

WE ^{THE} RESISTANCE



**Documenting
a History of
Nonviolent Protest
in the United States**

Edited by Michael G. Long
Foreword by Chris Hedges
Afterword by Dolores Huerta

CITY LIGHTS

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FOREWORD

Nonviolent Revolt

Chris Hedges

The ideas that sustain the corporate state—neoliberalism, the free market, globalization—have lost their efficacy across the political spectrum. The ideas that are rising to take their place, however, are inchoate. The right has retreated into Christian fascism, xenophobia, racism, a dangerous hyper-individualism and a celebration of the gun culture. The left, knocked off balance by decades of fierce state repression in the name of anti-communism, is struggling to rebuild and define itself. Popular revulsion for the ruling elite, however, is nearly universal. It is a question of which ideas, which vision, will capture the public's imagination.

Revolutions, when they erupt, appear to the elites and the establishment to be sudden and unexpected. This is because the real work of revolutionary ferment and consciousness is unseen by the mainstream society, noticed only after it has largely been completed. Throughout history, those who have sought radical change have always had to first discredit the ideas used to prop up ruling elites and construct alternative ideas for society, ideas often embodied in what is dismissed by the ruling elites as a utopian revolutionary myth. Once ideas shift for a large portion of a population, once the vision of a new society grips the popular imagination, the old regime is finished.

“Did you ever ask yourself how it happens that government and capitalism continue to exist in spite of all the evil and trouble they are

causing in the world?” the anarchist Alexander Berkman wrote in his essay, “The Idea Is the Thing.” “If you did, then your answer must have been that it is because the people support those institutions, and that they support them because they believe in them.”

Berkman was right. As long as most citizens believe in the ideas that justify global capitalism, the private and state institutions that serve our corporate masters are unassailable. When these ideas are shattered, the institutions that buttress the ruling class deflate and collapse. The battle of ideas is percolating below the surface. It is a battle the corporate state, which no longer has a coherent counterargument, is steadily losing. An increasing number of Americans are getting it. They recognize that we have been short of our most basic and cherished civil liberties, and live under the gaze of the most intrusive security and surveillance apparatus in human history. Half the country, because of deindustrialization and automation, can no longer find work that pays a sustainable wage and lives in poverty or near poverty.

The historian Crane Brinton in his book, *Anatomy of a Revolution*, laid out the common route to revolution. The preconditions for successful revolution, Brinton argued, are discontent that affects nearly all social classes, widespread feelings of entrapment and despair, unfulfilled expectations, a unified solidarity in opposition to a tiny power elite, a refusal by scholars and thinkers to continue to defend the actions of the ruling class, an inability of government to respond to the basic needs of citizens, a steady loss of will within the power elite itself and defections from the inner circle, a crippling isolation that leaves the power elite without any allies or outside support and, finally, a financial crisis. Our corporate elite, as far as Brinton was concerned, has amply fulfilled these preconditions. But it is Brinton’s next observation that is most worth remembering. Revolutions always begin, he wrote, by making impossible demands that, if the government met, would mean the end of the old configurations of power.

I reported for two decades on revolts, insurgencies and revolutions, including the insurgencies in the 1980s in Central America, the civil

wars in Algeria, the Sudan and Yemen, the two Palestinian uprisings and the revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania as well as the wars in the former Yugoslavia. George Orwell wrote that all tyrannies rule through fraud and force, but that once the fraud is exposed, they must rely exclusively on force. We have now entered the era of naked force. The vast million-person bureaucracy of the internal security and surveillance state will not be used to stop terrorism but to try and stop us.

Despotic regimes in the end collapse internally. Once the foot soldiers who are ordered to carry out acts of repression, such as the clearing of parks or arresting or even shooting demonstrators, no longer obey orders, the old regime swiftly crumbles. When the aging East German dictator Erich Honecker was unable to get paratroopers to fire on protesting crowds in Leipzig in the fall of 1989, the regime was finished. The same refusal to employ violence doomed the communist governments in Prague and Bucharest. I watched in December 1989 as the army general that the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu had depended on to crush protests condemned him to death on Christmas Day. Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak lost power once they could no longer count on the security forces to fire into crowds.

The process of defection among the ruling class and security forces is slow and often imperceptible. These defections are advanced through a rigid adherence to nonviolence, a refusal to respond to police provocation and a verbal respect for the blue-uniformed police, no matter how awful they can be while wading into a crowd and using batons as battering rams against human bodies.

Revolution usually erupts over events that would, in normal circumstances, be considered meaningless or minor acts of injustice by the state. But once the tinder of revolt has piled up, as it has in the United States, an insignificant spark easily ignites popular rebellion. No persons or movement can ignite this tinder. No one knows where or when the eruption will take place. No one knows the form it will take. But it is certain now that a popular revolt is coming. The refusal by the corporate

state to address even the minimal grievances of the citizenry, along with the abject failure to remedy the mounting state repression, the chronic unemployment and underemployment, the massive debt peonage that is crippling more than half of Americans, and the loss of hope and widespread despair, means that blowback is inevitable.

“Because revolution is evolution at its boiling point, you cannot ‘make’ a real revolution any more than you can hasten the boiling of a tea kettle,” Berkman wrote. “It is the fire underneath that makes it boil: how quickly it will come to the boiling point will depend on how strong the fire is.”

Max Weber wrote, “What is possible would never have been achieved if, in this world, people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible.”

It is the visionaries and utopian reformers such as the socialist Eugene V. Debs and the abolitionists who brought about real social change, not the “practical” politicians. The abolitionists destroyed what the historian Eric Foner calls the “conspiracy of silence by which political parties, churches and other institutions sought to exclude slavery from public debate.”

Foner writes:

For much of the 1850s and the first two years of the Civil War, Lincoln—widely considered the model of a pragmatic politician—advocated a plan to end slavery that involved gradual emancipation, monetary compensation for slave owners, and setting up colonies of freed blacks outside the United States. The harebrained scheme had no possibility of enactment. It was the abolitionists, still viewed by some historians as irresponsible fanatics, who put forward the program—an immediate and uncompensated end to slavery, with black people becoming U.S. citizens—that came to pass (with Lincoln’s eventual help, of course).

By the time ruling elites are openly defied, there has already been a nearly total loss of faith in the ideas—in our case free market capitalism

and globalization—that sustain the structures of the ruling elites. And once enough people get it, a process that can take years, “the slow, quiet, and peaceful social evolution becomes quick, militant, and violent,” as Berkman wrote. “Evolution becomes revolution.”

An uprising that is devoid of ideas and vision is never a threat to ruling elites. Social upheaval without clear definition and direction, without ideas behind it, descends into nihilism, random violence and chaos. It consumes itself. This, at its core, is why I disagree with some elements of the Black Bloc anarchists and antifa. I believe in strategy. And so did many of the older anarchists, including Berkman, Emma Goldman, Pyotr Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin. And I know that non-violence is the *only* route we have to radical social and political change.

I prefer the piecemeal and incremental reforms of a functioning democracy. I prefer a system in which our social institutions permit the citizenry to nonviolently dismiss those in authority. I prefer a system in which institutions are independent and not captive to corporate power. But we do not live in such a system. Revolt is the only option left. Ruling elites, once the ideas that justify their existence are dead, resort to force. It is their final clutch at power. If a nonviolent popular movement is able to ideologically disarm the bureaucrats, civil servants and police—to get them, in essence, to defect—nonviolent revolution is possible. But if the state can organize effective and prolonged violence against dissent, it spawns reactive revolutionary violence, or what the state calls terrorism. Violent revolutions usually give rise to revolutionaries as ruthless as their adversaries. “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster,” Friedrich Nietzsche wrote. “And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.” Violent revolutions are always tragic. I, and many other activists, seek to keep our uprising nonviolent. We seek to spare the country the savagery of domestic violence by both the state and its opponents. There is no guarantee that we will succeed, especially with the corporate state controlling a vast internal security apparatus and militarized police forces. But we must try. Once violence becomes the language of resistance, the

state, which can speak in the language of force with a ruthlessness that the opposition can never match, can triumph. The state uses violence to demand “law and order” and demonize the opposition, isolating it within the wider society and making it easier to crush.

The corporate state seeks to maintain the fiction of our personal agency in the political and economic process. As long as we believe we are participants, a lie sustained through massive propaganda campaigns, endless and absurd election cycles and the pageantry of empty political theater, our corporate oligarchs rest easy in their private jets, boardrooms, penthouses and mansions. As the bankruptcy of corporate capitalism and globalization is exposed, the ruling elite are increasingly nervous. They know that if the ideas that justify their power die, they are finished. This is why voices of dissent—as well as spontaneous uprisings such as the Occupy movement—are ruthlessly crushed by the corporate state. Revolutions are not only fundamentally nonviolent, because they never succeed unless the ruling apparatus self-destructs, but they are won around the battle of ideas. The ideology that sustained corporate power is dead. It is our job to fill the vacuum with an articulated socialism. And it is our job to use the tool of nonviolence to bring enough of the population and those who administer power to our side. If we fail, a Christianized fascism will be ascendant.

“[M]any ideas, once held to be true, have come to be regarded as wrong and evil,” Berkman wrote in his essay. “Thus the ideas of the divine right of kings, of slavery and serfdom. There was a time when the whole world believed those institutions to be right, just, and unchangeable. In the measure that those superstitions and false beliefs were fought by advanced thinkers, they became discredited and lost their hold upon the people, and finally the institutions that incorporated those ideas were abolished. Highbrows will tell you that they had ‘outlived’ their ‘usefulness’ and therefore they ‘died.’ But how did they ‘outlive’ their ‘usefulness’? To whom were they useful, and how did they ‘die’? We know already that they were useful only to the master class, and they were done away with by popular uprisings and revolutions.”

CITY LIGHTS BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

We the Resistance

Michael G. Long

“The politics of dissent is back in the United States,” says scholar Erica Chenoweth. “Since 2011, the country has witnessed the resurgence of popular action—from Occupy Wall Street to Flood Wall Street to Black Lives Matter to Standing Rock.”

Chenoweth may be right, but it’s not that the politics of dissent was ever absent. Dissent played an important role in our history long before the right to dissent—that is, the right to free speech, the right to assemble peacefully, and the right to express grievances to the government—was guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, and it has consistently appeared throughout the course of our history, even though its popularity has ebbed and flowed along the way. It ebbed in the early 1950s, for example, and now it’s flowing.

In light of the recent resurgence, Chenoweth and her colleagues have started counting political crowds on a monthly basis, and beginning with the Women’s March on January 21, 2017, they have found that monthly protests in the United States have numbered in the hundreds and that the most common type of political protest today is “civil resistance,” acts in which “unarmed civilians confront opponents using protests, strikes, boycotts, stay-aways and other forms of nonviolent contention.”

In defining civil resistance, Chenoweth, as well as many others who write on this subject, draw from Gene Sharp, founder of the Albert

Einstein Institution, whose work on nonviolent action has created a rich legacy for all of us who believe in the right to protest for right.

Sharp defines nonviolent action as “a technique of action for applying power in a conflict by using symbolic protests, noncooperation, and defiance, but not physical violence.”

It’s different from pacifism because it refers to a technique of action rather than a wholesale rejection of violence based on one’s religious or philosophical beliefs. Historically, nonviolent action has been employed by pacifists and non-pacifists alike, and it’s not a stretch to say that most U.S. citizens who participate in nonviolent actions are far from pacifists.

Nonviolent action is different from passivity, too, because it actively resists, challenges, defies, and confronts governing authorities. It’s not for slackers or the surrendering type.

Sharp has also classified nonviolent action into three broad categories: nonviolent protest and persuasion (like public speeches, marches, and teach-ins), noncooperation (strikes, boycotts, and sanctuaries), and nonviolent intervention (occupations, filling jails, and parallel governments). Although most of these methods—he’s identified more than 190 of them—are unlike those employed in conventional politics (voting, running for office, and other forms of electoral politics), his category of nonviolent protest and persuasion does include tactics, such as group lobbying, that do not altogether avoid standard political channels.

We the Resistance follows Sharp’s general lead, but there are a few differences to note. As it appears here, “nonviolent protest” refers to the use of nonviolent methods, including social, psychological, political, and economic ones, for resisting governing authorities—for example, speeches, petitions, opinion editorials, lobbying, picketing, marches, parades, teach-ins, walkouts, boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, sit-downs, speak-outs, civil disobedience, parallel governments, seizure of property, and occupations. In other words, nonviolent protest is a large umbrella term that includes all the methods included in Sharp’s three categories of nonviolent action.

In addition, although Sharp’s work addresses nonviolent action as

it occurs throughout the world, *We the Resistance* tends to the context of the United States and especially to the nonviolent methods used to resist governing authorities whose attitudes, actions, policies, and systems seek to undermine the democratic ideal of equal justice under law or to trample the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The last point is especially significant because there have been significant nonviolent protests throughout our history that have directly and intentionally sought to squash democratic principles and values.

On August 8, 1925, for example, more than 30,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., in a public display of racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism. Wearing white Klan robes, unmasked men and women carried U.S. flags in a three-hour march that ended at the Washington Monument. However historically significant it may be, the 1925 Klan parade, as well as similar nonviolent rallies, is not a proper subject for this book.

Nor are demonstrations that have been socially or politically conservative. This book does not include, for example, nonviolent protests that have targeted *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision granting women the right to abortion, even though these protests have shown massive strength.

We the Resistance aims to document nonviolent protests that have been leftist—socially, politically, and economically—within the context of U.S. history. These include protests for the separation of church and state, the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women, the right to free love and unregulated sex, the basic need for livable wages, the elimination of Jim Crow customs and laws, first-class citizenship for people of all colors and abilities, the right to abortion, the preservation of the environment, the liberation of animals, the citizenship of immigrants without legal standing, the right to same-sex marriage, the regulation of Wall Street, the elimination of police brutality against people of color, and so much more.

Although *We the Resistance* is not comprehensive in its documentation of leftist nonviolent protests, the documents included here will

introduce readers to some of the most significant protests, individual and collective, that have advanced equality, freedom, and justice. Taken together, the historic documents suggest that nonviolent protest is at the heart of what it means to be a U.S. American.

Violence, too, is at the heart of what it means to be part of our country, and if we have any doubt about that, all we have to do is read standard history books. There we will discover that historians have used conflicts and wars to order, explain, and give meaning to our past and present lives. Sometimes these histories even seem to suggest that the capacity to maim and kill for democratic values and principles is what it means to be American.

Perhaps this is the reason that nonviolent protests often feel so marginal, so peripheral, so out of the ordinary. But they're not. If we look closely, we will see countless individuals and groups throughout history who have wielded the powerful weapons of nonviolence in order to "redeem the soul of America," as Martin Luther King, Jr. put it. We will see slaves, Native Americans, Quakers, abolitionists, sharecroppers, suffragists, union members, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, pacifists, environmentalists, animal-rights activists, and LGBT folks, among so many others—all of them using nonviolent weapons to advance equality, justice, and freedom.

It's simply impossible to understand U.S. history without tending to nonviolent protests and the creative ways they have deepened and advanced our commitments to democratic values and principles. Nonviolent protests have been so pervasive and constant that we can even use them, rather than conflict and wars, to order, explain, and give meaning to our collective history. The critics who suggest that protest against the governing authorities is un-American simply don't know their own history.

My hope is that *We the Resistance* will inspire and educate readers about nonviolent protests, and help them discover that they're part of a wider community of resisters, even ones who date back to the pre-Revolutionary War era. I also hope that this book will help readers make

connections between their own protest actions and those of the recent past, and between those of the recent past and those of long ago—connections, for example, between the Black Lives Matter movement, the black civil rights movement, and the abolitionist movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr., rightly noted that the black civil rights movement did not emerge out of nothing but that it was deeply connected to the past. King felt especially indebted to Jackie Robinson and his nonviolent shattering of the color barrier in Major League Baseball. He even described Robinson as “a sit-inner before the sit-ins, a freedom rider before the Freedom Rides.”

Robinson, too, recognized his own indebtedness to nonviolent resisters of the past. Indeed, before Robinson, A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the 1941 March on Washington movement. Before Randolph, African American WWI veterans marched with the Bonus Army to demand payments that would help them survive during an awful depression. Before the Bonus Army, Ida B. Wells and the NAACP campaigned against lynching, as did those who marched in the Negro Silent Protest Parade of 1917. Before the parade, Elizabeth Jennings refused to leave a whites-only streetcar in New York City, and before she did that, African Americans in the North organized themselves to resist the 1850 Fugitive Law. And these brave folks had roots extending way back to the pre-Revolutionary days, when slaves in colonial America petitioned ecclesiastical authorities in Europe to arrange for their emancipation.

These are just some of the connections that this book will allow readers to make. Others deal with the intersectionality of nonviolent campaigns. Gay rights pioneer Frank Kameny, for example, credited the black civil rights movement for providing him with the inspiration and instruction required to politicize the homophile movement of the 1960s. Helen Keller joined other peace advocates during World War I, but she did so because of her unwavering socialist belief in the corruption of U.S. capitalism. And suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott first met each other through their mutual work in the abolitionist movement.

We the resisters in the 21st century may sometimes feel as if we're alone or doing something new, something innovative, something unique. But the truth is that a richly interconnected history has birthed us into this moment and offers us resources for resisting today and persisting tomorrow.

Our interconnected history also offers us hope because it shows us that some nonviolent protests can indeed succeed. Drawing from her groundbreaking work with Maria Stephan, Erica Chenoweth has argued that “historically speaking, nonviolent struggle is a more effective technique than violent struggle.” When democracy of some form is an intended goal, “nonviolent resistant campaigns are 10 times more likely to usher in democratic institutions than violent ones. Armed resistance actually tends to weaken democracy in previously democratic countries, while nonviolent resistance has no such effect.”

Although this book does not always identify the outcomes of the nonviolent protests documented here, just a bit of extra research will show that many of these campaigns were considerably successful in advancing democratic values and the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For example, the early women's rights movement eventually resulted in the enfranchisement of women, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom helped lead to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and numerous LGBT protests in recent years eventuated in the repeal of the government's “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy.

Of course there were horrific failures along the way. The nonviolent protests of Native Americans did not prevent the government from slaughtering them or forcing them on to barren lands. The nonviolent protests of individual slaves to white Christians did not typically lead to their emancipation. And more than a few of the nonviolent protests of factory workers in the first part of the twentieth century were crushed by industrialists; some of the workers, like many Native Americans and slaves before them, were maimed and murdered. While we herald the effectiveness of nonviolent protests, it's important to recall that nonviolence is not for the weak of heart; it requires courage, and sometimes a

willingness to die, in the face of the unspeakable horrors that our government is so capable of sanctioning and committing.

Thanks to the countless nonviolent resisters before us, our government has relented at points in our history. But let's not forget for one moment that state-sanctioned horrors continue to plague us—people of color, immigrants, the LGBT community, people with disabilities, women of all colors, the poor, and others—as well as animals and the environment.

But as the horrors visit us every day, so does our opportunity to stand on the shoulders of the men, women, and children whose nonviolent protests, documented here, have shaped us into the resisters we are today and can be tomorrow. And may we at last stand tall and exercise our constitutional right to resist for the sake of the democracy that still eludes us. All of Us—We the People, We the Resisters.

Notes on the Documents

I tried not to be heavy-handed in changing or correcting the grammar used by authors of the primary sources included here. I deleted outmoded grammar at some points, and in those places where I did retain its use, my purpose was to preserve the historic feel of the written word.

Excerpting historic documents always presents a challenge, and my hope is that I exercised care in doing so. Almost all of the writings here are shortened in some way, some of them quite liberally, and ellipses usually indicate my deletions. In some cases, I relied on the excellent editing done by other scholars who worked on the documents. You can find in the acknowledgments a list of editors whose work helped me to navigate the enormous amount of relevant and available material.

I deleted any notes that might have appeared in some of the original documents and did not add notes to explain particular references in the documents. Only rarely did I employ brackets to add information about references. Keeping or adding notes or bracketed information would have required me to delete some of the documents published here.

The most difficult choices I faced centered on the selection of which texts to include and which to exclude. My choices reflect my desire to show different types of actors, a wide range of nonviolent actions, and a diversity of goals and ends. The uneven quality of the documents reflects the availability of the historic material.

I should note, too, that some big names are missing in the pages ahead—William Sill, Eugene Debs, and Martin Luther King, Jr., come to mind. Also missing are some important protests—the Uprising of the 20,000 led by Clara Lemlich, Lucy Stone’s resistance to traditional marriage, and the student sit-in movement in the 1960s are but a few examples. I decided not to include King-authored documents for practical reasons: it is very difficult, and expensive, to secure permission to publish his work. As for Sill, Debs and other prominent peacemakers in U.S. history, as well as those historic protests I do not address, the best I can do in light of their absence here is to remind you that this work is not comprehensive and to encourage you to supplement the pages ahead by consulting the work of my colleagues who write on the increasingly important topic of nonviolent resistance.

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