WINNING THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE:
STATE RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the nature of police violence in the context of social discord. Using the anti-World Trade Organization protests as a backdrop, it delineates and applies Stark’s (1968) theory of police riots to explain the progression of police aggression in Seattle. The article also extends Stark’s model by integrating it with a Gramscian understanding of the dynamics of ideological consent in late capitalist societies. Finally, the article demonstrates the dangers that result from official perceptions of protesters as members of the “dangerous class,” and from police displays of excessive and provocative force. It also illustrates how the increased militarization of the police encourages provocative policing practices that undermine fundamental democratic rights, particularly the right to participate in peaceful protests.

Key Words: repression, policing, protest, police riots

According to conventional wisdom, the police exist above all to “serve and protect” the public. They defend honest, law-abiding citizens from criminals who would rob, rape, mug, harm, or otherwise victimize them. Many citizens also believe that the police carry out this charge without regard to race, class, gender, or ethnicity; that is, they simply and neutrally enforce the laws that they are charged with keeping. They arrest anyone who has violated the law, from the lowliest pickpocket to the wealthiest white-collar crook. In essence, the police are seen as the “good guys” who carry out the important social responsibility of catching and punishing the “bad guys.”

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Most Americans internalize these images of the police from their earliest days as children. They are taught that they should never trust a stranger, but they should trust their friendly, local police officer. Most forms of media reflect a similarly positive conception of the police, from television dramas showing that the cops always get the "bad guy" to newspaper stories stressing that our society is rapidly crumbling and the need to expand the current police force to restore social order.

Unfortunately, these rosy images of policing bear little connection to the truth. Scholars have pointed out many of the limitations of the police, including practices characterized by racism, sexism, homophobia, and a litany of other forms of discrimination (Miller, Forrest, & Jurik, 2003; Milovanovic & Russell, 2001). Yet while these practices are vexing, an even more insidious police practice is the use of massive violence to control public dissent.

During times of intense social and political crisis, ideological controls are no longer effective to sustain order. The anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in the late 1990s demonstrated that the United States government and international finance and trade organizations were experiencing a crisis of legitimacy, at least among some U.S. and world citizens. Despite receiving thinly-veiled threats from local officials (Hornblower, 1999), thousands of individuals and groups from a variety of nations flooded the streets of Seattle to protest WTO policies and the effects of global corporate capitalism. In turn, after attempting to turn away the protesters through "peaceful" coercion, the Seattle mayor authorized the use of naked and extensive police violence. The result was what can best be described as a police riot.

Rodney Stark (1968) has created the seminal model to describe the escalation of police violence into a police riot. Stark defines a police riot as an occasion where the police are the major or only perpetrators of violence in a confrontation with citizens. Stark also assumes that during this occasion the police had at least some intent to use excessive force. He draws a distinction between individual officers and policing in general, observing that during a police riot the unit must "collectively violate reasonable standards governing the lawful use of force" (Stark, 1968, p. 16).

One of the defining violations of reasonable standards is when roving bands of police officers attack non-provocative persons in an excessively violent fashion. For Stark, non-provocative refers to someone or some action that presents no significant threat to the life, safety, and property of the police or any other individual. Accordingly, even those practicing civil disobedience are classified as non-provocative, as all that is required from the police is the use of handcuffs, not any overt or direct physical action.

Stark (1968) proposes that the prototypical police riot is explainable in terms of six similar but distinct phases. The first is the convergence of the police on an area of possible or actual civil unrest. This event is followed by a confrontation between police and civilians. The police then demand that all those present disperse and, when this does not happen, they turn to the use of force. At this point a police riot is imminent, but it does not actually happen unless the citizens fail to disperse quickly. Finally, after this limited riot happens, the police tend to go on a full-scale extended riot, often lasting for several days, in which they rampage through the area and, in many cases, attack those who had nothing to do with the original disturbance. This last stage is most likely to occur on the "home turf" of the civilian crowd; that is, in places like "the ghetto" where dispersion is virtually impossible because most members of the crowd live there.

The principle characteristic of police riots is that they are not an aberration of which the police are ashamed. In fact, Stark found that the police "normally use excessive violence against persons who anger, offend, or frighten them" (1968, p. 55). The only thing that really distinguishes the police riot from everyday policing is its size and scope. The cause is much the same; a perceived lack of respect toward the police. The root cause of a police riot, however, is not in the individual officer's perception of respect, but rather in what the police are asked to do and in the dynamics of police culture (Stark, 1968). The police are expected to quell social disorders that can only be genuinely resolved through significant societal reconstructing. Thus, the police often have to act as a stand-in for meaningful social reforms and they become the last line of defense of the existing order during a crisis of legitimacy.

In this article, I will consider the applicability of Stark's model to the events that took place in Seattle. I will also consider and discuss some of the limitations of this model, pointing out how it can and should be extended by integrating it with a Gramscian understanding of hegemony in advanced capitalism. One of Gramsci's central tenets is that power in late industrial capitalism is based on consent; force is only used when consent breaks down. Gramscian theory can help us to gain a deeper understanding of why police violence escalated so quickly in response to the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, particularly by placing police riots in an overall framework of state repression.

As various analysts have observed (Jefferson, 1990; Kraska & Kappeler, 1997; Reiman, 2001), police units have become increasingly informed by a new, hypermilitaristic definition of reality. In turn, police officers are more likely to develop an "us versus them" mentality and to see themselves as engaging in "search and destroy missions against 'enemy combatants'" (Jefferson, 1990, p. 2). This trend, of course, is disturbing to many of us. It is one thing for the police to treat people who break the law as criminals, it is another for them to treat citizens as enemy combatants who must be destroyed.

In the case of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, the problem is largely one of competing claims between the police and the protesters about social order and justice. Although the protesters made a variety of claims about the WTO (as discussed below), their root claim was that it should be shut down. The police, on the other hand, did not issue ideological claims related to the activities of the WTO. Rather, their main claim was that the protesters were criminals who posed a threat to social order and should be arrested and detained, almost
THE RISE OF PARAMILITARY POLICE UNITS

The militarization of the police is most evident in the rise and spread of Paramilitary Police Units (PPUs), most commonly referred to as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units in America. A PPU involves “the application of (quasi-) military training, equipment, philosophy, and organization to questions of policing” (Jefferson, 1990, p. 16). Three factors are necessary for a unit to be a PPU: it must 1) train and function as a military special operations team with strict military command and structure; 2) have at the forefront a willingness to use great force and not only as a last resort; and 3) operate under the authority of the state (Krasca & Cubellis, 1997, p. 610).

Other factors further distinguish PPUs from regular police units. For example, they always employ a host of high-tech and high-power weaponry, including M16s, sniper rifles, and automatic shotguns, which most PPUs affectionately describe as “street sweepers” (Krasca & Kappeler, 1997, p. 3). PPUs often refer to themselves as “heavy weapons units,” making it clear that ownership of powerful weapons is what separates them from other police officers.

Historically paramilitary units have not been linked so much to fighting crime, but instead to fighting citizens during crises of legitimacy. They came into existence in the late 1960s, mostly as a response to the burgeoning civil and political unrest of that time. They were still fairly uncommon until the 1980s, when they became increasingly common across the nation. Ironically, this proliferation of PPUs was not provoked by or correlated with a rise in violent crime. Rather, it went hand in hand with an increased fear of crime and the growth of a paramilitary culture of weaponry, magazines, and professional organizations, largely orchestrated by for-profit companies that made these weapons and magazines (Krasca & Cubellis, 1997, p. 620). The most important aspect of this emerging paramilitary culture was the resulting changes occurring in the nature of PPUs. Whereas initially their existence was justified by claiming PPUs were for responding to extreme danger, such as riots and hostage situations, today PPUs cannot be distinguished from other police solely by their assignments. This serves to blur the line between regular and paramilitary policing.

PPUs are now normal; even in towns as small as 25,000 paramilitary units are commonly part of the town’s police force (Krasca & Cubellis, 1997, p. 620). The PPU being used proactively or reactively is a crucial determinant in assessing the normalization of paramilitary policing. In their study of all police departments serving populations of 50,000 or more, Krasca and Kappeler (1997, p. 6) found that an astonishing 89.4% had a paramilitary unit. Further, the activity of those units had quadrupled from 1980-1995, a time of decreasing crime rates. The major shift is policing responsible for this increase is the fact that PPUs are now being used proactively for high-risk work, such as serving warrants or patrolling high-crime neighborhoods. This trend stands in stark contrast to the traditional use of PPUs as reactively responding to violent crimes. Again, this situation is not limited only to large cities, as Krasca and Kappeler (1997, p. 9) found a 292% increase of such proactive work in that same period for towns with populations between 50,000 and 100,000.

The increasing use of PPUs is beginning to erode the distinctions between the police and the military. “The police and the military share the state-sanctioned ability to use violence both abroad and domestically” (Krasca & Paulsen, 1997, p. 261). The degree to which any nation does or does not work to separate its armed forces from its civilian police usually provides a good indication of its level of repressiveness. With the threat of communist invasion no longer looming on the horizon, crime has “become a more inviting target for state activity” (Krasca & Kappeler, 1997, p. 6).

Other, more direct and non-ideological connections exist between the police and the military. Krasca and Paulsen (1997, p. 59) dub the police the “fifth branch of the military” for good reason. The most obvious connection between PPUs and the military is their training. In their interviews with several PPU units, Krasca and Paulsen found that the units often train with U.S. armed forces tactical teams at military bases. Many active duty soldiers also cross train with PPUs. This hyper-militaristic training is problematic, as revealed by one police captain who said, “We just have to use our best judgment and exclude their [the army’s] information like: ‘at this point we bring in the mortars and blow the place up’” (Krasca & Kappeler, 1997, p. 12).

These hyper-militaristic police units did not simply arise out of thin air. Rather, they fit into the “inevitably political” nature of policing (Jefferson, 1990, p. 131). Conservatives see PPUs as necessary for suppressing the proliferating problems of drugs and gang warfare. Although this may be one of their functions, the most important reason for PPUs’ existence is perhaps best reflected in the Crime and Social Justice Associates (1983, p. 97) finding that:

...the net effect of SWAT’s police-state tactics is to induce fear... on the part of the community it purports to protect. The SWAT concept is an
indication of the extent to which the police are willing and able to use the
most brutally effective military tactics to ensure "order" at any cost. . . .

Jefferson (1990) offers an excellent model for understanding why this provoca-
tion of fear is necessary. His analysis is based on an understanding of the
Gramscian model of hegemonic power. Gramsci believed that the fundamental
bedrock of hegemony is the mastery of the economy by some form of a ruling
alliance. In modern capitalist societies, however, this hegemony is based
largely on consent. Coercion, then, is only used after "the ideological struggle
to provoke consent [has] failed" (Jefferson, 1990, p. 23). When economic and
political elites can no longer maintain complete influence, a crisis of legitimacy
emerges. Dissent begins to flourish more openly, and as it does, it becomes a
threat to the established political order that must be met with force.

In turn, we can see why PPUs are so often deployed to suppress protest
situations. The police riots that so often follow clearly fit into the United States'
history of repression of leftist politics. As noted earlier, PPUs arose during the
1960s, a time of open and widespread social rebellion, and their unmitigated
violence led to Stark's groundbreaking work on police riots. Clearly, the
ideological controls of capitalism were breaking down, and a more forceful
response was needed. After PPUs proliferated, police riots became even more
common in the late 1990s, which is the first era in American history that is comparable
to the 1960s in terms of open social rebellion. The police response to the Seattle
protest reveals a paramilitary response to a crisis of political legitimacy.

The problems with police paramilitary units go far beyond simply helping to
preserve political and economic hegemony. Again, the conservative view of
PPUs as defenders or public order fails to take many other factors into account.
Support for PPUs is rooted in the ideal of "professionalism"—the notion that
policing is above petty politics and is nothing more than a disinterested search
for the best solutions to the problems with which police are presented. This
belief in professionalism further claims that paramilitarism will allow the police
to stop all disorder with both impartiality and restraint, now that they are properly
equipped to do so (Jefferson, 1990).

The problem with this viewpoint is that it not only flies in the face of scores
of sociological studies on the nature of policing, but also fails to understand
the role of professional institutions in a rational system. Just as rationalized
corporations must find consumers for their services so, too, do rationalized PPUs
depend on violent crime for their existence. As a result, paramilitary units need
to foster situations in which violent outcomes are likely.

The militaristic approach of PPUs represents a standardized and completely
uncompromising approach to policing. However disciplined the individual
officers or entire regiments are, this approach is "inherently provocative"
(Jefferson, 1990, p. 101). The provocative nature of PPUs can easily be seen in
the "proactive" policing style. In these instances, the violent tension is not created
by those the PPUs seek to control, but rather by the police themselves. These
units do not simply react to the type of highly dangerous situations that would
require a specialized police force; instead, they "seek out and even manufacture
highly dangerous situations" (Kraska & Kappeler, 1997, p. 12). This police
antagonism creates what Jefferson has termed the "amplification spiral" (1990,
p. 86). In crowd control situations, paramilitary policing does not simply restore
order. It also creates bitter tension that leaves both sides (police and demonstra-
ators) angrier and more hostile for the next meeting.

Such police escalation is the "clearest case of authorities contributing to rule
breaking" (Marx, 1981, p. 223). The inherently provocative nature of PPUs can
often turn a peaceful crowd into a violent one. This is just one of the ways
that a police presence instigates, not solves, civilian violence. The view that
the police are necessary to prevent violence is not only wrong in many cases, but
has cause and effect entirely reversed. The reaction to demonstrators at the
anti-WTO protests in Seattle is one of the most dramatic examples of the police
as major instigators of violence and lawlessness.

THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE

The Seattle protesters, predominantly led by the nonviolent coordinating
group Direct Action Network (DAN), were among the best prepared protesters
the nation has ever seen. DAN divided the area around the Seattle Convention
Center, where most of the meetings of the World Trade Organization were to be
held, into 13 distinct sections. "Affinity groups" were recruited to fill these regions
in nonviolent protest to obstruct the movement of WTO ministers. Some engaged
in street theater, others in marching, and some "locked down" the area by sitting
in a circle and linking arms, often handcuffed to one another (Gillham & Marx,
2000, p. 215). These fixed groups were reinforced by "flying groups" who would
fill in when sections were a little thin.

When the first day of meeting finally came on November 30, 1999, referred to as
"N30" by protesters, over 5,000 people showed up to form the various affinity
groups. Although these groups had differing goals in what they wanted from the
WTO (ranging from environmentalism to labor reform to anti-capitalism), they
shared one overarching aim: a total shutdown of the WTO meetings (Hawken,
2000, p. 4). Some had even come prepared for police violence by wearing gas
masks and bandanas soaked in vinegar to shield themselves from chemical
weapons (Martin, 1999, p. 2).

What the protesters actually encountered, however, far surpassed their worst
nightmares. The Seattle police department came dressed in full riot gear, with
each officer burdened with 60 to 70 pounds of weaponry. All of the officers
were anonymous, as the riot gear hid their badges and identification numbers.
To counter what had been publicly declared to be a peaceful march, the police
came equipped with everything from full body armor to all forms of "non-lethal"
weaponry, making them appear as if they were straight out of a futuristic RoboCop movie (Hawken, 2000, p. 4).

The three “non-lethal” weapons the police most commonly carried and used during the anti-WTO protests were pepper spray, tear gas, and rubber bullets. Pepper spray comes from naturally occurring oil found in cayenne and other pepper plants. It works by causing an immediate burning sensation to the skin, and tearing and swelling of the eyes. When inhaled, it restricts breathing by inflaming the respiratory tract. The few long-term studies conducted on pepper-spray show that it has long-term effects on various bodily functions, especially in people with pre-existing medical problems (Chasan & Walker, 2000). According to Dr. Kirk Murphy of the DAN Medical Team, the closing of the respiratory tract can be fatal in some cases (Wong, 1999). Def-Tech, the corporation that manufactured the pepper spray used in Seattle, advises against using the spray at distance of less than three feet or for more than a one-second burst. Dozens of eyewitness and media reports, however, indicate the Seattle police regularly used pepper spray at pointblank range and in steady streams (Chasan & Walker, 2000). The second non-lethal weapon, tear gas, has a euphemistic name. Upon contact, tear gas causes burning and involuntary closing of the eye, burning of the skin, temporary blindness, gagging, vomiting, sneezing, coughing, and diarrhea (Chasan & Walker, 2000). One protester described it as “a fog through which people move in slow strange dances of shock and pain” (Hawken, 2000, p. 3). Finally, rubber bullets, the third non-lethal form of weaponry carried by the police, also have a misleading name. These bullets are not actually rubber at all, but rather are hard plastic which is fired out of a high-powered rifle that can cause death if left in the skin (WTO, 1999).

THE UNFOLDING OF THE BATTLE: AN APPLICATION OF STARK’S MODEL

The events that took place in Seattle may have looked like utter chaos, but they were actually quite easily predicted. In this section, I will provide a description and analysis of the Battle of Seattle by drawing upon Stark’s model of police riots. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the “anarchy” of Seattle actually fits quite well into Stark’s model, and that the police not only dramatically stepped beyond their bounds by engaging in a litany of illegal behaviors, but also that they could not have been expected to act in any other way.

Stages One and Two: Police Convergence and Confrontation between the Police and Civilians

At approximately 6:30 in the morning on N30, the first of the more than 5,000 DAN protesters converged on the Seattle Convention Center, which had already been ringed by Metro buses to prevent the protesters from getting too close. As a result, they changed their plan and blocked traffic north of the convention center. Another group came in roughly 20 minutes later on Pike street and effectively surrounded the entire convention center. The police had not expected to deploy any forces until 7:30 at the earliest, so they did not arrive in time to prevent the protesters from encircling the convention center (Orpheus 2, 1999).

Stages Three and Four: Police Demand Dispersal and Begin to Use Force

The opening WTO ceremonies were to begin at 10:00 A.M. However, due to the massive presence of protesters, very few WTO delegates had arrived, forcing a delay in the day’s proceedings. At this point, the police donned their gas masks and began ordering protesters to disperse. At roughly 10:04 A.M., the police began using pepper spray, tear gas, and rubber bullets. Few protesters were moved by the weaponry (Chasan & Walker, 2000). Stages three and four happened almost concurrently, as it was widely documented that the police gave little or no time for protesters to disperse before they turned to the use of force.

By then, much as Stark’s model predicts, police discipline had already begun to break down because of procedural policy and officer ineptitude. The Seattle police had decided not to make any arrests the first day of the protests. As a result, they had only their weaponry to use to clear the streets. Throughout the day, police used so many rubber bullets and chemical irritants, that they began to run out of these materials. What seemed like an afternoon lull in violence was actually due to the fact that many officers had already exhausted their vast quantities of ammunition (Hawken, 2000).

What is notable about the reaction of the Seattle police to the WTO demonstrations is the fact that it fits almost perfectly into Stark’s (1968) model of police riots. Dozens of sources (e.g. Chasan & Walker, 2000; Hawken, 2000; Martin, 1999; Wong, 1999) indicate that it was the police, and not the protesters, who were engaged in rioting.

Stage Five: A Limited Police Riot

Many eyewitnesses reported never being ordered to disperse, or being given contradictory orders by the police. Several dozen reported being ordered to go one way by a battalion of police, and then encountering another battalion that ordered them back the opposite way. When protesters failed to comply with the contradictory orders, they were fired upon with full force. This firing of tear gas and rubber bullets on protesters attempting to follow orders “indicates a wholesale loss of discipline and lack of control by superior officers” (Chasan & Walker, 2000). Taken together, these factors set the stage for misconceptions among city officials which led them to conclude that they would need to take dramatic action to control the streets.
As the afternoon wore on, police made one last attempt to clear the streets with a major volley of tear gas. When the protesters still did not move, Seattle Mayor Paul Schell declared a state of emergency and Washington Governor Gary Locke ordered in the National Guard to help restore order (Chasan & Walker, 2000). The order also included a nighttime curfew banning the general populace from a large number of downtown blocks from 7:00 P.M. until 7:30 A.M. the next day. The order was eventually extended through the morning of Thursday, December 2. The pretext for this state of emergency was a series of minor incidents of property damage that had occurred (Martin, 1999). Seattle had not seen a declaration of civil emergency since it was used during World War II to round up Japanese-Americans for internment.

Although the action cleared out the downtown area, police were still assaulting people well into the early hours of the morning. The protesters, however, were not swayed from continuing to express their dissent and they came out in full force the next morning, December 1 (D1). Again they were met by violent police officers. As the demonstrators blocked morning rush hour traffic, the police fired tear gas and concussion grenades right into the middle of the streets, affecting not only protesters, but also individuals in the cars and on buses, as well as people walking to work on the sidewalks (Martin, 1999).

In retaliation for the renewed protests, the Mayor’s office and the police stepped up their assaults on the civil liberties of the protesters and Seattle residents in general. President Clinton was scheduled to arrive and give the keynote address that day, and to ensure that scenes from the previous day would not be repeated, Mayor Schell established a “No Protest Zone,” a 25 block radius in which no demonstrations or protesters would be allowed. The area essentially became a militarized zone with entry barred to anyone who expressed views critical of the WTO, whether through wearing a button, holding a sign, or simply discussing the negative ramifications of the WTO (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

In a move even more telling of the city’s complete disregard for the rights and safety of the protesters, at 11:00 A.M. that day Mayor Schell announced an emergency order that prohibited the possession, sale, or purchase of gas masks by private individuals within the city limits of Seattle. By doing so, the city kept all people—protesters and innocent bystanders alike—from protecting themselves, including people who had special conditions (e.g., asthma or allergies) that made them especially vulnerable to chemical irritants. Moreover, the police made no attempt to ensure that the chemical weapons, which are easily blown by the wind, would affect only their intended targets (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

**Stage Six: The Extended Police Riot**

Perhaps the worst incident that took place in the Battle of Seattle happened in the evening of D1. After clearing protesters off most streets for the nightly curfew, the police pushed many protesters into the Capitol Hill district, a trendy neighborhood of shops and private residences. Police then ringed the neighborhoods with armored vehicles and unmarked school buses, effectively trapping both protesters and local residents in the area. Once this area had been cordoned off, the police began firing pepper spray, tear gas, concussion grenades, and rubber bullets at everyone within it, regardless of whether or not they were protesters. Local residents ran out of their houses to both aid the protesters and chastise the police for gassing their houses and their children.

Although this was not the only instance of indiscriminate and widespread police brutality, it was by far the most egregious. The police invaded a private residential area and “gassed, pepper-sprayed, and bullied local residents and shoppers” (Chasan & Walker, 2000). Their actions could not be justified in terms of the pressures of making split-second decisions in some sort of emergency situation. Rather, the police were simply and indiscriminately firing upon anyone who offended them or caught their attention (Chasan & Walker, 2000). This is a clear example of stage six of Stark’s model, in which an extended police riot takes place, and those affected by it cannot disperse, because they live in the riot zone. After this night, the police and protesters continued to clash for the rest of the conference, but many protesters were either in jail or had gone home, so no other major confrontations took place.

Police violence was rampant throughout the entire week of protests. John Goodman of the United Steel Workers publicly commented at a press conference on D1 that he had never seen a more obscene display of police brutality, and that he “couldn’t believe this was happening in America. It was a rude awakening” (Orpheus I, 1999, p. 3). The police were simply out of control, from the commanders ordering the gassing, spraying, and shooting of protesters, to the individual officers committing heinous acts of violence (Hawken, 2000). Dozens of protesters, media, and eyewitnesses described the scene as a “war zone.”

The police were attacking protesters who were overwhelmingly nonviolent. The vast majority of the protesters who broke the law were practicing nonviolent disobedience by sitting down and being chained to one another. Yet officers routinely walked up to motionless protesters to spray, shoot, or club them for little to no reason, actions which the ACLU has condemned as inappropriate levels of force used against inappropriate targets and “simply not proportionate to the threat” presented by protesters (Chasan & Walker, 2000, p. 3). In response to all of the reports of violence, the ACLU set up a Web forum where victims of police violence could voice their complaints. The site received over 500 reports of police abuse the first day alone, which prompted the ACLU to commission an exhaustive report prepared by Chasan and Walker (2000) to investigate and verify the claims of abuse. Much as Stark predicted, even though the protesters were nonviolent and could have been subdued by handcuffs, the police became extremely belligerent and violent anyway.

The violence was applied not only against protesters. Medics, whom the police had agreed not to interfere with, often became victims of the police, despite
the red armbands that clearly identified them (Wong, 1999). According to Jennifer Whitney, the coordinator for the DAN medic team, medics were actually being targeted by the police. They were having their equipment confiscated and destroyed. At one point, the police even blocked off access to the Swedish Medical Center (the local hospital) and reportedly told DAN medics that it was to prevent care for the protesters (Orpheus 1, 1999).

One King County Councilman (the county in which Seattle is located), Brian Derdowski, actually became a victim himself of police violence during the Capitol Hill invasion. Derdowski had been acting as an ad hoc negotiator between the police and protesters when he was hit in the back with a tear gas canister. He told the ACLU that the crowd was peacefully singing and without warning the police began to fire chemical weapons everywhere. By the time the final assaults occurred, Derdowski had been there for over two hours and had never heard a warning to disperse (Chasan & Walker, 2000). He further reported that he had heard from several sources that the police had begun simply going around in their armored personnel carriers, approaching groups of protesters and residents, jumping out of the van, spraying tear gas and rubber bullets everywhere, then getting back into the van and driving off.

The civil liberties of the protesters were trampled as well. The “No Protest Zone” was a clear infringement of protester’s First Amendment rights. For several days in downtown Seattle, it was illegal to publicly express negative views of the WTO. This policy violated the principle that any governmental restriction on free speech must be “content neutral,” meaning not favoring any specific point of view. The City was obviously favoring the view of the WTO over those of the dissenting voices. Furthermore, this zone had no possibility of establishing any form of security. The WTO delegates could have been protected without a no-protest zone in place just as easily as they could with it (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

Violations of First Amendment rights went much further than the no protest zone. On D1, an order came over the police radio instructing officers to confiscate all notes the legal observers were taking. These notes were to document police violence for later evidence. Twenty-five minutes later, the central office radioed back that it was in fact illegal to confiscate the notes, and that it should not be done. However, the initial lack of knowledge about free speech rights is a chilling example of the level of police ignorance and abuse that characterized the battle of Seattle.

The most telling of all the examples recorded by the ACLU also took place on D1. A protester had made 500 copies of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, with the section detailing the right to peaceful assembly underlined. When handing them out in the no-protest zone, he was confronted by 10 riot police who told him it was illegal to disseminate such material. They proceeded to destroy the copies he was holding and they also illegally seized and destroyed additional copies in his backpack. Ironically, the Seattle Police Department thereby engaged in confiscating and destroying the First Amendment (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

Nearly all of the arrests made during the anti-WTO protests were also illegal. The police arrested hundreds of people who never stood trial. Rather, they were held until the conference was over and then all charges were dropped. The questionable motives behind the arrests were amplified by the fact that many detainees had to sign an agreement not to enter the downtown area for the rest of the conference as a condition of their release. If they failed or refused to sign, they were not released. In an extreme example, prosecutors offered one woman release in exchange for an agreement that she would not protest anywhere in the country for the next two years (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

The illegality of these arrests was finally recognized when in December, 2003, a United States District Judge, Marsha Pechman, ruled that the police had no probable cause when they arrested 157 protesters in one single event (Associated Press, 2003). She found that the police not only had no probable cause for arresting these people, but also that they had done an atrocious job with their record keeping, using woefully improper warrant and arrest procedures.

The civil rights of the protesters were also clearly violated by the dramatic overuse of chemical weaponry. The use of pepper spray and tear gas often served no purpose and reached people well beyond the intended targets. The State Patrol Chief of Washington even admitted that many officers engaged in “gas and run” tactics throughout the demonstrations. In a related ruling, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals determined in May 2000 that the use of pepper spray against nonviolent protesters is an unconstitutional and unreasonable use of force (Chasan & Walker, 2000).

It is obvious that the heavy-handed tactics of the Seattle police were linked in a significant way to the protesters’ political views. There is no record of a single firearm being taken from a protester by the police, and there is no record of an officer being seriously injured by a protester at any time during the week (Chasan & Walker, 2000). The obvious point made by the ACLU is that if fans celebrating a Seattle Mariners’ World Series victory poured into the streets and blocked traffic, they would most certainly not be met by tear gas, concussion grenades, and rubber bullets. Clearly, it was the political views and claims being expressed by the protesters that made them more likely to be targets of excessive police violence.

As Stark would predict, many of the problems in Seattle came from inadequate and improper training. The police themselves complained of the fact that they were ill-trained to handle the situations that arose during the protests. Even more poorly trained were the outside forces that Seattle brought in at the last minute when City officials decided that their police force alone was not enough. Predictably, the discipline required for PPU-style policing quickly broke down, as officers broke formations to chase down individuals protesters. Many officers also took advantage of their anonymity to commit acts of brutality. Of course,
CONCLUSIONS: EXTENDING AND TRANSCENDING STARK'S MODEL

One important factor missing in Stark's analysis is how riot victims are labeled. The denomination of the WTO protesters proves that the idea of the "dangerous class" is alive and well today. Mass protests such as the battle of Seattle are seen as a threat to the very fabric of our society (Silver, 1967). The concepts of "riot" and "violence" are often used to describe mass protest in an attempt to place them outside the status quo. The emphasis in police reports on demonstrations is almost always focused on violence rather than on legitimate questioning of the current order (Quinney, 1974a).

As Quinney argues, in the capitalist system, complete repression is not necessary for smooth functioning of the economic order. Thus, the state tolerates some civil disobedience. The tolerance stops only when the current order is threatened. What this means is that civil liberties exist only in the abstract. Once a mass protest becomes effective, it becomes threatening and, thus, repressed by authorities. The "Battle for Seattle" is a clear example of this process. The Seattle police department made a whole list of promises about respecting the rights of protesters, yet when the protests became successful in shutting down the WTO talks, the police unleashed massive violent repression.

The fact that protesters are regarded and labeled as part of the "dangerous class" is also evident in the statements of city officials and the media prior to the demonstrations taking place. Mayor Schell was quoted as saying he would respect the rights of all dissenting opinions, but if they became "rowdy guests, we plan to treat them that way" (Hornblower 1999, 42). In the same article, the author wrote that the talks would go smoothly as long as violent anarchists did not disrupt the proceedings.

Finally, the reaction of the Seattle police is truly explained only in the historical context of the police being used to defend the current economic order. Much like the military abroad exists to put down threats that would upset foreign markets, the domestic police exist in large part to prevent any challenge to the economic structure (Quinney, 1974b). Utilizing the approach developed by Earl, Soule, and McCarthy (2003) we can see how the level of threat a protest presents to the present order is the best predictor of police repression. After conducting a thorough analysis of dozens of protests, Earl et al. found that the best predictor of police repression was the size of a protest and the confrontational nature of its tactics. They concluded that activities which threaten the ability of police to control a protest event will pose a great public relations challenge to authorities and will be much more likely to prompt a severe response (Earl et al., 2003). Surely the WTO protest fit this model, as there were well over 50,000 people with the antagonistic goal of attempting to stop the Conference from even happening. As a result of their challenge to the hegemony and legitimacy of global corporate capitalism, the Seattle protesters experienced the lash of state repression.

In concluding, this article demonstrates that the police do not simply act as neutral arbitrators of law and order. Instead, as demonstrated by many analysts, the police serve above all to preserve the existing social order and, in the process, to protect the interests of ruling elites. This is especially true in the case of paramilitary policing units. Their tendency to define politically active segments of the public as enemy combatants who should be destroyed, rather than as practitioners of democracy who need to be protected, shatters the illusion of the police's political neutrality.

In addition to revealing the political nature of policing, particularly in response to mass protest, this article illustrates the continued applicability of Stark's theory of police riots. The Seattle police clearly moved through the six stages outlined in Stark's model and they did so with alarming alacrity, reaching five out of the six stages in the first few hours of the protest.

Yet, despite its strengths and its ability to explain the police riot that took place in Seattle, Stark's model needs to be extended, particularly by supplementing it with Gramsci's theory of hegemony in late industrial capitalism. While Stark's model provides an excellent analysis of what happens during police riots, Gramsci's ideas extend it by explaining why these riots happen; that is, Gramsci offers us insight into the larger historical contexts and ideological forces that contribute to the emergence of these riots.

Finally, to develop a more nuanced understanding of 1) the nature of policing and 2) the nature of dissent in the 21st century, we need not only to place police riots in historical context, but also to explain why the police are prone to rioting even after the blatant abuses and mistakes that occurred in Seattle. Advanced capitalist societies such as the U.S. will continue to experience crises of legitimacy and unless we take action to significantly restructure laws and the modern police force, police officers will continue to use massive violence as a means to combat dissent. In so doing, they will jeopardize our abilities to engage in actions that are vital to the construction and continuation of genuine democracy.
AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jesse Wozniak recently graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and is currently selecting a program for doctoral studies in sociology. His senior honors thesis, from which this study was adapted, examined how the American police force has served largely to protect the interests of global corporate capitalism, often at the expense of basic human and civil rights. Jesse's research interests focus on how governments respond to subjervive movements and how capitalism shapes the interpretation and resolution of social problems. He currently works for AmeriCorps as a program assistant for the Empowering Dads program of the Family and Children's Council of Black Hawk County.

REFERENCES


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