
THE WEB OF COLLECTIVE ACTION
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CITIES

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March 1978

CRSO Working Paper #174

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Address to the annual meeting of the South Central Society
for Eighteenth-Century Studies, at Texas A. & M. University,
College Station, Texas, March 1978

"Dear Son," wrote the fussy old fellow in London to his son in New Jersey,

Since my last . . . nothing has been talked or thought of here but elections. There have been amazing contests all over the kingdom, £20 or 30,000 of a side spent in several places, and inconceivable mischief done by debauching the people and making them idle, besides the immediate actual mischief done by drunken mad mobs to houses, windows, &c. The scenes have been horrible. London was illuminated two nights running at the command of the mob for the success of Wilkes in the Middlesex election; the second night exceeded anything of the kind ever seen here on the greatest occasions of rejoicing, as even the small cross streets, lanes, courts, and other out-of-the-way places were all in a blaze with lights, and the principal streets all night long, as the mobs went round again after two o'clock, and obliged people who had extinguished their candles to light them again. Those who refused had all their windows destroyed . . . 'Tis really an extraordinary event, to see an outlaw and exile, of bad personal character, not worth a farthing, come over from France, set himself up as candidate for the capital of the kingdom, miss his election only by being too late in his application, and immediately carrying it for the principal county. The mob (spirited up by numbers of different ballads sung or roared in every street) requiring gentlemen and ladies

of all ranks as they passed in their carriages to shout for Wilkes and liberty, marking the same words on all their coaches and chalk, and No. 45 on every door; which extends a vast way along the roads into the country" (Franklin 1972: vol. 15, '98-99).

The time was April 1768, the writer our future revolutionary Benjamin Franklin.

The Wilkes in question was the gentleman, journalist, rake and demagogue John Wilkes. Wilkes had entered Parliament as Member for Aylesbury in 1757. In April 1763, issue 45 of Wilkes' paper, The North Briton, printed a veiled criticism of the King's speech at the opening of Parliament. For that article, Wilkes was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London, and the executioner burned No. 45 publicly in Cheapside. In 1764, Wilkes was expelled from the House of Commons, sentenced to jail, then declared an outlaw. Now he had not only reprinted the infamous No. 45, but also printed a pornographic parody of Pope's Essay on Man (entitled, to be sure, Essay on Woman), and then fled the country. After spending four years in leisurely but increasingly debt-ridden exile on the Continent, Wilkes had slipped back into Britain early in 1768. He had appealed unsuccessfully for a pardon, had failed in a bid for one parliamentary seat, and had then (in March of 1768) won election to a seat in Middlesex. Benjamin Franklin's letter to his son described the riotous Wilkite victory celebration of the 29th of March.

Wilkes' 1768 parliamentary campaign affronted the establishment in its direct appeal to the electorate -- an appeal by an outlaw, no less. Despite the narrowness of that eighteenth-century electorate, the entire campaign smacked of popular sovereignty. It challenged the principle of

virtual representation. It threatened the power of the authorities to place their allies and clients in Parliament and, by extension, in the government itself. The whiff of popular sovereignty did not please Benjamin Franklin either.

In describing the Wilkite celebrations, Franklin used the language of the authorities. The word was not crowd, or assembly, or gathering, but mob. Mobs are gatherings of dangerous people performing improper acts. Mobs make riots. Riots, in the language of the authorities, are collective actions (whether violent or not) whose impropriety justifies the use of force to terminate them: related words in the eighteenth-century lexicon are outrage and sedition. The words are essentially political labels; they set a distance between the observer and the actors, mark a line between responsible and irresponsible means of pursuing interests. As such, the categories are important. They affect the way the authorities behave. In the eighteenth-century setting, their use deserves the closest study. But as categories for historical and sociological analysis, words such as mob, riot, outrage and sedition obscure much of what is going on.

As it happens, over the past twenty years students of the eighteenth century have played the largest part in revealing what social realities lie in, and behind, the events that authorities call riots or seditions. In Britain, we have only to think of the work of E.P. Thompson, George Rudé, and Walter Shelton. In America, historians of the American Revolution such as Dirk Hoerder and Jesse Lemisch have made important contributions to "history from below". In France, the Revolution of 1789 has attracted the lion's share of the attention, with recent studies by Mona Ozouf and Lynn Hunt showing us that there are still important things

to be learned about the revolutionary crowd. Yves-Marie Berce, the ubiquitous George Rudé and others have extended the analysis of popular collective action both before and after the Revolution. Other western countries have produced similar historiographies; the study of the crowd in history has become something of an international enterprise. (Luckily, no one has succeeded in affixing a name to the specialty, thus saving us from a Journal of Historical Polemology or an International Demological Review.) Social, political and economic historians have shown us how to use the record of popular collective action to bring inarticulate ordinary people back into the history they lived and made.

Following the insights of this by now well-established historical approach, let us look more carefully at the popular collective action of London in 1768, before moving to observations and reflections on other eighteenth-century cities. By "popular collective action" I mean simply the various means by which ordinary people who share an interest, grievance or aspiration band together to act on their common interest. Some of those means are hard to trace because they involve the routine use of personal influence and of daily contacts, or because the actors deliberately hid their action from the authorities, and thereby from the historical record. We can make a start on the problem by concentrating on contentious gatherings: occasions on which people assembled and made visible claims on other people via declarations, attacks, petitions, symbolic displays or other means.

Contentious gatherings have a greater chance of entering the historical record than most other forms of popular collective action, since they are (almost by definition) observable, since observers find them interesting, and since authorities commonly seek to control them in one

way or another. We can gain some sense of the web of collective action in general by examining the form and content of contentious gatherings in eighteenth-century London and other cities, and then asking what the often exotic character of those gatherings has to do with the structure of the eighteenth-century city.

Let me stress again that many other scholars, including the formidable George Rudé, have taken up these problems -- indeed, have worked over many of the same materials and events we are examining here. Furthermore, my own current research on these matters focuses on the nineteenth century rather than the eighteenth. This is not, then, a report of new and original research but a survey of where we stand, and where we go from here. For the materials of popular collective action in eighteenth-century cities provide exciting opportunities for further reflection and research: opportunities to identify the links between what we loosely call "protest" and the routine ways in which people pursue their interests; to see how the particular geographic and social structure of the eighteenth century shaped the character of collective action; to specify the relationship between the large social changes going on in the eighteenth century and the local grievances which became visible in contentious gatherings; finally, to examine how the repertoire of available means of action was changing, and why.

When Benjamin Franklin witnessed the Wilkite electoral celebration of 1768, he had been in London, representing the interests of several American colonies, for over a year. Giant London had the wherewithal to impress even so sophisticated a provincial as Franklin. The metropolis was a sprawling agglomeration centered on the twin cities of London and Westminster. At three quarters of a million people, greater London

was then very likely the world's largest city. It served as Britain's capital, manufacturing center and commercial metropolis. It commanded a thriving, if turbulent, empire. It was the hurricane's eye of eighteenth-century industrialization. The metropolis of the time was dividing itself increasingly into a commercial center, based on the old City of London: a rich, fashionable West embracing parks, squares, avenues and palaces; a crowded industrial East, especially rundown and dense near the busy docks of the Thames.

The window-breaking celebration of the Wilkites had extended from the City over to the fine houses and public buildings of Westminster. Franklin himself lived in Craven Street, off the Strand. That put him by the river, only a stone's throw from Charing Cross, not far from Whitehall -- between Parliament and St. James', on the one side, and the commercial centers of the City, on the other. It also placed him just off the primary path of frequent processions and marches. They commonly originated at Mansion House or some other symbolically-charged location in the City, and then proceeded, soberly or tumultuously, down the Strand toward Parliament or St. James'. Charing Cross was, in fact, the choice-point: south toward Parliament or west toward the royal palace. The Wilkites of 1768 broke windows at the Duke of Northumberland's, in Charing Cross, a few steps away from Franklin's house; they may well have rushed down Franklin's street as well. Franklin's disdain for the London crowd was not a momentary aberration. In May, 1768 Franklin wrote to Joseph Galloway that:

While I am writing, a great mob of coal porters fill the street, carrying a wretch of their business upon poles to be ducked, and otherwise punished at their pleasure for working at the old wages. All respect to law and government seems to be lost among the common people, who are

moreover continually enflamed by seditious scribblers to trample on authority and every thing that used to keep them in order (Franklin 1972: vol. 15, 127).

That same day (the 14th of May) he wrote to John Ross that:

Even this Capital, the Residence of the King, is now a daily Scene of Lawless Riot and Confusion. Mobs are patrolling the Streets at Noon Day, some Knocking all down that will not roar for Wilkes and Liberty: Courts of Justice afraid to give Judgment against him: Coalheavers and Porters pulling down the Houses of Coal Merchants that refuse to give them more Wages; Sawyers destroying the new Sawmills; Sailors unrigging all the outward-bound Ships, and suffering none to sail till Merchants agree to raise their Pay; Watermen destroying private Boats and threatening Bridges; Weavers entering Houses by Force, and destroying the Work in the Looms; Soldiers firing among the Mobs and killing Men, Women and Children, which seems only to have produc'd a universal Sullenness, that looks like a great black Cloud coming on, ready to burst in a general Tempest (Franklin 1972: vol. 15, 129)

Thus the mobs of London, in Franklin's estimation, posed a serious threat to good government. All these things had, indeed, happened recently in London and vicinity. On the 22d of April, a large body of coal heavers, according to Gentleman's Magazine:

. . . assembled in a riotous manner in Wapping, went on board the colliers, and obliged the men who were at work to leave off; so that the business of delivering ships, in

the river, is wholly at a stand. . . This riot was attended with much blood shed, the rioters having met with opposition fought desperately, and several lives were lost (GM 1768: 197).

A week later their leaders met with city officials, and made a provisional settlement of the dispute. On the 7th of May, "The sailors assembled in a body in St. George's fields, and went to St. James's, with colours flying, drums beating, and fifes playing, and presented a petition to his majesty, setting forth their grievances, and praying relief" (GM 1768: 262). On the 9th,

A numerous body of watermen assembled before the mansion house, and laid their complaint before the lord mayor, who advised them, to appoint proper persons to draw up a petition to parliament, which his lordship promised them he would present; upon which they gave him three huzzas and went quietly home. The same night a large mob of another kind assembled before the mansion-house, carrying a gallows with a boot hanging to it, and a red cap; but on some of the ringleaders being secured by the peace-officers, the rest dispersed (GM 1768: 242).

That boot on a gallows, we shall meet again. On the following day, "A large body of sawyers assembled and pulled down the saw-mill lately erected by Mr. Dingley at Lyme-house, on pretence that it deprived many workmen of employment" (GM 1768: 242), and:

The coal-heavers assembled again . . . this day and rendezvoused in Stepney-fields, where their numbers considerably increased, and then they repaired with a flag flying, drums beating, and two violins playing

before them to Palace-yard, where they were met by Sir John Fielding, who persuaded them to part with their flag, to silence their drums, and to discharge their fiddlers; and then talking with their leaders, prevailed upon them to meet some of their masters at his office in the afternoon, and accommodate their differences (GM 1768: 242-243).

That same day, according to the magazine:

The mob which has constantly surrounded the King's Bench prison in St. George's-fields, ever since the imprisonment of Mr. Wilkes, grew outrageous; the riot act was read, and the soldiers ordered to fire. Several persons who were passing along the road at a distance were unfortunately killed; and one youth about 17, son to a stable-keeper in the Borough, was singled out, followed, and shot dead, in an outhouse where he had fled for shelter (GM 1768: 242).

In the Wilkite legend, this event came to be known as the Massacre of St. George's Fields. Only a few days, and a few riots, later, Benjamin Franklin wrote his gloomy diagnosis of the capital's condition: enfeebled by sedition, and infected with Wilkism.

The Wilkite fever was, in fact, still raging. At the end of April, Wilkes had gone to jail, had been released temporarily, only to be sentenced to 22 months in prison. During the judicial maneuvering, his supporters had thronged the streets, broken windows, and attended his every move.

Even pragmatic Americans, Franklin regretted to observe, showed a culpable sympathy for the mob. As he wrote William Franklin in October 1768,

Wilkes is extinguished. I am sorry to see in the American papers that some People there are so indiscreet as to distinguish themselves in applauding his No. 45, which I suppose they do not know was a Paper in which their King was personally affronted, whom I am sure they love and honour. It hurts you here with sober sensible Men, when they see you so easily infected with the Madness of English Mobs (Franklin 1972: vol. 15, 224).

Wilkes was not so extinguished as all that. When Franklin wrote to his son, Wilkes was comfortably ensconced in the King's Bench Prison, keeping good company and biding his time. In 1769, while still in prison, he was to win election as a London alderman, find himself expelled from Parliament, then win four more elections to his Middlesex seat, only to be disqualified each time. On all these occasions, and more, London crowds would celebrate or act out their disapproval in the streets. Wilkes was yet to become Sheriff in 1771, to be named Lord Mayor in 1774, and finally to re-enter Parliament that same year. From those establishment positions, he continued to bombard the King and the Commons with protests and demands. He became, indeed, a major British defender of American rights. Across the Atlantic, the Americans treated Wilkes as an ally, a hero, and a symbol of liberty. On both sides of the ocean, "Wilkes and Liberty" became the rallying-cry of opposition to royal policy.

On the first of October 1768, for example, an electoral assembly of "Mechanicks and other inhabitants" took place in Charleston, South Carolina. After the choice of nominees for the provincial legislature, the electors gathered at a live oak in a nearby pasture, dubbed it their Liberty Tree, and drank many a patriotic toast.

In the evening, the tree was decorated with 45 lights, and 45 sky-rockets were fired. About 8 o'clock, the whole company, preceded by 45 of their number, carrying as many lights, marched in regular procession to town, down King Street and Broad Street, to Mr. Robert Dillon's tavern; where the 45 lights being placed upon the table, with 45 bowls of punch, 45 bottles of wine, and 92 glasses [that was for the 92 Anti-Rescindors of Massachusetts Bay], they spent a few hours in a new round of toasts, among which, scarce a celebrated Patriot of Britain or America was omitted; and preserving the same good order and regularity as had been observed throughout the day, at 10 they retired (South Carolina Gazette, 3 October, 1768).

By that time the equation had greatly simplified: 45 = Wilkes = Liberty = the colonial cause. Ben Franklin was right to think that Americans were applauding Wilkes' No. 45, but wrong to think they were unaware of its strong, subversive political message.

Wilkes' dramatic personification of the principle of Liberty has recently led Richard Sennett to see in Wilkism the stirrings of privatism, the beginning of the end of Public Man. "From this idea of individual personality as a social principle," writes Sennett, "came ultimately the modern impulse to find political measures worthwhile only to the extent that their champions are 'credible,' 'believable,' 'decent' persons" (Sennett 1977: 105). Now, it seems to me that, in his general argument and in the specific case of Wilkes, Sennett has joined the eighteenth-century authorities by mistaking a challenge to the narrowness of national politics for a threat to principled public politics in general. I am

more inclined to accept John Brewer's equally recent interpretation of Wilkism as, at bottom, a principled challenge to indirect rule. I would also want to stress the role of the Wilkites in the development of a set of political techniques and precedents which cleared the way to a politics of large-scale popular mobilization via voluntary special-interest associations. More on that theme later. Yet Sennett has his finger on something significant: the emergence in the later eighteenth century of a type of demagogue (in the literal sense of the word) who would become a prominent figure in the politics of the nineteenth century. It is that sense of things to come, as much as the colorful character of Wilkes the man, that draws historian after historian back to reflect on his career.

The details of Wilkes' career -- and the career of his reputation -- are rich and fascinating. There is the ugly debauchee himself, one of the great political entrepreneurs. There is the implicit debate between virtual representation and popular sovereignty noisily posed by his later career. There is, most important for our purposes, the rambunctious creativity of the eighteenth-century urban crowd. The handful of events we have already reviewed show us the frequent use of music and parade: flying colors, drums, fifes, violins, tendentious ballads. They show us the display of dramatic symbols, such as a gallows and a boot to portray the crowd's punning condemnation of the King's favorite Lord Bute. They show us the chalking of the magic number 45, the forced illumination, the vengeful breaking of unlighted windows, and many more actions which, as cultural forms, belong unmistakably to the eighteenth century. If we followed Wilkes and his supporters further, we would also observe them organizing giant marches across London in which the pretext was the presentation of petitions to Parliament, staging elaborate tableaux (rich

with symbols such as the number 45, the gallows, and the liberty cap) in public places, and performing in a variety of other ways which, to twentieth-century minds, touch on street theater, mardi gras celebrations, circus parades . . . or perhaps college pep rallies.

Lest we think that popular creativity was somehow confined to Wilkism, however, we have only to turn our observations of Charleston back two or three years to the time of the Stamp Act crisis in the American colonies. On the 19th of October, 1765, for example, a group of Charleston patriots erected in mid-city a twenty-foot gallows bearing three images: a devil, a stamp-tax distributor, and a boot surmounted by a head with a Scotch bonnet, once again an allusion to Lord Bute. At the end of the day, the crowd removed the figures from the gallows, loaded them into a wagon, marched them to the house of the probable local stamp-tax distributor, broke a few windows there, demanded the surrender of any stamped papers, found none, proceeded on to the Green, and ceremoniously burned the effigies. "The bells of St. Michael's church," according to the South Carolina Gazette, "rang muffled all day; and, during the procession, there was a most solemn knell for the burial of a coffin, on which was inscribed, AMERICAN LIBERTY" (SCG 31 October 1765: 2). The same sort of pageantry, with or without references to Wilkes, characterized Charleston's displays of opposition to royal policy from then to the outbreak of the war with the mother country.

Celebrations and declarations of support, for that matter, also had more of a festival air than we are accustomed to in our sober twentieth century. When the news of the Stamp Act's repeal reached Charleston in May of 1769, reports the South Carolina Gazette, the companies of artillery and light infantry:

. . . appeared under Arms, and went through their Exercise, Firing &c.. In the Evening the Town was handsomely illuminated, and the Day closed with Loyalty and Mirth, echoing with loyal Toasts to his Majesty King George the Third . . . the great Patriot, Mr. Pitt, . . . and our other worthy friends in England (SCG 6 May 1966: 2; omission signs in original).

These were the rituals of public celebration: illuminations, toasts, marches, displays of colors. Essentially the same displays, for example, appeared in Charleston on the King's birthday, at least when the King was in good odor there. Charlestonians used the same sorts of symbols, actions and occasions for celebration and execration, for support and opposition. They were, in short, a general set of means for stating political positions.

Here we touch on some characteristics of eighteenth-century popular collective action which are fascinating to follow in detail, but which I can only mention here in passing. Popular collective action employed a vocabulary of words, symbols and gestures which was rich, varied, expressive and purposeful, yet broader than any particular application. It was a vocabulary held in common, available for a variety of needs. People drew on much the same vocabulary, with appropriate changes of emphasis, to express favor and disfavor. Often a negative performance had a positive twin, and vice versa; in the case of the widespread cacophonous mocking ceremonies variously called Rough Music, Skimmington and Shivaree, for instance, people commonly had at their disposal a parallel approving ceremony in the form of the serenade. The moral reprobate received Rough Music, while the moral hero (including, sometimes, the reprobate who had made amends) received a serenade.

There was, moreover, a good deal of continuity between the displays of sentiment which were authorized, or even promoted, by the authorities, and those which ordinary people undertook despite, or even in opposition to, the authorities. That continuity was not only a matter of vocabulary, but also of basic form and content. The most direct continuity lay in the fact that authorized public gatherings such as scheduled markets, holiday celebrations and hangings so regularly provided the occasions on which ordinary people gave collective voice to their grievances, hopes and demands. In addition to that continuity, popular collective action often consisted of a crowd's performance of a routine which was normally the function of the authorities, indeed which ordinary people thought the authorities themselves had improperly failed to perform. That was the secret of the so-called food riot, in which the pivotal actions were the forced inventory of grain in private hands, the seizure of excess grain for placement in a public store, the blockage of grain scheduled to be shipped out of the locality, and the forced sale of food to the local poor at a price below the prevailing market -- all of them measures which the authorities themselves commonly took in times of high prices and short supply. But it was also the essence of a number of actions which the American colonists took in the course of the struggles leading up to the Revolution: the substitution of people's courts for the royal equivalent, the tearing down of stamp distributors' premises, the ceremonious destruction of tea. Hanging and burning in effigy fell into the same category, for they were legal punishments commonly visited upon miscreants who were convicted in absentia.

The final continuity casts a new light on the continuities I have already mentioned. It lies in the fact that so much popular collective action addressed itself directly to the local authorities, and in a style

that one might call aggressive supplication. Aggressive, in that the postulants clearly conveyed the threat to take the law into their own hands. Nonetheless supplication, in that the people involved are prepared to cease and disband if only the authority in question will play the proper patron. We saw a bit of a standard sequence in the May 1768 confrontation of the coal-heavers with Sir John Fielding, who "persuaded them to part with their flag, to silence their drums, and to discharge their fiddlers" on his proposal to arrange talks with the coal-masters. What lies behind this sequence is a very general reliance on elite patronage to pursue an interest. The distance between a politics of deference and a politics of direct action was much less than our twentieth-century experience would lead us to expect. The deference was contingent on the proper performance of the authorities, and the alternative was not far away: it was direct action against, or instead of, the authorities. Mutiny, the characteristic rebellion of patron-client structures, was a very general form of eighteenth-century revolt.

All these forms of collective action and of rebellion rested on a series of crucial assumptions: that ordinary people grouped into more or less corporate bodies -- communities, guilds, religious groupings and the like -- which exercised collective rights; that the law protected those rights; that the authorities had an obligation to respect and enforce the law; that the chosen spokesmen of a corporate body had the right and obligation to make public statements of their grievances and demands. During the eighteenth century, as C.B. Macpherson has long insisted, the extension of the theory and practice of capitalist property relations -- of possessive individualism, in Macpherson's phrase -- was undermining the premises of such a corporate system; the rapidly growing number of landless wage-laborers, for example, caused increasing damage to the principle that they were

essentially servants, dependents of farms or shops whose masters represented them, and whose collective interest was their own. The demand for popular sovereignty threatened a fundamental alteration of the system. But in the meantime the available forms of collective action assumed the system's existence.

Most of these observations apply to eighteenth-century Anglo-American social life in general, and not only to that of Anglo-American cities. What was special about the cities? Because of its relatively great differentiation by trade, neighborhood, creed and place of origin, the eighteenth-century city served as the repository of a popular culture solidly premised on the rights and vigor of corporate communities. Yet at the same time it served as the spawning-ground for principles and practices which would come to dominate the lives of ordinary people during the nineteenth century. This dual character applied over a wide geographic range -- not just London or Charleston, but also Milan, Madrid, and a great many other western cities as well. It also applied over a wide range of day-to-day experience: marketing practices, industrial production, popular entertainment, and much more than that.

We have already had several illustrations of the first side of this dualism. Seen under a good historical lens, Ben Franklin's "mob" differentiates into specific interests. In the London of the 1760s, those interests appear in the form of trades: sailors, coal-heavers, and so on. I now have to qualify something I said earlier: Careful eighteenth-century observers generally made a distinction between a mob and a crowd representing some such recognizable interest. A mob, by and large, was a dangerous crowd which could not easily be identified with an established popular interest such as a trade, it was the more dangerous for that fact. When the interest was recognizable, the observer commonly

said something like "the coal-heavers," "a numerous body of watermen" or "a congregation of Protestant Dissenters." The crucial question was which interests had the right to voice demands and complaints within the city.

We have also seen innovation at work in the Wilkite movement and in the American conflicts which began with the Stamp Act crisis. They were two important elements in a much longer and broader set of changes. Via such organizations as the Sons of Liberty and the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights, they expanded the role in popular collective action of voluntary special-interest associations built outside of existing corporate structures. In a process too complex to trace here, the urban activists of the later eighteenth-century were helping to create a set of organizational forms and performances which would become the standard collective-action repertoire of the nineteenth-century: the emergence of the demonstration, the development of the electoral campaign, the spread of the strike, the creation of the social movement all depend to an important degree on struggles and changes which were already visible in major western cities toward the end of the eighteenth-century.

Having looked only at London and Charleston, one might think that these were uniquely Anglo-American developments. The Anglo-American experience was special in some regards. The Common Law tradition appears to have made the establishment of a single precedent for a particular organizational form or action peculiarly advantageous to the interest that could claim that precedent. The ability to choose between appealing to Parliament or to the King gave an organized interest room for maneuver which was not available, say, to its counterpart in the Berlin of the time. There are lines of imitation, collaboration and even causation which run from the British financial arrangements for the Seven Years

War and its aftermath to the fiscal conflicts of the 1760s to the struggles (in Britain and America alike) around the American Revolution, and thence to the French Revolution of 1789. Nevertheless, the changes in popular collective action we have been tracing transcended the Anglo-American experience, and by no means resulted uniquely from it. Ultimately, we will have to search for their origins in the expansion of capitalism and the concentration of power in the national state. Those processes loomed large in the British and American experiences, but they occurred widely elsewhere as well.

Let us abandon this perilously abstract discussion by hustling across the Channel and back to concrete cases. A glance or two at eighteenth-century Paris will put the Anglo-American experience into perspective. Our faithful year 1768 would serve us for Paris as well as for Charleston and London, but we can gain some additional perspective by moving forward two decades. That puts us in 1788, just short of the start of the great revolution. On Friday, the 29th of August, 1788, the bookseller Hardy set down this account in his journal:

Toward seven o'clock at night, the Foot Watch and the Horse Watch having been ordered not to appear in the Palace Quarter, and the rowdy youngsters, backed by the populace, who had planned to come declare a sort of open war on the watch, were emboldened by their absence; the youngsters began to gather on Pont Neuf and at Place Dauphine, in the interior of which people had to close all the shops and illuminate all the facades of all the houses along with those of the rue du Harlay. Toward nine o'clock the populace of the faubourg St. Antoine and the faubourg St. Marcel came to swell the number of the local

smart alecks. The disorder grew and grew; instead of sticking to lighting firecrackers, which were already bothersome enough to the inhabitants, they then lit a big fire in the middle of the Place Dauphine. They fed the fire with anything they could find in the vicinity, such as the sentinel's watch-house from the Pont Neuf near the statue of the bronze horse, and the stands of orange and lemon merchants in the same place, which were made of simple planks, the grills of poultry merchants from the Quai de la Vallée, all at the risk of burning the nearby houses. On that fire they burned the effigy of Monseigneur de Lamoignon, the current French Minister of Justice (Garde des Sceaux), after having him do public penance for his wrongdoing

(Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: Fonds Français 6687).

Later, the crowd destroyed the Pont Neuf guardhouse, chased away the Watch, then seized and burned their uniforms and arms before going off to attack guardhouses elsewhere in the city. Before the night had ended, a large crowd had confronted the Paris Guard in the Place de Grève, and seven or eight people had died (Rudé 1959: 32).

The gathering of the Place Dauphine has some things in common with the events we have surveyed in London and Charleston: the illumination, the bonfire, the burning effigy were international symbols. Yet the crowd spoke with a noticeable French accent, shooting off petards and using the nearby statue of Henri IV as a reminder of the people's ancient liberties. The Place Dauphine backed onto the royal courts of justice, and the nucleus of the "youngsters" consisted of law clerks from nearby offices. It is uncertain, despite Hardy's assertions, how many of the

participants actually came from the working-class quarters of St. Antoine and St. Marcel. In any case, crowds at the Place Dauphine had for several days been cheering the recall of the popular Finance Minister Necker and acting out a ceremonious trial of his predecessor, the Cardinal Lomenie de Brienne. The effigy of Brienne appeared in glorious episcopal robes.

"After having carried the mannequin to the equestrian statue of Henri IV," recorded Hardy, "and after having pushed him down on his knees before the statue, they carted him all around the square, then after reading him his death sentence, and making him ask forgiveness of God, the King, the Judiciary and the Nation, they lifted him into the air at the end of a pole so that everyone could see him better, and finally threw him onto an already-lighted pyre" (B.N. Fr. 6687, 27 August 1788). The ringleaders had also read a mock decree against Lamoignon, who was responsible for the implementation of a sweeping judicial reorganization which would, in Jean Egret's words, "wipe out the political role of French parlements" (Egret 1962: 246).

The festivities of the evening of the 27th at the Place Dauphine had finally burned themselves out, but late that night several run-ins between troops and youngsters around the royal courthouse had produced serious injuries. On the 28th the guard had stationed itself at the two entrances to the Place Dauphine and had turned away non-residents, while the mounted guard battled the crowds assembled on nearby streets. According to Hardy, three members of the watch were killed that night, and many on both sides injured. The following night the watch stayed away from the Place Dauphine, and the bonfire we have already witnessed blazed at the center of the square.

Over the following month, the pattern repeated itself, with variations, as Parisians celebrated the dismissal of Lamoignon and the return of the exiled Parlement to Paris. (The Parlement did not return the compliment; its first official action after resuming its sessions was to ban unauthorized gatherings and the throwing of firecrackers.) The repeated demonstrations of popular support led Restif de la Bretonne to ask ". . . is it flattering to receive homage from the same mouth which can, at a whim, belch obscenities? Thus the Parlement realized that it was dangerous to receive the fiery expression of joy from the hands of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds, of apprentice goldsmiths and clockmakers, of Savoyards, Auvergnats and coal-heavers" (Restif 1930: 193-194). "These last three," continued Restif:

are the most dangerous kind of troublemaker because of their natural crudeness and because they have no fear of the disasters fire might cause, given their poverty and the distance from their own hovels out in the faubourgs or in the impenetrable streets of the popular quarters. I admit that I have trembled every time I have seen the lower levels of the people excited, and I have trembled because I know them, because I know their hate for everything comfortable; it is an eternal and violent hate which asks no more than a chance to move into action . . . It is of the greatest importance to repress their gatherings, not to leave their disorders unpunished. If just once that ferocious beast thought it could dare, it would overturn everything. I fear it so much that I would not dare to

write this, or to have it printed, if it could read. But it can't read, that rabble of which I am now speaking; it will never be able to read, so long as it is the rabble (Restif 1930: 194).

Sound familiar? Like Ben Franklin twenty years earlier, Restif de la Bretonne was baffled and frightened by the early phases of an unprecedented popular mobilization. One might consider Restif to be remarkably prescient, since the massive, decisive actions of the Parisian crowd at the Bastille and elsewhere were less than a year away. Yet what that usually acute observer failed to see, or did not choose to see, was the conventionality and ritualism these Parisian "disorders." The novelty was not in their form, but in their context.

One of the more surprising things about Hardy's invaluable journal, in fact, is how little the detail of popular collective action in Paris changed with the advent of the Revolution itself. The pace, intensity and effectiveness of popular collective action did increase dramatically in 1789. But the form and content of contentious gatherings changed rather little. Food riots, torchlight processions, mocking rituals and the public representation of corporate interests continued to characterize the contentious gatherings of the time. The context, however, had altered so much that crowd actions could reach a scale and have an impact that had been inconceivable during more than a century of growing state power. Among other things, the crowd had allies and supporters in the middle class who now dared to voice their support as never before.

As the Revolution moved on, the forms of popular collective action in Paris did change significantly. Although France lacked a single figure comparable to the incomparable Wilkes, it did produce many

effective political entrepreneurs; part of their work was to stimulate, organize or use popular mobilization. From 1789 to 1792, the creation of clubs, militias, committees and public forums far surpassed anything the French had seen before. The revolutionary leaders themselves went in for top-down mobilization to a degree that the British Wilkites and Radicals never dreamed of, or at least never had the opportunity to attempt. The locally-organized National Guard and similar quasi-military units played a central part in the mobilization. The repeated processions of the early Revolution and the great ceremonies typified by the Federation Festivals of 1790 and 1791 synthesized old-regime pageantry with the revolutionary representation of a nation under arms, on guard against counter-revolution. In a characteristically different manner, the French were also creating new forms of popular collective action based on special-purpose associations, and breaking with the corporate structures of the old regime. Parisians, like Londoners, were creating the repertoire which would become the dominant means for the pursuit of shared interest in the following century.

Now, a few well-chosen colorful incidents cannot prove so grand a thesis. Rather, worse still, they can appear to prove almost any thesis one chooses, just so long as the selection of events is astute. That is the weakness of the "posthole history" Richard Sennett recommends to us, and with which he hopes to substantiate his own thesis of the fall of public man from the rich urban heights of the eighteenth century. My own efforts to deal with the problems of this paper in a truly systematic manner show me, alas, a complex, recalcitrant and sometimes tedious reality. In the long run, we have to substitute careful, continuous wall-building for the driving of an occasional posthole. By my own arguments, that means undertaking a close analysis of the day-to-day

life and fine structure of the city in order to locate the full web of collective action in that city.

We end, then, with working hypotheses and an agenda. The first working hypothesis is simply a useful commonplace: the character of collective action in the eighteenth-century western city reflected the character of the city itself: a city which was segregated into small subcommunities, organized politically as an interlocking set of corporate interests and patron-client networks, accustomed to doing much of its business (and pleasure) in the street, and peopled largely by poor, illiterate workers produced a web of collective action which capitalized on authorized public gatherings such as markets and ceremonies, which used street theater, ritualized mockery and garish symbolism generously, and which frequently consisted of a crowd's undertaking actions which, in the view of ordinary people, the authorities themselves should have performed.

Second working hypothesis: In those cities of the later eighteenth-century, new forms of action were emerging which would in the following century become the dominant repertoire of collective action through most western countries, in cities and villages alike. Urban activists were busy inventing the voluntary special-purpose association as a means of pursuing their interests. In the process they were fashioning events such as the demonstration and the mass meeting to display and deploy their power.

Finally, a reminder of the opportunities for research. The materials of eighteenth-century popular collective action are rich and abundant. Because so many of them come from the pens of the police, or of elite observers such as Franklin or Restif de la Bretonne, they require careful control. Their study necessarily draws us into close examination

of the political and social structures which produced them. Still they provide an extraordinary opening for retrospective ethnography, for the synthesis of literary, cultural, political and social analysis, for the creation of an eighteenth-century history which involves ordinary people as more than passive victims or faceless mobs.

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