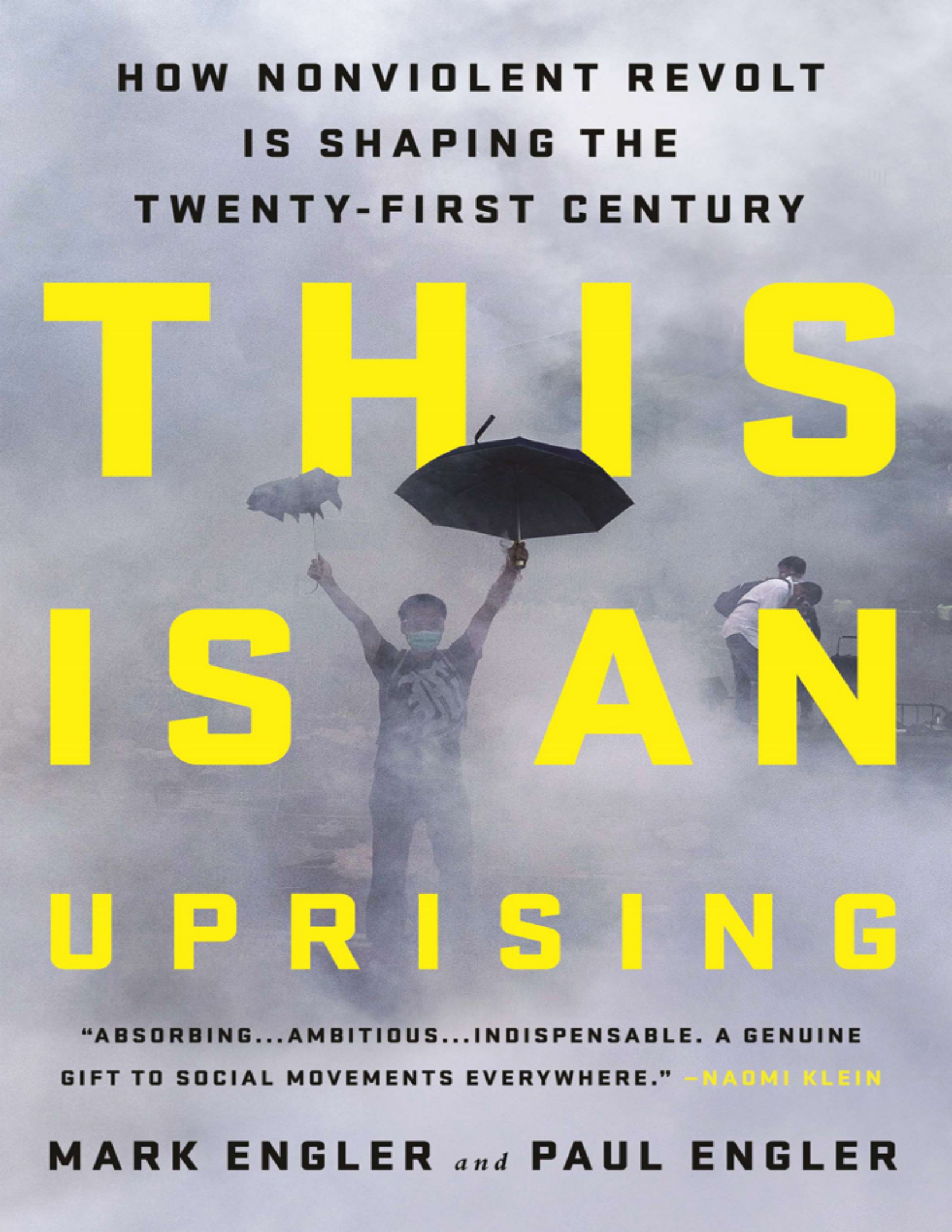
HOW NONVIOLENT REVOLT IS SHAPING THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

THIS IS AN UPRISING



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"This book tells the stories of the mass movements that have made our world and continue to change it, and it tells them with excitement, insight, and hope like few have told them before."
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"This book is the *Rules for Radicals* for a new generation. Mark and Paul Engler have written a defining work on the science of popular movements. It brings clarity and insight to many of major debates that I have experienced firsthand as an organizer in the immigrant rights movement and

beyond. A must-read for everyone fighting the battle for justice in this world."

—Carlos Saavedra, lead trainer, Ayni Institute, and former national coordinator, United We Dream

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How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-first Century

MARK ENGLER

AND

PAUL ENGLER

NATION BOOKS
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CHAPTER NINE

THE DISCIPLINE

EARTH FIRST! WAS in a crisis.

On May 8, 1987, a recently married twenty-three-year-old named George Alexander was working in a lumber mill run by the Louisiana-Pacific logging company in Cloverdale, California. Suddenly, the massive band saw he was operating hit a metal spike and exploded. A twelve-foot piece of the saw tore through Alexander's protective facemask, shattered his jaw, and cut into his jugular.

Had the blade rotated slightly, Alexander would have been decapitated. "The saw hit me flat," he later explained. "If it had hit me with the teeth I'd be dead. I'm only here because my friend Rick Phillips held my veins together in the hour before the ambulance came."[1]

In the wake of the accident, the logging company and county sheriff quickly blamed environmentalists for placing the metal spike in the tree being cut and thus causing the saw to break. Activists were flooded with a wave of public disgust and recrimination.

Earth First! had attracted controversy before, but this was different. The group was formed seven years earlier, and it had made an important contribution to revitalizing the defense of the nation's forests. Its founders

were staffers who had been working for mainstream national environmental groups, but who had been horrified by "Big Green's" willingness to cut a deal in Washington, DC, that allowed for logging throughout the majority of the still-roadless areas on public lands. In the spring of 1980, a small group of these disaffected organizers, including Dave Foreman, Bart Koehler, and Mike Roselle, took a camping trip to Northern Mexico. There they came up with the idea for a new grassroots organization that would be less respectful of Washington's insider process and unafraid to employ confrontational tactics.

The group's name, Earth First!, included an exclamation point to convey urgency. Its slogan, "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth," pointedly set the group apart from Big Green's dubiously conciliatory operating procedure.

From the start, Earth First!ers worked to create an image that would distinguish them from other branches of the environmental movement. Having met while working in Wyoming, founders such as Roselle and Foreman called themselves "Buckaroos." Roselle, originally from Louisville, Kentucky, had moved to northwest Wyoming in the late 1970s with a desire to spend more time in the wilderness after being burnt out on anti–Vietnam War activism in California. Within a few years, he had formed a construction business and was building his own house when he was drawn into antilogging protests by Friends of the Earth. Dave Foreman, an Albuquerque native, identified as both a "redneck" and a Republican, although he had pretty much given up voting that way. The two wore cowboy hats, guzzled beers, and tried to distance themselves from the hippie stereotype that the public associated with environmentalists.[2]

Some of Earth First!'s earliest actions were flashy media stunts: in one famous 1981 protest, activists unrolled a three-hundred-foot banner, painted to look like a crack, down the face of Arizona's Glen Canyon Dam. The dam was widely viewed as an environmental monstrosity. Its "cracking" symbolically echoed Edward Abbey's 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in which a band of eco-saboteurs conspires to blow up the dam.

Indeed, that novel would become influential for Earth First! Early media coverage, such as a 1983 *Outside* magazine article, portrayed the grassroots gang as a real-life version of Abbey's posse. For his part, Dave Foreman

published a book called *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, which advocated acts such as pulling up surveyors' stakes, downing billboards, and putting sand in the gas tanks of bulldozers.

In the early years, the group's decentralized activists had the reputation of being "loveable but mischievous vandals," in the words of journalist Dean Kuipers. That changed, however, as attention began focusing on their most controversial tactic. Tree spiking involved driving long metal nails into old-growth trees. This did not harm the trees, but it made cutting them dangerous for loggers, who risked damaging their saw blades and hurting themselves. Groves of spiked trees meant frustration and delay for timber companies—and, for activists, that was precisely the point.[3]

Did tree spiking work? Although advocates such as Foreman took it as an article of faith that it did, some others in Earth First! came to the hard conclusion that his insistence on the tactic's effectiveness could not be backed up. Although there were many incidents in which the nails in spiked trees did indeed break saw blades and endanger workers, logging executives considered this safety hazard an acceptable cost of doing business. As Roselle commented about the cutting of one spiked grove, the prospect of hitting nails "barely slowed them down."[4]

For the timber corporations, controversy surrounding tree spiking had a plus side: it was a chance to demonize and discredit their environmentalist opposition. Particularly after the Cloverdale incident, they took full advantage of this opportunity.

Earth First! had generally taken pains to ensure that its monkey-wrenching was designed to disable equipment, not to hurt people. And there were several reasons to believe that the group might not have been to blame for Alexander's broken saw: for one, the spike he hit had been placed in a relatively small, second-growth tree; Earth First!'s campaigns, in contrast, focused on ancient wood being extracted from previously roadless areas. Second, activists had typically spray-painted the trees they did spike as a way of leaving a calling card and creating a deterrent against logging. Finally, there were signs that the spiking was not carried out by an organized group at all but instead may have been the work of a disgruntled local resident, possibly one upset about the company threatening the area water supply.[5]

Nevertheless, having championed the spiking tactic, Earth First! was vulnerable to an onslaught of popular revulsion.

After the accident, the logging company did not shut down its mill or abandon its determination to strip old-growth forests. But it did launch an aggressive media blitz that cast a pall over environmentalism throughout the region. The Mendocino County Sheriff's office issued a press statement accusing the group of a "heinous and vicious criminal act." Following this lead, the *Eureka-Times Standard* ran stories with headlines such as "Earth First! Blamed for Worker's Injuries," while the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* decried "Tree-Spiking Terrorism." Politicians such as Idaho senator James McClure clamored to make spiking a federal offense.[6]

Roselle, who publicly disavowed the tactic a few years later, realized that the group was "facing a major PR disaster."[7]

Earth First!'s dilemma pointed to a larger problem. Disruptive movements that attempt to use polarization to their advantage must perform a careful balancing act. By creating confrontational scenes and trying to generate a public crisis around an issue, they knowingly defy the widely held preference for calm and quiet over discord and tension. Activists are aware that many people will not like them, but they pursue conflict in the belief that polarization can activate their base, draw passive supporters to their cause, and isolate their opponents. With ACT UP, the civil rights movement, and the DREAM Act students, this is exactly what happened. But polarization can also go bad. For movements to benefit from a state of heightened conflict, its participants must make sure of two things: first, that they are drawing in more active supporters than their opponents, and, second, that even if their methods are perceived as extreme or impatient, the tide of public opinion is pushing toward greater acceptance of their views. This requires strategic judgment. A willingness to court controversy does not mean that anything goes. If a movement's tactics are so divisive and widely condemned that they overshadow the issue at hand and foster sympathy for the opposition, polarization fails.

So, where should movements draw the line?

The merits of any individual tactic must be evaluated based on a variety of factors, including the norms and values of the society in which a social movement is functioning. Even when deployed with care, disruption does not always produce the desired results. Some of ACT UP's most controversial actions, such as interrupting mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City in December 1989, produced much greater public backlash than anticipated—and thus prompted intense debate among AIDS advocates about whether they had misfired.

But if there are areas of uncertainty with regard to polarization, some trends are clear. In the United States, one of the most consistent and predictable has been the overwhelmingly negative public response to tactics that are perceived as violent.

In the late 1980s, Earth First! experienced a situation in which polarization harmed a movement. But the group also showed how activists were able to turn the tide. Embracing a radical program of strategic nonviolence and mass civil disobedience, the group launched a landmark drive that helped make saving the California redwoods a winning public issue.

The person most responsible for this change was not one of the Buckaroos but rather a five-foot-tall eco-feminist, single mother, and former union organizer. Her name was Judi Bari.

Tellingly, Roselle's first words when he heard the news of the Cloverdale accident were, "Judi's not going to like this."[8]

Judi Bari had cut her teeth as an activist in the movement against the Vietnam War, rallying fellow students on the campus of the University of Maryland before ultimately dropping out. Taking on low-wage work at a supermarket to pay her bills, she quickly became a steward in her union, and she spent the next several years as a labor organizer. In 1979, Bari moved with her then-husband to Northern California, and by the mid-1980s she was a divorced mother of two girls, making a living as a carpenter. She had never given much thought to the idea of forest defense until one day when she was building a country home for a wealthy executive. Having

admired the fine grain redwood she was installing, Bari was outraged to learn from her supervisor that it came from millennia-old trees being torn down by logging companies in that same area. The moment served as what she would call her "environmental epiphany." In 1988, Bari joined an Earth First! affiliate in Mendocino County.[9]

Darryl Cherney, an activist and musician who would become one of her main collaborators, noted the boost that Bari provided to anti-logging organizing. "When Greg King and I were organizing demonstrations," Cherney said, mentioning another Earth First! member, "dozens, maybe hundreds of people turned out. But when Judi got involved, thousands came."[10]

Previously, Earth First!'s strategy was largely nomadic, premised on small groups of activists—usually fewer than a dozen people, mostly men—traveling to remote wilderness areas and setting up blockades or tree sits. Bari thought that such acts were courageous, but inadequate. Bari believed that if environmentalists were going to win in the long run, they needed a movement that could go beyond a few dedicated squads of activists and could instead gain broad popular backing.[11]

"There is no way that a few isolated individuals, no matter how brave, can bring about the massive social change necessary to save the planet," Bari explained. "So we began to organize with local people, planning our logging blockades around issues that had local community support."[12]

Coming from a labor background, Bari also strove to build alliances across the traditional blue–green divide that separated working-class communities and environmentalists. Although Earth First!'s founders had a tendency of treating timber employees as villains, Bari did not see front-line workers as the problem. She believed that tree-huggers and roughneck loggers could come together around a shared enemy: logging company executives. Deforestation, after all, affected not only the trees but also the workers who made their living from the woods, many of whom had strong critiques of the corporations for which they worked. "The timber companies treat them the same way they treat the forest," Bari argued, "as objects to exploit for maximum profit."[13]

When George Alexander was nearly killed in the Cloverdale mill, Dave Foreman was dismissive. He commented, "I think it's unfortunate that someone got hurt. . . . [But] nobody is forcing people to cut those trees." Not all Earth First! members were so callous, however. Judi Bari was horrified at the accident, and later she would seek out the logger and his wife, sitting down with them for an interview. Bari learned that, although it was never reported by the press, Alexander had been as critical of his employer's lax safety standards as he had been of Earth First! When the company asked him to go on tour denouncing environmental activists, Alexander refused. "I'm against tree spiking," he told Bari, "but I don't like clear-cutting either."[14]

Within a few years, Alexander was no longer a Louisiana-Pacific employee. "They used my name all over the country," he said. "Then they laid me off when the mill closed down."

Beyond her outreach to workers, Judi Bari also changed Earth First!'s culture by opening space for women to take on more leadership roles. In an essay entitled "The Feminization of Earth First!," Bari reflected, "It is not surprising that I, a lifetime activist, would become an environmentalist. What is surprising is that I, a feminist, single mother, and blue-collar worker, would end up in Earth First!, a 'no compromise' direct action group with a reputation of being macho, beer-drinking eco-dudes.

"Little did I know," she continued, "that combining the more feminine elements of collectivism and nonviolence with the spunk and outrageousness of Earth First!, we would spark a mass movement."[15]

To set off this spark, Earth First! needed to move away from tree spiking. By 1990, Bari and a variety of other likeminded activists argued that it was time to renounce the tactic once and for all. Bari based her position as much on pragmatic grounds as moral ones: "The forests that Earth First! had been instrumental in saving in this area (Trout Creek, Cahto Wilderness, Headwaters Forest, Albion, and Owl Creek)," she later wrote, "have all been saved through blockades and public organizing campaigns, often

combined with lawsuits." If anything, tree spiking was slowing down the efforts.[16]

Earth First! had always insisted that its tactics did not involve violence, but its informal local chapters had been hesitant to make explicit statements of nonviolent discipline. "After all, that would contradict the he-man image that Earth First! was founded on," Bari explained. Yet she argued forcefully that a formal declaration was essential. As she later wrote, "Those of us who are out on the front lines . . . can't afford to be isolated and discredited by something as ineffective and incendiary as tree spiking. If we are serious about putting the Earth first, we need to choose tactics because they work, not because they are macho or romantic. That's what no compromise really means."[17]

Others in the group, having heard the concerns of lumber workers, agreed with these sentiments. In late April 1990, Northern California and Southern Oregon Earth First! activists officially disavowed tree spiking in a press conference. Of the corporations that were cutting down the forests, they stated, "These companies would think nothing of sending a spiked tree through a mill, and relish the anti–Earth First! publicity that an injury would cause."[18]

The political and cultural changes that Bari ushered in caused a split in Earth First!'s leadership—prompting Foreman to cut ties with the group. The cofounder charged that Earth First! had been simultaneously taken over by hippies and "class-struggle leftists," and he adamantly defended the old tactics and identity of Earth First! In response, Bari wrote, "Dave Foreman would like to keep the movement small and pure. But profound social changes don't happen without mass movements, and I think we need a whole lot more of us to bring about even the modest reforms we need to save the redwoods."[19]

Foreman moved on, later leading a faction of anti-immigrant environmentalists at the Sierra Club.

Meanwhile, Bari and her fellow Earth First!ers announced a bold initiative: Redwood Summer. The drive took inspiration from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's 1964 Freedom Summer, when young people from around the country traveled to Mississippi to defy Southern

racists and register African Americans to vote. For the summer of 1990, Bari and others embarked on a national speaking tour calling for nonviolent direct action to save California's largest remaining stretch of unprotected old-growth redwood trees. As Bari recalled, "Requests for info started coming in from all over, and we realized this thing was bigger than we thought."[20]

Not everything went as planned, however. Faced with the summer's impending confrontation, opponents of Earth First! again tried to use the taint of violence to discredit the movement—this time in a most twisted fashion.

Starting in April, just weeks after Redwood Summer was announced, key organizers began receiving death threats, which local police refused to investigate. Then, on May 24, while Bari and Cherney were driving through Oakland doing outreach for Redwood Summer, a pipe bomb wrapped in nails exploded under Bari's car seat, tearing into her pelvis and nearly killing her. Cherney was also hurt, but escaped major injury. The FBI was on the scene within minutes. Despite the fact that the two were leading proponents of nonviolence, federal agents accused them of manufacturing the bomb themselves. Officers placed the critically injured Bari under arrest while she was still on the operating table. Presenting no evidence, the FBI argued that Cherney and Bari were transporting explosives to use against logging companies.[21]

Antienvironmentalist groups spread the same message. A right-wing organization that called itself the "Sahara Club" distributed a flyer with a diagram of how to make a bomb, falsely claiming that it had come from an Earth First! manual.[22]

While the press initially ran with the story of left-wing bomb making, Earth First! activists worked to disprove the charges and affirm their commitment to nonviolent direct action. In 1994, Bari and Cherney filed a civil rights suit against the FBI. Through the course of depositions, their lawyers revealed that the FBI had conducted a "bomb school" for its agents just weeks before the 1990 attack, setting off test explosions in several cars in the California woods. An FBI expert also acknowledged that the pipe bomb in Bari's car had been triggered by a sophisticated motion-sensing device, a fact hardly consistent with the notion that activists had

accidentally bombed themselves. Although no government involvement in planting the bomb was ever proven, to many it smelled like a repeat of the FBI's notorious 1960s-era COINTELPRO program.[23]

The attack on Bari and Cherney was not the end for Redwood Summer. In the wake of the bombing, volunteers for the campaign poured in. As Bari recovered from her wounds, new Earth First! leaders—largely women who had been inspired by her example—stepped up to take her place in coordinating the next several months of activity. The drive ended up being a milestone. As scholar Douglas Bevington writes, "Thousands of people participated in demonstrations in support of Headwaters, leading to the largest mass civil disobedience for forest protection in U.S. history."[24]

In almost daily actions throughout the summer, participants sat in trees, blocked logging roads, chained themselves to equipment, and confronted corporate leaders at executive meetings. In all, 3,000 participants joined in the campaign over the summer—up from 150 the year before—and there were more than 250 arrests. Unlike with monkey-wrenching tactics, which required secrecy, Earth First!ers were able to openly organize in the community, and they earned the active support of local sympathizers. In one inventive show of solidarity, several Mendocino County residents using the name "Breakfast First!" enlisted gourmet chefs to host a champagne brunch in the middle of a high-traffic logging road.[25]

The nonviolent direct action of Redwood Summer allowed participants to shine a light on the true violence taking place in the woods: both the horrific destruction of the forest, and the repression of those who resisted it. On several occasions, protesters were attacked by logging crews, and on one occasion a timber executive risked injuring demonstrators by ramming a car through a picket line.

In the end, Redwood Summer did not produce immediate legislative gains; a statewide ballot proposition designed to protect old-growth areas was defeated that November. Nevertheless, Earth First!'s campaign was responsible for identifying the destruction of the Headwaters as a critical public issue and turning it into a mainstream cause that drew national and even international attention. The group's call to halt logging in old-growth forest, previously seen as an impractical demand, became widely adopted, and politicians began citing Headwaters protection as a top environmental

priority. Ultimately, the summer of action fortified a multidecade campaign that resulted in the preservation of a substantial portion of Northern California's Headwaters Forest. After Redwood Summer, Roselle writes, new Earth First! chapters, in the United States and abroad, "were springing up like mushrooms after a spring rain."[26]

Tragically, Judi Bari lived in pain for the rest of her life owing to the bombing of her car, and she died in 1997 after suffering from an aggressive form of cancer. To the end, she worked for justice in her civil rights suit, even filming a deposition to be delivered posthumously. Before her death, she made Cherney promise not to settle out of court. He did not, and the two won. After they went to trial in 2002, a jury determined that the FBI and the Oakland Police Department had violated the activists' civil rights in their mishandling of the case. A judge ordered the agencies to pay $4.4 million to the pair, the largest amount the Bureau has ever been made to pay for a civil rights violation. The next year, Oakland's City Council passed a resolution declaring May 24 Judi Bari Day, encouraging schools and public institutions to memorialize her work.[27]

Bari's legacy also lived on in a revitalized wave of direct action forest defense in the Pacific Northwest that took place throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium. Much more so than lobbying from big-budget environmental groups in Washington, the model adopted and refined in the Headwaters Campaign was critical in securing some of the most important victories in US forest protection in the past quarter century: in multipronged assaults by activists, blockades and nonviolent interventions at logging sites pushed back the immediate destruction of threatened groves, while also shining a public spotlight and creating political pressure. Meanwhile, scrappy legal action groups supported and sustained by the movement pursued aggressive lawsuits to establish longer-term protections.

This combination of protest and litigation produced stunning results: overall, between 1988 and 1999 there was a 78 percent drop in logging in national forests, resulting in large part from activists working outside of national environmental organizations.[28]

"It took the major environmental groups decades to come out against logging in the old-growth forests," Roselle argued in 2009. "The nonviolent campaigns by Earth First! and other grassroots groups across the country

finally forced the hand of Big Green when their members began to voice support for such campaigns.

"Meanwhile," he continued, "it was the grassroots direct action effort that stopped logging in ancient forests, by spending day after day, year after year, blocking illegal roads."[29]

When it comes to questions of whether social movements should use violent tactics, the tradition of civil resistance takes a different stand from what many outsiders might expect.

Pacifists have long argued back and forth with defenders of revolutionary violence about the morality of using violent methods to advance political ends. Likewise, advocates of sabotage and property destruction commonly argue these tactics should not be considered "violent," because they target inanimate objects and are not designed to cause physical harm to people.

For activists using strategic nonviolence, these exchanges are beside the point. The relevant question is: What tactics work best in growing a movement and winning popular support?

Here, the philosophical definition of what constitutes violence is largely irrelevant. What matters is the response of the public at large to a tactic—whether the wider society in which a social movement exists judges an action to be violent, and how it reacts as a result. From a strategic perspective, which tactics are classified as "violent" or "nonviolent" is determined by this public perception, not by the outcome of any abstract debate.

Once a movement accepts that gaining broad popular backing is essential to its success, a strong argument can be made for the effectiveness of maintaining strict nonviolent discipline.

Many of the movements that adopt civil resistance as a means of struggle, especially those confronting authoritarian regimes, do so for a specific strategic reason: because they have determined that they cannot win through military conflict. Certainly, this was the case in Serbia, where

Otpor activists saw that the Milosevic regime and its paramilitary allies would quickly wipe them out if they took up arms.

In a US context, leftist author and activist Michael Albert puts it this way: "It's really quite simple. The state has a monopoly of violence," he writes. "What that means is that there is no way for the public, particularly in developed First World societies, to compete on the field of violence with their governments. That ought to be obvious. Our strong suit is information, facts, justice, disobedience, and especially numbers. Their strong suit is lying and especially exerting military power."

Although Albert rejects philosophical pacifism, he nevertheless concludes: "A contest of escalating violence is a contest we are doomed to lose. A contest in which numbers, commitment, and increasingly militant nonviolent activism confronts state power is a contest we can win."[30]

The use of tactics widely perceived as violent is a recurring issue in social movements. Short of armed guerilla warfare, various dissident groups on the US left since the 1960s have burned down animal testing laboratories and attacked research facilities with connections to the military, while groups on the right have bombed abortion clinics and federal office buildings. In the context of large demonstrations, some activists, especially those from traditions of anarchist insurrectionism, have consistently argued for an anything-goes approach euphemistically known as "diversity of tactics." Rejecting agreements that would set guidelines for behavior at mass protests, they seek to allow for tactics of property destruction—such as smashing storefront windows or lighting cars on fire—as well as throwing Molotov cocktails and fighting with police.

The moral implications of these different acts may vary considerably. But from a strategic perspective they have something in common: they directly interfere with the processes through which movements using nonviolent conflict are able to build support and leverage change.

Those who argue that mass movements should undertake property destruction or brawls with police often claim that routine marches and polite petitions do not accomplish anything. This position ignores the fact that the repertoire of civil resistance includes a vast range of tactics—many of which can be highly disruptive and confrontational. The tools of nonviolent conflict include boycotts and workplace strikes, blockades and

occupations, as well as art and creative resistance. Deployed in escalating fashion, these tactics can profoundly impede the regular daily functioning of the status quo.

Yet the use of violence by activists gives authorities a clear means of defusing such escalation, providing a justification for repressive force. In other words, it can stop the momentum of an uprising in its tracks.

When Gene Sharp set out to make an argument for nonviolent discipline, he based his position on the fact that different forms of action work in contradictory ways and therefore cannot function together effectively. "Violent action and nonviolent action possess quite different mechanisms, and induce differing forces of change in society," Sharp observed. Whereas authorities are well prepared to handle violent attacks, nonviolent confrontation creates a type of asymmetrical conflict that throws them off balance. "This is part of the reason why it is important for the actionists to maintain nonviolent discipline even in face of brutal repression," he explained. "If the nonviolent group switches to violence, it has, in effect, consented to fight on the opponent's own terms and with weapons where most of the advantages lie with him."[31]

Nonviolent conflict allows activists to highlight the systemic violence that exists in society and that usually goes unrecognized—the violence, for example, of routine and persistent police brutality, of economic displacement and exploitation, of wanton environmental destruction, or of racist criminalization and imprisonment of entire communities. As Martin Luther King Jr. argued, nonviolent direct action allows activists to "bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive." Yet, if activists turn to violence themselves, it allows authorities to institute expanded repression in the name of restoring a state of "peace" in which systemic abuses are once again submerged.[32]

Although King was a believer in moral nonviolence, he also voiced a clear strategic argument for nonviolent discipline. "Anyone leading a violent rebellion must be willing to make an honest assessment," he wrote, "regarding the possible casualties to a minority population confronting a well-armed, wealthy majority with a fanatical right wing that would delight in exterminating thousands of black men, women, and children."[33]

Judi Bari recalled that, shortly before being bombed, she told a friend, "I wasn't a Gandhian who considered nonviolence to be the only way ever." Expressing solidarity with the struggle against death-squad governments in Central America, she stated, "I would never tell a Salvadoran to use nonviolence only." Moreover, given her deep love of the forest, Bari had sympathy with people carrying out clandestine acts of sabotage against development projects. But, always an organizer, she was equally clear that such tactics would have disastrous consequences if used as part of a mass movement.[34]

"People who put their bodies in front of the bulldozer are depending on prevailing moral standards and the threat of public outrage to protect them from attack," Bari wrote. "Unfortunately, prevailing public opinion in the country, at least in the timber region, is that if sabotage is involved, they have a license to kill. Until that changes, mixing civil disobedience and monkey-wrenching is suicidal."[35]

By adopting the liberal rhetoric of "diversity," the argument for "diversity of tactics" is designed to sound unobjectionable. But this agreeable phrasing masks a profound problem: social movements need strategy, and strategy requires discipline.

The measure of success for a polarizing movement is whether it draws ever-greater numbers of active supporters and whether it builds popular support for its cause. However, for at least the past half century of US history, tactics perceived as violent have been overwhelmingly unpopular with the American public.

Social movements on the right wing of the political spectrum have experienced this reality. In the mid-1980s, a rash of clinic bombings by opponents of abortion rights resulted in near-universal condemnation. In a joint CBS News–*New York Times* poll from early 1985, a full 82 percent of respondents said the attacks on reproductive health facilities were "the same thing as terrorism," compared to just 5 percent who thought that the arson "should be treated as a forceful kind of political protest." A decade later, the *Washington Post* reported that the Reverend Flip Benham, director of

Operation Rescue, went so far as to argue that "those in the abortion-providing industry" had themselves engineered most of the violence that had occurred against clinics "in an attempt to discredit the anti-abortion movement."[36]

Although sabotage and damage against property fall in a very different moral category than violence against human targets, the public tends to conflate these categories. And they have some rational grounds for doing so: like tree spiking, arson may be meant to target property only, but it puts people at risk. Historically, there have been all too many cases when people have been unintentionally injured or even killed when bombs go off and buildings burn. In street demonstrations, those interested in breaking store windows or smashing cop cars also tend to be willing to actively fight with police, especially if it allows them to escape capture.

Whether or not the public perception of these actions as violent is warranted, mass mobilizations have seen detrimental consequences as a result of their use. The tactics tend to limit the numbers of a movement's active supporters, turn off potential sympathizers, and boost the opposition. In other words, they contribute significantly to negative polarization.

In the fall of 2012, rapper and longtime Oakland resident Boots Riley commented on community reaction to the repeated use of Black Bloc tactics by groups associated with Occupy Oakland. The Black Blocs involved groups of disproportionately young, white men who dressed in all black and engaged in activity that included trashing parked cars, breaking windows at businesses, and clashing with police. The blocs had the effect of visibly alienating the predominantly African American base of residents in the city. "If 'the job of the revolutionary is to make the revolution seem irresistible,'" Riley wrote, "the use of black bloc has been making a revolutionary movement pretty damn resistible in Oakland, CA.[37]

"When almost every conversation I have with folks from Oakland about Occupy Oakland has the smashing of windows brought up as a reason people don't like that grouping," Riley argued, "scientifically it means the tactic is not working. It doesn't matter that technically it's only smashing corporate windows. It matters that people don't want to join because of that."

Knowing that violence can cause harm to movements and provide an ideal pretext for repression, governments and reactionary groups have actively tried to encourage it. Highlighting this tendency, Gandhi put forth a willfully counterintuitive proposition: for a member of a mass protest movement to resort to violence, he argued, was to "cooperate with the Government in the most active manner."[38]

In many cases when activists do not initiate violence, governments have worked to provoke them. Across a wide range of countries and time periods, authorities have sent infiltrators into activist organizations to serve as *agent provocateurs*—people who attempt to instigate activity that damages the targeted movements.

In the United States, the public will never know the full extent of the government's use of provocateurs, because agencies such as the FBI closely guard information about the activities of paid informers and undercover operatives. It took journalist Seth Rosenfeld two decades of lawsuits to uncover even a small portion of FBI files on the bureau's attempts, in the words of Director J. Edgar Hoover, to "disrupt and neutralize" the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Among the discoveries published in his 2012 book *Subversives*, Rosenfeld found that it was a paid informant of the FBI who had supplied the Black Panthers with some of their first firearms.[39]

Also during the 1960s, there were multiple instances of infiltration and provocation on the part of authorities seeking to neutralize the movement against the Vietnam War. One infamous case involved an undercover police officer in upstate New York known as "Tommy the Traveler," who infiltrated an area chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. As author and attorney Michael Linfield writes, Tommy "constantly urged students to undertake violent actions," showing them how to use guns and make bombs. In early 1970, he persuaded two 19-year-old students to firebomb an ROTC office at Hobart College. Not only did the bombing result in the arrest of the students who carried it out, but also public backlash from the incident became a significant setback for Hobart's antiwar movement, effectively squelching activism on campus by incriminating its leaders. In

another incident, a paid FBI informer and Vietnam veteran named Larry Grathwohl helped teach bomb making to the Midwest collective of the Weather Underground.[40]

Such activity by authorities is not limited to a bygone era, many decades in the past. To the contrary, examples of infiltration and probable provocation have already been exposed in the new millennium.

In July 2001, at the height of the movement against corporate globalization, leaders of the G8 industrialized nations met in Genoa, Italy, attracting a large protest mobilization. There is strong evidence that one of the Black Blocs that formed amid the demonstrations was actually made up of authorities and right-wing provocateurs. An Italian member of parliament claimed that he spotted members of this bloc gearing up at a local police station with black garb and iron clubs, and the *Guardian* reported video evidence of men in black deploying from police vans near the protests. Activists accused these provocateurs of ransacking storefronts and torching cars during a three-hundred-thousand-person protest outside the summit.[41]

Although they denied provoking violence in the streets, police later admitted to disguising officers as Black Bloc members. Moreover, during a parliamentary inquiry into police action, senior officer Pietro Troiani confessed that authorities planted two Molotov cocktails in a school building that Genoa activists were using as a dormitory—a location that was then raided by security forces.[42]

In the absence of explicit agreements setting guidelines for people taking part in the demonstrations, movements have little means of calling out and containing fake protesters. In Genoa, police took advantage of the confusion their agents had helped create. They unleashed what radical anthropologist Jeffrey Juris described as an "indiscriminate campaign of state terror," during which authorities "used the excuse of militant violence to attack violent and nonviolent protesters alike." One protester in Genoa was shot and killed by police, and hundreds were injured. Commenting on the decision by factions of militants to enact "performative violence," Juris noted, "Paradoxically, tolerance for certain tactics"—namely, property destruction, Molotov cocktails, and brawls with police—showed that it

could "undermine the ability of other protesters to implement more innovative direct-action practices."[43]

Nor have recent cases of provocation been limited to Europe. On the eve of 2012's May Day protests, five young anarchists who had been involved in Occupy Cleveland were arrested in an alleged plot to blow up the Brecksville-Northfield High Level Bridge. It soon came to light that they had been encouraged in this scheme by a thirty-nine-year-old FBI informant, Shaquille Azir. Among other acts, this informant arranged logistics and provided transportation so that the activists could meet with a merchant to buy explosives. In truth, the supposed arms dealer was an undercover FBI agent, and, on the night of the action, Bureau officers swept in moments before the planned detonation to arrest the group. Amid sensationalistic headlines, police moved to evacuate the entire Occupy Cleveland encampment, one of the movement's longest-standing camps.[44]

Governments may sometimes be eager to provoke violence. But they do not do it alone. Attempts at instigation only succeed in environments where nonviolent discipline has not been established. As one sociologist writes, "Provocateurs must move in a movement that tolerates their wild talk and wild action."[45]

By the late 1960s, the movement against the Vietnam War and the broader radical student movement had become such settings. Even if the government had not attempted to infiltrate and provoke, there were groups of activists who believed that revolutionary violence could prevail in the United States, or at least that violent strikes against symbols of US power could help slow down the government war machine. Their actions in pursuit of this belief went far in crippling one of the leading forces of antiwar mobilization in the country.

In 1969, a small faction that later became the Weather Underground succeeded in taking control of Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS—the largest mass organization of the antiwar student movement. In the fall of 1969, leaders of this faction, including former Columbia University student Mark Rudd, called for activists to descend on Chicago for what would be

dubbed the “Days of Rage.” Their mission was to “bring the war home” by sparking a violent clash with police. In a series of confrontations spread between October 8 and 11, a few hundred activists smashed windows of cars, homes, and businesses in the affluent Gold Coast neighborhood of Chicago and in the city’s downtown Loop. Chicago’s police department met them in force, deploying thousands of officers to pummel, gas, and arrest the demonstrators. Despite predictions by organizers that fifteen thousand activists would attend, the Days of Rage involved only a tiny fraction of that number. Moreover, a wide range of movement groups denounced the protest, including Chicago’s Black Panthers. Panther leader Fred Hampton called the actions “opportunistic,” “adventuristic,” and suicidal.[46]

Large swaths of American society as a whole were also repelled; yet this was hardly an accident. In their most militant phase, the Weathermen were actively opposed to winning majority popular support. They saw most of the American public—and indeed most of the rest of the antiwar movement—as too bourgeois and compromised to contribute to a genuine revolutionary struggle. Reflecting with several decades of hindsight, Mark Rudd would later conclude, “I had purposely excluded the millions of moderate, nonviolent, middle-of-the-road people who now were willing to publicly demonstrate their opposition to the war.” The rhetoric at the time was more blunt. Bernardine Dohrn, another of the group’s leaders, stated: “We’re about being crazy motherfuckers and scaring the shit out of honky America.”[47]

By the time the Weathermen backed off this ultramilitant line and sought to create broader alliances with other movement and countercultural groups, they had already done significant damage.

By some estimates, SDS at its peak could claim more than 350 chapters and 80,000 members. Yet rampant sectarianism and out-of-touch tactics would quickly destroy the organization. In the months after the Days of Rage, a torrent of chapters disassociated from the national office; some disbanded altogether, with members turned off from the movement. An FBI report later released through the Freedom of Information Act noted gleefully, “The SDS has been deeply fractured in the last four months. Its pre-eminence as the leader of the young radical left in the USA is now

questionable. . . . Rudd and his colleagues have alienated a large segment of potential and heretofore willing followers."[48]

"I couldn't have said it any better," Rudd himself would later write. "The anonymous FBI analyst and his superiors must have had a long laugh over the gift we'd handed them.[49]

"We might as well have been on their payroll," he concluded.[50]

Indeed, with SDS in peril, a few of the Weathermen, deeming the organization insufficiently revolutionary, decided to destroy it altogether. "The SDS is not serious enough," Rudd had exclaimed in a speech; "I want it to die." In January 1970, the Weathermen closed SDS's national office in Chicago. The next month, Rudd and fellow activist Ted Gold loaded boxes full of mailing lists and organizational files from SDS's New York office in a Volkswagen van, drove to the pier at Manhattan's West 14th Street, and dumped their cargo onto a city sanitation barge.[51]

A few months after that, in March, Gold was one of three people killed when an attempt at bomb making in a Greenwich Village townhouse went awry and resulted in an explosion that destroyed the building. Subsequently, the Weathermen became a tiny, clandestine organization that carried out bombings of courthouses, banks, police stations, and public buildings.

Even some of the international movements with which New Left activists had aligned watched this self-destruction with dismay. According to Rudd, a diplomat from the Cuban Mission had argued that the Chicago Days of Rage action was a terrible idea and that student radicals needed to unite the largest possible number of Americans in opposition to government interventionism. His advice was disregarded.[52]

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Although the Weathermen represent an extreme case, factions often exist within movements that are consciously antagonistic toward other activists. There are strains of anarchist insurrectionism, for example, that explicitly reject efforts of other activists to build long-term organization—even efforts by antiauthoritarians with other strategic perspectives, whom they sometimes dismiss as "not real anarchists."

These insurrectionists are willing, and sometimes even enthusiastic, to undermine organizing that they deem to be too bureaucratic or reformist. Moreover, they spurn the idea of appealing to the wider public or paying attention to media coverage of protest tactics. They argue that concern for public opinion stands in the way of "real action," which they define as specific attacks on governmental and corporate institutions.[53]

Within social movements, this presents a clear conflict. To simply advocate for a "diversity" of approaches in this context, without reckoning with how some of those approaches are diametrically opposed to one another, is to abandon strategic thinking altogether.

Likewise, some tactics just do not mix. Or, rather, they are actually poisonous when mixed together. Activists who have locked themselves to the entrance of a building to prevent politicians or business leaders from carrying out undemocratic trade negotiations, for example, are put in grave danger if insurrectionists a few blocks away decide to begin trashing stores and cars. Those engaging in property destruction may be able to run to safety and evade arrest, but those locked down will be forced to bear the unmitigated brunt of a police attack, with the public likely to view even harsh repression as justified.

This is not an uncommon dilemma, as advocates of controversial tactics often take cover in larger crowds that do not willingly choose to support their activities. In response to Black Bloc mobilizations in Oakland, activist and author Rebecca Solnit writes, "If you wish to do something the great majority of us oppose, do it on your own." Unfortunately, that is not what typically happens. As Solnit comments, "These small violent bands attach themselves to large nonviolent movements, perhaps because there aren't any large violent movements around." In the context of larger protests, trashing stores or brawling with authorities can endanger people who are seniors, who have physical disabilities, or who have children with them, and thus are unable to easily run away in the event of indiscriminate police repression.[54]

A second reason that not all tactics mix well is that some methods, rather than lending themselves to public outreach, promote insularity. Earth First! cofounder Mike Roselle ultimately rejected both violence and property destruction, in part for this reason. "As a tactic, the use of violence

is corruptive, requires secrecy, and generally isolates its practitioners from the very people and places they wish to serve," Roselle writes. "I've learned this the hard way, not in some university course."[55]

A final reason that some tactics do not mix well involves the issue of defectors. As social movements successfully remove the pillars of support for the status quo, they encourage dissension and splits within the ranks of opponents. Particularly important for activists living under undemocratic regimes are "security defections," moments when soldiers and police officers refuse orders to attack protesters—or even decide to take the side of popular forces.

This process is endangered by an anything-goes approach. "Resistance violence is especially likely to restore loyalty and obedience among any of the opponent's troops or police becoming disaffected," Sharp explains. "In nonviolent struggles in which success and failure hinge on whether the opponent's troops can be induced to mutiny, violence against them may spell defeat."[56]

Even in democratic states, absent political jiu-jitsu and broad public sympathy to push back against official crackdowns, activists can be exposed to the full impact of the state's repressive apparatus. And despite militaristic posturing, those who have called for violent escalation can find themselves the most isolated and vulnerable.

Advocates of sabotage and property destruction have often been taken by surprise by the severity of the response from the state. In 1990, a cohort of disaffected activists had taken to calling Earth First!'s California campaign "Deadwood Bummer." They believed that organizers were "leading lambs to the slaughter" by subjecting recruits to violence at the hands of the logging industry. Some of these activists and their friends would later become active in the likeminded Animal Liberation and Earth Liberation Fronts, which undertook campaigns of arson in the 1990s and early 2000s against targets including facilities connected to the fur industry and SUV dealerships. Although their actions never attracted a mass following, the reaction they prompted from authorities was extreme. Sadly, it turned out that they were the ones presenting themselves for slaughter.[57]

In the 2001 PATRIOT Act and the subsequent 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, the federal government explicitly defined the kind of attacks

perpetrated by the eco-anarchists as terrorism. In 2005, the arrest of fourteen accused arsonists resulted in a highly unromantic scene in which militants scrambled to inform on their fellow activists in order to avoid the draconian, one-hundred-plus-year jail sentences the government had authorized itself to impose.

Looking back on their strategy, several participants later renounced their former approach and argued that environmental radicals should pursue nonviolent tactics that can be more effective. One prominent activist, Rod Coronado, called on movements working to defend forests and protect animal rights to "Let our opposition who believe in violence carry the burden of its justification."[58]

Among activists and academics alike there is an idea that more radical approaches to resistance can have a constructive effect by making moderate reformers look less extreme. If those trying to negotiate with business leaders or reluctant politicians can point to militant activists who are bolder in their tactics and more uncompromising in their demands, this argument goes, they can present themselves as a sensible alternative. The more moderate elements can implicitly pose the question, "Who would you rather deal with: us or them?"

In social movement theory, this is known as the "radical flank" argument, and scholars of civil resistance have studied the phenomenon. "A positive radical flank occurs when . . . the presence of a radical wing makes moderate demands and strategies appear more reasonable, and radicals may create crises that are resolved to the moderates' advantage," writes sociologist Kurt Schock. Meanwhile, "a negative radical flank effect occurs when . . . radicals discredit an entire movement's activities and goals," making it more difficult for moderates to extract concessions.[59]

Radical flanks relate directly to the dynamics of polarization. Once again, the challenge is to maximize the positive effects while avoiding the negative ones.

Schock points out that radical flanks need not be violent. ACT UP, for one, provided a militant pole that indirectly helped bolster the ranks of more

temperate AIDS groups and boosted their lobbying efforts. The question, therefore, is not whether a radical flank can be helpful for a movement; it is whether escalating civil resistance can be more adept than revolutionary violence at creating positive flank effects and pushing the spectrum of political debate.

The best quantitative evidence available on this issue suggests that radical flanks are more effective when they exert pressure through nonviolent conflict. Political scientist Erica Chenoweth reviewed hundreds of cases in order to compile a groundbreaking data set on the track record of resistance efforts that have challenged undemocratic regimes in the past century. She found that, empirically, movements in which a violent flank was present were more than 20 percent less likely to achieve their goals than nonviolent movements without such a flank. Rather than increasing the size and prominence of wider efforts, violent factions tended to decrease participation—something that her research found was vital to movement success.[60]

Chenoweth might well have chosen to echo Judi Bari's words: "There is no way that a few isolated individuals, no matter how brave, can bring about the massive social change necessary to save the planet." That requires a wider revolt.

Creating discipline within a movement is at once a difficult task and an essential one.

Where structure-based organizations such as labor unions and community-organizing outfits operate through clearly defined hierarchies, mass mobilizations rely on activating loose, broad networks of supporters. This creates a unique challenge for momentum-based organizers. Invariably, some of those drawn in from the outside will want to pursue tactics or advance agendas that contradict the aims of the movement. Mass mobilizations must find means of inviting creative, broad-based participation, while also being able to distance the movement from destructive actions that contribute to negative polarization.

Hybrid organizations offer some solutions to this dilemma: like Otpor and the SCLC, those working to intentionally spark, guide, and sustain mass protest can frontload adherence to nonviolent tactics as one of their movement's norms. And they can create a culture of training to foster a greater unity of strategic vision. In Redwood Summer, modeled on the civil rights movement, participation was premised on an explicit commitment to nonviolent direct action. This agreement set the tone for a wealth of resistance that was simultaneously creative, daring, and disciplined.

The key common link among all the activities in a momentum-driven movement is that they must be designed, in the long run, to build mass support. It is with this common goal in mind, and with the importance of nonviolence established, that activists can adopt a diversity of roles and approaches.

There is no single type of dissident, and no single style of organizing, that alone will carry a movement to the final realization of its goals. After moments of peak involvement, social movements must attempt to reap what their escalating disruption has sown. The energy of mass mobilization must be channeled back into long-term structures that can formalize and preserve the gains brought about by high-profile drives. And here, a new array of skills is required.

Once the whirlwinds die down, another struggle begins.