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Nina Eggert and Elena Pavan, Guest Editors

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BOOK REVIEWS  
Deana A. Rohlinger, editor


David Cortright  
University of Notre Dame

During the Vietnam War, a significant anti-war movement developed among active duty soldiers and recent veterans. Hundreds of GI underground newspapers were published on ships and at military bases around the world. Unauthorized absence and desertions rates reached record levels. In Vietnam, combat refusal and avoidance spread. Nothing on the scale of this revolt occurred during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; but antiwar dissent nonetheless emerged within the ranks of the military and among recent veterans. This military antiwar movement played an important role in mobilizing public opposition to U.S. military intervention and occupation. The movement also generated pressure for ameliorating military grievances and healing the wounds of returning veterans.

A number of recent volumes have been published by military movement participants, but until now no comprehensive analysis of the movement has been available. Lisa Leitz makes a valuable contribution in presenting such an overview and providing a sympathetic participant-observer analysis (her husband was an Army Reserve officer). She offers a sociocultural assessment of the movement that analyzes the mobilizing force of identity and emotion in sustaining cultures of antiwar action.

The book examines approximately twenty organizations of active duty service members, recent veterans and military family members that were openly critical of U.S. policies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of the groups focused on conditions of service and military grievances (such as the lack of body armor in the early years of the wars), while others were explicitly antiwar and articulated a radical critique of U.S. foreign policy. Leitz focuses on four groups in the latter category—Veterans for Peace, Military Families Speak Out, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Gold Star Families for Peace—and presents detailed assessments of their protest strategies and mobilizing tactics. These groups opposed U.S. war policy but also addressed the grievances of veterans and returning soldiers, demanding improved conditions and services while linking these issues to the war’s dubious origins and outcomes. As Leitz notes, recent military antiwar activists received support from their Vietnam-era predecessors, including members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

One of the military movement’s most significant tactics was the use of antiwar memorials. These were displays of crosses representing the number of U.S. military fatalities that were placed in public locations. Leitz analyzes the memorials as an effective means of mobilizing emotions of grief to attract sympathy and support for the antiwar cause. The tactic emerged in early November of 2003 when activists with Veterans for Peace and other antiwar groups in Santa Barbara created “Arlington West,” planting 340 unpainted wooden crosses (one for each soldier killed in Iraq as of that date) on a popular beach next to Stearns Wharf. A few months later a similar antiwar memorial was placed in the sand next to Santa Monica Pier. Over the next six years, similar memorials were established in public locations in dozens of communities across the United States. The organizers of these memorials used their identity as members of the military community to express grief for their fallen comrades and to urge an end to the war. In some cases, the mobilization experience enabled individual veterans and military members to transform personal feelings of anger or guilt into “emotions of resistance” for constructive social engagement.

Leitz’s analysis is inclusive but it gives short shrift to one of the most visible antiwar expressions of the era: the Appeal for Redress, an online petition to Congress calling for an end to the war in Iraq that was launched in the fall of 2006 and signed by more than 2,000 active duty and reserve service members. The Appeal generated stories in the Washington Post (and other newspapers), in major military publications, and was featured on CBS’s 60 Minutes.

Most of the military activists who spoke out against the Iraq and Afghanistan wars sought to embrace and redefine the concept of patriotism. In doing so, they were channeling Dr. Martin Luther King, who declared in an antiwar sermon in April 1967, “I oppose the Vietnam War because I love America.” True patriots, the veterans asserted, speak out against abuses of power that lead to unjust wars. They linked patriotism to protest and emphasized the right and duty of dissent as an essential foundation of American democracy. The activists used their distinctive military identity to reframe the meaning of patriotism; to take back the flag from militarism and assert it as a symbol of antiwar protest. This emphasis on patriotism is contested by some activists, including a few Vietnam-era antiwar veterans,
who question the very premise of patriotism. Yet many organizers today recognize the mobilizing power of framing antiwar dissent as reflecting American values of freedom and democracy.

Leitz has authored a substantively rich and analytically sophisticated study of an important antiwar movement within the military, while also making a valuable contribution to understanding how emotion and identity can affect movement mobilization. Her study confirms that even within an all-volunteer force, dissent against unjust war is possible. The book can serve as an important resource for comparative analysis of military antiwar movements today and the GI revolt of the Vietnam era.


Craig Hughes
City University of New York

In recent decades, the U.S. government increasingly has labeled environmental resistance and animal rights efforts as forms of terrorism. Laws passed with the inducement of industry lobbyists have steadily criminalized radical animal and environmental groups, with a particular focus on the clandestine work of autonomous Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF) cells. Activists have called the monitoring and harassment of earth and animal rights activists the “Green Scare,” with clear reference to the McCarthy-era Red Scare. Dozens of activists have been rounded up and accused of arsons, conspiracy, and other crimes, or subpoenaed to grand jury hearings for their association with environmentalism or animal rights work. Arrests, surveillance and harassment by state forces have been documented by activists in various publications, but this is the first scholarly analysis of the Green Scare and state repression against environmental and animal liberationists.

Pellow applies critical race theory, feminism, and Gramscian and Foucauldian analyses to earth and animal liberation struggles in a critical, but supportive, effort to think through what they offer for building cross-racial, class-cross, class-gender and cross-species liberation movements. In order to conduct this analysis, Pellow works through the four elements of what he calls the “total liberation” framework, which he describes as “an ethic of justice and anti-oppression, inclusive of people, nonhuman animals, and ecosystems; anarchism; anticapitalism; and an embrace of direct action tactics” (pp. 6-7). He accomplishes this through a “socioecological inequality” analysis, which examines the impact of hierarchy on all parts of the ecology. The bulk of the volume is dedicated to analyzing each of these “pillars,” with the first chapter focused on providing historic context of animal and earth liberation efforts and the final chapters focused on the Green Scare.

Pellow’s core argument is that the total liberation framework provides insights for ecological theories and sociological analyses through its commitment to a comprehensive intersectional understanding of oppression—one that includes human domination over other animals. Pellow emphasizes the deep links between the oppression of people, the environment, and other animals and offers readers a top-to-bottom analysis of all hierarchies and their consequences. In order to do so, Pellow draws on interviews and stories to powerfully illustrate that the repression many white earth and animal liberationists are now experiencing has been the historic norm for radical movements of color. He highlights what these movements have learned from each other, particularly from their joint organizing efforts in recent years. More importantly, given his theoretical emphasis, he pays close attention to the contributions of people of color to the radical earth and animal liberation struggles.

Pellow conceptualizes race and privilege as somewhat fluid categories. He proposes that, within the legal and state apparatuses, white earth and animal liberationists may be, temporally and situationally, “racial deviants” and “not quite white.” He is cautious, showing that even while experiencing state repression, racial and class privilege continue to play out—citing that some activists have access to private attorneys.

Pellow’s book offers contributions to social movement theory, and the history of social struggles. Arguably, the book is an important political project in its own right. While examining the complexities that liberationists face in their work, Pellow documents state efforts to intervene in his research, a fascinating aspect of the book. He points out that ethical movement research comes with substantial risks, offers a model of ethics, and outlines how scholars can conduct research under the gaze of the state. Social movement scholars will be interested in the steps he took to protect the activists he researched, and how he dealt with an educational institution that was less concerned with such protections.

Like any work on complex social movements this volume has limitations. Perhaps most salient is that, in an effort to show the strengths of these movements, Pellow minimizes the impact that “primitivist” and “anticultivation” theories have had on the earth and animal liberation move-
ments. Many earth and animal liberationists describe themselves as anticivilizationists, which shapes how they think about their activism. Pellow addresses briefly, but given the heavy presence of such thinking in these movements, it could have been developed more. Additionally, Pellow does not really address the vanguardism that can be found in some of the animal liberationist and earth liberationist thought and action. If these activists believe in revolution, which many clearly do, what is the theory of political change and strategy here? What is the relationship between animal liberationists, earth liberationists, and mass based movements, not in theory but in practice?

Quibbles aside, Pellow’s book provides important insights to politically engaged scholars and social movement theorists, who study U.S. social movements in the post 9/11 world. It is a must read for scholars interested in repression, radical movements, and ethics.


Laurence Cox
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Can Democracy be Saved? is two books in one, and Donatella della Porta carries off the trick impressively. The first book is a textbook of the models of democracy—liberal, participatory, deliberative, electronic, and global. Like comparable textbooks, della Porta offers a typology, organised around the different adjectives which enable the all-purpose “democracy” to acquire concrete meaning. The second book is an account of how social movements practice democracy—both internally and in their pressure for wider political and social democratization. Linking these two narratives takes some skill, but the book’s concept is a strong one.

In Can Democracy be Saved? the development of liberal democracy is neatly tied to the scholarship concerning the movement struggles underlying first-wave democratization and the vision of participatory democracy is intertwined with the history of European workers’ movements. Deliberative democracy is explored in tandem with the experiments of the global justice movement, indignados and Occupy, while e-democracy is illustrated with online activism and movements’ use of social media. The democratic deficit of European and global governance is related to “global civil society,” Social Forum processes and activists’ cosmopolitanism, while recent democratization processes are reconnected to social movements in an important assertion of “democratization from below.” The narrowing of space for protest through aggressive policing is documented, as are the more hopeful attempts at intranstitutional experimentation with deliberative and participatory processes. In each case, a formidable battery of literature is consulted, complexities and contradictions are acknowledged, national differences are highlighted and (usually) typologies are deployed to make sense of each area, along with relevant vignettes, including, rather nicely, a protest by della Porta’s own students at the European University Institute.

The result is a rich source for student readers in particular. I would have been very happy to offer my own first-year students a book like this when teaching courses on democracy and active citizenship. Can Democracy be Saved? offers a clear narrative, structured partly logically and partly chronologically, with complexities that resist easy simplification and offer sufficient data to draw a range of conclusions.

The book has something very significant to say to political theorists, if they will listen. Theories of democracy that do not reflect systematically on agency are academic in the pejorative sense. Any substantive (rather than simulated) democratization means redistributing power, and one of history’s dirty secrets is that the major mechanism for this is the popular construction of power from below—in other words, social movements. There are certainly other routes, but they too pass through collective agents (albeit of different kinds). A theory of power structures, normative or descriptive, which does not consider the power relations required to construct those structures, has a gaping intellectual (and, for normative theories, political) hole—and this book highlights that hole.

For social movement readers, the book might seem to have less to offer. Much of the empirical material will be familiar to historically and comparatively minded scholars. However, the material is marshalled to make a case that should have real interest to movement researchers. Can Democracy be Saved? highlights the significance of what we do to the wider world. Too often social movements research allows itself to be boxed off as operating within a given, pre-structured “level of activity,” as a neatly self-contained subdiscipline. This book shows that anyone who seriously wants to understand how democracies come into being and how they are weakened, how popular participation rises and falls, and how things could be improved, needs to think about social movements. We should be saying this more clearly, more frequently and more publicly, than we do.
Reading this book, I had three concerns, on varying scales. The first is that the discussion of how states police movements could, and according to the logic of the other chapters should, have been accompanied by a discussion of how movements contest the policing of protest. Such contestation has been central to democratic struggles since the outrage over the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, if not before. It is also important to understand that while political policing is getting more aggressive across the global North, it faces substantial limits set by this history. Other groups can, and do, protest when states’ attacks on movements overstep what are felt to be popular gains. E.P. Thompson made this argument 50 years ago.

Second, the great missing figure of this book is Latin America’s experiments with democracy. Following the “thin democratization” of the post-dictatorship period, social movements have engaged with the state in a variety of forms, from the more traditional experiences of the Brazilian Workers’ Party or Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution via the remarkable experiments of movement involvement in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian state to Mexico’s dramatic Zapatista enclave or the neighborhood assemblies of the Argentinazo. If we want to explore what real democratization—more participatory and deliberative—might look like, we need to look beyond the handful of examples given here (primarily Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting) to the possibilities and limitations of Latin America’s attempts at deeper democracy.

Finally, the short conclusion is disappointing, not least in relation to the book’s self—chosen theme. After a book (rightly) full of ambiguities and empirical richness, a reader might reasonably expect the author to take a position on whether democracy can in fact be saved, rather than restating how complex the question is. In particular, the retreat to political theory and the various models discussed in the book at the expense of considering the contemporary power relations affecting the struggle for “real democracy now” falls short of what we might hope for from the magisterial sweep of this book.

These concerns aside, this is a fascinating and valuable book which deserves to be widely read and (perhaps more importantly) widely debated.

Scholars know that religious institutions are important to the course and content of many social movements. Religious institutions often provide shelter, meeting space, motivation, human and financial resources, and other essentials for social movements. Some religious institutions have social movement qualities themselves. As environmental concerns have grown, so has religiously based environmental action. Most of the scholarly research examining the “greening” of religion consists of case studies. While useful, case studies do not provide a reliable assessment of the extent to which various religious traditions are actually embracing environmental causes. Moreover, surprisingly little scholarship applies the insights of social movement scholarship to the religion-environment nexus, despite the rapid proliferation of religious environmental organizations and increased mass media attention to these groups and their opponents.

Lucas Johnston’s book—its subtitle at least—promises to remedy this deficit. Alas, it does not. This does not mean it is not useful to scholars of environmental movements, but researchers in the field, will not see it as one of their field’s own. The book’s subtitle, Social Movements and the Politics of Environment, is misleading. Johnston offers readers two books in one, and neither is really about social movements or politics. In the first half of the book, Johnston attempts to show that sustainability discourse—not the same as environmentalism, although there is slippage in Johnston’s usage of the concepts—has “religion-resembling features.” Johnston concludes that there is a strong religious dimension to sustainability advocacy. However, his conceptualization of religion is so broad that it loses its sociological benefit. I sensed that anything that referred to values, feelings of awe, or that tried to affect “changes in hearts and minds” (p.187) would be labeled as religious. Another—more productive—conclusion is that explicitly religious expressions directly contribute to public discourse. The value here is that a Habermasian approach to deliberative democracy requires religious expressions to be translated into secular ones. If sustainability advocacy seems “religious-like,” it might be because formal rationality has penetrated Western society so much, eliminating discursive space for other ways of naming and knowing the world.

In the second half of the book, he provides three case studies of religious-based environmental action. In this section, he draws on an unspecified number of interviews to make his argument. Johnston purports that religious actors do not want to find a new ethic, but instead, seek to understand their religious traditions in ways that will support sustainability. But I was left with several questions; many of which social move-


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contentious agency of social movements explains much of the variation in extraction expansion outcomes, and—more importantly—contentious agency can slow or even reverse corporate resource exploitation.


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It is easy to support Markus Kröger’s motivation for this succinct book: because there is ample evidence of societies’ environmentally and socially destructive patterns, “what are needed are studies of how change, real change, is possible” (p. 1). Answering this call, Contentious Agency and Natural Resource Politics provides a systematic analysis of resistance to the expansion of industrial tree plantations (ITP) in Brazil and globally. Kröger scrutinizes strategies of contestation and claims that “agency matters most” (p. 2). He argues that effective contentious agency entails five strategies: (1) organizing and politicizing, (2) campaigning and framing, (3) networking, (4) protesting, and (5) embedding with the state while maintaining autonomy, which reoccur in an ongoing cycle. The book explicates how activists can fight back against resource exploitation—and, more generally, how they can challenge the status quo—through the analysis of successful resistance strategies and their concatenation.

Kröger addresses important, underresearched topics such as the outcomes of social movements and, in particular, the strategies through which mobilization goals can be attained. Built on the Marxist dialectic tradition and informed by a broad social movement literature, the book’s dynamic and relational approach contributes to contentious politics research. Tripartite political games between corporations, the state, and social movements are at the heart of Kröger’s comprehensive framework. Political games consist of contentious, electoral, and institutional (or structural) politics through which economic and policy outcomes are forged. Private politics—those not involving the state—can play their role too. Kröger argues that such a framework conceptualizes political opportunity structures dynamically as “government-industry alliances and corporate agency” (p. 141), instead of as external factors that shape the field of play. This, Kröger suggests, helps researchers better understand social movements as part of the political structure, which, in turn, illuminates a broader array of movement outcomes.

Building on Bourdieu, Kröger identifies territorial, social, and symbolic spaces in which strategies linked with political games operate. Contestation can take place in any of these, and all three have to be analyzed to adequately explain resistance. The territorial space refers to the material sphere (e.g., planting of eucalyptus by corporations and the uprooting of them by protesters), social space to the relationships and power dynamics between actors, and symbolic space to cognitive mechanisms through which grievances are framed. In essence, such a framework allows a study of “which strategies work and under which circumstances” (p. 137)—and also why.

Kröger uses predominantly qualitative data on Bazils ITP expansion to make his claims. His data are impressive. The book includes an analysis of all thirteen major eucalyptus plantation expansions in Brazil. While not all of these are contestations of the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST), MST, Kröger argues, spread the “metaculture of replication” (p. 21) required for contentious agency in other cases. Kröger’s case is clear and mostly convincing. The contentious agency of social movements explains much of the variation in extraction expansion outcomes, and—more importantly—contentious agency can slow or even reverse corporate resource exploitation.
Some readers might find the generalizing from MST’s resistance problematic, given the exceptionally successful history of the movement. Kröger tries to assuage reader skepticism by highlighting differences among the cases when they exist. For example, he shows how the Mapuchean activists refused to adopt the strategy of autonomist embedding in their contestation against the Chilean state and corporations—a strategy MST embraces.

Large-scale corporate resource exploitation projects have the potential to cause “more radical mobilization and fostering of contentious agency than more invisible, unidentifiable, slower and more gradual dislocations and hardships” (p. 151). This is true even if less visually dramatic projects are more exploitative. Kröger suggests that activists take advantage of the opportunity and capitalize on the translocal resistance to spearhead the “second major Polanyian counter-movement—the second great transformation” (p. 151). It is a call worth heeding.

I highly recommend this book for students and scholars interested in natural resource politics, the dynamics of contestation, and the strategies that can help us slow environmental destruction.


Jordan Brown
Loyola University, Chicago

In Social Change: Globalization from the Stone Age to the Present, Chase-Dunn and Lerro embark on the ambitious task of writing a textbook that traces the history and evolution of globalization from the earliest humans to the present. The authors root their work in a world-systems approach that describes the transformation small-scale human societies that operated in multiple world systems across the globe to the present day in which all societies operate within one large, intertwined global society dominated by a core hegemonic power: the United States. Finally, they draw parallels between the past and the present to predict possible directions for the future of a global society.

The text begins by placing their work in the context of theoretical debates about the evolution of society, the nature versus nurture discussion of human evolution, and the usefulness of science and the comparative method for discussing the process of globalization over time. After an overview of the major social and biological theories used to explain globalization, the authors describe the theoretical approach of institutional materialism that guides their work. This approach emphasizes the use of ideological constructions and technological advancements to deal with the demographic, ecological and economic challenges that confront societies. In short, their view is that globalization developed because (1) core states, those with the most economic and military power, have created ideologies to justify it; (2) growing populations have shortened the distances between different cultures, increasing cross-cultural interactions; and (3) technological advancements have eased the burden of transferring goods and information across the globe. The end result is that all states on the globe are now interconnected in one large world system.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book. However, there are some aspects of it that I think a good editor could have helped improved. First, while it does an excellent job describing the process of globalization and contextualizing it in a comparative world-systems approach, so much attention is given to outlining globalization’s development over time that less attention is accorded to its consequences comparatively. As a result, the text reads more as a history and chronology than a sociological examination of how globalization has affected human societies. That is not to say that the consequences of globalization are completely absent, but it is overshadowed by other topics and themes.

Second, the authors seem to get diverted on a number of tangents at various points in the book. For instance, the majority of chapter two is spent describing the evolution of primates. It’s a discussion not altogether irrelevant to the book’s argument, but the detail may be ponderous for undergraduates. Similarly, chapter sixteen devotes a great deal of space to describing the evolution of the social psychological processes that allowed humans to move from second- to third-order abstraction. Again, the idea is not irrelevant to the authors’ perspective, but the amount of space dedicated to its description seemed excessive to this reader. These pages could have been better spent by going more in-depth into the consequences of globalization or to tying the evidence provided in the chapters back to the theoretical perspective in which their argument is based. In fact, after the initial description of institutional materialism in the first chapter, the book rarely makes references back to this theory and never explains how this theory is tied to the evidence they provide.

A final observation is that I cannot imagine for what courses this text might be appropriate. The lack of attention paid to globalization’s consequences make it inappropriate as a primary text.
for a sociology of globalization course. The world-systems perspective and focus on states and nations would make it too specific for a course on social change, and there is not enough attention devoted to social movements to make the text appropriate for a collective behavior and social movements course.

Despite these observations, there was a lot to like about this book. It is beautifully written, which cannot be said of all textbooks. The writing is engaging and straightforward for an undergraduate audience, while also being appropriate for a graduate course. In addition, while the authors are writing from a sociological perspective, the first section of the book provides an adequate explanation of relevant sociological concepts, theories, and methods so that a student without a background in the field could easily follow the arguments presented.

What I most liked about this book was how successfully bridges were built between macro- and microlevel processes. It is no easy task to link Mead to Wallerstein, but the authors are able to do just that, and they do so in a very compelling and convincing manner. The authors devote a good deal of attention, and provide documentary evidence to support their argument of how the conceptualization of the self and the internal I-Me dialogue, is changed during each phase of social evolution. As societies transformed from hunter-gathers, to chiefdoms, to nation states, so did socialization processes, which changed how individuals viewed themselves in the world. In this sense, the text outlines how the macro processes of interactions among societies in world systems changed the social psychology of individual members of societies.

In short, while there were a few weaknesses in this text, I found the book to be very well-written and provide a very unique and compelling argument. While I may not choose this as a primary text for an undergraduate or graduate course, I think this book would make an excellent supplementary text for a globalization course.


Angelica Menchaca
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Until recently, we thought of undocumented immigrants as older men, worn down from a life of hard labor. That is until this stereotype was destroyed by the young immigrants demanding equality and acceptance from the country in which they were raised. These immigrants did not migrate to the United States. They were brought into the country as infants and children, and, now, are forced to live an exiled existence because the state denies them their basic rights. These immigrants are called the “DREAMers.” In his book, The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate, Nicholls documents their unique struggles as well as their efforts to reclaim their identity and future.

Nicholls attributes the birth of the movement to a demonstration in Senator John McCain’s office. Like the lunch counter protests, this demonstration served as a model—and acted as a catalyst—for subsequent demonstrations. More importantly, these youth-based mobilizations attracted the support of existing movement groups, which helped the DREAMers develop the discourse and strategies necessary to challenge the anti-immigrant sentiment dominating American public discourse. This was not an easy task. The DREAMers had to find what Nicholls calls “niche openings” to cast their cause (and themselves) in the glow of “American values,” which gained them empathy with the broader public and helped them build their political legitimacy.

An important aspect of Nicholls book is that he challenges common misconceptions regarding undocumented immigrants. For example, it is often assumed that undocumented immigrants lacked a “voice” as a consequence of their legal status. As a result, established pro-immigration organizations (at the local and the national level) quickly took over the proverbial podium in an effort to speak on the behalf of the undocumented. Nicholls convincingly shows that undocumented immigrants cannot only “speak” for themselves, but that they have the skills to do so. He points out that, like most other Americans, undocumented immigrants are well educated, articulate, and loud. More importantly, Nicholls reminds us that most of what we know about the DREAMers comes from mass media rather the personal experience—and reality is always more complex. There are no “good” and “bad” immigrants; only poorly constructed, archaic foreign policy.

Like other social movements, the DREAMers have faced their share of setbacks. Media misrepresentation, exploitation by other groups, and a failed Comprehensive Immigration Reform demonstration forced the DREAMers to reconsider their role in the immigration-rights movement and their political future. The DREAMers decided to reinvent themselves, narrow their focus, and act as an “autonomous group,” while maintaining links with their former allies. Specifically, the DREAMers pushed for the Dream Act to be
In American Fascism and the New Deal, Nelson Pichardo Almanzar and Brian Kulik relate the untold story of the Associated Farmers (AF), an elite organization created by industrial farming corporations in California during the Great Depression as part of a massive corporate reaction to labor unrest and New Deal policy. The book is organized around two questions. Was the AF fascist? Is fascism possible in the United States today? In addressing these questions, the authors make valuable theoretical contributions in a number of fields.

American Fascism offers a detailed history of the AF and its sociopolitical contexts. In the first half of the 1930s, the AF organized to suppress increasing unrest among migrant Mexican farm-workers responding to depressed wages and unemployment. The AF enlisted local lawmakers, police officers, swarms of deputized vigilantes, and the petty bourgeoisie in an effort to suppress labor activism with a variety of tactics which were often insidious or violent. In the later 1930s, political threats to big agriculture in California grew, Washington D.C. became increasingly favorable to workers, and agitated Dust Bowl refugees filled California. In response, the AF rededicated itself to expanding political influence and generating a broad social movement in defense of its interests. Despite thwarted attempts at national influence, big agriculture maintained regional political dominance, and elites were also able to shift mass opinion thanks in large part to the sympathetic Hearst media empire.

The authors’ underlying objective is to explore the possibility of fascism in America. Much of the book is therefore devoted to pinning down the notoriously slippery concept of fascism. Regrettably, a systematic, parsimonious, and stable definition never emerges, which muddies the driving inquiries of the book. Was the AF fascist? The authors note that, in contrast with the “classical fascism” of Europe, the AF did not emerge from the middle class, was not headed by a single charismatic leader, was not antiliberal (in the Lockeian sense), and did not move a government to fascism. Nonetheless, they argue that the movement spawned by the AF was “corporate fascism” because it engaged in efforts to bring the state under corporate control and because those efforts involved “othering” alien worker groups (Mexican immigrants and Dust Bowl refugees), propagating a “palingenetic myth” of a glorious (but nonexistent) past, suppressing democracy, and arranging vigilante violence. While this analysis is provocative, the concept of fascism ends up feeling overly flexible, and asking if the AF was fascist seems to beg the question.

Is there fascism in America today? The authors review several existing answers to this question, but do not explain how those answers relate to their own data and conclusions. In contradiction with two prior studies, they conclude that the U.S. government is not fascist. Then, after raising the possibility that the Tea Party movement may represent the re-emergence of a fascist movement, they conclude only that “the potential is certainly there” (p.173). While this book will serve as a useful introduction to the fascism literature, the clearer contribution is to theories of social movements and political sociology.

In the final chapter, Pichardo and Kulik successfully weave together threads of social movement theory, theories of the state, and theories of corporate behavior. First, they examine leading formulations of resource mobilization (RM) theory. RM posits that movements live and die by their resources and opportunities flowing down from more-or-less distant elites. However, the AF was organized and led by the elites themselves. The idea that elites will lead social movements—just as activists from below will lead social
movements—has not been thoroughly explored until now. The authors argue that the only major difference in elite-based movements and mass-based movements is their proximity to resources.

The authors then demonstrate that leading theories of the state also miss the role that corporate elites play in determining policy. They identify a number of key scenarios during the 1930s in which state-centric theorists have ignored the role of elites in modifying the impact that preexisting institutions have on policy development. Further, they demonstrate that institutions which already exist can behave very differently depending on the interests guiding the institutions at any given time. The key insight for both social movement theory and theories of the state is that we have much to gain by examining elite activism per se as the authors do with the AF.

To plug the gap, the authors draw on theories of corporate behavior in economics to provide a multistep model of activism among corporate elites. In situations such as the Great Depression or Great Recession, where mass unrest reduces the efficacy of one level of influence, elites escalate to the next. Each level requires more resources.

The first level consists of campaign contributions. These are routine and inexpensive. The second level involves the formation of collective associations for lobbying and shaping discourse. The third level involves the sponsoring of “astroturf” movements which are given a populist face but in fact work directly for elites. The fourth step entails forming actual mass-based movements. Finally, the fifth step involves the formation of a political party. In the rigidly two-party system of the U.S., this most likely will result from the takeover of an existing party.

With the given model, important questions arise. Where exactly does the Tea Party movement fit in, or for that matter, what about recent movements in Ukraine and Egypt? How might social movement theory from after the cultural turn help illuminate the critical link between elite instigation, corporate politics, and mass movements? How might the given model inform studies concerning neoliberalism or winner-take-all-politics? Overall, American Fascism raises many interesting questions and should be fertile ground for many theoretical developments involving elites’ roles in movements and politics.