strikes. And the third category, "nonviolent intervention," includes sit-ins, land seizures, and civil disobedience.

This last category involves not only a refusal to participate in political or economic structures but also intent to actively interrupt normal daily activity. Such interventions, Sharp writes, pose a "direct and immediate challenge." A lunch-counter sit-in, after all, is more urgently troublesome for a storeowner than a more removed consumer boycott. And, Sharp contends, because "the disruptive effects of the intervention are harder to withstand for a considerable period of time," these actions can produce results more swiftly and dramatically than other approaches to nonviolent conflict.[7]

In the long run, the breadth of participation in a protest movement matters; but in the short term, a sense of drama and momentum can trump numbers. Because the "One Nation Working Together" march had taken place on a weekend, and because it was viewed as a standard-issue demonstration in Washington, DC—one of several major rallies that took place within just a few months in the nation's capital—it could be easily overlooked, even though it brought out more than 175,000 people.

The scenario for confrontation offered by Occupy Wall Street fell into Sharp's third category, and as a result it possessed a different tenor than the marches and rallies that had come before. Occupy Wall Street involved a much smaller number of people, particularly at its beginning. Yet it set out to generate a much greater level of disruption. Activists intended to go to the investment banks in the heart of Manhattan's financial district and erect an encampment on their doorstep, hampering the daily business of those most responsible for the economic crisis.

Although the protesters ultimately established camp at a location several blocks from Wall Street itself, the occupation at Zuccotti Park effectively posed a dilemma for those in power. Authorities could allow activists to hold the space indefinitely, permitting a staging ground for continual protests against the area's financial institutions. Or police could act on behalf of the country's wealthiest 1 percent and shut down dissent, a move that would perfectly illustrate the protesters' claims about what American democracy had become. It was a no-win situation for the state.

While city officials pondered these unattractive options, the question of "how long will the occupation hold?" fostered a growing sense of dramatic tension for the public.

The tactic of occupation had other advantages as well. One was that it could be replicated. Somewhat jokingly, a few weeks into the mobilization, organizers issued a call to "Occupy Everywhere!" Much to their surprise, people responded in droves: the disruptive impact of Occupy grew as encampments sprung up in cities throughout the country. They even sprouted internationally, as with Occupy London, which set up shop directly outside of the London Stock Exchange.

As Occupy progressed, protesters staged sit-ins at banks and marches that blocked streets and bridges. By the end of the year, Occupy-related actions had resulted in an estimated 5,500 arrests in dozens of cities, big

and small—from Fresno, California, to Mobile, Alabama; from Colorado Springs to Honolulu; from Boston to Anchorage—all dramatizing the divide between the "99 percent and the 1 percent."[8]

Such actions propelled Occupy forward. However, like all exercises in disruption, they also posed risks.

Although tactics that interrupt business as usual are the most likely to draw attention, this attention is not necessarily positive. Because these actions inconvenience people and create disorder, they risk inviting a negative response—backlash that can reinforce status quo injustices. Therefore, the use of disruption places activists in a precarious position. In crafting scenarios for political conflict, they must carefully cultivate sympathy, working to ensure that observers recognize the legitimacy of their cause. Strategic judgment is needed to maximize the disruption's transformative potential while at the same time minimizing backlash from the public.

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It is precisely for this reason that disruption pairs well with a second key factor that works as kindling for mass uprisings: personal *sacrifice*. Movements are primed to flare up when participants demonstrate the seriousness of their commitment. One main way of doing this is through showing a willingness to endure hardship, to face arrest, or even to risk physical harm in dramatizing an injustice.

As he sought to distance his ideas from the tenets of moral pacifism, Gene Sharp constantly insisted that strategic nonviolence does not avoid confrontation or encourage passivity. On the contrary, going back to Gandhi's experiments in mass mobilization, advocates have noted that it can more accurately be considered as a form of asymmetric warfare.

In *War Without Violence*, an early study of Gandhian strategies published in 1939, Krishnalal Shridharani noted that both war and nonviolent conflict recognize suffering as a core source of power. In the case of war, this notion is straightforward: "By inflicting suffering on the enemy, the warriors seek to break the former's will, to make him surrender, to annihilate him, to destroy him, and with him all opposition,"

Shridharani wrote. "Suffering thus becomes a source of social power which compels and coerces."[9]

The main twist with nonviolent action, of course, is that participants do not seek to impose physical suffering but instead are willing to face it themselves.

"Gandhi's whole theory is based on the concept of suffering as a source of . . . social force," Shridharani explained. "In Satyagraha, it is by inviting suffering from the opponent and not after inflicting suffering upon him that the resultant power is produced. The basic formula is the same, but its application is about-face. It almost amounts to putting the energy in reverse gear."

Leading proponents of civil resistance emphasize that strategic nonviolent action can produce serious clashes and that these may result in serious injuries and even casualties. Indeed, advocates have sometimes displayed a notable lack of sentimentality on this point. "Guerilla warfare has huge civilian casualty rates. Huge," Sharp explained in a 2005 interview. "And yet Ché Guevara didn't abandon guerilla warfare because people were getting killed." Sharp saw no reason why nonviolent combatants should behave differently.[10]

For his part, Gandhi was frank about the potential consequences of *satyagraha*. During his drive for Indian self-rule he argued, "No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering."[11]

There is a strong spiritual component in Gandhi's explanation of how this works. This aspect of his thinking has historically been appealing to religious-minded interpreters and sometimes off-putting to more secular-minded readers. Gandhi invokes ideas ranging from the Hindu concept of ascetic renunciation, *tapasya*, to the Christian emphasis on the redemptive suffering of Jesus—pointing to how forms of self-suffering have motivated religious movements for centuries, often with history-shaping consequences.

The modern tradition of civil resistance has adopted a different emphasis. It has drawn out the more practical side of Gandhi's thinking. Even those not inclined toward spiritual considerations can find impressive results in the empirical record of protests in which participants

have been willing to take serious risks—whether by jeopardizing their professional reputation or by potentially inviting bodily harm.

Nonviolent actions involving the possibility of arrest, reprisal, or physical trauma allow those who undertake them to display courage and resolve. When participants must ask themselves how much they are willing to sacrifice for a cause, it clarifies their values and strengthens their commitment. It can become a moment of personal transformation. Within successful social movements, organizers constantly ask members to make sacrifices—to make contributions of time, energy, and resources; to risk tension with neighbors or family members who prefer to avoid controversial issues; or even to endanger their livelihood by standing up on the job or coming out as a whistleblower. Nonviolent confrontations often involve making such sacrifices visible, creating scenarios in which those involved can publicly convey their seriousness of purpose.

Personal acts of sacrifice thus have public repercussions. They both draw attention and invite empathy: a bus boycotter willing to walk five miles to work rather than to ride on segregated public transportation; a teacher going on hunger strike against school budget cuts; an environmentalist who commits to sitting in an old-growth tree for weeks to prevent it from being cut down; or an indigenous rights advocate who chains herself to a bulldozer to prevent construction on a sacred site. Gandhi contended that these displays could effectively activate public opinion, serving to "quicken the dead conscience into life" and "make people think and act." When bystanders see someone in front of them suffering, it is difficult for them to remain detached and uninvolved. The scene compels them to pick a side.[12]

A common misconception about nonviolent action is that it is necessarily focused on touching the heart of the opponent and leading to a conversion. In fact, the impact of sacrifice can have little to do with changing the views of one's adversaries—and much more to do with affecting one's friends. When people decide to risk their safety or to face arrest, their decisions have the effect of mobilizing the communities closest to them.

During the civil rights movement, the students who organized sit-ins at lunch counters in cities such as Nashville, Tennessee, experienced

this phenomenon. In February 1960, students from Fisk University, Tennessee State University, and Baptist Theological Seminary who had been trained in Gandhian tactics walked in to downtown establishments such as the city's Woolworth and Kress stores. After making small purchases, they sat down at the stores' lunch counters, quietly reading and doing homework as storeowners predictably refused them service. When employees tried to ignore them, they sat for hours on end, and then returned on repeated days. Tension increased. Inevitably, word of the protests spread through Nashville, and the sit-ins started to attract white mobs. Hecklers taunted the students and poured milkshakes over their heads. At times, the violence got worse. In his autobiography, *Walking with the Wind*, sit-in organizer and future congressman John Lewis recalled a moment when enraged whites began to attack. "I was hit in the ribs, not too hard, but enough to knock me over," Lewis writes. "Down the way I could see one of the white men stubbing a lit cigarette against the back of a guy in our group." Despite their discipline in refusing to respond to these provocations, the victims were arrested for disobeying police orders to vacate the store.[13]

As they faced such reprisals, the students found that their parents, their ministers, and their classmates—many of whom had previously been reluctant to speak out—were drawn in by their actions. As the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* explains: "The local black community began to unite behind the students. Black merchants supplied food to those in jail. Homeowners put up property for bail money. Z. Alexander Looby, the city's leading black lawyer, headed the defense." Family members were especially galvanized. "Parents worried that arrest records could hurt their children's future, and they feared for the safety of their children." In response, they "turned to the power of their own pocketbook," launching an economic boycott in support of the sit-ins. The students' sacrifice had created a virtuous circle, drawing in more participants and allowing for even greater disruption. Soon, the mayor was compelled to intervene to quell unrest. And, within months, Nashville storeowners agreed to begin desegregating their lunch counters for good.[14]

Independently, sacrifice and disruption can each produce forceful results. But together, they form an unusually effective pairing. Sacrifice helps to address two of the great problems of disruptive protest: the risk of public backlash and the danger of swift and severe repression. First, by invoking an empathetic response in the public, sacrifice dampens negative reactions and allows for mobilizations to attempt more profound ruptures of business as usual. Second, sacrifice can take the crackdowns that often accompany disruptive protests and turn them into unexpected assets.

Such was the case with Occupy, where sacrifice complemented disruption in critical ways. From the start, protesters signaled an intention to endure significant hardship in order to voice an ongoing objection to Wall Street's misdeeds. One of the first images associated with the movement, a publicity poster released in advance by the Canadian magazine *Adbusters*, featured a ballerina atop Wall Street's infamous charging bull. The dancer posed serenely while police in gas masks amassed in the background. The text below the bull read simply, "#OccupyWallStreet. September 17th. Bring tent."

The poster's suggestion that camping gear would be required for the mobilization—and that police reprisal would be a looming danger—immediately set the action apart from countless other demonstrations, in which participants might show up for an afternoon with a sign, chant for an hour or two in a permitted area, and then call it a day and go home. As Occupy commenced, reporters and participants alike were drawn to the spectacle of protesters ready to sleep on slabs of concrete in lower Manhattan's sterile financial district in order to bring populist discontent to the doors of those who presided over the financial crisis. The dedication of the initial occupiers drew friends and brought in sympathizers curious about the Zuccotti encampment.

Outside interest did not build immediately, however. As MSNBC's Keith Olbermann noted, "After five straight days of sit-ins, marches, and shouting, and some arrests, actual North American newspaper coverage of this—even by those who have thought it farce or failure—has been limited to one blurb in a free newspaper in Manhattan and a column in the *Toronto Star*."[15]

It took two further developments to break through the de facto blackout of the protest. Each involved even greater personal suffering, and each ignited outrage about how police handled free speech in America.

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The first pivotal event occurred on September 24, a hot day that marked the one-week anniversary of the occupation. On that occasion, protesters hiked two-and-a-half miles to Union Square, and then turned around to return to Zuccotti. But before they made it back, police detained groups of marchers and started to make arrests. In total, eighty people were taken into custody.

The arrests themselves were significant, but the most consequential product of the day's activity would be a video of a police officer later identified as Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna. The video showed two women who had been penned in with orange police netting standing and talking calmly. Unprovoked, Bologna walks up to them, pulls out a can of pepper spray, and lifts it toward their faces. Then he sprays them at virtually point-blank range. Grainy cell phone footage captured the scene of the women dropping to their knees in pain, cupping their eyes, and crying out in agony.

Video of the malicious attack went viral, accumulating over a million views within four days. It became the incident that put Occupy Wall Street on the map nationally, spurring a new flood of articles about the mobilization. Rather than deterring participants wary of facing violence, as one might expect, the video fueled public outrage. It motivated new occupiers to join the assembly in Zuccotti, and it compelled many outside of New York to consider how they could support the movement.

A week later, Occupy was a bona fide news event, and the mobilization was able to stage a much larger march to mark the completion of two weeks of occupation. For this procession, protesters made their way toward the Brooklyn Bridge. As they approached, the NYPD directed marchers onto the bridge's main roadway. There, officers promptly surrounded the assembly and methodically arrested some seven hundred people, binding their wrists with plastic zip-tie cuffs. Several activists on

the pedestrian walkway above live-streamed video of the arrests, making the event an Internet sensation even as it was still taking place.

The roundup involved the most arrests by far for Occupy to that date, and it represented one of the largest mass arrests in New York City's history. Yet, like the previous week's video, footage of the police action on the Brooklyn Bridge did not dampen dissent. Instead, it conveyed a sense of escalating momentum and attracted fresh participants. Just a few days later, on October 5, Occupy held its largest march yet, bringing out some fifteen thousand people, including delegations from the city's most prominent labor unions.

The idea that repression can actually help a movement, rather than hurt it, is a notion that stands a conventional understanding of power on its head. And yet, the ability of nonviolent demonstrators to benefit from the zealousness of authorities is a well-studied occurrence within the field of civil resistance. This phenomenon is commonly described as "political jiu-jitsu."

In the martial art of jiu-jitsu, practitioners use the momentum of an opponent's blow to throw the opponent off balance. Strategic nonviolence does something similar in the realm of political conflict.

Dictatorial security states and heavily armed police forces are well prepared to deal with violent outbursts, which conveniently serve to justify heavy-handed repression and legitimate a trend toward militarization. In these cases, the mainstream media is all too willing to play along, with local news stations fixating on acts they perceive as violent and valorizing attempts to restore order.

What confounds and destabilizes authorities is a different type of militancy. Gene Sharp writes, "Nonviolent struggle against violent repression creates a special, asymmetrical conflict situation" in which the use of force by those in power can rebound against them and embolden opposition.

"Harsh repression against nonviolent resisters may be perceived as unreasonable, distasteful, inhuman, or harmful to . . . the society," Sharp explains. Therefore, it turns the public against the attackers, provokes sympathetic onlookers to join the demonstrations, and encourages

defections even within those groups that might regularly be opposed to protests.[16]

As Occupy progressed, it had further opportunities to show its skill in this unusual form of combat. One highly publicized incident involved demonstrators at the University of California, Davis. On November 18, 2011, police arrived on the Davis campus in full riot gear and began to remove tents that students had erected. A group of perhaps two dozen students sat down along a walkway, linking arms, to try to stop the eviction.

Within minutes, campus police officer John Pike approached with military-grade pepper spray and began dousing the students. Video showed Pike casually strolling down the line of protesters, spraying toxic fluid, while those seated on the walkway doubled over and attempted to shield their eyes. Once again, footage of the attack began circulating almost immediately. In the aftermath of the soon-notorious incident, outraged students and faculty called for the resignation of university officials responsible for the attack. Nationally, the event helped keep Occupy in the headlines—and turned Lieutenant Pike into an unlikely Internet celebrity. Popular memes on Facebook and Twitter featured photoshopped images of Pike "casually" pepper-spraying everyone from the *Mona Lisa*, to the Beatles, to the founding fathers.

Occupy is hardly unique as a mobilization that grew stronger as a result of efforts to quash protests. Although too many factors are at play in a given protest to ensure that the gains of enduring abuse will be worth the cost, there is a rich history of repression serving as a turning point for movements promoting change.

In the case of Otpor in Serbia, waves of arrests and beatings by authorities brought the movement fresh recruits, as young people saw the state acting in a way that was arbitrary and vindictive. As author Matthew Collin writes, "They felt that their generation was under attack, and had decided that it was time to fight back."[17]

This was also the case in the push for civil rights in the segregated South. As Representative Emanuel Celler, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, remarked in 1966, "There are times when the civil

rights movement has no greater friend than its enemy. It is the enemy of civil rights who again and again produces the evidence . . . that we cannot afford to stand still." Likewise, Saul Alinsky argued, "A Bull Connor with his police dogs and fire hoses down in Birmingham did more to advance civil rights than the civil rights fighters themselves."[18]

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Alinsky was right to highlight the importance of Bull Connor's strategic misjudgments. At the same time, he gave the civil rights protesters too little credit for their skill in creating a situation where Connor's brutality would be exposed and widely denounced. The reality is that, despite the demonstrated power of sacrifice and disruption, it is rare that activist groups risk either in significant measure. Even more rare is when social movement participants undertake disruptive and risky actions not once, but on an ongoing basis—endeavoring to carry out ever-bolder displays of noncompliance over the course of a campaign.

This is *escalation*. Added to sacrifice and disruption, it represents a third crucial element in the alchemy of explosive protest.

Within the field of civil resistance, theorists and practitioners have emphasized the idea of the "dilemma action." The idea here is that demonstrations are especially effective when they create a dilemma for those in power, producing situations in which any response the authorities choose helps the movement. The student lunch-counter sit-ins are often cited as an instructive example. If students were permitted to sit at the lunch counters, unmoved, they would have achieved their goal: by virtue of their protest itself, they would have desegregated the store's eatery. On the other hand, if they were removed forcefully, it threatened to create a media spectacle that portrayed Jim Crow defenders in a negative light. It would demolish the myth of a genteel South in which blacks and whites were each happier to remain separate, and it would show racism for what it was: ugly, violent, and pervasive. Faced with these unpleasant alternatives, both police and storeowners squirmed for days, hoping in vain that the protests would just go away.[19]

The dilemma action has had a prominent place in many other civil resistance campaigns as well. Otpor's stunts—which made the Milosevic regime look like it couldn't take a joke and highlighted the fact that authorities were prone to abusing their power—are another example. Likewise, Gandhi's Salt March left the British Raj with no good options. As a nationalist newspaper described the predicament at the time: "To arrest Gandhi is to set fire to the whole of India. Not to arrest him is to allow him to set the prairie on fire. . . . In either case, Government stands to lose, and Gandhi stands to gain."[20]

The dilemma Occupy Wall Street created was not quite so stark as these examples. But to the extent that police had to choose between respecting free speech and acting as enforcers for Wall Street's banks, the movement put them in an uncomfortable position.

The point of the dilemma action is that activists need to devise protests that cannot simply be ignored, and they need to create situations in which they will gain public sympathy if they are attacked or arrested. Disruption and sacrifice can each play a role here. Disruption is a crucial means for making sure that demonstrations are not overlooked. Sacrifice, meanwhile, makes it more likely that observers will side with movement participants rather than those who move against them.

Thinking in terms of creating dilemmas for their adversaries can be a useful way for activists to devise more effective interventions. At the same time, perfect dilemmas are very difficult to construct. In truth, any individual action can only do so much. More important than coming up with a single, brilliantly conceived act of nonviolent resistance is a willingness to string together multiple protests in a way that creates a sense of heightening drama.

This is where escalation becomes significant.

When scholar Joan Bondurant set out to chart the fundamental rules of Gandhi's mass campaigns, she emphasized that movements must progressively advance through new stages of activity, always avoiding stagnation. Gene Sharp, influenced by this analysis, stressed that to sustain a long struggle, activists cannot deploy just one tactic. Rather, they need to create a sequence of actions that builds over time. The goal, he

contended, citing prominent rabbi and author Arthur Waskow, is the "escalation of disorder without violence."[21]

Practitioners experimenting with unarmed uprising have come to similar conclusions. The antinuclear movement of the late 1970s was a key moment in the development of the modern tradition of nonviolent direct action in the United States. During this movement, organizers tried to follow what one activist called the "power of ten" rule. As they rallied participants to stage occupations on the site of the proposed Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire, these organizers aimed to make sure each of their planned disruptions was exponentially larger than the last. They knew this was not easy. But, to their surprise, they succeeded. As historian Barbara Epstein explains, "On August 1, 1976, eighteen people walked down the abandoned railway tracks leading into the site and were arrested. On August 22, in pouring rain, 180 people, some of them from Boston and Western Massachusetts, were arrested." All of this led up to a much larger action the following spring. Starting on April 30, 1977, a group of approximately twenty-four hundred arrived on the Seabrook site and began setting up camp. The National Guard arrested more than fourteen hundred protesters, who were held in several armories around the state for up to two weeks after they refused to pay bail. The fact that the mass disobedience at Seabrook grew in size and militancy throughout the campaign helped make the antinuclear actions a national story.[22]

The track record of what escalation can accomplish is impressive, and still it is rarely attempted, for a variety of reasons. A first is fear: it takes courage to engage in a protest that might involve physical harm or legal sanction. Risking these repercussions once is significant. Doing it repeatedly requires an even more uncommon commitment.

For structure-based groups, there can be severe consequences to disobedience: formal leaders can be sued, assets can be seized, hard-earned access to mainstream powerbrokers can be compromised. These are the factors that veteran labor strategist Stephen Lerner identifies as decisive in limiting the willingness of mainstream unions to experiment with more disruptive strategies: "Unions with hundreds of millions in assets and collective bargaining agreements covering millions of workers won't risk their treasuries and contracts by engaging in large-scale sit-ins, occupations, and other forms of non-violent civil disobedience that must inevitably overcome court injunctions and political pressures."[23]

It is not that unions lack the ability to stage major disruptions. During the rare moments when they commit serious effort and resources to mass noncooperation—for example, during a strike—their powers of mobilization can be impressive. However, the potential for negative fallout from militant nonviolence presents a clear danger, and leaders of established groups rarely see the upside of escalation. Because a mass mobilization might not produce instrumental gains in the short term, transactional organizers may not see the point in pushing it to greater heights.

In short, when confronted with the possibility to escalate, groups have all too many reasons to play it safe. Which is why it is especially remarkable when they opt for a more turbulent course.

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In the case of Occupy Wall Street, the movement often escalated without having a conscious plan to do so. With its unexpectedly successful invitation to "Occupy Everywhere," tent cities proliferated widely beyond Zuccotti, with occupations springing up from Tahlequah, Oklahoma, to Lagos, Nigeria. One attempt to keep track of the activity listed 1,518 encampments in total. And Occupy escalated in other ways as well. Although the camps themselves were important, they also served as launching pads for other protests. Occupiers disrupted foreclosure auctions, held sit-ins in bank lobbies, and erected blockades to protect families that had been victims of predatory lending schemes from being evicted from their homes. The movement also used partnerships with labor and community groups to stage mass marches. The October 5, 2011, march, for one, was joined by unions such as Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the Communication Workers of America (CWA), drawing thousands of participants. Throughout that fall, these varied forms of protest combined to create the sense that the movement was continually stepping up its activity.[24]

If Occupy's escalation lacked premeditated design, other prominent campaigns of civil resistance have planned to scale up from the start. In Serbia, Otpor's acts of resistance—which started with cultural defiance and individual creative stunts—were all connected to a grand strategy that built over time. When the movement peaked, massive nationwide disobedience was being used to force Milosevic to recognize the results of the presidential election and cede office.

In Birmingham, organizers also planned for escalation from the outset, and they backed up their intention to go big on repeated occasions as the campaign unfolded. The pressure that civil rights advocates put on city storeowners did not come through a single demonstration but rather through a range of tactics, deployed in a calculated sequence. These included store-based sit-ins, a citywide economic boycott, and large protest marches that resulted in significant numbers of arrests. "The SCLC had anticipated that Birmingham would be a long struggle," writes sociologist Aldon Morris. "Project 'C' was prepared according to a precise timetable designed to produce maximum drama." When this timetable broke down due to unforeseen twists, civil rights organizers had to make tough decisions about how they were going to step up movement activity in the face of challenging circumstances. In other words, many of the pivotal decisions of the Birmingham campaign revolved around questions of escalation.[25]

King's gambit to risk arrest on Good Friday, despite the concerns of his advisors, was one such decision. In the end, his instincts proved sound. In addition to animating local supporters, who came out in large numbers to see King personally face off against Bull Connor, the mere announcement that he would be facing arrest earned the movement front-page coverage in national newspapers.[26]

The burst of energy created by his arrest only lasted for so long, however. Three weeks later, when the campaign was again threatening to stall out, organizers in Birmingham made the difficult and controversial decision to allow high school students—who were clamoring to join the demonstrations—to participate. This ended up becoming the campaign's most critical moment of escalation, allowing the civil rights activists to expose the true depths of Bull Connor's brutality. "Mobilizing the children saved the movement from collapse," historian Adam Fairclough writes.[27]

The salt *satyagraha* in India was another instance in which nonviolent activists progressively turned up pressure on their adversaries. Gandhi's march to the sea was only the first stage of a much wider rebellion that would quickly involve millions of participants. Future prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "It seemed as though a spring had been suddenly released." Despite facing heavy repression from colonial authorities, activists reinvigorated the boycott of foreign clothing, British-appointed Indian bureaucrats resigned from their posts, and tax strikes flared across the country's provinces. Soon, prominent officials such as the mayor of Calcutta were being arrested for reading seditious literature in public.[28]

The Salt March, historian Judith Brown writes, sparked a "moral enthusiasm for breaking laws seen as oppressive, even to the point of suffering severe personal injury from police retaliation." In one famous action alone, the nonviolent raid on the saltworks at Dharasana in May 1930, the savage beating of protesters by police resulted in two deaths and at least 320 hospitalizations. Defiance continued throughout the year. Across the country, the number of arrests, by some estimates, rapidly surpassed sixty thousand. Only when Gandhi sensed that the movement could escalate no further did he seek out a settlement with Irwin.[29]

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Along with disruption and sacrifice, escalation has served as the lifeblood of major civil resistance campaigns. From India, to Birmingham, to Serbia, its impact has been undeniable. But what about with Occupy?

Just as Alinsky gave civil rights campaigners too little credit for their savvy maneuvering in catapulting segregation into the headlines, so Occupy activists often receive slight acknowledgment for their success in propelling inequality to the fore of national discussion. In fact, some have gone so far as to question whether Occupy Wall Street really accomplished anything at all. In mid-2012, political analyst Andy Ostroy concluded that the movement "has had no material impact on

American life." Similarly, the *New York Times*'s Andrew Ross Sorkin, writing on the one-year anniversary of the occupation of Zuccotti Park, argued that Occupy was nothing more than "a fad" and that "it will be an asterisk in the history books, if it gets a mention at all."[30]

It is true that Occupy Wall Street may not get its due in the annals of history. Because its vision was so broad and its ambitions so great, the movement lent itself to disappointment. After all, participants aspired to nothing less than a revolutionary shift in America's economic structures and a grassroots reinvention of political democracy. Observers who compare the actual political reverberations of Occupy with its most grandiose pronouncements can easily conclude that it achieved nothing close to its stated goals.

Even judging by more realistic standards, there is legitimate debate about whether Occupy lived up to its full potential. Momentum-driven organizing distinguishes itself from unstructured mass protest in that it seeks to be deliberate in harnessing and sustaining the power of disruptive outbreaks. Its goal is to allow mobilizations to endure through multiple waves of activity. Occupy fell short in this regard. Like many other mass protests, it was not well equipped to last beyond a brief cycle of revolt. Although it did have general assemblies and working groups through which it organized participants, activists soon experienced the limits of these structures. The movement did not have the frontloading that would have allowed it to convey an overarching strategy. Because it lacked a culture of mass training, methods of transmitting the movement's norms to new participants remained informal. And the diverse crowds of Occupiers never developed a shared theory of how they would leverage change.

Because of this, much of the movement's escalation was accidental. For some, ramping up the confrontation was not even a goal. Their focus was on building community within the occupations, not on creating strategic protests outside of them. They were indifferent or hostile to engaging with the mainstream media or crafting appeals to win over the general public.

Finally, momentum-driven organizing is attentive to ways mass mobilization might collaborate with structure-based institutions; it tries

to draw in further support from established groups that are ordinarily reluctant to risk disruptive activity. Many regulars at the Occupy encampments, in contrast, were so wary of "cooptation" that the movement missed opportunities to collaborate with constituencies outside its countercultural base.

Such limits were not only acknowledged by outside critics: after the mobilization died down, some of the most committed Occupy activists, dissatisfied with the movement's organizational models, entered into a period of introspection similar to that experienced by the student activists who went on to form Otpor in Serbia.

Occupy's shortcomings were real. But reflection on them should not obscure the impact that the movement did have. It is important to remember that Occupy was a drive that started with extremely minimal financial resources, no staff, no offices, and no established membership lists. Throughout its peak months, it drew primarily on its own momentum rather than on any sources of outside support. Yet, despite its lack of institutional backing, it accomplished precisely what far more muscular organizations had tried, and failed, to do in the years before. Its mixture of disruption, sacrifice, and escalation ended up having concrete implications, both small and large.

On the level of direct, incremental gains, Occupy could claim a variety of wins, many of which involved fights around housing. When Occupy erupted, it provided a major boost to existing campaigns against foreclosures, generating an influx of attention and volunteer support. In Brooklyn, the group Organizing for Occupation prevented at least one public foreclosure auction by interrupting the court proceeding with chants and song. In Cleveland, movement activists who camped out on the front lawn of a local woman's home helped her to secure a stay of eviction. Occupy Atlanta assisted injured Iraq War veteran Bridgette Walker by guarding her home and pressuring Chase Manhattan. "They got everyday people like myself involved—everyday people contacting Chase and advocating for me, peaceful demonstrations, people calling and writing in," Walker stated after successfully negotiating a loan modification. An umbrella effort, "Occupy Our Homes," tracked cases like these around the country.[31]

Occupy also secured instrumental advances related to consumer banking. Bank Transfer Day, which took place on November 5, 2011, encouraged those who held accounts with major banks—specifically Bank of America—to switch their business over to credit unions. This campaign surged as Occupy gained steam, and when Bank Transfer Day arrived upward of 650,000 customers shifted $4.5 billion in resources from major banks to credit unions. As Salon's Andrew Leonard wrote, riffing on an old joke, "$4.5 billion here, $4.5 billion there, and pretty soon you are talking about real money, even for JPMorgan-Chase." Bethpage Federal Credit Union CEO Kirk Kordeleski told the *New York Daily News*, "These are very good times for credit unions." Conversely, American Bankers Association CEO Diane Casey-Landry called the antibank sentiment generated by Occupy a "reputational kick in the chin."[32]

This was not merely a matter of public relations. When Bank of America announced plans to instate a $5 monthly charge for debit card holders with account balances under $20,000, twenty-two-year-old Molly Katchpole, an underemployed recent college graduate and nanny working two jobs, started an online petition protesting the change. Amid the antibank climate Occupy had created, the drive went viral, quickly garnering three hundred thousand signatures. Katchpole appeared on YouTube cutting up her debit card outside her local branch's lobby, and she was soon getting calls from ABC and CNN. By October 28, Bank of America moved to "redefine" its fee structure and effectively end the monthly charge. Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase quickly followed suit.[33]

Finally, the movement contributed to other concrete gains in the realm of union campaigns. Occupy Wall Street maintained a Labor Outreach Committee, which used movement energy and volunteer resources to assist numerous groups of workers. Verizon employees, Longshoremen on the West Coast, HarperCollins publishing house workers, Harvard dining hall employees, and art handlers at Sotheby's all benefited from active relationships with the Occupy movement. For their part, the Longshoremen secured a resolution that allowed some

fifty thousand port workers to win their first contract as union members. After the victory, Jack Mulcahy, an officer in the Longshoremen's Portland local, argued that Occupy was "a critical element in bringing [the company] to the bargaining table and forcing a settlement."[34]

"Make no mistake," he added, "the solidarity and organization between the Occupy Movement and the Longshoremen won this contract."

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Although these direct, on-the-ground victories are not insignificant, the movement's most profound impact was in shifting the national debate, prompting a change that had important ramifications in the realms of policy and electoral politics. Prior to Occupy, in the summer of 2011, congressional Republicans had effectively trained public attention on controlling the federal budget deficit, creating a debt ceiling, and implementing drastic, emergency cuts to government programs and social services. A ThinkProgress report showed that in the month before activists arrived in Zuccotti Park, news outlets such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News were mentioning government debt some fifteen times more often than problems of unemployment.[35]

Two months later, with the movement in full bloom, the trend had reversed. *BusinessWeek* reporter Dan Beucke wrote, "Coming out of the summer the economic debate in Washington was dominated by talk of cutting the deficit—not jobs, not the wealth disparity in America, and certainly not the role of money in politics. Today that has shifted. Part of my job here each morning is to aggregate stories about the wealth debate; the volume of candidates is impressive."[36]

The change outlived the encampments themselves. In January 2012, well after Occupy Wall Street's eviction, Richard Morin, a senior editor at Pew Social and Demographic Trends, told the *New York Times*, "Income inequality is no longer just for economists. . . . It has moved off the business pages into the front page." For months after that, database searches showed that mentions of "income inequality" in US newspapers were still double what they had been before Occupy began.[37]

Attempting a similar shift in debate through paid media would have taken tens of millions of dollars in ad buys. When advertisers and conventional political campaigns spend such resources, they have no guarantee that they will have nearly as much influence in shaping popular discussion. But they are willing to spend handsomely because they know that nudging the public even slightly can have major repercussions: it can swing an election, tip a ballot initiative, or dramatically alter sales of a product.

The same autumn that Occupy Wall Street burst onto the scene, conservative lawmakers in Ohio were pushing antiunion legislation strikingly similar to that passed by Republican governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin. If the measure, known as SB 5, had been allowed to stand, it would have curtailed labor's capacity to collect dues from its members in Ohio and decimated the state's public sector unions. The issue was ultimately decided by a referendum on the November ballot, which gave voters a chance to repeal the lawmakers' initiative. Coming off of major defeats in Wisconsin and Michigan, winning the ballot measure was seen as a national priority for the labor movement.

The Occupy movement transformed the dynamics of the campaign. "I spent a week in Ohio in early November interviewing dozens of people and reporting on the run-up to the SB 5 referendum," wrote *Mother Jones* reporter Andy Kroll. "I visited heavily Democratic and Republican parts of the state, talking to liberals and conservatives, union leaders and activists. What struck me was how dramatically the debate had shifted in Ohio thanks in large part to the energy generated by Occupy Wall Street. It was as if a great tide had lifted the pro-repeal forces in a way you only fully grasped if you were there."[38]

When SEIU president Mary Kay Henry went door to door to canvass voters, she told Kroll, "Every conversation was in the context of the 99 percent and the 1 percent, this discussion sparked by Occupy Wall Street." On Election Day, labor emerged triumphant, and SB 5 went down to a resounding defeat. In the aftermath, Henry stated, "The Occupy movement has framed the fight. They've totally changed the debate within a 30-day period."[39]

It wasn't just Ohio. After being targeted by Occupy activists as "Governor 1 Percent," New York's Andrew Cuomo reversed his stance on extending a "Millionaire's Tax" in the state, which gave a tax break to working- and middle-class families by hiking rates for top earners. Once considered a dead measure, the bill came back to life after protesters erected a "Cuomoville" outside the state capitol. As the *New York Times* reported, state legislators "lauded the Occupy Wall Street movement for changing the political climate in Albany, where lawmakers had planned to allow the millionaires' tax to simply expire." California governor Jerry Brown had pushed forth a similar measure in his state the same month, prompting an Associated Press headline reading, "You Can Thank the Occupy Movement for These New Taxes on Millionaires in California and New York."[40]

In Los Angeles, activists helped push forward a "responsible banking" ordinance, forcing banks that conducted business with the city to release data about their lending practices. For years, the *Los Angeles Times* explained, "the ordinance . . . had been languishing, but the arrival of protesters outside City Hall last October brought new momentum to the issue." The measure became law, as did California's Homeowner Bill of Rights, which offered a host of protections for families facing foreclosure. This state-level initiative had likewise been defeated by banking lobbyists in previous years but was pushed forward by housing activists in Occupy.[41]

In each case, one could argue that the movement was not the sole cause of the victory. But it would be myopic to ignore the contribution provided by the surge in grassroots activism. As such initiatives went forward, the *New York Times* reported, "It is apparent that Occupy Wall Street's impact is already being felt."[42]

On the national level, Occupy's messaging seeped into many prominent races, helping to advance candidates such as Elizabeth Warren in Massachusetts, who won her Senate seat after adopting the rhetoric of the "the 99 percent." In his race against Barack Obama, Republican presidential hopeful and multimillionaire Mitt Romney had planned to use his background as head of an investment firm as a major selling

point in the 2012 election. Instead, his ties to the private-equity industry became a liability.[43]

Far too many factors shape the outcome of a presidential race for Occupy to claim any defining role. However, some political commentators who are generally skeptical of the movement's impact have given it partial credit. Even while questioning whether Occupy Wall Street made a "deep impact on the political landscape," *Washington Post* reporter Chris Cillizza concluded, "It helped re-frame or re-emphasize the populist messaging that President Obama ran and won on." Similarly, at the *New York Times*, Andrew Ross Sorkin acknowledged that Occupy's "message has subtly been woven throughout the Obama administration's re-election campaign, in the Democrats' position on everything from taxes on the highest earners to the soaring levels of student debt."[44]

Having failed to spark a revolutionary upheaval or uproot the power of the big banks, Occupy's most dedicated participants could hardly declare that their mission had been accomplished—especially since many of them were loath to support the Democrats. But any account of the movement's significance must surely weigh these outcomes against the blasé assertion that Occupy ended with nothing to show for its efforts.

After the financial collapse of 2008, political analysts waited for years for an eruption of mass outrage to begin. Some of the nation's most powerful progressive groups tried diligently to spark revolt, and still popular fury stayed dormant. The outbreak of defiance that finally changed this state of affairs was not without faults. But Occupy showed the power and potential that unarmed uprisings possess when they make use of a vital combination of ingredients: *Disruption. Sacrifice. Escalation.*

Not every exercise in strategic nonviolent conflict generates the type of intense flurry of activity that surrounded Occupy. But the experience of that movement illustrated a phenomenon that has been repeated in many campaigns of civil resistance. At its most successful, momentum-driven organizing creates new spaces of possibility in public life. It produces situations in which the normal rules of politics appear to be suspended, and large numbers of people respond with outpourings of hope and creativity.

Time and again, those who have encountered such situations have found them to be both exhilarating and enigmatic. They are not always certain how to make sense of them. But invariably they are aware that they have lived through something special.

They have experienced the whirlwind.