3

Obstacles to Progressive Change

There are many people trying to make the world better. Why aren't they more successful?

This chapter first addresses some popular but faulty criticisms of progressive social change efforts. Then it describes the five main obstacles that actually thwart positive change. The next few chapters then put forth a progressive change strategy that can surmount these hurdles.

MISGUIDED CRITICISMS

When change does not come the way we would like, it is easy to blame others. Progressive activists often blame those who are not working for change — calling them apathetic, ignorant, complacent, or cynical. However, labeling people does not explain their behavior nor suggest positive solutions. These labels are also unfair — it is not at all unreasonable for people to spend their time earning a living, raising their children, living their lives, and having some fun. Rather than blaming those who are not actively working for change, it is more useful to determine why progressive activists *are* able to live their lives and work for positive change. What has inspired and enabled them to do this?

Similarly, society assigns progressive activists full responsibility for positive change and then blames them for their limitations and blunders when they fail. For example, I often hear criticisms like these:

TOO LITTLE AND TOO MUCH EFFORT

• Progressive activists are not dedicated enough, and they do not do enough. They should care more and work harder. They should forfeit their careers, forgo having children, minimize social entanglements, and focus all their efforts on change.

• Activists work too hard, engaging in useless frenzy and then burning out. They should take better care of themselves and work at a sustainable pace. They should also remember what is important in life. They do not spend enough time supporting their spouses, children, and friends and enjoying themselves. To be effective, they must lead a sane, balanced life and regularly stop to smell the roses.

ORIENTATION TOO ORDINARY AND TOO SPIRITUAL

• Activists are not spiritual enough. They should tune into the ecological wisdom of the cosmos and open themselves to the possibilities of mystery and magic.

• Activists are too idealistic and "airy-fairy" with their heads in the clouds. They should get down to brass tacks

and do the hard, demanding work necessary to bring about change.

TOO MUCH PLANNING AND TOO MUCH SPONTANEITY

> *If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it.*
> — Abraham Lincoln

• Activists spend too much time meeting with each other to discuss how to create change and not enough time actually doing it.

• Activists do not spend enough time considering the consequences of their actions. They too often act impulsively without adequate analysis or discussion with others — then make grievous mistakes.

TOO LITTLE AND TOO MUCH CONSIDERATION OF THE POOR

• Activists build too few organizations of working-class people and the poor — those who can easily see how they are oppressed and will fight on their own behalf.

• Activists spend too much time focusing on the underclass. The poor are too downtrodden to work coherently for progressive change. Those who do work for change only selfishly want to get more for themselves — they will not fight for the common good. Moreover, activists only want to align themselves with the victims of society because they pity them or identify with their pain.

TOO LITTLE AND TOO MUCH CONSIDERATION OF THE ELITE

• Activists focus too little on educating members of the elite — those who are prosperous enough that they can attend to the common good and who can use their power and resources to end oppression.

• Activists spend too much time cozying up to the elite. The elite are inherently antagonistic to any substantive progressive change. Moreover, activists only want to align themselves with the elite because they envy their wealth and privilege.

NOT ENOUGH PURITY AND TOO MUCH

• Activists should not compromise their ideals by working with others who do not share their goals. Those who share ideals should go it alone, even as a member of a small sect if necessary.

• Activists should work together in large groups and coalitions to garner enough power to create big changes instead of working in small, fragmented groups.

FOCUS TOO NARROW AND TOO BROAD

• Activists should work on every important problem, not just their few pet issues. All issues are connected and all are important.

• Activists should all work together on one single issue instead of scattering their efforts on a thousand different projects.

NOT ENOUGH FOCUS ON POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND PERSONAL CHANGE

• Activists should focus pragmatically on electing progressive legislators to office by working within the Democratic Party.

• Activists should create a new political party so they can promote a truly progressive platform, even if their candidates fail to win office.

• Activists should ignore politicians and act directly to educate people and to acquire power.

• Activists should forget power and focus on shifting cultural paradigms instead.

• Activists should focus inward on their own complicity with evil and work to overcome their own power-tripping, racism, sexism, and classism.

NOT ENOUGH ATTENTION ON THE FUTURE AND ON THE PRESENT

• Activists should strive to teach their children progressive ideals and hope that an enlightened next generation can change society.

• Activists must change the world now so their children can grow up uninjured by current problems.

Miss the Mark

Though contradictory, these are all reasonable criticisms. Each of them reflects an important truth about the nature of society, and each may be an apt criticism of a particular change effort. Activists make many mistakes and often choose foolish or counterproductive tactics. Their understanding of the world is often incomplete or wrong and the strategies they choose are often inappropriate. However, none of these criticisms really explains why progressive change efforts do not accomplish more, and none clearly points the way to fundamental change.

These criticisms and their implied solutions miss the mark. The world is complex and diverse, so efforts to change it will also be complex and diverse. In different situations, progressive activists must act in different ways. Sometimes they must work alone — other times they must work with other groups. Depending on circumstances, they must concentrate narrowly or sweep widely, focus on highest ideals or pragmatically choose to compromise, look inward or outward, focus on the present or look to the future, work long and hard or take a much-needed vacation.

*But **why** do activists so often choose the wrong response? And why, even when they choose seemingly effective means, do they still very often lose?*

Five Primary Obstacles

Rather than simply blaming ordinary people for not working for change or blaming progressive activists for their failures, it is better to probe much deeper to discover what actually holds back social change. Why are there so few people willing or able to work for positive change? Why do progressive activists err so often? Why is it so hard for them to succeed? What gets in the way?

I believe five main obstacles prevent progressive activists from creating a good society:
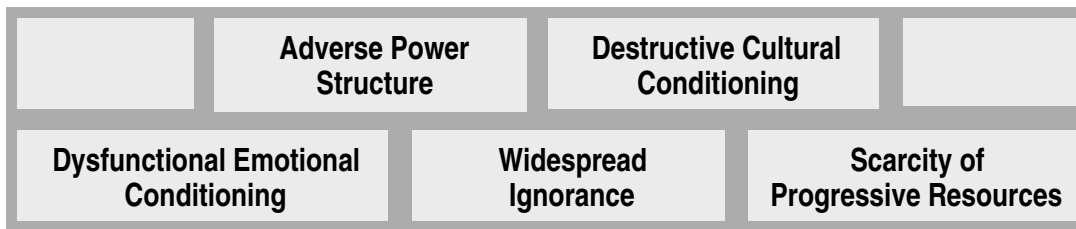
• **Adverse Power Structure**: Society's institutions and structures entice and coerce everyone into acting to perpetuate these institutions and social structures and to resist progressive change. In particular, powerful elite interests use their immense resources to thwart positive change. Regular people fear that if they stray from traditional paths they will be attacked or ruined financially.

OBSTACLE 1: ADVERSE POWER STRUCTURE

Changing society requires changing both the way people relate to each other and changing the way societal institutions are structured. The particular way that our society is structured makes it extremely difficult to bring about fundamental positive change. Our institutions and social structures entice and coerce everyone into acting in ways that perpetuate existing institutions and social structures, even those that are quite destructive.

The people who are most hurt by the current system typically have little power to make changes. They do not have the authority to order change, the money to pay for change, nor the skills to persuade others to change. Moreover, they are taught that they deserve their fate and should passively accept it.

A Wall of Opposition

	Adverse Power Structure	Destructive Cultural Conditioning	
Dysfunctional Emotional Conditioning		Widespread Ignorance	Scarcity of Progressive Resources

• **Destructive Cultural Conditioning**: All of us grow up accepting societal norms, some of which are quite destructive. These norms powerfully dictate what is expected of us and what is permissible. Those who challenge or stray from the accepted norms in any significant way are usually criticized or ostracized.

• **Dysfunctional Emotional Conditioning**

All of us are hampered by internalized emotional injuries that have embedded fear and oppression deep within our psyches. This conditioning makes it difficult for us to change ourselves and often makes us resist progressive change.

• **Widespread Ignorance**: Most people do not know about progressive alternatives and do not have the skills to implement them. In addition, most progressive activists have few skills and little relevant experience working for change — which leads them to make many mistakes.

• **Scarcity of Progressive Resources**: Progressive activists have extremely limited financial resources, receive little personal support, and are too few in number.

Stacked together, these five obstacles comprise a huge barrier blocking positive change. Any serious effort to transform society fundamentally must overcome every one of these critical obstacles.

In contrast, those who have the most authority, money, and skills have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. They are taught to believe they deserve their power and privilege and taught that they should actively fight to maintain the established order. If they feel pangs of conscience and decide to challenge the power structure or even if they just do not perform as much as is demanded by the system, they may lose their positions of power.

Most people have an intermediate level of power and awareness. They are partially hurt by the current structure, but also have a personal stake in maintaining it. They may see some of the problems caused by this structure, but they still mostly support it, often hoping that they can personally escape problems by garnering more power and money for themselves or aligning themselves with the elite.

No single person, even someone who is seemingly quite powerful, has enough power to individually bring about significant change against all the opposition generated by everyone else playing their assigned roles. Faced with broad opposition, people learn to accept the current system and to conform to its dictates, even if this means carrying out actions that oppress others.

At the Top

Our society has developed in a way that has allowed a relatively small number of people to accumulate immense power and resources. Since they reap many benefits from the present system, these wealthy, privileged members of the "upper class" have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Though progressive change would greatly improve society as a whole, it would cause these affluent individuals to lose their special privileges. So typically, members of the upper class oppose progressive change, and with their immense power, they constitute a formidable obstacle.

Sociologists C. Wright Mills and G. William Domhoff call the people who fight to maintain the privileges of the upper class the "power elite." In a series of carefully documented books, they have systematically explored who constitute the power elite, how members of the elite exert power, and how they maintain their strength.[1]

To determine who constitute the power elite, Mills and Domhoff examined: (1) who garners most of the valued benefits of society (wealth, income, well-being); (2) who occupies important institutional leadership positions and makes societal decisions; (3) who wins when there are societal disagreements; and (4) who are considered by others to wield power. From this analysis, they conclude that the power elite encompasses primarily two sets of people: (1) leaders of the wealthy upper class who have the interest and ability to protect and enhance the privileged social position of their class; and (2) high-level employees of important businesses and organizations, particularly ones owned by the upper class. They find the power elite serves as the leadership group for the upper class and works largely on its behalf.

The Upper Class

Domhoff estimates that the upper class in the United States is a relatively small group, comprising about one-half of one percent of the total population (about one million people). Though relatively few in number, members of the upper class own 20–25% of all wealth, own about half of all corporate stock, and exercise ultimate control over a significant portion of all business.[2] They sit in a large number of the seats of power in the government and the corporate community.

Members of the upper class do not all know each other and they are not monolithic in their perspectives. However, most do share similar backgrounds, share similar lifestyles, vacation at the same resorts, and socialize in overlapping social circles. They identify with each other as the "elegant, refined, sophisticated, genteel, well-bred, upper echelon, best and the brightest." Given their shared position in society, they also generally share an interest in maintaining their power and privilege.

Some people join or leave the upper class as their wealth and status grows or shrinks. Nevertheless, membership generally changes slowly, usually bequeathed from elite elders to their elite heirs. To ensure continuity over time, private boarding schools, elite colleges, and upper crust social clubs mold upper class children and up-and-coming new members of the elite into a cohesive group.

The Power Elite and the Power Structure

The power elite is that select group with the desire and the ability to shape public policy — often with the goals of maintaining the power and wealth of the upper class and of resisting efforts to democratize society. The power elite does not include every upper class person nor is it limited to the upper class. Still, many members of the power elite are upper class and most of the rest are aligned with upper class interests.

The power elite is *not* a secret cabal conspiring to oppress other people. However, members of the power elite *are* powerful and influential. Most *do* share common interests. Many of them *do* meet together in a variety of forums (policy conferences, business meetings, trade conferences, social clubs, and friendship networks). Many *do* discuss and work out mutually satisfactory policy initiatives. Many *do* use their power to advance these initiatives.[3] Together, their efforts to "maximize profits for shareholders," "merge assets into more efficient units," "reduce labor costs," "increase productivity," "support and defend free enterprise," "overturn trade barriers," "defend property rights," "protect individual initiative," "stamp out immorality," "uphold law and order," "honor traditional family values," "maintain a strong defense," "reform government," and implement other seemingly innocuous and benevolent principles actually result in the oppression of billions of people here and abroad.

The owners and top-level managers in large income-producing properties are far and away the dominant power figures in the United States. Their corporations, banks, and agribusinesses come together as a corporate community that dominates the federal government in Washington. Their real estate, construction, and land development companies form growth coalitions that dominate most local governments. Granted, there is competition within both the corporate community and the local growth coalitions for profits and investment opportunities, and there are sometimes tensions between national corporations and local growth coalitions, but both are cohesive on policy issues affecting their general welfare, and in the face of demands by organized workers, liberals, environmentalists, and neighborhoods.
— William Domhoff [4]

Many members of the power elite do not feel that they are particularly powerful. Rightfully, they see tens of thousands of other powerful people and perceive that their own ability to exert control is small. Still, compared to the average person who has few resources and does not occupy a seat of authority, members of the power elite are tremendously more powerful.

Members of the power elite are not "evil" individuals. Many deeply believe authoritarian ideology and free market rhetoric and so honestly believe their actions are benign. They typically believe they are saving the world from some greater evil like "Satanism," "Communism," "terrorism," or "tribalism," or defending against domination by "politically-correct Feminazis" or "misguided Luddites."

Some members, naïve about the true nature of social processes, go along with the system and trust that their actions are benign. Other members of the power elite, ambitiously seeking monetary gain or status, feel compelled to play according to the rules of the game even though this sometimes means they must act in ways they know are destructive and immoral. Still others try to act for the social good, but discover that the economic, political, and social structures of society force them to act in destructive ways. They find that the forces they confront are so powerful that they are not allowed to choose positive solutions. If they attempt to oppose or bypass the power structure, they are barred from acting or stripped of their power — either way, they cease being members of the power elite.

> *The trouble with being in the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.*
> — Lily Tomlin

No matter what their motives, desires, or ideological bent, members of the power elite control immense resources and they use these resources to advance particular policy initiatives. These initiatives generally enable, support, and defend themselves, other members of the power elite, the upper class, and the whole power structure that permits them to continue wielding their power.

Although members of the power elite shape the power structure and generally support it, they are also manipulated and oppressed by it. They are bombarded with their own rhetoric, terrorized by their own scare stories, forced to act in proscribed ways, barred from reaching out to most other people, and prohibited from considering positive solutions to social problems. Many members of the elite feel they are trapped in a terrifying world: they feel inferior to anyone with more power, money, or status; they feel besieged by liberals, people of color, the poor, and perhaps by other members of the power elite; and their lives feel empty and meaningless.

The Might of the Power Elite

Backed by the enormous wealth of the upper class, members of the power elite own or exert dominant control over most of the important resources of society. Together, they have enormous holdings in land, mineral rights, factories, buildings, equipment, TV and radio licenses, patents, and copyrights. They control government commissions and regulatory agencies. They command military services, "intelligence" agencies, and police forces. They direct the news media, policy think tanks, universities, churches, banks, agribusiness, and most other industries, including the important information industries of publishing and entertainment. With these immense resources, they have the ability to obscure the truth and threaten anyone who attempts significant change.

Are You a Member of the Power Elite?

• Were you born into a prominent family? When you were a child, did most people in your community see your parents as distinguished, sophisticated, glamorous, or eminent? Are you viewed that way now?

• Did you attend a prestigious private prep school or elite college? Did/do/will you send your children to such a school?

• When you came of age, did you receive gifts or an inheritance worth more than $50,000 (beyond college tuition)?

• Are you listed in the Social Register? Do you belong to the Bohemian Club or a local upper-crust social club? Do you vacation at posh resorts?

• Does your immediate family have an annual income of more than $200,000?

• Does your immediate family have a net worth of more than $1,000,000?

• Are you a top executive or a member of the board of directors of a large corporation, bank, law firm, foundation, university, policy-formation institute, large cultural organization, or religious denomination?

• Are you an elected or appointed official at the state or national level, a top political party official, or a top military officer?

• Do you serve on any official commissions or task forces at the local, state, or national level?

• Do your direct and indirect contributions to political campaigns, political parties, or lobbyists at the local, state, and national level total more than $5,000 annually?

• Are you a member of the board of directors or do you directly or indirectly (through a foundation) contribute more than $5,000 annually to a national policy-formation institute?

If you answer yes to three or more of these questions, then you are probably a member of the power elite.[5]

For example, in the area of public governance, the elite can mostly control who is nominated for office, who is elected, and who is appointed to commissions and judgeships. Moreover, they can mostly determine who lobbies legislators, how issues are portrayed, which policy questions are asked, what research information is revealed, and which solutions are considered.

The public be damned!
— Railroad baron
William H. Vanderbilt

Consider the ways that the elite controls who is elected to public office. In the current political system in the United States, candidates for public office can usually win election only if they raise hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. Candidates with large amounts of money can poll voters to discover what they want to hear, then craft dazzling television advertisements filled with alluring messages, and blast them at every voter in the district. They can completely overpower honest political discussion with verbiage and spectacle. They can also blast their opponents with vicious accusations and nasty innuendo.

Candidates who cannot raise large amounts of money have no way to tell voters about themselves or their positions on policy issues and no way to counter the misinformation broadcast by opponents. Even so-called "grassroots campaigns" (with many volunteers making telephone calls and delivering literature door-to-door) typically require large amounts of money to pay for telephones, printing, and travel. Given this environment, the candidate who spends the most money usually wins.

Realistically, candidates can only raise large sums two ways. They can tap their own reserves if they are multimillionaires like Ross Perot or Steve Forbes. Alternatively, they can solicit big donors — who are usually members of the upper class. Consequently, most candidates able to win office are members of the power elite, ideologically sympathetic to elite interests, or beholden to the elite. Tellingly, the Senate is known as "the millionaire's club" for its large number of extremely wealthy members.

We have the best government money can buy. — Graffiti

Once elected, these officeholders usually want to (or feel they must) propose legislation that supports and protects their elite sponsors. Hence, tax reductions for the rich are usually on the congressional agenda, but reductions for those below the poverty line rarely are.[6] To bolster their policy positions, politicians aligned with the elite can easily rely on reports generated by universities and think tanks — that are also backed by elite interests. In stark contrast, those who oppose elite domination usually have only the research of small, poorly funded public-interest groups.

Politicians who vote against elite interests are targeted by moneyed congressional scrutiny groups. These groups can distort the purpose of their legislation and rally people to flood them with calls and letters of opposition.

To ensure that Congress passes no law detrimental to their interests, large business and professional interests also hire thousands of lobbyists to visit officeholders in Washington and state capitals regularly. Besides barraging officeholders with their political arguments, lobbyists often confer lavish gifts and campaign contributions in a manner tantamount to bribery.[7]

*We have a governing system of the power elite, by the power elite, and largely **for** the power elite. Excluded from the decision arena, most ordinary people are relegated to watching silently from the sidelines as elite interests dictate the contours of their lives.*

The power elite also largely controls the news media.[8] The "major" news media, owned by large conglomerates, usually report on issues with enough dazzle to attract viewers and readers, but also in a way that does not offend their corporate owners. Top reporters for these news outlets usually have an upper middle-class background and aspire to wealth and prominence. This tilts their sympathies toward upper class and business interests. Those few reporters who challenge the elite are sometimes directly reprimanded by their editors or publishers, but more often, their editors simply do not assign them to important stories until they change their ways. They soon learn to censor themselves.[9]

Consequently, it is generally difficult to hear other than elite perspectives about anything but the most trivial topics. Most news articles approach issues from an elite perspective — pointing out how various options would affect "us" (the elite) and what the most prudent course of action is for "us" (the elite).[10]

When politicians and pundits say the American people want free trade, capital gains tax reductions, and less government regulation, it makes no sense. Most people couldn't care less about these things. But if you substitute the phrase "the power elite" for "the American people," the meaning becomes clear.

For example, the news media extensively cover issues concerning capital, trade, and military might. These issues are portrayed as important since they concern "our" (elite) interests. Other issues, even if they affect millions of people — like the health and welfare of children, unemployment, toxic wastes, or family violence — receive little or no coverage. Proposed solutions seldom include any that seriously challenge the power or wealth of the elite. As a result, virtually the only "controversial issues" covered by the media are those involving a struggle between different factions of the power elite.

When reporters do point out injustice, wrongdoing, or corruption by members of the elite, they typically frame it as

an unusual aberration caused by a few greedy people. Alternatively, they may frame it as a larger problem, but one that occurred in the distant past and that responsible authorities have now fixed. They seldom place these problems where they belong in the larger context of ongoing, systemic corruption, chicanery, connivance, and domination by the elite.

On the local level, communities are usually dominated by bankers, real estate developers, and the owners and top managers of large local industries, law firms, and newspaper and TV stations. Members of the local power elite usually support the national elite, and members of the national elite support the local elite — or at least they passively tolerate each other.[11]

Elite Interests Usually Win

Domhoff finds that with their immense wealth and authority, elite interests can usually exert enough power to win struggles on important societal issues — especially those concerning economic matters like tax law, consumer protection, workplace safety, and environmental standards.

As one clear example, Domhoff details how elite interests watered down a full employment bill — one that working people greatly desired — until it had virtually no substance.[12] The Employment Act of 1946 began its life as the Full Employment Act and would have made "the federal government underwrite the national investment needed each year to ensure full employment. It would be the task of government to determine what amount was needed each year, then to make available to private industry and state and local governments the loans necessary to bring total private and public investment up to the target figure. If the loans were not utilized, the Congress would authorize money for public works and other federal projects." (109)

This bill, which might have ended unemployment and poverty,[13] was fought by the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and others. The moderate-conservative "Committee for Economic Development" then put forward a substitute bill that "fit their conception of the limited role government should have." By the time the bill passed Congress, it "merely called for a yearly economic report to provide suggestions for dealing with threats of inflation or depression that might be on the horizon... [It] also called for a three-person Council of Economic Advisors to help the President prepare this report." (113)

No one can earn a million dollars honestly.
— William Jennings Bryan

Behind every great fortune there is a crime.
— Honoré de Balzac

Two recent cases are also telling. Elite financial interests engineered deregulation of the savings and loan industry in the early 1980s, which led to wild financial speculation. When the industry collapsed in the late 1980s, federal regulators gently slapped the wrists of those who had committed fraud. Meanwhile, the federal government bailed out the industry with hundreds of billions of dollars. The news media mostly ignored this gigantic government handout to wealthy investors and instead focused its attention elsewhere — on poor welfare cheats stealing a few thousand dollars. The federal government might have taxed the rich to pay for the bailout. Alternatively, it might have taken partial ownership of savings and loan institutions or garnered some portion of S&L's future profits in exchange for bailing them out. But these options were never considered, even though these alternatives would probably have been better for the country as a whole.

The elite agenda also governed the 1994 debate on health care reform. At the beginning of the debate, about 70% of Americans expressed strong interest in a universal, Canadian-style system of health care. In such a "single-payer" system, a government agency would serve as the single payer for all care in place of the many insurance companies that perform that role now. By avoiding the bureaucracy needed to determine who gets health care (since everyone would), a single-payer system would provide a great deal more health care at less cost to everyone. Moreover, in this kind of system, doctors would maintain their independence and would continue to decide what is appropriate care — not insurance company bureaucrats.

Though fair, efficient, and popular, the single-payer option was virtually ignored by the news media and Congress. The main options offered by the Democrats and Republicans involved expanding insurance company coverage, not replacing it. The debate — as portrayed in advertising and the news media — concerned only how much insurance coverage should expand and who should pay for it. Since the power elite did not favor it, the single-payer alternative was dismissed as "politically unrealistic." As usually happens in a battle between a large industry and the public, Congress sided with the industry.

Progressives own or control few banks, corporations, stores, universities, think tanks, television stations, or churches. Members of the power elite own or control thousands of these institutions.

Perhaps the clearest example of elite power is the U.S. tax structure. In ***America: Who Really Pays the Taxes?***, journalists Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele document how the wealthy are able to keep their tax rates low at the expense of the poor and middle class.[14] Barlett and Steele demonstrate the inequity of the tax code by comparing the taxes paid by two representative families in the early 1990s: Jacques Cotton, a single father of two small children living in Portland, Oregon, who earned a little less than the median family income, and then President George Bush and his wife Barbara. In 1991, the Bushes paid 18.1 percent of their $1,324,500 income for federal, state, and local income taxes, Social Security tax, personal property tax, and real estate tax. In 1992, Cotton paid 19.8 percent of his income

of $33,500 for the same taxes. The tax *rate* on Cotton's moderate income was nine percent higher than the rate on the Bushes' enormous income. (17–20)

This case is not unique. The tax code allows wealthy people to write off much of their income so they only pay taxes on a small portion of the total — greatly reducing their effective rate of taxation. In 1989, more than five thousand households with income over $200,000 paid federal income tax at an effective rate of less than five percent. In contrast, over seven million households with income between $25,000 and $30,000 paid federal income taxes at an effective rate of ten percent. (46)

Barlett and Steele document how politicians change the tax code to protect the wealthy and shift the tax burden onto the middle class and poor. Summarizing, they write:

> Just what kind of a [tax] system is this?
>
> Very simply, a system that is rigged by members of Congress and the executive branch. A system that caters to the demands of special-interest groups at the expense of all Americans. A system that responds to the appeals of the powerful and influential and ignores the needs of the powerless. A system that thrives on cutting deals and rewarding the privileged. A system that permits those in office to take care of themselves and their friends. (21)

Not only have the wealthy been able to keep their taxes low, but they have also managed to mollify people by propagating several myths. Defenders of the elite contend the tax system currently soaks the wealthy and at a rate greater than ever before. They further argue that burdensome taxes discourage new investment and hinder job creation. They also maintain that American corporations cannot compete overseas because onerous taxes hobble them. (15)

Actually, taxes on the wealthy have dropped dramatically over the last five decades. An IRS study shows that the effective tax rate on the richest one percent has dropped from about 45% in 1950 to about 23% in 1990.[15] Corporations now pay much lower taxes than they did in the 1950s and at a much lower rate than corporations in other industrialized countries do.

Defenders of the elite have also routinely distorted the terms of the debate to obscure their true goals. In looking at the history of federal in-

come taxes, Barlett and Steele conclude:

> Over time, much of the debate concerning tax rates would boil down to two phrases. Tax legislation that would increase the rate on the wealthy was called "class warfare." Tax legislation that would reduce the rate on the wealthy was called "tax reform." (65)

Figure 3.1 shows how skewed is the distribution of wealth in the United States. A study by the Federal Reserve shows that in 1989 the wealthiest one percent of households — those with net worth of at least $2.3 million — owned nearly forty percent of the nation's wealth. The next wealthiest nineteen percent — with net worth of $180,000 to $2.3 million per household — owned another forty percent. This left only twenty percent of the nation's wealth for the other eighty percent of U.S. households. The United States has become the most economically stratified of industrialized nations, surpassing even countries like Britain which have moved away from their feudal pasts.

Figure 3.1: Approximate Distribution of Wealth in the United States, 1989
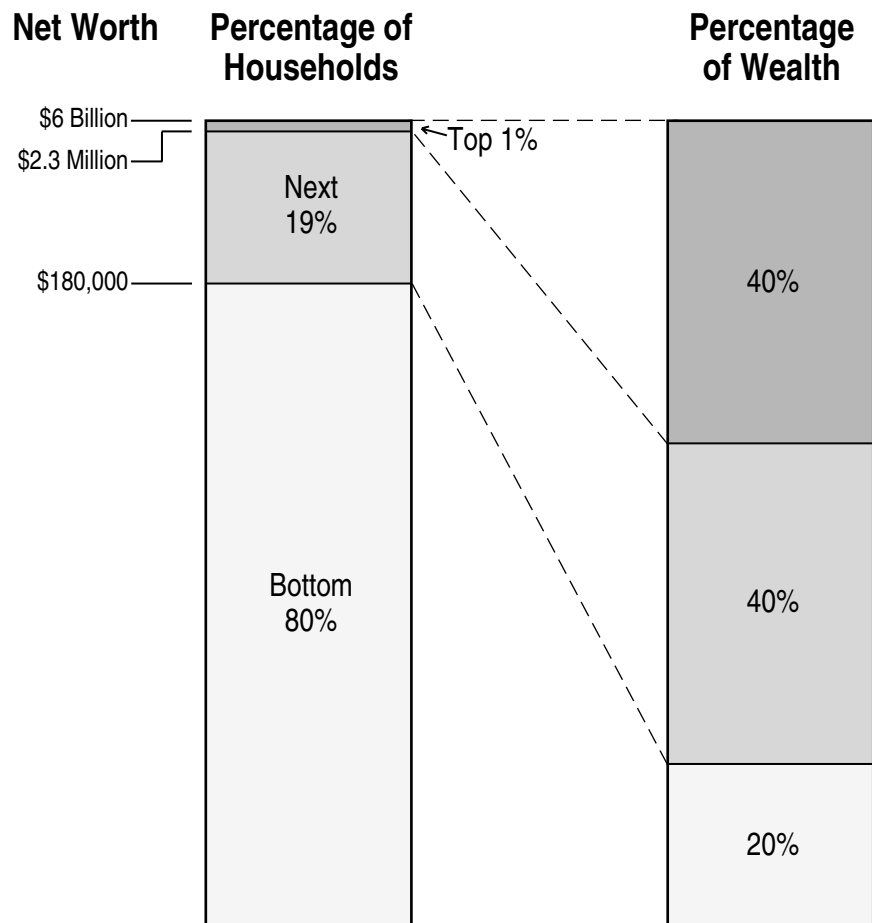
Source: *New York Times* quoting U.S. Federal Reserve data[16]

Gross Inequity is Indefensible

There is no reasonable justification for one person to make as much money in a few days as another earns in a lifetime. No matter how smart, beautiful, refined, charismatic, brave, clever, educated, experienced, or hard working, no human being deserves to receive five thousand times as much money as another. But billionaires in our society today typically realize more return on their investments in just two days than someone paid the minimum wage earns in fifty years of hard work.[17]

Our economic system rewards luck, inheritance, chicanery, and raw power. It scarcely rewards effort and usually discounts virtue. In defending this absurd system, apologists can ultimately cite only its supremacy and invincibility: it exists, and so far, no one has been able to change it, therefore it must be worthy. Skewed political and social relations rest on similarly specious logic and equally lame excuses. They too are indefensible in a civilized society.

Elite Interests Dictate Foreign Policy

In the realm of foreign affairs, Noam Chomsky and other critics have extensively documented how the U.S. elite supports the elite in other "friendly" countries. Atrocities committed by countries aligned with U.S.'s elite interests are usually ignored or downplayed, but those of "terrorist" countries are vociferously condemned. Indigenous peoples' struggles against exploitation by multinational corporations or local elites are usually labeled "communist aggression" or "terrorist rebellion" by U.S. elites and are subject to U.S. military intervention or covert action by the CIA.[18] But those countries that allow western corporations to operate without restriction ("free trade") are granted Most Favored Trade status.

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint.

When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.

— Dom Helder Camara, Brazilian Archbishop

For example, the United States has vigorously condemned every possible violation of human rights in Cuba and maintained a devastating blockade of this small nation for forty years. In contrast, despite the massive brutality shown in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the United States has downplayed much worse transgressions in China. Similarly, the United States launched the Persian Gulf war against Iraq when it invaded the autocratic government of Kuwait. However, when Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and killed over one-third of the civilian population, the United States did nothing to stop the violence and, in fact, continued to sell weapons to Indonesia.

Elite Power is Hidden

The extent of elite power is concealed from most people — hidden behind a pluralist facade. In a true pluralist system, individuals band together according to their interests and struggle on behalf of their group. In an ideal pluralist system, each group wins sometimes and loses sometimes. If all groups are equally powerful, then each receives approximately an equal share of resources. Even if some are more powerful than others, over time, the theory goes, victory shifts from one to another and everyone is eventually rewarded.

However, in our actual society, the overwhelming power of elite interests ensures that they completely win most of the battles and they strongly shape the outcome in the rest. The lower echelons — the homeless and the working poor — are virtually shut out.

Our society only resembles the pluralist ideal in those few cases when a conflict is between comparably powerful factions of the power elite. Regular people may also be able to win a battle if they are able to organize themselves into large enough groups to wield a significant amount of power.

You can fool all the people all the time if the advertising budget is big enough.

— Ed Rollins, former Republican political campaign consultant

I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China, I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

— Major General Smedley Butler, USMC, speech, 1933[19]

Unfortunately, even in these two circumstances, the spoils are usually divided solely among the winners, rather than allocated in a way that might be best for the common good. Weak or invisible entities like young children, future generations, and the environment have no way to compete and may completely lose out.

Progressive Change is Subverted

Those progressive groups that play the pluralist game and work entirely within the existing political system are often manipulated by the elite and compromised. Since these groups have limited resources, they must enlist the help of more powerful, but less progressive players such as the news media, business people, congressional moderates, mainstream foundations, and moderate voters. However, in order to maintain their support from and influence with these groups, they usually must also adjust their political stance to fit within the norms of the established order. This often requires them to abandon their positions and limit their demands.

Especially in Washington, D.C., progressive organizations often must bargain, haggle, and compromise to achieve even small gains. Fair-minded activists must compete with well-funded political hacks and lobbyists. Fair and sensible solutions must compete with the vested interests of businesses, trade groups, parochial labor unions, and dogmatic religious groups and with the fetishes and whims of powerful fat cats. Elite interests deliberately malign and distort reasonable solutions until these solutions seem foolish or dangerous. Those who refuse to play these power games are ignored by the influential powerbrokers and media barons or are dismissed as extremists.

A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman thinks of the next generation.
— James Freeman Clarke

As difficult as it is to play the pluralist game, it is even more difficult to bring about any truly fundamental change since this usually requires working outside the political system and challenging the core of elite power. When directly challenged, elite interests employ the full range of their formidable arsenal to resist and retaliate. Dissident groups are pointedly ignored until they grow quite large in size and stature. Then they are often slandered, harassed, belittled, infiltrated, burglarized, defrauded, and entrapped. When progressive activists are able to create some significant change, they are often threatened, jailed, fired from their jobs, assaulted, or even killed.

Help the police. Beat yourself up!
— Anarchist graffiti

As a pointed example, in 1990 in Oakland, California, a car bomb seriously injured Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney. These two EarthFirst! organizers had been particularly effective in bringing together environmentalists and loggers to oppose clearcutting of ancient forests, the export of mill jobs overseas, and other destructive logging company practices. In investigating the case, the Oakland police and the FBI brushed aside the many death threats directed at these activists in the previous year. Instead, the authorities accused Bari and Cherney of planting the bomb, even though the physical evidence showed this was absurd.[20]

To further distract, weaken, or disrupt effective change groups, elite interests sometimes actively encourage racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. For example, company owners often attempt to disrupt labor unions by encouraging hatred towards new immigrants, women, or less-skilled laborers. Currently, many mainstream commercial radio stations (owned and controlled by the elite) carry incendiary "hate radio" talk shows in which hosts and callers hurl racial and sexual epithets and discuss ways to kill their enemies. Federal regulatory agencies ignore the antisocial behavior of these stations but closely scrutinize progressive, nonprofit stations, which right-wing critics accuse of airing "one-sided political diatribes" and "filth."

Vulnerability and Fear Induce Conservatism

Given the enormous power of elite interests and their ability to crush opponents, most people are quite aware of their vulnerability. The power structure does not tolerate much dissent or divergence, and people fear being singled out as rebels. People accurately perceive that the personal risk of stepping out of line and challenging the structure is usually quite large compared to the benefits they will personally gain. The risk looks worthwhile only if there is a high probability that their efforts will somehow bring about dramatic positive change.

This fear may also feed on early conditioning. In our childhoods, probably most of us tried at least once to stand up to the oppression we saw around us. Rather than being praised and supported for our efforts, our parents or peers may have criticized, ridiculed, ignored, ostracized, or even physically brutalized us. Small and powerless in the situation, we learned not to challenge the status quo. Even now that we are adults and even in situations where we are unlikely to be punished, our painful memories and internalized fears may hold us back.

No other offense has ever been visited with such severe penalties as seeking to help the oppressed.
— Clarence Darrow

Not only is it difficult to rebel in this society, but even those who play strictly by the rules are vulnerable. Bad things happen to good people, and our unforgiving society provides only a minimal safety net. Multitudes of omnipresent homeless people continually remind us how much worse our lives could become if we are not careful.

Many people rightfully fear that change of any sort will just make their lives worse. Power struggles are disruptive, and those people with the fewest resources usually suffer the

most. For them, though the current situation may be miserable, it is at least a known and limited misery.

Moreover, our current society is not the worst possible. Though elite powers are tyrannical and oppress billions of people here and around the world, they *do* maintain U.S. society at a certain functional level, enabling many people to have a tolerable life. Our rich society — with its free public schools, rule of law, balance of powers, and free enterprise — does a minimal job of providing for basic needs and restraining hatred, greed, and craziness. It does mitigate — at least to some extent — bigotry and other social oppressions. It does curb the most egregious corruption and domination. People still have some freedom of religion, freedom of expression, the right to vote, and the right to form and join independent organizations. They can still exert influence on some issues.

In comparison, alternative institutions proposed by progressive activists often seem paltry or pathetic, and activists do not usually have the resources to implement these alternatives. Those few times when activists *can* implement them, elite interests malign, undermine, or destroy them. Consequently, there are few viable alternatives. Many people then conclude that conventional institutions are the best ones possible.

Under capitalism, it's dog eat dog. Under Communism, it's just the opposite. — Polish joke

For these reasons, many people argue philosophically, as did Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's **Candide,** that "all is for the best" in this "best of all possible worlds." Even many poor and oppressed people, believing they will never do any better, adamantly support the status quo and oppose efforts to change it.

OBSTACLE 2: DESTRUCTIVE CULTURAL CONDITIONING

Humans are creatures of habit. Typically, we do the same things every day in about the same manner. If we did not, we would have to make decisions constantly about every facet of our lives: what to eat, when to sleep, where to go, what to do, what clothes to wear, who to talk to, what phrases to speak, what mannerisms to use, and on and on. It is much easier to find a reasonable way to act just once and then do it the same way after that.

Consequently, we adopt habitual ways of behaving, and we raise our children to act these same ways too. We socialize and civilize each other by discouraging destructive or unpleasant behavior and encouraging decorous behavior. This process establishes broad cultural norms that specify what is acceptable and expected.

All humans set up and adhere to cultural norms; it is generally a desirable way to run society. However, when cultural norms are destructive or limiting, they can block our potential as human beings.[21] For example, cultural norms dictate that young men accept their "duty" to go off to war stoically, even though they may be maimed or killed for no legitimate purpose. If young men did not accept this norm, they might refuse to fight and instead demand the end of the war system. They could save their own lives and make the world safer for everyone.

Sometime they'll give a war and nobody will come. — Carl Sandburg

Cultural norms include traditions, customs, religious practices, rituals, fashions, fads, peer pressure, and gossip. Some norms are codified into laws and regulations, but most are simply accepted as "normal behavior." Norms may be based on deeply held moral values or they may actually violate them. For instance, many commonly accepted sales tactics violate the ethic of honesty. Advertisements also frequently depend on (and promote) the "seven deadly sins" — especially avarice, lust, and envy.[22] Most cultural norms are relevant to our current society, but some are remnants of some ancient purpose, now long forgotten yet still passed along from generation to generation.

Cultural norms are widespread and deeply instilled. Some, like fashions, are easily recognized, but most cultural norms are so pervasive that we discount their potent influence on our lives. Frequently, what we consider personal decisions are actually dictated by strong societal norms. For instance, the dominant culture urges us to marry, bear two children, eat junk food, drink coffee and soft drinks, watch television, drive cars, shop in malls, buy presents for everyone we know for an ever-increasing number of holidays, compete with others, and scoff at the government. Women are expected to shave their legs and armpits, and wear makeup and jewelry. Men are expected to follow sports avidly, drink alcohol, and act tough around other men.

People in groups tend to agree on courses of action which, as individuals, they know are stupid. — Graffiti

Most people accept without question these and thousands of other norms, large and small. It is usually only when someone refrains from owning a car, fails to buy presents for others, or commits some other heinous cultural crime that people notice.

Norms surround us in an extensive and mostly unseen web that profoundly affects who we are, how we act, what we believe, how we vote, what we consider pleasurable, and how we think. Cultural norms influence every aspect of our lives from superficial aspects like our music preferences and shopping patterns to important societal functions like our childrearing practices.

Cultural norms even dictate the various ways that people rebel against the dominant culture. American individualism is a cultural norm. The counterculture of the 1960s required long hair, blue jeans, work shirts, and peasant dresses. Punks

today must have tattoos and body piercings. Hip artists must wear black clothes and dour expressions.

Much of our core culture and norms derive from our ethnic heritage. Because everyone in our immediate family shares the same culture and norms, they are usually invisible to us. It is only in a multicultural environment that our cultural upbringing comes into view. For example, my German and English ancestry directs me to be logical, responsible, and hard working, but also perfectionistic, emotionally impassive, and uptight around physical closeness. Living and associating with people from other backgrounds and cultures for the past thirty years — especially progressive and new age activists — has led me to notice and change some of my ways. I am now much more comfortable with mistakes, emotions, and closeness. I have also learned that when other people are not logical, responsible, or hard working in the way that I am, it is usually not because they are irrational, irresponsible, or lazy (as I was led to believe), but because they are operating from different cultural norms.

Chauvinism, prejudice, bigotry, homophobia, and other oppressive attitudes typically emanate from cultural norms. Because they are implanted at an early age and held so widely, they are difficult to identify or change.

Children are natural mimics who act like their parents despite every effort to teach them good manners.
— Mark Twain

For instance, classism completely infuses our culture and deeply affects how everyone thinks and acts about money and worth. Often owning-class people are arrogant and disdainful of others. They typically do not discuss money openly. Middle-class professionals frequently are uptight, insecure, squeamish, and overly polite. They usually are embarrassed to talk about money issues. Working-class people frequently are insecure, reticent, and distrustful, yet completely open about discussing money issues.

Because classism is so common and its effects so convoluted, most people do not recognize it as the source of these myriad behaviors and attitudes. Instead they accept this conduct as normal or attribute it to quirks of individual personality. This leaves classism difficult to recognize or challenge.

The most important factor for the development of the individual is the structure and the values of the society into which he was born.
— Erich Fromm

Most cultural norms are mindlessly passed along from one generation to the next. Norms that do not work eventually fade away, and new norms arise to deal with changes caused by weather, migration, or new technology.

However, some cultural norms are deliberately promoted. Cultural leaders such as newspaper columnist Ann Landers, talk show hosts Rush Limbaugh and Paul Harvey, and prominent religious leaders like the Pope, Billy Graham, and Louis Farrakhan promote particular standards of acceptable behavior. Entertainers, employers, teachers, and gang leaders also establish cultural norms in their areas of influence — some positive, some destructive. Generally, the more exposure we have to these cultural leaders, the more prestige they hold with us. Also, the more they can exert power over us, the more they influence our attitudes.

Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards.
— Jesuit Maxim

With their control of society's resources, elite interests can encourage cultural norms that bolster their power and wealth. Through corporate advertising and the entertainment industry, they have the ability to steer the dominant culture in particular directions. They promote some positive norms like litter reduction, but some elite interests also promote cigarettes, alcohol, sex, violence, militarism, mindless consumerism, deference to authority, apathy towards politics and progressive change, and hatred towards racial minorities, foreigners, immigrants, homosexuals, the poor, and anyone who challenges the status quo in other than "acceptable" ways. They relentlessly promote the idea that "capitalism is good, socialism is bad" to the extent that most people fervently believe this mantra even though they have no idea what the terms "capitalism" and "socialism" mean.

Corporate advertising is especially effective in establishing cultural norms since it is slick, pervasive, and incessant. Every day, the average American is bombarded by three thousand marketing messages. No one can completely resist this torrent of ideas and images. Children are especially susceptible to advertising's influence since they have less experience and understanding of the world. Typical American children now see more than 100,000 TV commercials between birth and high school graduation.[23]

There is no absurdity so palpable but that it may be firmly planted in the human head if only you begin to inculcate it before the age of five, by constantly repeating it with an air of great solemnity. — Arthur Schopenhauer

Besides promoting particular products, advertising insidiously sells the idea that any need or dissatisfaction can

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A Few Examples of Destructive Cultural Norms

- Individualism, selfishness
- Materialism and consumerism
- Competition
- Drug consumption (alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, etc.)
- Classism, sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, etc.
- Militarism

and should be rectified by buying something. Under the onslaught of consumer advertising over the last hundred years, selfish individualism has displaced traditional norms of community cooperation and support.

Because social norms are so strong, those who challenge or stray from the accepted order in any significant way are usually criticized or ostracized, even if their new ways are more reasonable and humane. There is strong pressure to conform and to pressure others to conform. This makes it difficult to create and diffuse new, positive cultural norms.

OBSTACLE 3: DYSFUNCTIONAL EMOTIONAL CONDITIONING

As described briefly in Chapter 1, research over the last few decades has shown that when a person is severely or repeatedly traumatized, especially as a small child, the trauma is etched into her psyche. She is then much more likely to "act out" destructive or dysfunctional behavior for the rest of her life.

Severe trauma can induce rigid, patterned behavior — behavior that may have been protective at the time of the trauma but is not a rational response to current circumstances. For example, many victims of childhood sexual abuse, whose trust was severely betrayed, find it difficult to trust other people — even their supportive, loving friends.[24]

Childhood trauma also frequently induces low self-esteem or self-hatred. Victims assume they must somehow be evil enough to warrant the physical, sexual, or verbal abuse that was directed at them. This causes them to feel fearful, uncertain, docile, worthless, depressed, cynical, hopeless, and suicidal. Many people with low self-worth become addicted to alcohol or other drugs to suppress these deep, painful feelings.[25] With a low opinion of themselves, victims of abuse are also often desperate for loving attention, but incapable of loving or supporting others. This makes them poor parents.

Many people truly believe they are stupid, ugly, or worthless because they were told this repeatedly throughout their childhood.

Severe trauma affects some victims in a different way: they become violent and domineering. Some grow up to become violent criminals; some abuse their own children.[26]

In our society today, an alarming number of children are subjected to severe mistreatment in their homes. There are almost one million substantiated cases of child abuse or life-threatening neglect each year in the United States.[27] A federal advisory panel estimated that every year 2,000 infants and young children die from violence in the home and 140,000 (about 0.2% of all children) are seriously injured, leaving 18,000 children permanently disabled.[28]

Many parents do not physically hurt their children but still injure them psychologically by berating, bullying, fon-dling, rejecting, or ignoring them. Some children are traumatized by witnessing their parents venomously fight with each other.

Even children who grow up in stable, loving families may nevertheless face violence at school or in their neighborhoods. Children who are small, shy, or perceived as being different in some way are especially vulnerable to being ridiculed, threatened, isolated, or beaten by their peers.

Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can break your heart. — Graffiti

Overall, a very large percentage of U.S. children are traumatized in some way. A recent survey of 4,000 adolescents (aged 12–17) found that 13 percent of females had been subjected to unwanted sexual contact, 21 percent of males and 13 percent of females had been physically assaulted, and 43 percent of males and 35 percent of females had witnessed firsthand someone being shot with a gun, knifed, sexually assaulted, mugged, robbed, or threatened with a weapon. An astonishing 72 percent of all the adolescents had directly observed someone being beaten up and badly hurt.[29]

Human Being

Contents: *100% Pure Human Being*
Care Instructions: *Hand wash with mild soap, towel dry. Regularly shower with warm affection. Leave self-worth intact. Use no bleach. Do not tumble, squeeze, or wring dry.*

Trauma does not end with adolescence, of course. Adults suffer from domestic violence, rape, assault, murder, and war. In the United States in 1997, there were 18,200 murders, 300,000 sexual assaults, 1.8 million aggravated assaults, and 5.5 million simple assaults.[30] It is estimated that about 1.5 million women are raped or battered each year by their husbands or partners.[31]

Insults, threats, belligerence, and hostility are also prevalent in our culture. Moreover, we are all affected by the affront to dignity inherent in poverty, sexism, racism, classism, ageism, militarism, cultural chauvinism, and so on. Even relatively minor trauma can affect us — nibbling at our self-esteem, making us less flexible, inducing irrational fears and prejudices, and hindering our ability to address problems effectively.

Consequently, we all have been wounded in a variety of ways and have some emotional scars. Our injuries are buried deep within our psyches where they are difficult to fathom or remove. For example, most of us have long-term addictions of some sort — that is, we have compulsive, obsessive, fanatical, or inhibited behavior around alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, sex, food, sweets, drugs, gambling, sports, shop-

ping, TV, money, religion, or work that interferes with our ability to live good lives.[32]

Emotional injuries usually dissipate with time, but the worst injuries can be quite persistent. Even many decades later, our most severe emotional wounds are often still raw and tender. When poked, they stir up a swarm of intense feelings — fear, grief, and anger — that may lead us to respond in seriously dysfunctional ways. Those people who have been most severely injured typically behave the worst, terrorizing and wounding others. But in times of stress, all of us tend to behave badly, often directing our anger at those who are unable to escape or fight back: small children. In this way, the disposition toward hostility and violence is irrationally conveyed from generation to generation.

> **Common Emotional Dysfunctions**
>
> • Irrationality
> • Chronic rage
> • Depression
> • Low self-esteem
> • Inhibitions, phobias
> • Compulsions, obsessions
> • Addictions

A Sick Society

Even worse for society, those who share the same dysfunctional behavior or attitudes sometimes band together, develop a rationalization for their warped perspective, and promote their ideas to others. For example, some women — who have been severely brutalized by men — have argued that men are inherently evil brutes and that the only solution is to imprison or castrate them all. Because this perspective is so harsh and unusual, it seems bizarre to most of us.

However, in a similar fashion, people have concocted equally irrational ideas that are now widely tolerated. They have promoted their fears (xenophobia, homophobia, gynephobia, and so on), their angry responses (lynchings, corporal punishment, vengeance, militarism, hazing, hierarchical domination, cultural chauvinism), and their compulsions (smoking, gambling, drinking alcohol, using drugs, dogmatism). All of these are twisted, misdirected, and ineffectual responses to oppression. Nevertheless, they have become so pervasive that many of them are now institutionalized in schools, fraternities, churches, business, the military, and advertising. They are accepted as cultural norms.

The floggings will continue until morale improves. — Office Graffiti

Consequently, we live in a "sick society" with a culture dominated by racist, homophobic, vindictive, and violent ideas.[33] We are routinely bombarded by images and stories of brutality in graphic television coverage of automobile crashes, executions, bombings, and wars. Children learn spite and prejudice from their parents, other adults, and their peers. Fears are passed along through books, movies, television, and games.

Living in a crazy society makes all of us more fearful and isolated from one another. We are afraid to talk about our troubles for fear others will criticize us for our shortcomings and reject us. We are afraid to get too close to others for fear we will be forced to bear their problems and woes. We are afraid to disagree with others for fear they will show us to be wrong or assault us. We are even afraid of working with those with whom we agree for fear they will abandon us in trying times. This isolation and fragmentation make it difficult for us to get together to solve our mutual problems or to challenge the power elite. For this reason, elite interests often encourage individualism, social isolation, and fear of others.

Emotional Shackles

Clearly, it would be far easier to create a good society if everyone were happy and acted rationally. It would even be a bit easier to bring about positive change if just the majority of progressive activists were rational most of the time. But progressive activists share the same cultural conditioning and carry the same emotional baggage as others. Just like everyone else, activists are often self-righteous, arrogant, guilt-ridden, fearful, dogmatic, bureaucratic, irrational, depressed, dishonest, violent, vindictive, and fanatical. Many activists act out chauvinism and prejudice. They have addictions, compulsions, phobias, and deep feelings of self-doubt.*

The greater the feeling of inferiority that has been experienced, the more powerful is the urge to conquest and the more violent the emotional agitation. — Alfred Adler

Emotional injuries often limit activists' ability to listen to others, discern the truth, or lovingly support or even cooperate with others. Activists' behavior is often patterned and rigid, making them unable to address new situations flexibly. More than a few activists crave raw, gut-level retaliation more than they desire positive change. When they spew these feelings and behaviors at other activists or manifest them in political action, they can wreak havoc on progressive change movements.

Emotional baggage can also disempower activists. In difficult times, activists may erroneously feel their situation is as grim as it was during the worst days of their childhood when they were small, weak, and ignorant. Emotional injuries may also prevent activists from recogniz-

Madness takes its toll. Please have exact change. — Office Graffiti

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* Lest my phrasing erroneously convey that I am somehow beyond irrationality or above petty foolishness, let me assure you that I am as crazy as the next person and I have done my fair share of acting out inappropriate and counterproductive behavior.

ing positive solutions or remembering them once discovered.

Though progressive activists seek change, their internalized fears may limit how much change they can imagine or tolerate. Even those who seek to change society down to the roots often fear changing themselves if it means risking the loss of the bits of security and control they have accumulated over the years.

I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth, if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives. — Leo Tolstoy

The nature of progressive change sometimes pushes activists towards especially bad behavior. Struggling nearly alone in a hostile world, they may huddle together for comfort, spawning the elitist and irrational behavior that Irving Janis calls "groupthink."[34] Out of desperation or self-righteousness, a small number of change organizations employ some of the techniques of mind control to recruit, indoctrinate, and manipulate their members. Some activists — those especially vulnerable to manipulation because of emotional hurts — are drawn into these organizations.[35]

Some Symptoms of Groupthink

• Moral self-righteousness, elitism

• Pressure for conformity, vicious attacks on anyone who questions the group's direction

• Self-censorship

• Single-mindedness and tunnel vision

• Suppression of bad news

• Insulation from outside criticism or ideas

OBSTACLE 4: WIDESPREAD IGNORANCE

Many people have limited knowledge about how society functions, and they passively accept conventional notions about democracy, free enterprise, addictions, personality disorders, and so forth. Most are also woefully ignorant of progressive alternatives. Hence, when people do learn about a useful alternative idea or method, they usually have little idea how to implement it in their own community.

This ignorance derives from many sources. Our public schools do a poor job of teaching people even the most basic information. For example, a 1992 national survey for the Department of Education found that more than 40 million adults (about 21% of the adult population) are illiterate or only barely literate.[36] A far greater percentage of students do not learn the basics of how our government and our economy operate. Few learn even rudimentary interpersonal skills.

As noted in the sections above, this state of affairs exists in part because people tell each other erroneous ideas based on outmoded cultural norms or prejudice and pass these ideas on to their children. Moreover, elite interests actively use the news media to obscure their mechanisms of societal control and to circulate myths that perpetuate racism, sexism, classism, and so on. The elite also suppress information about progressive alternatives and belittle the ones that publicly emerge.

The trouble with people is not that they don't know, but that they know so much that ain't so. — Josh Billings

Clearly, it would be easier to create a good society if everyone had basic literacy and cooperation skills. It would be easier if activists were knowledgeable and skilled, but most progressive activists are also quite ignorant. Activists typically have limited progressive change experience, only a rudimentary understanding of how the world functions, and only dim visions of possible alternatives. Their ignorance and lack of experience often lead to inefficient, ineffectual, or even counterproductive change efforts.

There are several reasons why most activists are inadequately prepared:

• Progressive change is one of the few complex endeavors in which it is assumed that, after watching others do it a few times, activists will be able do it themselves. Conceptually, progressive change seems straightforward, but to do it well requires extensive knowledge and skills. It is at least as difficult as building a skyscraper, programming a computer, performing surgery, or assembling a television. Yet it is often lumped in with other "simple" tasks like eating, washing dishes, or driving an automobile — and think how many years of our childhoods we spent mastering these tasks. Many of the skills required of activists are the same ones required of managers, planners, lawyers, social workers, and therapists — skills taught in multiyear college programs and honed through years of practice.

Just because you watch a television set, doesn't mean you know how to build one.

As in the complex job of building a skyscraper, not everyone who works for progressive change needs to know how to do every task well — and some activists may only need to know how to do a few jobs. Clearly though, in each change organization, there must be *some* activists who understand and have experience performing each of the essential tasks. Furthermore, every activist must be able to work with other activists to coordinate their efforts.

• A large percentage of progressive activists have only worked for change a short time. It is often just a few months from the time an activist is first stirred to join a progressive organization and fight for change until the time she burns out and leaves.

Since activists are generally not active for long, they often have little idea how to conduct a social change campaign. Many are unaware of historical change efforts (including how other activists overcame problems) and ignorant of theoretical analyses (like socialism, anarchism, feminism, pacifism, environmentalism, multiculturalism) that help explain larger political, economic, and cultural processes. Few have a chance to learn or develop the skills they need to work cooperatively with other people. Moreover, many harbor unexamined racist, sexist, xenophobic, or other reactionary attitudes. Moreover, many activists are young and so are inexperienced in basic life knowledge and skills.

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.
— Vernon Sanders Law

• Since progressive organizations have little money, they usually focus narrowly on their primary change work and skimp on "extraneous" education. Often the educational opportunities they do offer focus on immediate tactical skills, not strategic planning or visionary thinking.

• Activists often favor quick action over study and reflection. Our consumer culture encourages shallow, short-term, reactive thinking and discourages skill-building and long-term planning. Activists often thrash each other with stories about horrendous calamities that they feel they must immediately correct. This fosters a movement culture of desperate urgency.

Ignorance Greatly Hinders Change

Activist ignorance creates a myriad of obstacles for progressive organizations. Here are just a few of the many ways progressive activists blunder primarily because of their ignorance:

• Hold Low Expectations and Feel Powerless

Like others in society, many activists accept that humans are inherently evil, greedy, or crazy or believe that humans cannot change very much. Others believe the claims of invincibility made by the power elite. Without knowing

After suffering years of frustration, many progressive activists are content merely to "make a statement" instead of actually being heard or to be heard rather than having influence or to have influence instead of having decision-making power or to seize decision-making power rather than creating a true democracy of empowered citizens.

that ordinary people have generated major positive changes in society countless times before, activists believe they have little power.

Activists with these beliefs are likely to feel discouraged and hopeless even before they begin — they are programmed to fail. Feeling powerless, they often content themselves with inflicting some bit of revenge against a few powerholders. This may provide some immediate personal gratification, but it usually does not create much positive change.

• Hold Shallow Analyses or Goals

Activists often put forth simplistic, bumpersticker critiques of social problems and organize flashy, but inconsequential political demonstrations. Though these tactics can quickly generate a great deal of excitement and may seem to elicit quick responses, the potential for real, long-term change is usually limited.

If progressives can guide people to the left with shallow, flamboyant rhetoric, then manipulators like Ronald Reagan or Newt Gingrich — with their armies of propaganda specialists and immense advertising resources — can lure them even further to the far right. A progressive movement for change is quite fragile unless it can instill into a large number of people a deep understanding both of society's problems and of progressive alternatives. There are no easy shortcuts.

I don't want you to follow me or anyone else... I would not lead you into [the] promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else could lead you out. — Eugene V. Debs

• Focus Narrowly on Superficial Change or Social Service

Elite interests continually provide assurance that everything is fine — when social problems surface, the powerholders swear they need only rein in those few people who cheat, steal, or murder. Inexperienced activists often do not understand how deep and tangled are society's problems and how extensive the changes must be to get to the root causes. These activists usually offer superficial or feeble reforms that, if implemented, would not count for much in the long run.

They may also focus on providing social services to those injured by injustice, inequity, or disaster. There is, of course, value in ameliorating present suffering: feeding the homeless, sheltering battered women, providing health care to the elderly, repairing environmental damage, and the like. However, this work does not alter the underlying structures that perpetually create and maintain suffering. It is far better to ensure

There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.
— Henry David Thoreau

Three Kinds of Progressive Action

• **Social Service** — helping the sick, uneducated, old, young, or poor to have a better life; or repairing damage to the natural environment.

• **Policy Change** — working to change specific policies and practices of government, business, or social organizations (such as churches).

• **Social Change** — working to fundamentally transform society so that it is more democratic, humane, just, cooperative, compassionate, and peaceful in all realms.

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that no child is battered or malnourished than to provide support forevermore to someone with brain damage caused by battering or nutritional deficiencies.

• Focus Narrowly on a Single Issue or an Immediate Problem

Activists often focus on a single issue that personally affects them and ignore all other issues. However, our society is extremely interconnected. If activists concentrate exclusively on a single, narrow issue, another issue will often undo or undercut their good work.

For example, the union movement of the 1930s successfully raised wages for industrial workers and made factories safer. However, because it did not make broader changes, these gains have been partially lost as the workforce has shifted more to service industries and as factory owners have automated industrial plants or moved them overseas. Efforts to make automobiles less polluting have been undercut by the increasing number of cars on the road and the increasing amount each one is driven. These increases stem partly from the greater distances people must commute after they move to the suburbs to escape from polluting factories, urban crime, and automobile noise. To be effective, activists must understand how all the problems and oppressions fit together and they must have the resources to tackle multiple problems simultaneously.

Of course, to win a campaign, activists must also focus on an accessible and immediate problem that captures peoples' imaginations. Still, if their focus is too narrow, then their solution will only address a single situation and it will only last while people are actively agitating. Members of the power elite will still hold the reins of power and will reinstitute the old forms as soon as progressive activists stop pressuring them. Clearly, it is better to create an enduring democratic process and empower people to participate in that process, but inexperienced activists often do not see this or do not know how to do it.

> *Whenever we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.* — John Muir

• Focus Narrowly on Individual Powerholders

It is usually easiest to focus attention on a single powerholder who appears to be responsible for a particular problem — to persuade that person to change, force him to change, or oust him from his seat of power. However, single individuals — even wealthy or influential ones — usually have little real power. When a powerholder is persuaded to change his mind and begins to act on his new perspective, other powerful individuals and institutions usually remove him from power and step in to isolate or counteract whatever changes he may have made. Though it is more difficult, activists must fundamentally transform policies, cultural norms, and large institutions like governments, corporations, churches, and schools.

• Focus Narrowly on Challenging Existing Institutions

Progressive activists often focus only on challenging existing institutions without creating progressive alternatives. But most current institutions serve important societal functions. If there are no alternatives that can serve these functions, then people will struggle to preserve the original institutions. Activists who seek only to eliminate these institutions will often end up fighting *against* the majority of people.[37]

• Focus Narrowly on Progressive Alternatives

Other activists take the opposite tack and only focus on building progressive alternative institutions. However, if activists do not undercut existing institutions, then those institutions can usually use their strength to undermine or out-compete the progressive alternatives.

• Advocate Positions to Promote a Parochial Interest

Sometimes activists argue for a position only because it helps them grab the limelight or advance their fundraising efforts. This usually does not lead to any significant progressive change.

• Advocate Morally Dubious Positions

Sometimes — in the interest of expediency or out of sheer frustration — activists promote policies or tactics that are morally repulsive. By using tactics resembling those of their opponents, they may become similarly callous, untrustworthy, and oppressive.

For example, environmentalists concerned about toxic emissions from a factory might be satisfied if the plant were moved to Mexico. However, the workers at the factory would lose their jobs and the new factory would still emit toxics. Overall, this change would accomplish little, merely shifting misfortune elsewhere. Another example: activists might advocate murdering a police officer who routinely beats poor people and then frames them on assault charges. His

> *Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.* — George Santayana

murder would end an injustice, but it would extinguish a person's life and endorse bloodlust and killing.

• Appeal to Prejudices or Fears

Activists often use guilt, anger, and fear to stimulate people to action. However, people charged up with intense emotions are more likely to form a lynch mob than to come up with solutions that are best for society.

For example, to attract the interest of blue-collar workers to a union, activists might raucously expose the homosexuality of a hated boss, or taunt a female manager with sexual insults. To appeal to gay professionals, activists might trash the mayor for his fundamentalist religious beliefs or blame recent immigrants for high government expenses. When encouraging business executives to promote women to top positions, activists might try to win support by snidely referring to the ethnicity of factory workers or by mocking environmentalists. All of these tactics are counterproductive in the long run.

The road to Hell is paved with good intentions. — Proverb

Even relatively mild tactics can have negative consequences. Every day progressive groups send direct mail funding appeals designed to scare and enrage people into impulsively supporting their causes. These simplistic fundraising letters provide little useful information and sometimes distort the policies of their opponents or exaggerate the danger of right-wing groups. Dishonest tactics frighten people, exploit their trust, perpetuate stereotypes, and foster a politics based on fear or arrogance rather than one of rational discourse. Deceptive tactics do not inform, enlighten, or empower people or advance democracy.

• Appeal to Self-Interest

Some progressive groups attempt to advance their work by appealing to the self-interest of a group like working-class people or racial minorities. If the group eventually wins power, then it may use its newfound power to dominate others.

For example, in the early parts of the twentieth century it was considered to be in society's interest to provide cheap electricity, irrigation water, and other economic benefits to

Figure 3.2: Various Perspectives on the Extent of One's Responsibility to Others

Responsibility Extends To…	Interest in and Concern about Others' Situation or Plight	Phrases Describing Someone Who Acts This Way	Examples of Social Philosophies Based on this Perspective	Examples of Positive Political Activity Based on This Perspective [38]	Examples of Negative Political Activity Based on This Perspective	Who is Held Responsible When Bad Things Happen?
One's Self	None: only self-interest and self-preoccupation	Rugged individualist Absorbed in daily life Selfish	Free-enterprise Entrepreneurialism Libertarianism Individualism	Self-defense (against attack or imposition)	Apathy Selfishness	"Not me"
One's Local Community, Neighborhood	Empathy only with those one knows personally	Good neighbor Community booster	Community cooperation Anarchism	Resistance to new oppression from outside	Parochialism	"No one I know"
One's Interest Group	Empathy only with those of one's interest group or ethnic group	Team player Partisan	Pluralism Capitalism Unionism Gangsterism	Liberation from long-standing oppression	Triumph of one's group over others Factionalism Oligarchy	"Them" (the other group)
One's Nation-State (the Government)	Empathy only with people in one's country	Patriot Citizen	Socialism Statism	Democracy	Totalitarianism Xenophobia Isolationism Imperialism	"Foreigners"
The Whole World	Empathy with everyone in the whole world	Statesperson World citizen	Environmentalism Internationalism	Stewardship	World domination	"God" "No one" (all of society)

rural farmers who made up a large part of the population. These subsidies helped poor farmers and ensured a steady source of cheap food for everyone. However, farmers now constitute a small percentage of the public, and many of these subsidies go to wealthy corporate farms that cause massive environmental damage. The subsidies are no longer good for society.

Figure 3.2 summarizes the ways people typically view their responsibility toward others. Narrowly focused perspectives tend toward selfishness, parochialism, factionalism, isolationism, or imperialism. Activists can avoid these problems only by adopting a broad orientation in which they look out for the interests of the whole world (including other species and the environment).

To bring about truly progressive change, activists must embody statesmanship, stewardship, self-sacrifice, and policies that help everyone. They must seek inclusive democracy, not just power or control for the activist camp or for a particular constituency.

• Focus on Blame and Punishment

Many progressive activists share the dominant societal ideology that the way to stop oppression is to find out who is to blame and attack, immobilize, destroy, or "retrain" them. But this perspective can easily lead to more oppression. In fact, this punishment-revenge-control model of change is the same one used by those who originally set up prisons, military schools, mental hospitals, and police forces. Though the founders of these institutions may have had good intentions, the institutions they created are now frequently bastions of oppression.

Might doesn't determine who is right, only who is left. — Bumper sticker

Punishment-revenge-control is also the essence of gang warfare and clan feuding — conflicts in which victory usually comes to those who are most ferocious and who have the most firepower. Since progressive activists usually have less firepower than our opponents, we usually lose these battles. It is in our interest to fight in other ways.

OBSTACLE 5: SCARCITY OF PROGRESSIVE RESOURCES

Fundamentally transforming society is an enormous enterprise. Millions of people must change their personal behavior as well as work in concert to change major societal institutions and transform cultural norms. This effort would require them to spend a significant amount of time and effort outside their daily routines.

However, the vast majority of people spend all their time just coping with immediate problems and living their daily lives. Immersed in a sick society and besieged by their own daily traumas, most scurry from one task to another as best they can and then retreat to distracting entertainment (TV, movies, sports, travel) in their bits of spare time. Most of their money goes to essentials — or to things they consider essential for a decent life.

Under these circumstances, it is not unreasonable that so many people choose to delegate political responsibility to others. As long as their lives are tolerable — that is, as long as they feel they have some degree of economic opportunity, security, and liberty — then most people will passively allow the power elite to maintain control.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
— Henry David Thoreau

This passivity then builds on itself: when people pay little attention to societal problems and political activities, they do not feel competent to make responsible decisions. They deliberately make a commitment to everyday life and delegate their political responsibility to leaders (the power elite) who "know more."[39]

As discussed above, members of the power elite mostly work to maintain the power and privileges of the upper classes, not to advance the common good. Since most people cannot and the elite will not, the burden of developing positive alternatives and moving society toward democracy falls on those few people willing and able to make the effort: progressive change activists.

However, the elite control the vast majority of society's assets (other than simple household items), so there is not much left for activists to tap.[40] Consequently, progressive organizations are usually underfunded and overburdened. Many progressive activists volunteer time and money and

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Who Is Politically Active?

One researcher estimates "about 10–15 percent of the electorate may be counted as political activists — that is, people who are informed and active participants in organizations, parties, or campaigns — people who take some ongoing political responsibility as a feature of their lives." Another scholar believes only five percent of the U.S. population is politically sophisticated and involved.

Who are these informed and politically active people? Research indicates they are likely: (1) to have attended college; (2) to be part of the high-status, powerful part of society (wealthy, older men); (3) to have parents who inculcated a sense of civic duty, provided a model of political responsibility, and suggested one was capable of effectively acting in the political sphere; and/or (4) to be a member of an ethnic group, political party, or other social group with a political bent. They are typically people who have the skills and resources to make change and believe that either individually or collectively, they *can* have influence.[41]

receive nothing for their efforts beyond the satisfaction of working for a good cause. Paid activists typically work long hours and receive low wages and poor benefits.

Living in the Cracks

In times past, some activists managed to live on part-time work, disability payments, or Social Security. Others lived in cheap crash pads and grazed on the discards of our affluent society by dumpster diving for food and castoff clothes. Though poor, they had time to work for progressive social change. Other activists found a safe niche in the church, in academia, or by working for nonprofit organizations. However, recent conservative government policies have drastically shifted the nation's wealth to the rich and defunded social services and education — severely constricting these alternative sources of livelihood. In these tough times, there are few ways for activists to support themselves.

In the past, progressive activists also relied on liberal institutions for financial support as well as encouragement, education, office equipment, research materials, and safe places to meet, rest, work out strategy, and resolve internal problems without harassment. These institutions included liberal foundations, liberal churches (such as Quaker Meetings, Unitarian churches, and various black churches), progressive labor unions, progressive businesses, alternative schools, liberal colleges, and some government agencies. Unfortunately, most of these institutions are now wracked with their own internal problems and money woes and can no longer offer much support.

Activist poverty and scarce resources impose many limitations on progressive change organizations:

• Low-income activists are often immobilized by layoffs, transportation breakdowns, housing troubles, health or dental problems, injuries, crime, and family crises. They do not have the money that wealthier people use to avoid or overcome these problems.

Financial Independence

To avoid financial dependence on the Southern white elite, the Black Freedom struggle of the 1960s relied instead on the financial and organizational self-sufficiency of independent black people such as church ministers and hairdressers. The struggle also relied on donations from white liberals in other parts of the country. Martin Luther King, Jr. spent much of his time speaking and raising funds around the country.

Some activists in the anti-war movement in the late '60s sold alternative newspapers to finance their activities. In the '70s and '80s, food co-ops, the progressive therapeutic community (therapists and body workers), and other alternative businesses provided employment and financial support for many activists. Colleges and universities have often provided a safe haven for a small number of progressive faculty and staff.

• Activists are continually tugged by other commitments to work, family, and friends. These obligations limit the time they can devote to progressive change and to developing the knowledge and skills necessary to do good work.

• Progressive activists are often drawn to more enticing work. Many activists in the United States have the opportunity to live adequate lives without involvement in change work. So activists voluntarily choose to work for change and to endure the hardships that accompany this work. If the work becomes too tedious or difficult for them, they can just stop. Those activists with the most skills are also usually the ones with the best opportunity to pursue lucrative and supportive conventional careers and hence have the greatest disincentives to devoting their lives to progressive change.

• Activists often burn out from overwork. Volunteer activists are especially vulnerable if they must also work full-time at a conventional job to support themselves.

• Progressive organizations must devote a great deal of their efforts to recruiting volunteers and raising funds. In

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Conflicts, Turf Battles, and Infighting

Coming from different backgrounds and with different experiences, activists have diverse ideas about what needs to be changed and how to go about it. Immersed in a competitive culture and lacking the skills to work with others from diverse backgrounds, activists create a multiplicity of small groups. These groups sometimes duplicate each other's efforts, compete with other groups for limited funds and supporters, or even work at cross-purposes. Some activists believe they are the sole "vanguard of the revolution," and believe they must crush competing ideologies. Frustration at meager results — exacerbated by activists' internalized emotional wounds — leads some activists to bludgeon others for their real or imagined mistakes.

Conflict among human beings is inevitable and, when dealt with well, can be quite useful. Conflict can shine a light on fuzzy thinking and reveal the flaws in proposed solutions. But unless activists have the knowledge and skill to debate rationally and spar gently with each other, their conflicts can escalate into nasty feuds.

Struggles among progressives can destroy organizations and dishearten activists. Turf battles and infighting can create painful and long-enduring enmity among activists who might otherwise work effectively together. Since progressive resources are so scarce, squandering them on internecine battles is especially unfortunate.

my experience, progressive groups typically expend between one-quarter and one-third of all their time and money just raising funds.

• Progressive institutions that might be able to pass on the lore and practice of social change to new activists — such as progressive political parties, libraries, museums, and activist schools — are almost nonexistent. Progressive groups, focused as they usually are on current change efforts, usually devote scant resources to these long-term organizational resources. Thus, the solutions they work out are often lost, and new change movements must painfully re–learn or re-invent them.

Scrambling for Money

This desperate scramble for scarce resources has several other negative consequences:

• It encourages progressive groups to compete for resources rather than cooperate with one another.

• It entices progressive groups to use obnoxious fund-raising methods like the inflammatory direct mail appeals mentioned above.

• It entices progressive groups to focus their outreach on people already supportive of change — "preaching to the choir" — instead of toward those they might sway to a new, progressive understanding.

• It forces progressive groups to cater to their supporters and volunteers. This is positive when it pushes organizations to be more democratic, accountable, and responsible. However, when donors and volunteers are ignorant or more conservative, it may bind groups to a simplistic analysis or a watered-down solution and stifle their most creative and effective work. Groups are especially sensitive to the desires of their most powerful and wealthy supporters who are often the least progressive.

• It entices progressive groups to shift their political stance to enlist the help of more powerful, but less progressive people like reporters, businesspeople, Congressmembers, and foundation directors. Groups cannot advocate fundamental change when their politics must fit within the norms of the established order.

Inadequate Personal Support

Besides financial resources, progressive activists also need cultural and personal support, but our society is not very sympathetic to them or their mission. Television, movies, and advertising generally laud those with a sharp wardrobe, cool accessories, and a sarcastic attitude who individually rebel (in proscribed ways) against square "family values." However, they typically belittle those who work for democracy, compassion, and real community or those who challenge militarism, consumerism, inequality, or domination.

Progressive activists also tend to get minimal personal support for their change work. Parents and friends often oppose their efforts. To obtain support, some activists im-

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Lost Heritage

Society seldom acknowledges the contribution of progressive activists, even when they bring about far-reaching social change. At best, society may extol the work of a single individual like Martin Luther King. Newspapers and history books usually only record the steps taken by the elite when they finally *respond* to social movement demands.

For example, years of progressive struggle won both the forty-hour workweek and the Social Security program, but most people assume these things have always existed or attribute them to the generosity of President Franklin Roosevelt.

Most people are unaware of progressive history or its importance in forcing the government to respond. New activists often have no idea how their activist forebears struggled and what they accomplished.

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merse themselves in a tight community with other progressive activists, but then they risk losing touch with the rest of society.

To secure the emotional and financial support they need, some activists try to build their own hierarchical fiefdoms, manipulating and controlling less powerful activists. Others seek ego-enhancing fame by carrying out wild stunts. These actions usually accomplish nothing and may actually undermine real progressive change.

Some activists invoke one of the several glamorous images that society sometimes allows activists — that of morally pure saint, strident rebel, or wise sage — to attract disciples and admirers. But creating a just and humane society requires ending dependence and domination in all its forms, so this is not a good, long-term solution.

Advice from Friends and Relatives

Rather than being praised for their virtuous efforts and encouraged to do even more, activists are often given advice like this:

• *"The world is full of problems and it's always been that way. Why do you think you're so smart that you can change everything?"*

• *"If you want to be noble, why don't you become a doctor — you could help people and make a good living too."*

• *"Why do you feel you have to be the one to take on the world's problems? Leave it to the bigshots and the politicians who think they know what is best for us."*

• *"How can you be a good parent if you're running around the country saving the world?"*

• *"Hey dude, mellow out and be cool. Life's a beach."*

Burnout

If a change organization includes many activists suffering from these afflictions, it generally becomes ineffectual — plagued by lack of direction, fruitless activities, poor follow-through, and infighting. Exhausted or cynically disgusted, activists then drop out of the organization. Those few who keep plugging along feel powerless and exude hopelessness. Naturally enough, potential new activists are reluctant to join a group populated by such dreary people.

We, the unwilling, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much, for so long, with so little, we are now qualified to do anything with nothing.
— Office Graffiti

After many tough battles, progressive organizations sometimes consist entirely of activists desperately trying to extract support from each other, but with none able to give to the others. These organizations accomplish little and soon collapse.

OVERCOMING THESE FIVE OBSTACLES

In summary, the reason that progressive activists have not yet created a good society is not that they are unworthy to bring about positive change, they do not care enough, or they have impossible goals. Rather, it is simply that they lack the knowledge, skills, strength, and endurance to overcome the sizable opposition they face from the power structure, destructive cultural norms, dysfunctional emotional conditioning, and widespread ignorance. The size and breadth of these obstacles make them seem overwhelming. It is easy to feel hopeless when faced with this gigantic wall of opposition.

Still, though these obstacles are huge and intertwined with each other, they *can* be understood, untangled, and surmounted. The next seven chapters describe a way we could build a powerful and skillful counterforce capable of systematically addressing and overcoming every one of these hurdles.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

[1] Of their many books, see especially C. Wright Mills, ***The Power Elite*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, E169.

1.M64); G. William Domhoff, ***The Powers that Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America*** (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1978, HN90 .E4D65 1979b); and G. William Domhoff, ***Who Rules America Now?: How the "Power Elite" Dominates Business, Government, and Society*** (New York: Touchstone-Simon & Schuster, 1983, HN90 .E4D652 1986). In his recent books, Domhoff uses the term "power structure" to denote the network of powerful people along with the powerful institutions they control.

[2] In a 1995 government survey, the majority of financial assets were owned by the 1% of households with the greatest net worth:

Asset Type	Top 1%	Next 9%	Bottom 90%
Stocks and Mutual Funds	51.4%	37.0%	11.6%
Financial Securities	65.9	23.9	10.2
Trusts	49.6	38.9	11.5
Business Equity	69.5	22.2	8.3
Non-Home Real Estate	35.1	43.6	21.3
Total for Group	**55.5**	**32.1**	**12.5**

Of those in the top 1%, 77.3% were 45 years old or older; 95.3% were non-Hispanic White and 3.9% were Asian. Most had attended college (16.5% had attended but not graduated, 29.1% had graduated, and 40.1% had graduated and also attended graduate school). The overwhelming majority were self-employed (71.1%) or professionals, managers, and administrators (23.5%). More than half (55.0%) rated their health as excellent.

Edward N. Wolff, "Recent Trends in the Size Distribution of Household Wealth," ***Journal of Economic Perspectives*** 12, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 140, 146. This data is based on the Survey of Consumer Finances conducted by the Federal Reserve Board.

[3] Michael Parenti has made this point and documented it quite well in several of his books.

[4] Domhoff, G. William, ***Who Rules America: Power and Politics in the Year 2000,*** 3rd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1998, HN90 .E4 D654 1998), p. 1.

[5] Clearly, these questions are not absolutely definitive. The power elite is an amorphous group with no clear line separating its members from others. These questions are merely suggestive of the amount of prestige, wealth, and authority typically held by members of the power elite and of the level of influence they exert.

[6] Kevin Phillips, in ***The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath*** (New York: Random House, 1990, HC110 .W4 P48 1990), documents the massive redistribution of wealth from the poor to the wealthy during the Reagan administration.

[7] There are various estimates of the size of the lobbying effort in Washington, DC:

"About 5,000 to 6,000 lobbyists are registered out of a total Washington lobbying population that has been estimated as high as 80,000." Washington Post Wire Service, "Senate OKs Tighter Rules for Lobbyists," ***San Jose Mercury News***, 7 May 1993.

"…more than two-thirds of Washington's nearly 14,000 lobbyists [are] unregistered, according to the General Accounting Office." Washington Post Wire Service, "House Takes Up Lobbying Reform Bill," **San Francisco Chronicle**, 25 November 1995.

Associated Press, "Special Interests' Spending Disclosed," **San Francisco Chronicle**, 23 September 1996:

> Corporations, trade groups, unions and other special interests spent at least $400 million trying to influence the federal government in the first half of 1996, according to an analysis of the first disclosures under a new lobbying law…

> The figure is the most comprehensive estimate yet of amounts special interests spend on lobbying official Washington, but experts say it is probably conservative.

> "I don't think you're at all out of bounds with the thought of a billion-dollar-a-year-industry," said Ron Shaiko, an American University professor who teaches lobbying.

This article further reports the top 10 spenders among groups that reported lobbying expenses for the first half of 1996:

	$ Millions
Philip Morris	11.3
American Medical Association	8.5
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	7.5
General Motors	6.9
Christian Coalition	5.9
General Electric	5.3
Chemical Manufacturers Association	4.5
AT&T	4.3
Pfizer	4.2
Citicorp	4.2
Total for Top Ten:	**!The Formula Not In Table**

[8] Ben Bagdikian, in **The Media Monopoly**, 5th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997, P96 .E252U625 1997), reports that ten corporations now control most of America's daily newspapers, magazines, radio, television, books, and movies. He also documents the many ways this restricts coverage of important issues.

[9] Randolph T. Holhut, in "A Horrible Year for Journalism," opinion column, **San Francisco Bay Guardian**, January 6, 1999: 11, summarizes the problem by describing what happened to four reporters: Gary Webb, who reported on the CIA-backed Nicaraguan contras' role in introducing crack cocaine into South Central Los Angeles; Mike Gallagher who reported on the abuses in Honduras of Chiquita Brands International (poisoning, bullying, and sometimes killing farmworkers); and April Oliver and Jack Smith, who reported that U.S. forces used sarin nerve gas to kill American defectors in Laos during the Vietnam War:

> The fates of Webb, Gallagher, and Oliver and Smith have one common thread. They all took on powerful institutions, the essential facts of their stories were all true, and all of their bosses abandoned them and discredited their work when the powerful institutions in those stories raised a fuss.

> The message this sends to other reporters is clear: stick to safe, innocuous stories and stay away from anything that might cause

trouble for the military-industrial complex or multinational corporations.

[10] Jeff Cohen, Executive Director of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) explores this "propaganda of the center" in "Propaganda from the Middle of the Road: The Centrist Ideology of the News Media," **Extra!** 2, no. 4 (October/ November 1989).

[11] Philip J. Trounstein and Terry Christensen, in **Movers and Shakers: The Study of Community Power** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982, JC330 .T86), describe the reputational methodology for determining the identity of the elite in a community. As an example, they conducted a study of the elite in San Jose, California.

[12] G. William Domhoff, **The Powers that Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America** (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1978, HN90.E4D65 1979b), pp. 109–117. This account relies on Stephen K. Bailey, **Congress Makes a Law** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), pp. 23–24.

[13] Marxists would argue that capitalism requires a reserve army of the unemployed, but the very low rates of unemployment found in many European countries challenges this argument.

[14] Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, **America: Who Really Pays the Taxes?** (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone, 1994, HJ2381 .B37 1994). Barlett and Steele also document the history of tax law and detail recent changes: who wrote each piece of legislation, who lobbied for changes, who made campaign donations, and so forth.

Another good summary of the history of income taxes can be found in Sam Pizzigati, **The Maximum Wage: A Common-Sense Prescription for Revitalizing America by Taxing the Very Rich** (New York: Apex Press, 1992, HC110 .I5P59 1992).

[15] Quoted in "Beautiful Dreamer: Is Phil Gramm Right About 1950?" **Too Much**, Summer 1995: 2, Council on International and Public Affairs (Suite 3C, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York 10017).

[16] Federal Reserve data for 1989 quoted in Keith Bradsher, "Gap in Wealth in U.S. Called Widest in West," **New York Times**, April 17, 1995, p. A1.

More recent figures indicate that the share of all wealth owned by the bottom 80 percent dropped to 16.1 percent in 1995. In this year, the top 1 percent of the population had about the same amount of wealth (38.5 percent) as the bottom 95 percent (39.7 percent); 18.5 percent of households had zero or negative net worth.

Percentage Share of Net Worth Held by	Percent of All Wealth	Percent of All Financial Wealth
Top 1%	38.5%	47.2%
Next 4%	21.8	24.6
Next 5%	11.5	11.2
Next 10%	12.1	10.1
Top 20%	83.9	93.0
2nd 20%	11.4	6.9
3rd 20%	4.5	1.4
Bottom 40%	0.2	-1.3

Subtracting net equity in owner-occupied housing, the top 1% owned 47.2% of all financial wealth in 1995 and the top 20% owned 93.0% of all financial wealth; 28.7% of households had zero or negative financial wealth.

In 1995, each of the families in the top 1% had a net worth of $2.4 million or more, and each of the families in the top 10% had a net worth of $352,000 or more. Each of the families in the top 20% had a net worth of $177,000 or more.

Edward N. Wolff, "Recent Trends in the Size Distribution of Household Wealth," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 131–150, especially p. 136.

[17] An annual return of 10% on a billion dollars yields $100 million/year or about $548,000 in two days. Someone earning $5.15/hour (the minimum wage in 1999) makes $206/week or $10,712 in a year. In fifty years she would make about $535,600.

"The assets of the [world's] top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people." United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, HD72 .H85 1999), p. 3.
<http://www.undp.org/hdro>

[18] See, for example, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, P95.82 .U6H47 1988).

After studying U.S. military and covert intervention in over seventy nations since World War II, William Blum concludes:

> The engine of American foreign policy has been fueled not by a devotion to any kind of morality, but rather by the necessity to serve other imperatives, which can be summarized as follows:
>
> • making the world safe for American corporations;
>
> • enhancing the financial statements of defense contractors at home who have contributed generously to members of congress;
>
> • preventing the rise of any society that might serve as a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model;
>
> • extending political and economic hegemony over as wide an area as possible, as befits a "great power."

William Blum, "A Brief History of U.S. Interventions: 1945 to the Present," *Z Magazine* 12, no. 6 (June 1999): 25–30. This article is based on his book, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995, JK468 .I6B59 1995), revised and expanded edition of: *The CIA: A Forgotten History* (London: Zed Books, 1986).
<http://members.aol.com/bblum6/American_holocaust.htm>

[19] Excerpt of a speech posted on the Federation of American Scientists web site: <http://www.fas.org/man/smedley.htm>

[20] Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do About It* (Boston: South End Press, 1989, HV8141 .G57 1988) summarizes how the government's COINTELPRO program waged covert action against activists in the 1960s and how similar efforts were directed against activists working on Central America issues in the 1980s.

David Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens: The Wise Use Movement, the New Right, and Anti-Environmental Violence* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994) recounts recent terrorism directed at environmentalists including the Bari/Cherney example.

For a history of government and business harassment of progressive activists from the beating of Wobblies to the blacklists of the 1950s and the COINTELPRO program in the 1960s, see Robert Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1977, JC599 .U5G58).

Also, see the books listed in Chapter 12 under the heading of Suppression of Activists.

[21] For an extensive discussion of norms and cultural change, see Robert F. Allen with Charlotte Kraft and the staff of the Human Resources Institute, *Beat the System!: A Way to Create More Human Environments* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980, HM101 .A574).

[22] Lewis Mumford observed that industrial society transformed all these sins except sloth "into a positive virtue. Greed, avarice, envy, gluttony, luxury, and pride [are] the driving forces of the new economy." Lewis Mumford, *The Transformations of Man* (1956; reprint New York: Harper & Row, Torchbooks, 1972, CB53 .M82 1956), p. 104.

[23] The 3,000 marketing messages per day statistic comes from the Media Foundation, Adbusters web site, accessed January 12, 1999: <http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/media-index.html>

The Media Foundation can also be reached at 1243 West 7th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6H 1B7 Canada, (604) 736-9401.

"One analyst estimates that the typical American is exposed to 50–100 advertisements each morning before nine o'clock. Along with their weekly 22-hour diet of television, American teenagers are typically exposed to 3–4 hours of TV advertisements a week, adding up to at least 100,000 ads between birth and high school graduation." Alan Durning, "Asking How Much is Enough," *State of the World, 1991: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress toward a Sustainable Society*, Project Director, Lester R. Brown (New York: Norton, 1991, HC59 .S733 1991), p. 163. For ads in the morning, he cites Andrew Sullivan, "Buying and Nothingness," *The New Republic*, May 8, 1989; for the data on teenagers (aged 12–17), he cites John Schwartz, "Stalking the Youth Market," *Newsweek Special Issue*, June 1990; his childhood total estimates were based on Action for Children's Television, Boston, MA, private communication, October 17, 1990.

TV-Free America estimates children watch 30,000 TV commercials each year. They also report that the average American child sees 200,000 violent acts on TV by age 18 including 16,000 murders. TV-Free America web site, accessed January 12, 1999: <http://www.tvfa.org/stats.htm>

TV-Free America can also be reached at 1611 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 3A, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 887-0436.

[24] A review of 27 studies on the impact of sexual abuse of female children found that "long-term effects include depression and self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward revictimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment." Angela Browne and David Finkelhor, "Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Research," *Psychological Bulletin* 99, no. 1 (1986): 66–77.

A more recent review of 32 studies found that "adult women with a history of childhood sexual abuse show greater evidence of sexual disturbance or dysfunction, homosexual experiences in adolescence or adulthood, depression, and are more likely than nonabused women to be revictimized. Anxiety, fear, and suicidal ideas and behavior have also been associated with a history of childhood sexual abuse but force and threat of force may be a necessary concomitant." Joseph H. Beitchman, Kenneth J. Zucker, Jane E. Hood, Granville A. daCosta, Donna Akman, and Erika Cassavia, "A Review of the Long-term Effects of Child Sexual Abuse," ***Child Abuse & Neglect*** 16 (1992): 101–118.

25 One study found that children who experience severe violence in the home are approximately three times as likely as other children to use drugs and alcohol, get into fights, and deliberately damage property. This study also found that abused and neglected children are four times as likely to steal and to be arrested. Richard J. Gelles and John W. Harrop, "The Nature and Consequences of the Psychological Abuse of Children: Evidence from the Second National Family Violence Survey," paper presented at the Eighth National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 24, 1989.

In this same 1985 survey of 3,346 U.S. parents, 63% of parents reported they used verbal aggression — such as swearing at or insulting their child — at least once in the previous year. More than a third of parents who used verbal aggression reported they did so more than eleven times during the year. Researchers found that the more parents used verbal aggression, the greater was the probability of their child being physically aggressive, delinquent, or having interpersonal problems. This relationship applied both to children who were physically punished as well as those who were not. Yvonne M. Vissing, Murray A. Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and John W. Harrop, "Verbal Aggression by Parents and Psychosocial Problems of Children," ***Child Abuse & Neglect*** 15, no. 3 (1991): 223–238.

Another study of 4,000 adolescents aged 12–17 found that nearly 30 percent of sexual assault victims developed Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and 20 percent still suffered from it. Typical symptoms of PTSD are anxiety attacks, nightmares, and difficulty sleeping. Of those physically assaulted, 23% developed PTSD and 15% still suffered from it. Of those who had witnessed serious violence, 15% developed PTSD. Dean Kilpatrick and Benjamin Saunders, "The Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, NIJ Research Preview, Report Number FS 000179, April 1997, 2 pages. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/fs000179.pdf>

The studies cited in the note above and the note below also document the consequences of childhood abuse or neglect.

26 Psychotherapist Alice Miller, in ***For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence***, Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum, trans. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983, HQ769 .M531613 1983; originally published in German as ***Am Anfang war Erziehung***, 1980), convincingly argues that oppressive childrearing practices — employed to beat the willfulness out of children ("spare the rod and spoil the child") — lead to adults who are docile, servile, and unfeeling. Repressing their feelings of anger, pain, and fear, they often are completely unaware of what was done to them. They are then ripe for exploi-

tation by dictators like Adolph Hitler who can easily manipulate their obsequiousness and suppressed anger and induce them to fight wars and engage in mass murder:

> People with any sensitivity cannot be turned into mass murderers overnight. But the men and women who carried out "the final solution" did not let their feelings stand in their way for the simple reason that they had been raised from infancy not to have any feelings of their own but to experience their parents' wishes as their own. These were people who, as children, had been proud of being tough and not crying, of carrying out all their duties "gladly," of not being afraid — that is, at bottom, of not having an inner life at all. (p. 81)

A growing body of research supports the concept of an intergenerational transmission of violence (also called the "cycle of violence") that begins with child abuse and neglect.

For example, one recent national study of 900 people who had been victims of physical and sexual abuse or neglect before the age of 12 were compared with 670 non-victims. It found that victimization increases the chances of later juvenile delinquency and adult criminality by 57%. It also found that physical abuse almost doubles the chances of later being arrested for a violent crime and severe neglect increases the chances by 55%. Michael G. Maxfield and Cathy Spatz Widom in "The Cycle of Violence Revisited 6 Years Later," ***Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*** 150 (April 1996): 390–395.

Another analysis of the same data found that the 153 children who had been sexually abused were 27.7 times more likely to be arrested for prostitution as an adult than non-victims. Cathy Spatz Widom, ***Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse — Later Criminal Consequences***, NIJ Research in Brief Series, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Report Number NCJ 151525, March 1995, 8 pages. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/abuse.pdf>

Another study found that 68 percent of 300 incarcerated male felons in a New York State medium security prison reported they had been subjected to some form of harsh victimization in early childhood (before age 12). The study found that about 35% reported severe childhood physical abuse, 14% reported sexual abuse, 16% reported life-threatening neglect, and 23% reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse and neglect. About 26% of the sex offenders reported sexual abuse. Robin Weeks and Cathy Spatz Widom, "Self-Reports of Early Childhood Victimization Among Incarcerated Adult Male Felons," ***Journal of Interpersonal Violence*** 13, no. 3 (June 1998): 346–361. This report is also summarized in Robin Weeks and Cathy Spatz Widom, ***Early Childhood Victimization Among Incarcerated Adult Male Felons***, NIJ Research Preview, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Report Number FS 000204, April 1998. <http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/fs000204.txt>

Many older studies provide additional evidence that physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect of children as well as children witnessing violent behavior in person or on television causes some — perhaps many — of them to be aggressive in infancy and childhood, to be delinquent in adolescence, to be abusive and violent in adulthood, or to be withdrawn and suicidal in adolescence and adulthood. Unfortunately, most of these older studies have methodological flaws that prevent drawing any firm conclusions. Cathy

Spatz Widom, "Does Violence Beget Violence?: A Critical Examination of the Literature," ***Psychological Bulletin*** 106, no. 1 (1989): 3–28.

27 U.S. Census Bureau, ***Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1998***, "Table 373: Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Substantiated and Indicated — Victim Characteristics." <http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>

28 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States — A Report of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect," Administration for Children and Families, April 1995, HE23 .1002:AB 9, pp. xxiii–xxv. I calculated the percentages from census data showing there are about 65 million children aged 17 or younger.

29 Dean Kilpatrick and Benjamin Saunders, "The Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, NIJ Research Review, Report Number FS 000179, April 1997. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/fs000179.pdf>

30 Michael Rand, ***Criminal Victimization 1997: Changes 1996-97 with Trends 1993-97***, National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, Report NCJ 173385, December 1998, p. 3. The Crime Victimization Survey interviews about 80,000 people aged 12 and over each year. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv97.pdf>

31 Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, ***Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey***, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Research in Brief Series, Report Number NCJ 172837, November 1998. <http://ncjrs.org/pdffiles/172837.pdf>

32 For exploration of this point, see Anne Wilson Schaef, ***When Society Becomes an Addict*** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, BF575 .D34S33 1987).

33 Erich Fromm convincingly makes this point in ***The Sane Society*** (New York: Rinehart, 1955, reprinted New York: Henry Holt, First Owl Book, 1990 HM271 .F75 1990), especially in Chapter 2, titled "Can A Society Be Sick? — The Pathology of Normalcy."

34 Irving Janis, "Groupthink," ***Psychology Today***, November 1971: 43–46, 74–76; Irving Janis, ***Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes***, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1982, E744 .J29 1982).

35 Steven Hassan, a former member of the cult known as the "Moonies," provides an excellent analysis of mind control, including a list of mind control techniques.

Steven Hassan, ***Combating Cult Mind Control*** (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 1988). <http://www.shassan.com>

36 A 1992 survey by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics estimated that about 21 percent of the adult population — more than 40 million Americans over the age of 16 — had only rudimentary reading and writing skills. Most adults in this "Level 1" category could pick out key facts in a brief newspaper article, for example, but could not draft a letter explaining an error on their credit card bill. A sub-group in this category — representing roughly 4 percent of the total adult population, or about 8 million people — was unable to perform even the simplest literacy tasks.

Many factors help to explain why so many adults demonstrated English literacy skills in the lowest proficiency level defined (Level 1). Twenty-five percent of the respondents who performed in this level were immigrants who may have been just learning to speak English. Nearly two-thirds of those in Level 1 (62 percent) had terminated their education before completing high school. One-third were age 65 or older, and 26 percent had physical, mental, or health conditions that kept them from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities. Nineteen percent of the respondents in Level 1 reported having visual difficulties that affect their ability to read print.

Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jungeblut, Lynn Jenkins, and Andrew Kolstad, ***Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey***, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, 1993, LC5251 .A6437 1993). <http://nces.ed.gov/nadlits/naal92/>

37 For a good example of "functional analysis" and finding alternatives that fulfill necessary functions, see George Lakey, ***Powerful Peacemaking: A Strategy for a Living Revolution*** (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), Chapter 1.

38 Richard Flacks, in ***Making History: The American Left and the American Mind*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, JK1764 .F57 1988), discusses self-defense, resistance, liberation, and democracy.

39 For a good discussion of this point, see Flacks, ***Making History***, pp. 51–53.

40 A Merrill-Lynch study based on 1995 census data shows that half of all U.S. families have less than $1,000 in net financial assets (excluding their equity in a home or car). Joseph M. Anderson, ***The Wealth of U.S. Families in 1995*** (127 Hesketh Street, Chevy Chase, MD: Capital Research Associates, June 1, 1998). <http://www.ml.com/woml/forum/wealth1.htm>

41 The quote comes from Flacks, ***Making History***, p. 26.

The 5 percent estimate comes from W. Russell Neuman, ***The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate*** (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, JK1967 .N48 1986), p. 170. Neuman finds that 20 percent of the public are unabashedly apolitical. He finds the remaining 75 percent are only marginally attentive to politics and are mildly cynical about the behavior of politicians but still feel a duty to vote.

The characteristics of politically active people comes from Flacks, ***Making History***, pp. 25–27, and Neuman, ***The Paradox of Mass Politics***, pp. 112–131.