G 1442

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992
Reprinted 1994, 1995, 1996

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-43062-3 hardback
ISBN 0-521-43679-6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

To SAM FINKELSTEIN,
pushing ninety and still arguing about politics.

3

Injustice

Students of social movements with different orientations emphasize a strong injustice component in the political consciousness that supports collective action. Turner and Killian (1987, 242) argue that "a movement is inconceivable apart from a vital sense that some established practice or mode of thought is wrong and ought to be replaced. . . . The common element in the norms of most, and probably all, movements is the conviction that existing conditions are unjust."

Moore (1978, 88) agrees. "Any political movement against oppression has to develop a new diagnosis and remedy for existing forms of suffering, a diagnosis and remedy by which this suffering stands morally condemned." Similarly, McAdam (1982, 51) argues that "before collective action can get underway, people must collectively define their situations as unjust. . . ."

The main challenge on this point comes from those who accept that a sense of grievance is necessary but argue that it is so ubiquitous that it lacks any explanatory value. Hence, Oberschall (1973, 133–4) concedes that sentiments of "being wronged are . . . frequently present in the lower orders" but aren't very important, since they "can be easily linked with the more elaborate ideologies and world views." McCarthy and Zald (1977, 1215) suggest that there is always enough unhappiness to supply the grass-roots support for a movement and, hence, the only explanatory power is in how "grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations."

But the cynical view that grievances have little explanatory value, since it is so easy for leaders or organizations to link more elaborate world views with the sufferings of the "lower orders," has not prevailed. Most contemporary analysts treat it as no simple matter to explain how the indignities of daily life are sometimes transformed into a shared grievance with a focused target of collective action.

Different emotions can be stimulated by perceived inequities – cynicism,

bemused irony, resignation. But injustice focuses on the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul. Injustice, as I argued earlier, is a hot cognition, not merely an abstract intellectual judgment about what is equitable.

The heat of a moral judgment is intimately related to beliefs about what acts or conditions have caused people to suffer undeserved hardship or loss. The critical dimension is the abstractness of the target. Vague, abstract sources of unfairness diffuse indignation and make it seem foolish. We may think it dreadfully unfair when it rains on our parade, but bad luck or nature is a poor target for an injustice frame. When we see impersonal, abstract forces as responsible for our suffering, we are taught to accept what cannot be changed and make the best of it. Anger is dampened by the unanswerable rhetorical question: Who says life is fair?

At the other extreme, if one attributes undeserved suffering to malicious or selfish acts by clearly identifiable persons or groups, the emotional component of an injustice frame will almost certainly be there. Concreteness in the target, even when it is misplaced and directed away from the real causes of hardship, is a necessary condition for an injustice frame. Hence, competition over defining targets is a crucial battleground in the development or containment of injustice frames.

More specifically, an injustice frame requires that motivated human actors carry some of the onus for bringing about harm and suffering. These actors may be corporations, government agencies, or specifiable groups rather than individuals. They may be presented as malicious, but selfishness, greed, and indifference may be sufficient to produce indignation.

An injustice frame does not require that the actors who are responsible for the condition be autonomous. They may be depicted as constrained by past actions of others and by more abstract forces – as long as they have some role as agents in bringing about or continuing the wrongful injury. From the standpoint of those who wish to control or discourage the development of injustice frames, symbolic strategies should emphasize abstract targets that render human agency as invisible as possible. Reification helps to accomplish this by blaming actorless entities such as "the system," "society," "life," and "human nature."

As Sennett (1980, 180) points out, "The language of bureaucratic power is often couched in the passive voice, so that responsibility is veiled." Any given agent of an authority system can disclaim responsibility easily by passing the buck. For subordinates, "I'm only following the rules; I don't make them" is the classic ploy. Even those at the top can externalize a "system" that binds them as well as all other participants and is beyond anyone's ability to alter.

The late Saul Alinsky pinpoints the problem for organizers in his *Rules for Radicals* (1972, 130–1):

> In a complex urban society, it becomes increasingly difficult to single out who is to blame for any particular evil. There is a constant, and somewhat legitimate, passing of the buck. . . . One big problem is a constant shifting of responsibility from one jurisdiction to another – individuals and bureaus one after another disclaim responsibility for particular conditions, attributing the authority for any change to some other force.

If reification does not prevent the development of an injustice frame, a second line of defense involves accepting human agency but diverting the focus to external targets or internal opponents. Righteous anger cannot always be prevented, but it may still be channeled safely and perhaps even used to further one's purposes.

For those who would encourage collective action, these strategies of social control provide a formidable dilemma. The conditions of people's daily lives are, in fact, determined by abstract sociocultural forces that are largely invisible to them. Critical views of "the system," however accurate, may still encourage reification just as much as benign ones as long as they lack a focus on human actors.

The antidote to excessive abstraction has its own problems. In concretizing the targets of an injustice frame, there is a danger that people will miss the underlying structural conditions that produce hardship and inequality. They may exaggerate the role of human actors, failing to understand broader structural constraints, and misdirect their anger at easy and inappropriate targets.

There is no easy path between the cold cognition of an overdetermined structural analysis and the hot cognition of misplaced concreteness. As long as human actors are not central in understanding the conditions that produce hardship and suffering, we can expect little righteous anger. Targets of collective action will remain unfocused. As long as moral indignation is narrowly focused on human actors without regard to the broader structure in which they operate, injustice frames will be a poor tool for collective action, leading to ineffectiveness and frustration, perhaps creating new victims of injustice.

To sustain collective action, the targets identified by the frame must successfully bridge abstract and concrete. By connecting broader sociocultural forces with human agents who are appropriate targets of collective action, one can get the heat into the cognition. By making sure that the concrete targets are linked to and can affect the broader forces, one can make sure that the heat isn't misdirected in ways that will leave the underlying source of injustice untouched.

Injustice in media discourse

Media practices have a double-edged effect, both stimulating and discouraging injustice frames. As we will see shortly, the extent to which they do one or the other differs substantially from issue to issue. But some framing practices cut across issues and operate more generally.

Some encouragement of injustice frames is built into the narrative form that dominates news reporting. Most journalists understand that news writing is storytelling, but sometimes it is made explicit. Epstein (1973, 241) describes a memo that Reuven Frank sent to his staff at NBC News. "Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama." Stories were to be organized around the triad of "conflict, problem, and denouement," with "rising action" building to a climax.

This dependence on the narrative form has implications for promoting an injustice frame. Narratives focus attention on motivated actors rather than structural causes of events. As new events unfold and changes appear in the conditions of people's daily lives, human agents are typically identified as causal agents in a morality play about good and evil or honesty and corruption. The more abstract analysis of sociocultural forces favored by social scientists is deemphasized, if it enters the story at all.

Media emphasis on narrative form, then, tends to concretize targets in ways that would appear to abet injustice frames. Far from serving the social control needs of authorities in this instance, media coverage frequently gives people reasons to get angry at somebody. Of course, that "somebody" need not be the real source of grievance at all but merely some convenient surrogate. Nevertheless, however righteous indignation may get channeled, media discourse on many issues inadvertently helps to generate it by providing concrete targets. Hence, it is an obstacle to social control strategies that diffuse a sense of injustice by moving the causes of undeserved hardship beyond human agency.

At the same time, the personalization of responsibility may have the effect of blurring broader power relations and the structural causes of a bad situation. Many writers have argued that the total media experience leads to the fragmentation of meaning. News comes in quotations with ever shorter sound bites. The preoccupation with immediacy results in a proliferation of fleeting, emphemeral images that have no ability to sustain any coherent organizing frame to provide meaning over time. The "action news" formula adopted by many local news programs packs thirty to forty short, fast items to fill a twenty-two-and-a-half-minute "newshole." "One minute-thirty for World War III," as one critic described it (Diamond, 1975).

Bennett (1988) analyzes the news product as a result of journalistic practices that combine to produce fragmentation and confusion. "The fragmentation of information begins," he argues, "by emphasizing individual actors over the political contexts in which they operate. Fragmentation is then heightened by the use of dramatic formats that turn events into self-contained, isolated happenings." The result is news that comes to us in "sketchy dramatic capsules that make it difficult to see the connections across issues or even to follow the development of a particular issue over time." Hence, the structure and operation of societal power relations remain obscure and invisible.

Iyengar (1991) provides experimental evidence on how the episodic nature of media reporting on most issues affects attributions of responsibility. He contrasts two forms of presentation – the "episodic" and the "thematic." The episodic form – by far the more common one – "takes the form of a case study or event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances." In contrast, the much rarer thematic form emphasizes general outcomes, conditions, and statistical evidence.

By altering the format of television reports about several different political issues as presented to experimental and control groups, Iyengar shows how people's attributions of responsibility are affected. More specifically, he shows that exposure to the episodic format makes viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable for the existence of some problem and less likely to hold them responsible for alleviating it.

The implication of this line of argument is that if people simply relied on the media, it would be difficult to find any coherent frame at all, let alone an injustice frame. The metanarrative is frequently about the self-reforming nature of the system, operating to get rid of the rotten apples that news media have exposed. If moral indignation is stimulated by fingering the bad guys, it is quickly and safely assuaged by their removal.

These complicated and offsetting characteristics invite us to look closely at how media discourse treats the injustice theme on different issues. All of the issues considered here contain hardship and suffering as part of the story. On troubled industry, workers lose their jobs, and their families and communities suffer along with them. On affirmative action, people may experience discrimination and lose jobs or educational opportunities. On nuclear power, people may risk harm from radiation and be forced to evacuate their homes. On Arab–Israeli conflict, which so often takes a violent form, death, injury, and dislocation are constant features. Every

frame has the task of interpreting the source of these sufferings and considering how they can be mitigated or eliminated. Only by examining each issue in turn can we understand the extent to which media discourse encourages or discourages specific injustice frames.

Injustice in conversations

When working people talk about the actors who dominate the news, they constantly judge and, most of the time, condemn them. There are very few heroes in these conversations. But the implicit and explicit judgments are not necessarily about injustice – that is, the belief that individuals or organizations are operating in a way that warrants righteous indignation.

There are many ways of short-circuiting the connection between the belief that people are being undeservedly wronged by human agents and the emotional response of indignation. Corruption, for example, rarely seems to trigger it. A cynical chic view of politics leads to the expectation that greed and the pursuit of narrow self-interest are typical and, perhaps, even part of human nature. To learn that yet another rich businessman has colluded with government officials to rip off the taxpayers is so normal, in this view, that apathy and boredom are more likely to be triggered than outrage.

But a countertendency operates as well. There is enough pain and hardship in the daily lives of many of these working people to produce quite a bit of anger. They draw on these feelings when some aspect of an issue under discussion makes these emotions relevant. In this sense, injustice frames offer potential hooks to which people can attach their anger over the hardships and indignities that they experience in their daily lives. Since this coupling of the cognition of unfairness in the larger society with the emotion of indignation does not happen easily or automatically, we can learn by taking a close look at how it occurs in these conversations.

Here, I must acknowledge the importance of a methodological limitation discussed in Chapter 2. Something is lost with each transformation of this conversation – from being there, to videotape or audiotape, to written transcript. This "something" centers on the intensity and nature of the emotions being expressed. We used audiotape, which loses all of the critical visual cues, although it at least preserves voice intonations.

Most of the vocal cues are lost in the written transcriptions, in spite of our inclusion of some transcribing conventions to indicate emphasis. Our coders flagged "high-intensity moments" using audiotapes, but these included a much broader range of emotions than indignation and never reached satisfactory levels of reliability. Hence, the measure of injustice

in these conversations relies on an impoverished expression of it – a written transcript – that may underestimate its presence.

When indignation does spill over into words, it may well be only the tip of the iceberg. It seems likely that the more visible part is not very different from the less easily visible in revealing which perceived injustices seem to make working people angry as they talk about these issues. My search for injustice frames focused on explicit moral condemnations: "That is just wrong," "That's unfair," "That really burns me up," and "That pisses me off," for example.

The mere words, however, are not sufficient to make a segment of conversation qualify as expressing moral indignation. Sometimes the word *wrong* is used in the sense of a mistake, not in the sense of a moral wrong – for example, "They think they have this nuclear power under control, but they're wrong." The context must make the moral nature of the injustice claim clear. However, even when the moral dimension is clear, it is quite common for other speakers to challenge the target of indignation, suggesting that the emotion is either misdirected or not justified.

Finally, speakers sometimes qualify their own statements in ways that explicitly break the potential link between the unfairness claim and indignation. They say, "It's unfair, *but*..." and the "but" may include either the fatalism of "that's life" or more explicit arguments that offset or justify the unfairness.

Injustice frames are measured here by explicit moral condemnation, unqualified by offsetting arguments and unchallenged by other group members. The following excerpt provides a good example of such a discussion.

Characters:

Marjorie, a waitress, in her forties.
Judy, a data entry clerk, in her thirties.
Several others who don't speak in this scene.

(The group is near the end of a discussion of nuclear power):

Marjorie: They should have taken all that money to nuclear power and everything – and you've got kids starving in America.
Judy: Yeah.
Marjorie: You've got homeless people. Where's your values? (pause) They suck. They really do suck.
Judy: You're on tape.
(*laughter*)
Marjorie: I don't care what I'm on. Still – it's obvious – when you pay

millions and millions of dollars in nuclear plants when people in America are starving –

Judy: – Right.

Marjorie: And you've got homeless people, no matter what they are – whether they're drunks or they're – whatever they are. Mentally ill people and you've got them living on a street. And you've got a family of five people – I worked for Legal Services of Greater Boston and I had people in the Milner Hotel, mothers with five kids in one room. Living. And we don't have places for them, but we have places to build nuclear plants. That's garbage. That's garbage!

Troubled industry

Two of the critical discourse moments in our media sample centered on large corporations seeking government help to avoid bankruptcy. In 1971 the Lockheed Aircraft Company, a major defense contractor, sought and received guarantees from the Nixon administration for a $250 million loan; in 1979, the Chrysler Corporation sought and received similar guarantees for a $1.5 billion loan from the Carter administration.

Media accounts generally framed the controversy as a contest between pragmatists who focused on the hardships created by the closing of such large companies and the ideologues who objected on principle to public bailouts of failing private enterprises. What intrigued most commentators, however, was the central irony that apostles of free enterprise were seeking government handouts. Supporters of the loans, as Rep. Bella Abzug put it, believed in "Socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor."

This theme of a hypocritical double standard was repeated again and again. In 1971, a full 50 percent of the thirty-six cartoons and 39 percent of the thirty-three opinion columns played on it. The phrases *socialism for the rich* and *welfare for the rich* occurred repeatedly, and Lockheed was frequently depicted as a fat ne'er-do-well looking for an easy handout. Many commentators contrasted the help proposed for Lockheed with the neglect of the poor. The following Herblock cartoon expresses the central irony very well.

The same theme of a hypocritical double standard remained central in commentary on the $1.5 billion Chrysler loan eight years later. Some 31 percent of twenty-six relevant cartoons and columns presented some version of it. A column by Art Buchwald, "Giving a Broken-Down Bum a Break" (Nov. 8, 1979), captures it most fully; reprinted with permission from Art Buchwald:

Cartoon 3.1. Troubled industry. (Herblock, *Washington Post*, July 25, 1971. From HERBLOCK'S STATE OF THE UNION (Simon & Shuster 1972). Reprinted by permission.)

"Hey, mister, could you spare a billion and a half dollars to get me through 1980?"

"Out of my way, you bum. Why don't you get a job like everyone else?"

"I have a job making Chrysler cars."

"Then why are you standing here with a tin cup asking decent folks for money?"

"Nobody seems to want to buy my cars."

"In the capitalist system, my good man, it is the survival of the fittest. If you can't sell a product, then you don't deserve to be in business. Suppose I do give

you a billion and a half dollars. How do I know you won't use it for drink instead of building better cars?"

"Don't worry about that, mister. You give me the money and I'll go right to the plant and produce one of the most beautiful automobiles you've ever seen."

"Why didn't you produce one before if you know how to do so?"

"That's a long story."...

"This is ridiculous. I don't approve of panhandlers, even if they make automobiles."

"Don't think it's much fun being out here on the street, mister. But panhandling for car money is all I can do. The banks won't give me none, and a lot of people think I'm a loser. But if I can just get a little nest egg, you won't see me on this corner again."...

"If I give you a billion and a half dollars, what will you do differently?"

"I have great plans for the new models. I even have an updated slogan: 'Buy the car that is guaranteed by the United States Treasury.' How does that grab you?"...

"I guess I'm always a sucker for a hard-luck corporation story. You know, if you had been a little guy I'd have let you starve to death."

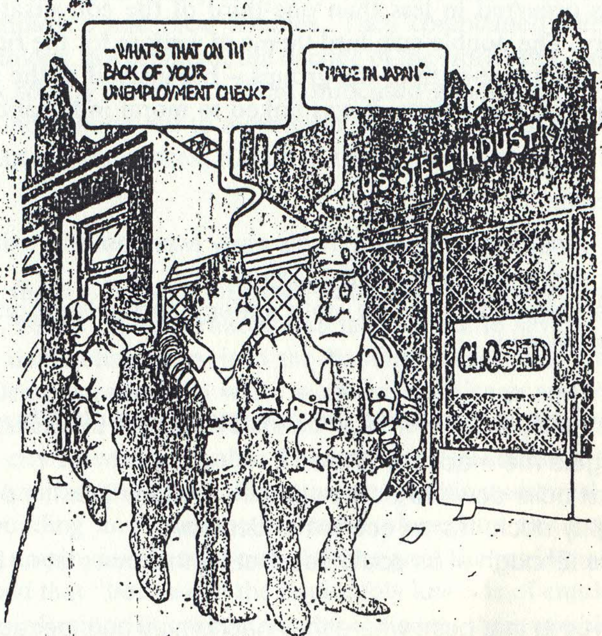
"I appreciate that, sir. The minute I saw you walking down the street I said to myself. 'There's a man who cares about the big guy when he gets in trouble.' "

The other critical discourse moments on this issue focused on problems in the steel industry during 1976 and 1977. The double standard theme did not emerge in this coverage, since steel companies sought different forms of federal aid – especially the relaxation of environmental and safety regulations, import restrictions, and tax breaks. This time, the hardships for laid-off workers, their families, and their communities were a current rather than a future prospect.

Of the twenty-seven attributions of blame for this suffering, only one put the onus on the workers themselves. Some 63 percent focused on Japan or other countries as the primary culprits. *Time* magazine's coverage (Dec. 5, 1977) was especially inflamatory, speaking of "a relentless assault from cut-rate foreign competitors" and a "foreign invasion [that] has caused shutdowns of old mills, forcing more than 60,000 workers out of jobs." An accompanying picture showed a steel mill in Fukuyama, Japan, captioned "Cut-rate competition routs U.S. rivals." Three of the five cartoons told people to blame the Japanese for their troubles. The following Sargent cartoon provides a good example.

Critics of deindustrialization who emphasized management decisions such as the milking of Youngstown Sheet and Tube by the Lykes Corporation (see Chapter 4, "Troubled Industry") and the failure to modernize production received scant attention. Steel companies themselves received only 12 percent of the blaming attributions, a number equaled by the environmental movement and the "Nader juggernaut," which allegedly forced costly antipollution and health regulations on the struggling industry.

There is a sharp contrast here with the discourse on the Lockheed and



Cartoon 3.2. Troubled industry. (Sargent, *Austin American-Statesman*, December 8, 1977. Reprinted by permission.)

Chrysler loans. When a company was in trouble, media discourse emphasized management responsibility. Lockheed received 46 percent and Chrysler 54 percent of the blaming attributions when the critical discourse moment focused on their plight. But when the problems were industrywide, management responsibility almost disappeared in a discourse that emphasized other causal agents.

In sum, media discourse on troubled industry offered two potential injustice frames. First, there was the unfairness implicit in the double standard of government welfare for the rich and powerful, and neglect for the poor and weak. Second, there were foreign agents, with their cheap and docile labor force and their lack of environmental and safety constraints, who exploit these and other unfair advantages to force American workers out of jobs. Potential sources of injustice flowing from global capitalism, with multinational corporations as the human agents, rarely appeared, and one would need to go beyond national media discourse to be aware of such frames.

Injustice frames in conversations

Injustice frames occurred in less than one-third of the conversations on troubled industry. The double-standard theme of welfare for the rich came up explicitly in about one-sixth of the groups – but instead of the amused irony of the editorial cartoonists, it was linked to moral indignation.

Characters:

Don, a construction worker, in his early twenties.
Pam, a secretary, in her late twenties.
Alice, an administrator at a state agency and college graduate, in her thirties.

(The group is discussing the government loan to Chrysler):

Don: That one gets me mad, you know.
Pam: I think it all boils down to politics. It's the bottom line. It's politics.
Don: The almighty buck. It's an economic decision.
Pam: It's politics. Enough of us could see that, at the lower level, the little level.
Don: Chrysler was at that point where they had to play ball, because they were going down the drain. And now he, he just come out and said, "hey, whatever you want, how much you want? You can have it, just make me number one."
Alice: Oh, come on, Lee Iacocca when he needed it –
Don: And they said, "Don't worry, Lee. We'll get you a book, we'll write you a book, we'll put your name on the cover and you'll be all set."
Alice: You know what burns me is, they spend, I don't think a lot of money to aid people, but then they go and they give the Contra aid. And here they won't give people in our country, they're cutting social services.
Don: Now that's another subject –
Alice: The real kick in the ass is that they say, "Now we're going to displace all these workers, and we're going to throw you a little 75 mill. to do a training program, but we'll give you an incentive and we'll let you have 10 percent of that for displaced workers." Thank you very much! I mean, you know, "train all the people that we put out of work." We helped Chrysler people go back to work, but Chrysler people had to take a cut in pay and that was fine. They didn't tell you the second year they got a bonus.

The two-thirds of the groups that expressed no explicit moral indignation on troubled industry frequently expressed sympathy for the hardships of the unemployed and their families. They complained freely about companies, unions, government, the decline of the work ethic, and the direction in which society is headed. This unfocused general griping did not lead them to indignation but to a cynicism that accepts that politics and justice are distant acquaintances, if indeed they have ever met.

Affirmative action

In 1969, the conflict over affirmative action centered on the construction industry. Major demonstrations had taken place in several cities by black workers demanding entry into the building trades, and these stimulated counterdemonstrations by white workers in Chicago and Pittsburgh. The major vehicle for affirmative action was the Philadelphia Plan, named for the first city in which a Labor Department agreement with federal contractors had been reached. The plan set specific numerical goals for each of the building and construction trades, based on the extent of current minority employment and the availability pool. Labor Department officials announced that "because of the deplorably low rate of employment among members of minority groups" in the industry, they would set up similar plans in other major cities.

Media discourse offered a clear target of moral indignation: unions, especially in the building trades. Opponents were typically symbolized in cartoons, for example, by a construction worker in hard hat or sometimes by AFL-CIO head George Meany. The recurrent theme in all eight of the cartoons from this period was the hypocrisy and covert racism of opponents of affirmative action. The cartoonists all took for granted that blacks were unfairly excluded from the building trades and lampooned the opposition.

The media's "other side" in this case was represented by quoting union leaders or rank-and-file workers who were undisguisedly racist. *Newsweek*, for example, presented a construction worker: "We do all the work. The niggers have got it made. They keep closing in, working their way into everything. Last 3 or 4 months you can't even turn on the damn TV without seeing a nigger. They're even playing cowboys" (Oct. 6, 1969, 57).

Ten years later, at the time of the Supreme Court's Weber decision, there was a dramatic change. Brian Weber was a worker at a Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical plant in Gramercy, Louisiana. The company, in an agreement with the United Steelworkers Union, had instituted a program

to correct a racial imbalance among its craft workers. Blacks were to be given half of the openings in a training program until the imbalance was corrected. The result of this program was that some blacks were accepted who had less seniority than several white applicants who were rejected. Weber, who was one of these, claimed that his exclusion was racial discrimination, prohibited by the Civil Rights Act.

This time there was no media heavy at all, no clear-cut target of moral indignation. Supporters of affirmative action relied more and more on the abstract and complex idea of institutional racism: Race-conscious programs are necessary because of the continuing structural effects of past discrimination. But none of the players in the Weber story were carrying on that legacy.

Opposition to affirmative action was no longer represented by workers complaining that blacks were getting undeserved advantages but by articulate neoconservatives who objected to race-conscious programs as a violation of individual rights. The opponents of affirmative action competed directly with proponents over claims of victimization and the moral indignation to which those who have been wronged are entitled. By 1979, the affirmative action story in the media had competing victims and would-be redeemers but, as villains, only ghosts from the past.

By the middle of the Reagan administration, this situation had changed again. Affirmative action discourse was more polarized, with two strong competing frames, each with influential sponsors. Each of the major protagonists – the Reagan administration and the network of civil rights advocates – was a potential target of indignation, depending on the frame being displayed. Victimization had become an equal opportunity job, available to whites, blacks, and other minorities alike. Two competing frames both offered their own reasons for getting angry.

Boston, of course, has its own special racial history that is not reflected in this national media discourse. For months at a time during the 1970s, local media attention was heavily focused on the bitter controversy over de facto segregation in the Boston public school system. Unlike the national discourse during the 1970s, which blurred potential targets for an injustice frame, the Boston school busing controversy offered clear-cut and personalized targets.

Although de facto school segregation and affirmative action are not the same issue, reference to the busing conflict comes up repeatedly in the affirmative action discussions of both white and black groups in our Boston sample. Since the local and national discourses are quite different in presenting targets for injustice frames, one can't rely exclusively on national discourse for this part of the analysis.

In sum, national media discourse on affirmative action combined with

local discourse on the school busing controversy has consistently presented concrete targets of moral indignation for use in injustice frames. In the late 1960s, these were provided mainly for supporters of affirmative action, but from the 1970s to the present, injustice claims abound with concrete targets on all sides at which to point a finger of accusation.

Injustice frames in conversation

Affirmative action conversations, far more than any other issue, were heavily permeated with injustice frames. For almost all of the black groups and half of the white groups, affirmative action requires that they reconcile a moral conflict. Black groups either took for granted or explicitly pointed out the continuing disadvantages of blacks in American society. But, as we will see in Chapter 5 ("Affirmative Action"), the majority of them also asserted that a person should be judged as an individual, independently of group membership. Hence, they acknowledged the possibility that individual whites may suffer unfairly and that some balancing of justice claims is necessary.

Similarly, about half of the white groups also tried to balance competing injustice claims. All of the white and interracial groups endorsed the idea that people should be judged as individuals, but half of them avoided a moral conflict by denying the continuing existence of discrimination against blacks. "That was then; this is now" was the vehicle of denial and the basis for claiming exemption from responsibility for discrimination by others in the past. The other half of the white groups and the interracial groups acknowledged that blacks and other minorities continue to operate at a disadvantage, in spite of affirmative action programs.

One might think that the moral complexity and ambiguity of the issue for most groups would inhibit the expression of indignation. Perhaps it does in black groups, since only 53 percent expressed injustice frames on affirmative action compared to 86 percent of the others.[1] But a common pattern seemed to be the expression of double indignation: directed at discrimination against blacks *and* at preferential treatment of individuals on the basis of group membership rather than personal qualifications.

Almost 30 percent of the black groups expressed anger at how affirmative action programs set poor whites and blacks against each other when both groups suffer undeserved hardship; and at the unfairness to everybody – white and black alike – of setting blacks up for failure in positions that they are not adequately trained to handle. The following transcripts show the two contrasting ways in which black groups expressed an injustice frame

on the issue. The first group emphasizes the injustice to blacks in an unambivalent way; anger is directed against those whites who, in the face of a long and continuing history of discrimination against blacks, shamelessly claim that they are being victimized.

Characters:

Nancy, a homemaker and college student, in her thirties.
Lucy, a human service worker, in her thirties.
Rudy, a musician, in his thirties.
Duane, a machinist, in his thirties.

Nancy: Well, in Memphis – that's where I'm from – I worked in a bank for six years and, um, I worked as a file clerk in the bookkeeping department and in customer service answering the telephone. Well, I know I had the experience for other jobs but there would be – like young white women would come in, you know, no experience at all, except they may know the boss, or know their mother or daughter, and they'd get in another way. I didn't think it was fair and I tried to do something about it, but there wasn't enough co-workers there that was really trying to pull in together. But I didn't think that was fair at all.

[*later, in response to Cartoon 6 (see Appendix B)*]

Lucy: Where were the white folks yelling "discrimination" when we were enslaved? (pause) I mean, where were they? I didn't see nobody standing in line to wash the white folks' dishes. I didn't see no whites in that line. There were no white folks standing in line when we had to sleep in the barn when they were selling my mama, and her sister and their children, down the road. I didn't see no whites in that same line getting their folks sold down the road. And now they're in the lines talking about we're getting preferential treatment because we're black. All of a sudden, we're beginning to raise our consciousness so that we can fight white America – the prejudiced part of white America that keeps us enslaved – and to say that we ought to have an opportunity to get this job too. And here a couple of white folks try to get in there and say, "Oh, now you're getting preferential treatment." Didn't nobody care about the preferential treatment they've been getting for 300 years.

[*later*]

Facilitator: You've already said a lot about affirmative action, but just to sum it up, what do you think should be done about affirmative action?

Lucy: I would say there's a multitude of revisions that need to be done. And it's not fair. They paint a very unfair picture of what they're trying to do, and they're trying to give to the blacks.

Rudy: What I think about when I think what could be done to make affirmative action real is let us have some real affirmative actions – none of this affirmative action that we've had in the past. Because it's not affirmative action.

Lucy: Or change the name. It doesn't fit the bill. Affirmative action is not what they're doing. There is nothing affirmative. I think of the word *affirmative* as having a positive connotation.

Rudy: Right.

Lucy: And there's nothing positive about the kind of affirmation that they've given us. I don't see very much that's affirmative.

Duane: I don't see affirmative. If they want to be affirmative –

Lucy: – they're keeping eighty and giving us twenty.

Duane: – with their actions and what they are going to do, I'd say still give me my forty acres and my mule.

Rudy: Speaking of changing the name, what we really need is some *drastic* action.

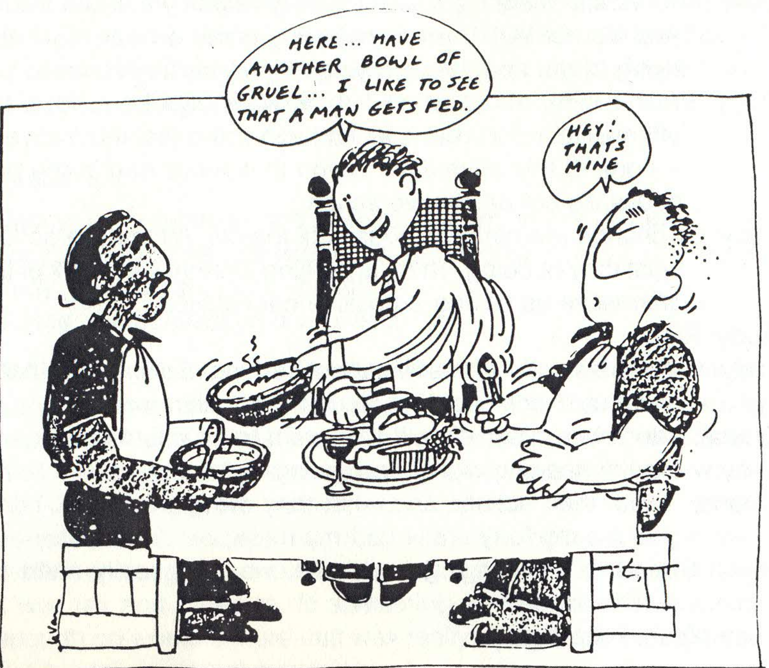
Lucy: Yeah, I like that.

The next group shows the complex, multifaceted way in which the affirmative action issue sparks double indignation in other black groups where the claims of victimization by whites are taken more seriously. These two patterns of discourse on affirmative action occur with about equal frequency in black groups:

Characters:

Elizabeth, a data processor at an insurance company, in her forties.
Thomas, a transportation worker, in his forties.
Emilie, a billing clerk for an insurance company, in her thirties.

Elizabeth: Well, to give you a good example of – of your quotas, your – your hiring your minorities. There was this girl and I started on this job, same time. Now I don't know if she had office experience from before, but I did. We started same time, doing the same type of work, but because she had a little college background, I don't know if she had any certificate or what-have-you, but because she did go to college, they started her off paying her more than they started me off with. And that wasn't fair, because we were doing the same kind of work.



8. The cartoonist seems to be saying that rich liberals want to give special breaks to blacks at the expense of whites who also need a break. Reprinted with permission.

Thomas: And you're still trying to catch up.
Elizabeth: Right

[later, near the end of the discussion]

Thomas: The white male, the ones that have wanted to work, have always been able to get work.

Elizabeth: Yes, those that had a little pull, but you had white poor people just like we categorize ourselves as being poor. They were being pushed out of jobs, and that wasn't fair either. Why take away from the poor white man who was trying to survive and take care of his family? Because he was in the same – to me, he's just as equal as I am. He's out there working, trying to survive, trying to take care of his family. So why take his job away because you had to give it to a black person?

Thomas: It's going back to that Cartoon 8. Why grab over, reach over there and grab his bowl of food when you're sitting in the middle with all of it? Why don't you just say –

Emilie: – Yeah. "We'll share."

Thomas: "Why don't you guys just split mine up and we'll all eat." . . . And it's making the poor whites and the blacks feel this animosity towards each other because we all feel – I feel that if my parents, my father had a had the same chance as this white man's father had when he was coming up, that I would be in a better position right now. But he didn't have that chance. He got out there and do the same work that white man was doing, but he was getting twenty-five cents a day and the white man was getting fifty cents a day. Now, what kind of, what kind of – what is that? I'm not trying to go back a hundred years, but that is a fact.

Injustice frames occurred in 85 percent of the discussions of affirmative action in white and interracial groups. Even in the three white groups without them, at least one person made an explicit injustice claim but had it challenged by others. As with the black groups, there were both single and double indignation discussions, reflecting differences in whether the injustice claims of others are taken seriously or not. The double-indignation pattern appeared in 29 percent of the white groups and in two of the three interracial ones.

The first of the following examples illustrates a white group in which the potential moral complexity is resolved by laying exclusive claim to the victim's role. But note how even in this group, which never overtly acknowledges a black disadvantage, Judy implicitly accepts the argument that equal opportunity hasn't always prevailed in the past by accepting the legitimacy of providing "special things where they go for classes."

Characters:
Linda, a nurse, in her twenties.
Marie, a nurse, in her forties.
Cris, a nurse, in her forties.
Judy, a dental assistant, in her thirties.
Nora, a nurse, in her forties.
Lil, a nurse, in her forties.

Linda: Why should the government pay for a black person to go to school and not me? Now why is he any better than I am? I didn't get any special assistance to go to college. Why should all my friends that are black have special assistance?
Marie: That's right, you had to work your behind off.
Cris: I think, I think they get too much.
Marie: And they – all they do is cry discrimination, and they're in and

we're out – we're the ones being discriminated against, not the blacks anymore.

Judy: The whole thing with busing and everything. My kids are in parochial school because of the busing; I never intended to send my kids to Catholic school, never, because I hated Catholic school when I was there. So, where are they? The same school I went to.

Cris: I particularly bought my house so my kids could walk to school, and then they tell me, "No, the black kids are coming to that school and your kids are going someplace else." That isn't fair; I was being discriminated against.

Judy: This is a real sore spot that you're hitting here, and if you don't think it is –

(*general laughter*)

Judy: It definitely is a sore spot. Everybody is entitled. But you've got a working-class bunch of people sitting at this table, you know, and if we're all breaking our backs working, then Joe Shmo should be out there working, his wife should be out there working, and as far as – we're not into welfare so I won't even get into that, but I was gonna say, why not have – if they don't have a job, why not get them to fill that hole in on Washington Street? Get them working for a paycheck; give them a little self-respect, and have them working for a job.

[*later*]

Cris: When I went – when I went to Boston Latin, the black kids and the white kids –

Judy: – You had to make the grade.

Cris: – we all had to get the same grade, we all had to pass exams to get in there. And there was plenty of black kids in there. And we all busted our ass while we were in there. Now – hey, I left – it was too hard. There was other black kids that stayed there, you know? But now it's firemen's exams – there's a level for the black, there's a level for the white.

Judy: That's not right.

Nora: That's not right.

Lil: I don't feel it's right either. There should be equal opportunity.

Judy: Then they could, you know, maybe set up special things where they go for classes but not – when the time comes for the exam, *no* special treatment! That is a very sore subject. Very sore.

Some white groups acknowledged past or continuing discrimination against blacks but short-circuited the path to moral indignation by immediately qualifying or undercutting the force of the injustice. But others directed part of their indignation to the treatment of blacks even while they expressed anger at their own unfair treatment. The following group illustrates this double-indignation pattern:

Characters:

Ida, a bookkeeper, in her late sixties.
Nancy, a secretary, in her forties.
Arlene, a bookkeeper, in her forties.

Ida: You know, I didn't keep them down. I wasn't even there.

(*laughter*)

Nancy: See, nobody stopped us. So why should we not encourage?

Ida: I encourage! I absolutely do. I know a couple of instances from really personal experiences that I felt very bad. Early, before you were born, I worked for the State Department in Washington. And one of my best friends, who was an extremely bright gal, was black. And I was leaving. My husband was a student. This was after the Second World War. And they wanted to give me a party. You know, the girls all wanted to get together. And we couldn't have it in a public restaurant, because if we did, we couldn't have invited this girl to join us. Now, *that's wrong!* I mean, that's absolutely – (pause) We had it at somebody's house so she could be included because I wouldn't want a party without her. Now that's very wrong.

Nancy: Oh, sure.

Arlene: Yeah.

Ida: That sort of thing. But today, when a person can't even read or write and they get a better opportunity than someone who has three degrees and is beating their head against the wall trying to get a job opening? Oh, come on!

Nuclear power

The discourse on nuclear power has been indelibly marked by Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Public awareness began with images of sudden, enormous destruction, symbolized by the rising mushroom cloud of a nuclear bomb blast. Even when discourse focuses on the use of nuclear reactors to produce electricity, the afterimage of the bomb is never far from the surface.

Until the 1970s, media discourse on nuclear power was dominated by a dualism about nuclear energy. Boyer (1985, 125) points to the either/or

structure of so many post-Hiroshima pronouncements: "Either civilization would vanish in a cataclysmic holocaust, or the atomic future would be unimaginably bright." "We face the prospect either of destruction on a scale which dwarfs anything thus far reported," said the *New York Times* in an editorial a day after Hiroshima, "or of a golden era of social change which would satisfy the most romantic utopian."

As long as the issue was framed as a choice between atoms for war and atoms for peace, it is hard to see who could be against nuclear power development. In effect, there was no significant anti–nuclear power discourse during this era and nuclear power was, in general, a nonissue. "Nuclear power" was an uncontested symbol of technological progress.

By the time of the accident at Three Mile Island (TMI), nuclear power had become a controversial issue. Two years earlier, in our 1977 media sample at the time of the site occupation of the Seabrook, New Hampshire, reactor (see Chapter 4, "Nuclear Power"), many opponents of nuclear power were quoted. But it is striking how little critical framing of nuclear power was ever presented; the opposition itself was the story, not the reasons for it.

Even when comments were quoted that framed the nuclear power issue, opponents rarely suggested an injustice frame and were frequently vague about the human agents involved. CBS, the only network to make any attempt to present the demonstrators' frame, quoted Harvey Wasserman, a spokesman for the Clamshell Alliance: "We are fighting the war that is being waged against the environment and our health." The war metaphor implies an enemy who is waging it, but in using the passive voice, Wasserman left unsaid just who was waging this one.

Newsmagazine coverage quoted many different spokesmen, including Wasserman, Ralph Nader, and representatives from Friends of the Earth, the Sierra Club, and the National Resources Defense Council. But none of the selected quotes suggested a frame on nuclear power; instead, they focused exclusively on the strategy of direct action and whether the demonstrators would succeed. Proponents of nuclear power were treated as mistaken in these quotes, perhaps tragically so, but not as moral offenders.

After the TMI accident, there was an inevitable search for blame, but again it was rarely put in the context of an injustice frame. Accidents are, by definition, unintentional, so one searches for negligence or error but assumes the absence of malice. None of the most prominent frames offered very much of an injustice theme in accounting for the accident.

The most prominent frame after both the TMI and Chernobyl accidents was RUNAWAY (see Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). In it, human agency

is blurred. Some reified entity such as society or humankind has chosen to develop nuclear power under the mistaken idea that it can be controlled when it cannot. It has become a force of its own, beyond human agency, a powerful genie that has been summoned and now can not be forced back into its bottle. Genies make poor targets of moral indignation.

The once dominant PROGRESS framing of nuclear power offers a target of indignation in the "coercive utopians" and "neopastoralists" who would retard our economic growth and thereby make us renege on our obligation to the poor and to future generations. But whatever else their sins in this frame, the antinuclear movement can hardly be held responsible, even indirectly, for the accidents at TMI and Chernobyl.

After 1979, PROGRESS became a minority framing in all of the media samples and an increasingly defensive one. *Time,* for example, quoted Alvin Weinberg, introducing him as a nuclear advocate and pronuclear author who believes that the alternatives to this source are "so crummy that we probably should in a cautious way continue this nuclear enterprise" (Apr. 9, 1979, 20). This is not the kind of language that whips up an angry citizenry against those who would deny them their vital energy needs.

The most visible antinuclear framing, PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY, has a populist, anticorporate flavor and offers the nuclear industry as a potential target for an injustice frame. Nuclear power companies, in this frame, are frequently dishonest, greedy, and arrogant. Public officials who are supposed to monitor the activities of the industry are all too often captives of it. The nuclear industry has used its political and economic power to undermine the serious exploration of energy alternatives.

After TMI, PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY received quite a bit of prominence, but it generally appeared in a weak form. The strong version was typically displayed through one of the following three ideas: (1) profits are emphasized at the expense of public safety, (2) government regulation is ineffective because public officials function as promoters of the industry, or (3) industry interests work against providing full protection and information to the public. The weak version merely suggests some culpability by company managers, with negative consequences for the public or consumers. No analysis of reasons for such culpability is suggested beyond general incompetence, stupidity, laxness, or overconcern with public image. Only the strong form really offers an injustice frame.

By this criterion, only 10 percent of the relevant television utterances after TMI (N = 99) offered such an injustice frame and, after Chernobyl,

less than 10 percent ($N = 74$) reflected either the strong or the weak version of this package. Very similar figures held for newsmagazine utterances as well.

In sum, media discourse on nuclear power offered very few targets for injustice frames. Although the nuclear power industry was the most likely target offered, even at the high point after TMI, only about 10 percent of the media displays on nuclear power offered it as a candidate for moral indignation. No other actor came remotely close.

Injustice frames in conversations

The example quoted earlier, in which Marjorie expressed indignation about wasting money on nuclear power when people in America are starving and homeless, was a rare event in these groups. Only two other groups had some form of injustice frame on this issue, focusing mainly on how unfair it is that they have so little say about an issue that can affect their personal lives so directly. The dominant emotions evoked by nuclear power are fear and anxiety, not moral indignation.

Arab–Israeli conflict

Israelis and Palestinians make strong and competing claims about deep historical injustices, and these claims appear, of course, in the frames offered by their supporters in the United States. But these are not the dominant frames in American media discourse. Indeed, they must compete with two formidable frames that explicitly downgrade injustice claims, treating them as a distraction and an obstacle to be overcome.

In FEUDING NEIGHBORS, for example, fanaticism and the nurturing of long-standing grievances are the core of the problem. Whether the Hatfields or the McCoys have justice on their side is hardly the issue. The conflict takes on a life of its own, providing new grievances and a continuing sense of injustice to each side as they respond to the latest atrocity by the other. The real victims, in this frame, are the bystanders, not the combatants. They suffer the consequences and, in the case of Arab–Israeli conflict, there is a danger that we may all become such bystanders as the whole world becomes drawn into the conflict. If there is indignation here, it is expressed as a "plague on both your houses." When moments of reconciliation or compromise occur, it is not justice but reasonableness and good sense that appear triumphant.

The official frame, STRATEGIC INTERESTS, understands the issue in geopolitical terms and views the Middle East as a theater of major power

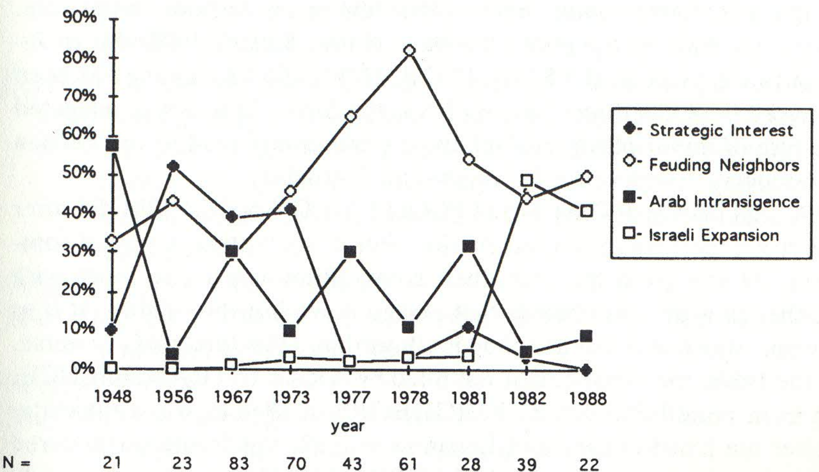


Figure 3.1. Cartoon frames on Arab–Israeli conflict.

competition, a battleground of the cold war. One doesn't ask, in this frame, which of the combatants has justice on its side, but of their value as strategic assets for the superpowers. Injustice claims become relevant only in an instrumental way, because they can be manipulated for advantage. Hence, it was common in this frame during the cold war to suggest that Soviet statements and actions were mischievous in intent, designed to enhance its influence in the Arab world by fanning their grievances and making peaceful resolution more difficult.

We sampled nine critical discourse moments from the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948 to a period in 1988 about three months after the *intifada* had begun, at the time of a new U.S. peace initiative (see Appendix A). With one exception, as Figure 3.1 shows for our cartoon sample,[2] the prominence of particular frames depends heavily on the historical context; sometimes they were very prominent in the discourse and sometimes virtually invisible.

The conspicuous exception was the consistent prominence of FEUDING NEIGHBORS, regardless of context. Even at its low point after the Six Day War in 1967, it was reflected in 30 percent of the cartoons. Over the entire forty-year period, it was displayed in half of the 390 cartoons; its major competitors averaged around one-fifth overall.

The other frames all had their moments of prominence, generally competing with FEUDING NEIGHBORS rather than with each other. STRATEGIC INTERESTS had its day from the 1950s through the late 1970s,

when many cartoons commented on the flow of oil and the Soviet role. But from the time of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's 1977 visit to Jerusalem to the present, the STRATEGIC INTERESTS framing has been very muted in media discourse. In effect, the Soviet Union was relegated to the role of minor player and oil anxiety was transferred to the Persian Gulf, reducing its relevance for Arab–Israeli conflict.

ARAB INTRANSIGENCE and ISRAELI EXPANSIONISM did offer competing targets for moral indignation, but it was a strange sort of competition. At any given moment, their competition was not so much with each other as with those frames that played down injustice claims. It is as if only one injustice frame at a time is allowed into this forum of discourse. Until the 1980s, the injustice slot was filled by ARAB INTRANSIGENCE, which even bested FEUDING NEIGHBORS in 1948 to win a majority. But after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, this frame surrendered the injustice slot to its rival, ISRAELI EXPANSIONISM, which currently carries on the competition with the nonpartisan FEUDING NEIGHBORS.

In sum, FEUDING NEIGHBORS, the dominant frame in media discourse on this issue, avoids taking sides on the justice claims of the parties in conflict. Until 1977, its main competitor was typically STRATEGIC INTERESTS, a frame that agreed with it in playing down the issue of which side was right or wrong. If these frames offered targets for indignation, it was typically the Soviet Union or fanatics and extremists on both sides. And even the frames that do endorse the injustice claims of the combatants offered no actor within American society toward whom such feelings could be directed.

Injustice frames in conversations

Injustice frames on Arab–Israeli conflict were almost as rare as on nuclear power. It was unusual for any discussion of this issue to take sides between the conflicting parties. Far from deciding where justice lies, most discussions emphasized the irrelevance of the moral concerns of the partisans. Sometimes, as in the discussion of the following interracial group, they distinguish explicitly between foreign policy conflicts in which issues of injustice are relevant and feuds in which the righteousness of the conflicting parties makes compromise and resolution especially difficult and unlikely.

Characters:

Bob, a human services administrator, white, in his thirties, a college graduate.

Reggie, coordinator at a health services pool, black, in his forties.

Dot, coordinator at a health services pool, white, in her forties.

Marilyn, a nurse, black, in her thirties.

Bob: It's not like we don't have any other problems to deal with in our own country. So you know, that just adds another problem that we need to be worried about in terms of a couple ideologies fighting it over, as you say, over the Gaza Strip. I mean, if they want to blow themselves into little tiny pieces for the sake of their beliefs, that's fine.

Reggie: I agree. I feel the same.

Bob: I feel the – exactly the same way about the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland.

Reggie: Um huh.

Bob: I see the same type of conflicts. And, you know, I mean, I got other things to worry about. You know what I mean?

Reggie: Um huh.

Dot: All the people that are getting killed.

Bob: I mean my basement – full of water, right?

Marilyn: You see the same – do you feel the same way about South Africa?

Marjorie: No. Uh uh.

Marilyn: I mean, we're talking about countries at war.

Bob: I see a difference here because we – I see an obvious, um, –

Reggie: – Wrong.

Bob: – wrong being done. Thank you, Reggie. To the black population in South Africa. I don't see necessarily a great wrong being done to the Israelis, nor do I see one to the Arabs. I don't see a great wrong being done to the Catholics versus the Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Marilyn: Um hum.

Bob: So I – I, personally don't share the enthusiasm and the zeal of the participants in this particular conflict, and therefore, I can't sympathize with them.

Conclusion

Explicit outbursts of moral indignation were infrequent in the course of a long conversation. They flared up unexpectedly, coming at unpredictable moments – for example, sometimes at the end of a discussion in which little anger or any other strong emotion had been expressed earlier. Though infrequent, few groups were without them. Overall, more than three-fourths of the groups had conversations on at least one issue in which

someone articulated an injustice frame, expressed moral indignation about it, and was supported by others.

There is a strong overall relationship between the prominence of injustice frames in media discourse and in popular discourse. On affirmative action, where the injustice theme is central and highly visible in media discourse, it is equally central and visible in the attempts of working people to make sense of the issue. On nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict, where injustice frames have low prominence in media discourse, conversations about these issues rarely express moral indignation.

The causal relationship, however, is complicated and indirect. On troubled industry, for example, in spite of the fact that media discourse frequently offered the Japanese or Third World countries as potential targets of moral indignation, none of these conversations employed such an injustice frame. When the Japanese were discussed, it was typically in an admiring way, for their disciplined and cooperative work habits. When Third World countries came up, as they often did, foreign workers who take American jobs were spared moral indignation because of a presumed lack of choice and desperation that forces them to accept low wages that Americans would not accept.

On the other hand, the targets for indignation that did come up most frequently in conversation were limited to those with visibility in media discourse. On troubled industry, for example, general business practices or specific companies were the most frequent targets of denunciation, as was the double standard of welfare for the rich and neglect for the poor. It was rare to find an injustice frame that went beyond the targets that media discourse made readily available – for example, indignation at American-based multinational corporations that hire Third World workers at substandard wages.

It would be very misleading, however, to conclude that people are parroting what they have taken from the media in developing these injustice frames. When a group expresses indignation at the double standard, it is not because they got the idea from a Herblock cartoon or an Art Buchwald column. They forge the cognitive link themselves by using awareness of an antiwelfare public discourse that deplores poor people's getting government help, combining it with their knowledge of government help for the rich.

The use of injustice frames, it turns out, is a critical catalyst for the appearance of other elements of a collective action frame. In the next chapter, we explore people's sense of collective efficacy and the potential for ordinary people to change the conditions of their daily lives through collective action.

4

Agency

If many intelligent analysts and close observers are right, precious few American working people have any sense of themselves as collective agents of history. Indeed, if I had found such a sense among these Boston area working people, I would immediately have suspected the typicality of the sample and concluded that our methods had produced a deviant group. But if one listens carefully to their conversation, a portrait of passivity and quiescence seems incomplete; there is a rebellious streak as well that flares up in conversations at selected moments. And it expresses a sense of collective agency.

This chapter presents a story of "in spite of." The forces discouraging a sense of agency among working people are overwhelming. Culture and social structure combine to induce collective helplessness. Only individual escape seems possible, typically through some kind of liberating educational experience that strips the scales from one's eyes and opens opportunities. The vast majority seem to remain subject to sociocultural forces that systematically remove from their consciousness any sense that collectively they can alter the conditions and terms of their daily lives.

Most of us, even those with political activist identities, spend most of our time and energy sustaining our daily lives. Flacks (1988, 2) points out that this includes not only meeting material needs but "activity and experience designed to sustain one's self as a human being – to validate or fulfill the meaning of one's life, reinforce or enhance one's sense of self-worth, [and] achieve satisfaction and pleasure." This daily activity typically takes for granted and reinforces the patterned daily life characteristic of a community or society; rarely do people have an opportunity to engage in activity that challenges or tries to change some aspect of this pattern – what Flacks calls "making history."

As long as history making is centralized and hierarchical, with very little opportunity for working people to participate in any of the institutions that set the conditions of their daily lives, they will inevitably feel "that they