

Social Movements and  
Global Social Change

*The Rising Tide*

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## Chapter Twelve

# Restrictionist Social Movements

Restrictionist movements fought to resist and reverse social change. They opposed the creation of constitutional government based on popular sovereignty in the republics, installed dictators in the republics, and resisted the expansion of citizenries in the republics. They viewed these developments as a threat to their own liberty, which consisted, in part, of dominion over others in both public and private settings. They enlisted state officials to obstruct change and persuaded them to authorize nonstate actors to use violence against subaltern groups. Restrictionist movements have routinely used or threatened violence to protect their own liberty and deny it to others. When state officials refused to license their violence, they persuaded their peers to give them informal legal immunity from prosecution by refusing to convict them for their crimes in court, which allowed them to commit violence with impunity.

For the most part, sociologists have excluded restrictionist movements, or what Sidney Tarrow called “the ugly movements,” from the study of social movements.<sup>1</sup> For Tarrow, the ugly movements are “rooted in ethnic and nationalist claims, religious fanaticism, and racism.”<sup>2</sup> Because many scholars *define* social movements as antiauthoritarian challengers, they exclude *pro*-authoritarian or restrictionist movements.

According to Alberto Melucci, a social movement “breaks the rules of the game . . . [and] questions the legitimacy of power,” while Frances Fox Piven argues that social movements not only challenge authority but disrupt the patterns of daily life, “a pattern of ongoing and institutionalized cooperation [with state authorities, who depend] on their continuing contributions [to

maintain their legitimacy].”<sup>3</sup> William Gamson defines social movements as “challenging groups” that target social authorities and persuade them to change their practices and policies.<sup>4</sup> Doug McAdam agrees that social movements are “challenging groups” or “insurgents” who seek to make modest reforms or radical changes in economic, political, or social institutions.<sup>5</sup> Sidney Tarrow defines social movements as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and [state] authorities,” though Suzanne Staggenborg notes that “not all social movements target the state” but also “other types of authorities, such as business owners or religious leaders.”<sup>6</sup> She goes on to say that “movement scholars have generally regarded movements as *challengers* that are, at least in part, *outsiders* with regard to established power structures,” though they have typically excluded political parties and interest groups, whom they regard as “insiders” or defenders of established power structures.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, insiders who defend authority should not be treated as social movements, though some scholars concede that they may constitute a countermovement, which suggests that they have no real autonomy or agency but exist only to counter a *real* social movement, one that possesses agency and autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

Social movement scholars have excluded restrictionist movements because these movements seek to preserve authority, defend inequality, and deny state power or political rights to subaltern challengers. For example, Paul Street and Anthony D. Maggio insist that the Tea Party “is *not a social movement*, but rather a loose conglomeration of partisan interest groups set on returning the Republican Party to power.” The authors argue that the Tea Party “is not an ‘uprising’ against a corrupt political system or against the established order,” which might define it as a social movement, but is instead “a reactionary, top-down manifestation of the system . . . a classic, rightwing and fundamentally Republican epitome of what . . . Christopher Hitchens once called . . . ‘the manipulation of populism by elitism.’”<sup>9</sup>

Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williams disagree, arguing that the Tea Party is a social movement, both because it has a grassroots component that consists of about two hundred thousand “angry, conservative-minded citizens who have formed vital local and regional groups” and because it has an antigovernment rhetoric, rooted in opposition to the election of President Barack Obama, that makes it an “antiauthoritarian” challenger like other social movements.<sup>10</sup>

I take a different view. Restrictionist movements should be included in the study of social movements for several reasons. First, restrictionist movements have shaped the pace, direction, and meaning of global social change during the past two hundred years, and they continue to do so. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which has studied racist, antigovernment “hate groups” in the United States for the past thirty years, found that the number of grassroots groups and armed militias has grown from 602 in 2000 to 1,018 in 2012. Second, they possess the agency and autonomy needed to resist change in both public and private settings. Although some are supported by state officials and nongovernment authorities, many restrictionists organize and act independently and are beholden to no one but themselves. Third, many of the antiauthoritarian challengers identified by sociologists as members of “real” social movements have themselves become pro-authoritarian restrictionists. This development, which is quite common, suggests that social movements be defined not by their opposition to authority but by their relation to social change. Their efforts delayed, compromised, and deflected social change and ensured the survival of social inequality.

#### RESISTING CHANGE

Restrictionists fought to preserve dynastic states and prevent the creation of constitutional government based on popular sovereignty in republican states. They included the royalists who opposed republican government in the American colonies and their American Indian and African American allies; the whites and mulattoes who fought to suppress the slave rebellion in Haiti and enlisted the French, British, and Spanish Empires in their counterinsurgency campaigns; the dynastic rulers and military cadres that crushed republican uprisings across Europe in 1848; the antirepublican fascists who defeated anarchist and socialist republicans during the Spanish Civil War and crushed socialist and communist movements in Italy and Germany before World War II; and the Taliban and al-Qaida, who fought to overthrow republican governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan and establish retrograde dynastic states based on a narrow definition of Islamic law.

Restrictionists seized power and established dictatorships in many republics and then fought to prevent democratization in these states. They included the caudillos who established dictatorships in postcolonial republics across Latin America; the white minority that organized an apartheid regime in South Africa; the communist parties that took power in the Soviet Union,

China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, postwar states in eastern Europe, and postcolonial states in Asia and Africa; the dictators who seized power with US assistance or consent in Europe, East Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East during the Cold War; and the dictators who seized power in postcommunist states across the former Soviet Union and fought to prevent the spread of the “color revolutions.”

Restrictionists resisted the expansion of citizenries within the republics and revoked or reduced the status of citizens, denizens, and subjects when they could. In the United States, restrictionists deprived American Indians of their sovereignty and forcibly relocated them to reservations in the West; slaveholders and secessionists fought to keep slaves, retrieve escaped slaves, and expand slavery to new territories outside the South; during Jim Crow, whites in the South deprived black men of citizenship and suffrage and made them denizens and subjects; anti-immigrant groups restricted the entry of Asian immigrants and worked to expel immigrants whom they viewed as a threat to public health or safety; men refused to extend suffrage to their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters; men treated women and children as chattel and beat them at will; and teachers defended the right to administer corporal punishment in public and private schools.

In recent years, restrictionist movements have worked to restrict or revoke the rights of citizens, denizens, and subjects in a variety of ways.

### Suppressing Citizens, Denizens, and Subjects

Restrictionists complaining of “voter fraud” have introduced legislation in different states that requires voters to “show photo ID at the polls or to prove their U.S. citizenship. Same-day voter registration would be ended in some places, strict new limits would make it harder to mount voter-registration drives, and early voting has been cut back.”<sup>11</sup> They have introduced English-language tests for citizens who seek public office and have argued that English should become the official language of the United States, which would make it difficult for non-English-speaking citizens to participate in public life.<sup>12</sup>

Restrictionist movements have fought to revoke female citizens’ right to abortion, which was given constitutional protection by the Supreme Court in 1974, introduced legislation to give “rights” to fetuses and make it more onerous for women to obtain contraception and abortions, deny funding for Planned Parenthood, which provides health care for millions of women, and demeaned the victims of rape.<sup>13</sup> Restrictionists have worked to undermine or

revoke the right of citizen workers to organize unions, bargain collectively, and exercise their solidarity.<sup>14</sup> And they have denied or revoked the right of gay and lesbian citizens to marry or obtain civil unions and kept sodomy statutes on their books even though the Supreme Court has ruled that these laws are unconstitutional.<sup>15</sup>

Restrictionists announced plans to revoke the “birthright” status of citizens born in the United States to foreign parents and create a two-tier system of birth certificates, deny public school education to the children of illegal immigrants, access that is currently protected by a Supreme Court ruling, and question the legal status of citizens and denizens alike.<sup>16</sup>

Restrictionists have imposed curfews on denizen youths, limited their ability to drive their cars with other minors, and attached red stickers on their license plates “to make it easier for the police to enforce . . . curfew and passenger restrictions.”<sup>17</sup> An editorial against underage drinkers expressed restrictionist sentiments with the headline: “Enforce the Laws Ruthlessly.”<sup>18</sup>

Restrictionists encouraged parents to use corporal punishment to discipline their children. The authors of *To Train Up a Child*, which has been purchased by 650,000 Christian homeschoolers, instruct parents to use “a switch from as early as six months to discourage misbehavior and describe how to make use of implements for hitting [children] on the arms, legs or back, including a quarter-inch flexible plumbing line that [the author notes] ‘can be rolled up and carried in your pocket.’”<sup>19</sup> The authors, Mr. and Mrs. Peal, argue that the practices they advocate in the book are “based on the same principles the Amish use to train their stubborn mules,” and maintain, “To give up the rod is to give up our views of human nature, God, eternity.”<sup>20</sup> Several sets of parents who adopted the practices outlined in the book have been charged with “homicide by abuse” of minors in their care.<sup>21</sup>

Restrictionists introduced “three-strike” and mandatory-sentencing laws for many crimes, restricted opportunities for parole, and disenfranchised felons who have completed their sentences and been released from jail. These measures have contributed to the expansion of the subject population in the United States and increased the social-legal distance between citizens and subjects.

### LICENSED TO KILL

During the past two hundred years, state officials have slowly revoked the ability of male nonstate actors to use violence on their own authority, a

development that has contributed to the monopolization of the legitimate use of physical force by the state, though the process that Weber described is by no means anywhere complete. But in recent years, restrictionists have fought to recover the authority of nonstate actors to use violence on their own initiative. They fought to weaken gun-control laws and advanced “stand-your-ground” and “concealed-carry” legislation, which gives legal protection to nonstate actors, most of them male, to use guns in “self-defense,” on their own authority. They passed legislation barring doctors from asking their patients whether they own a gun, a question that gun owners view as “unnecessarily harassing.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, police did not prosecute Brice Harper, who killed an unarmed man, Dan Friedenber, the husband of a woman Harper was having an affair with, when Friedenber approached Harper at his home; police did not initially prosecute George Zimmerman after he shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager in Florida. In both cases, the police believed that the killers had the legal authority to act as they did.<sup>23</sup> “Given [Mr. Harper’s] reasonable belief that he was about to be assaulted, [Mr. Harper’s] use of deadly force against [Mr. Friedenber] was justified” under Montana’s new stand-your-ground law, the county attorney explained.<sup>24</sup> Harper shot Friedenber three times. “There is no justice,” Mrs. Friedenber complained.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, one can “use” a gun without firing a shot. The public display of guns can be used by individuals to threaten, provoke, or cow others, depending on the circumstances. When women in Dallas held a meeting in a restaurant for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a group formed after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, a heavily armed group of gun-rights activists belonging to Open Carry Texas gathered in the parking lot outside the restaurant and brandished assault rifles and shotguns in an intimidating display of force. “Sadly, these bullies are attempting to use guns to intimidate moms and children and to infringe on our constitutional right to free speech,” Shannon Watts, the national founder of Moms Demand Action, observed.<sup>26</sup> As Stephen Stills and Buffalo Springfield observed in the 1967 song “For What It’s Worth”: “There’s a man with a gun over there / Telling me I got to beware.”

### CAPABILITY, DIFFERENCE, AND INEQUALITY

In dynastic states, restrictionists rejected constitutional government based on popular sovereignty because they believed in social *inequality*, which was

the basis of claims to power by dynastic rulers and aristocracies, and because they thought that the multitude were *incapable* of governing themselves. In the republics, restrictionists believed in social equality for *some* people, though not for all, and reserved citizenship and suffrage for themselves, whom they described in the Constitution as “the People.” They did not believe in equality for *all* because they thought that the multitude was incapable of exercising popular sovereignty. Because the multitude, which were often described as “childlike,” was incapable of exercising the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship and suffrage, they should be treated differently, as denizens or subjects, not as citizens. Restrictionists simultaneously defended social equality for some but not all, as a matter of principle, arguing that it was based on the difference between the *capable* and the *incapable*.

During the past two hundred years, restrictionists have argued that people assigned to denizen and subject populations lacked the moral capacity, the economic autonomy, the social agency, and the self-discipline necessary to exercise popular sovereignty responsibly. Restrictionists have defended the resulting social inequalities because these inequalities are based on social *differences* that reflect different individual and social *capacities*.

Of course, denizens and subjects have argued that they, too, are capable of exercising popular sovereignty, that they are not so different as restrictionists imagine, and that they, too, should be allowed to claim citizenship and suffrage, liberty and equality. One way that they demonstrated “capacity,” agency, and autonomy was by organizing social movements to demand change. By organizing movements, they demonstrated an ability to *act* like citizens, even if citizens did not yet treat them as citizens, as equals. But subaltern groups have not always *challenged* the idea that *capacity* should be used as a criterion to determine who might exercise popular sovereignty, which is the rationale used to justify persistent social inequality and deny some “people” from being seen as members of “the People.” Although many subaltern groups have objected to social inequality, they have not challenged the principle that underlies it. In fact, many aspiring and altruistic movements that fought to expand citizenship in the republics also embraced or adopted this principle as their own.

## ARE WE ALL RESTRICTIONISTS?

Social movements have expanded citizenries in republics around the world. But social inequality persists, even in the most “advanced” republics, where citizenship has been extended to the vast majority of people, where denizen populations are modest (mostly young people and a small number of immigrants) and subject populations (convicts) are relatively small. Of course, restrictionist movements fought to limit the expansion of citizenries and keep social and economic inequalities intact, and they still do. But social inequality is not the product of their efforts alone. Inequality persists in part because many of the denizens and subjects who became citizens and obtained suffrage subsequently worked to *prevent* its extension to others, even to their own. Immigrants who became citizens joined restrictionist, anti-immigration groups, youths who became adults campaigned to restrict the rights of minors, white women who obtained suffrage denied it to black women in the South, male workers who obtained the right to bargain collectively denied women and minorities admission to their unions, and the Islamic demonstrators who struggled for democracy in Arab states then fought to exclude women from public and political life. Do the citizens of any republics now support the extension of citizenship to minors, immigrants, or convicts? Perhaps, but they are few in number.

Subaltern groups, who were once oppressed, participated in restrictionist social movements for different reasons. They may have done so because they wanted to secure their own interests, exercise their own liberty, or treat others as they were treated. This last practice has been a common response to hazing, abuse, and mistreatment by others. But while such reasons may have played a role, this behavior also has social explanations.

Immigrants who join anti-immigration groups do so not because they see themselves as having something in common with new immigrants, being immigrants themselves, but because they see new immigrants as *different*: “We came here legally, worked hard, and asked for nothing. They came here illegally, are lazy, and ask for resources and special treatment from the state.” Adults who were, of course, once children imposed driving restrictions on youth because they think contemporary youth are *not* the children they once were. If people persuade themselves that others are *different*, if others lack the capacities that they possess, then it is easy to justify measures that would constrain others’ liberty and rationalize the inequalities that result.

Of course, denizen and subject populations who aspired to citizenship often found it effective to argue that they were *not* different but the *same* as others. For example, gay and lesbian movements successfully argued that they were not different, not a threat to public health or safety, and should therefore be allowed to serve in the army, teach in a public school, or marry their partner, just *like* other citizens. As Mary Bernstein observes, “[T]he lesbian and gay movement seems largely to have abandoned its emphasis on *difference* from the straight majority in favor of a moderate politics that highlights *similarities* to the straight majority.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, they were able to make this argument more easily than some other subaltern groups because they were already citizens, though in a precarious, second-class status, so they were less different, in some ways, than children, immigrants, or convicts.

Ironically, the postmodern scholars who insist on “difference” and exhort subaltern populations to exercise their “self-determination” and portray themselves as “different,” one from another, make it easier for restrictionists to differentiate themselves from other people, rationalize differential treatment, and maintain social inequality.

The problems for the remainders—children, immigrants, and convicts—is that denizen and subject populations are now a minority of people in the republics, which means that their *capacity* to act, ascend, and change their condition is fairly weak, given the fact that a majority of people now belong to the citizenry. The citizen majority have displayed little interest in inviting or allowing the remainders to join them, largely because they view the remainders as different, as lacking the capacity, autonomy, or agency needed to act as citizens. In fact, this is a dubious assertion. Are children less capable than senior citizens with dementia? Are immigrants less capable than adult citizens with Down syndrome or any chronic and debilitating disease? Are convicts less capable than citizens taking mood-altering prescribed drugs? When children in Manhattan, Kansas, elementary schools were given the opportunity to participate in a mock election for presidential candidates in the 2012 election, 56 percent voted for President Obama, compared with only 41 percent of adults in the town and in the state, a fact that attests not only to the children’s agency and autonomy (they voted quite differently from their parents) but also to their maturity and sagacity.<sup>28</sup> Age is no more a measure of capacity than ethnicity, class, gender, or place of birth. Yet so long as citizens use capacity as a criterion for admission to the citizenry, social inequality in the republics will persist. Citizens will insist on it.