One of the most important contributions of the Parsonian tradition has been its conceptualization of the relative autonomy and mutual interpenetration of culture and social systems. The first part of this chapter defines three ideal types of empirical relationships between culture and society: specification, refraction, and columnization. Each is related to different configurations of social structure and culture and, in turn, to different degrees of social conflict. The second part of the chapter uses this typology to illuminate critical aspects of the relationship between conflict and integration in the Watergate crisis in the U.S.

10

THREE MODELS OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY RELATIONS: TOWARD AN ANALYSIS OF WATERGATE

Jeffrey C. Alexander

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

The problem of the relation between systems theory and social conflict remains unresolved. Within conflict theory, the problem has unfortunately been linked to the emphasis of systems theory on the relative autonomy of ideas—that is, to its emphasis on the value segment in social systems. In part, systems theorists themselves are to blame for this false link between an emphasis on equilibrium and social values, since Parsons in particular—as well as theorists like Shils—tended to illustrate "analytically differentiated" social systems by referring to such societies as the United

I would like to thank Jeffrey Broadbent, Randall Collins, and an anonymous reader for their instructive readings of earlier drafts of this chapter.

States, in which there is an unusual amount of consensus within the differentiated value segment (Parsons, 1971). Parsons, moreover, often explicitly conflated (see note 1) the *analytical* problem of the relation between social system level and cultural system level with the *empirical* problem of consensus and the concrete structure of value systems (Parsons, 1971).

On the one hand, Parsons used the term *specification* in a very clear analytical way to argue that any social system configuration involved the application or utilization of cultural patterns that were necessarily more general than any particular institutional form of concrete behavior. The way concrete behavior utilized general forms inevitably involved a process of "specification." Social system behavior, in other words, always involved some cultural reference. Yet Parsons also applied the notion of specification to the actual empirical instance of a historical nation. He often portrayed the values of the political and social actors in the system as specifications of a common value system. Although this may indeed have been the historical fact, the use of the same term, *specification,* to cover both analytical and empirical instances is an illegitimate conflation of a particular historical situation with a general analytical point.[1] For even if a society contained competing general value systems and no common value system with which these were integrated, it would nonetheless be analytically correct to say that each of the political or social subgroups in conflict with one another derived its own specific form of values by a process of specification from the more general values of a cultural system. These more general values would, nonetheless, be antagonistic to other systems of values on the cultural level. Thus, in this kind of empirical case, analytical specification and empirical polarization and conflict are perfectly reconcilable. Conflict theory is wrong: Systems theory can both allow the autonomy of values and illuminate the instability of social systems.

Once we have understood the fundamental dangers and fallacies of this conflationary strand in Parsonian work we can develop a more satisfactory approach to the analysis of values in empirical social systems. I will try to demonstrate in this chapter that the seminal theoretical advances of functionalist theory in analyzing the relation between cultural and social systems can, in fact, help us to develop a theory of conflict in empirical historical systems.

Three Models of Culture/Society Interrelation

First, I will introduce an ideal-typical schema for analyzing the relation between values and social structure. Three models can describe the relation between conflict and consensus in advanced societies—models that refer to different relations between the social and the cultural system. The first model assumes harmony and consistency on both the cultural and the social levels. Particular functions and groups in the social system do "specify" cultural patterns in concretely different ways, but these diverse value groupings are not in conflict with one another in any sense beyond the immediate one of a division of labor. This model I will call "cultural specification."

The second model assumes that there are more fundamental conflicts on the social system level but sees the cultural system as still fairly integrated. In this model conflicting social groupings and functions can and do develop antagonistic subcultures, not just complementary cultural "specifications," but because these subcultures still draw on an integrated value system at the cultural level, there remains between these subcultures substantial if unacknowledged commonality. We might call this the model of "cultural refraction," following Evans-Pritchard's (1953) analyses of harmony and conflict among the Nuer. Why refraction? Because we can say that different interests have been refracted through the same cultural lens.

Finally, the third model I introduce describes fundamental antagonism in both social and cultural systems. Thus, rather than simply subcultural conflicts, genuinely antagonistic cultures emerge in a society, interest groupings that have no significant common beliefs. One might call this "cultural columnization" because interest groupings occur in hermetically sealed cultural columns, vertical spaces between which there is no horizontal integration.[2]

Examples of Specification, Columnization, and Refraction

In the recent literature in sociology, the prototypical account of cultural specification is Parsons and Platt's (1973) analysis of the relation of the cultural value of rationality to social sys-

tems. Parsons and Platt argue that there is a dominant cultural theme of rationality in American society and that this theme operates at a very general, cultural level. They suggest, further, that there are more specific, institutionalized versions of rational orientations in each of the four subsystems of society: economic rationality in the adaptive sector, political rationality in the polity, citizenship or solidary rationality in the integrative system, and value rationality in the pattern maintenance system.

Pluralist theorists, or theorists who emphasize the disintegrative aspects of modern life, such as those in the Frankfurt school, would portray these concrete institutionalizations of rationality as in fundamental conflict with one another, arguing, for example, that the economic rationality that emphasizes efficiency in the business world is totally antithetical to the cognitive rationality that inspires scientific truth in the world of the university. Parsons and Platt, by contrast, argue that although the systemic exigencies of such concrete institutions are certainly different, the cultural rationality that guides them is derived from a common "rationality" theme in the culture at large. They assume, moreover, that these social-system-level functions are not particularly antithetical—indeed, that they usually support one another through a process of complementary exchange. With neither functional nor cultural antipathies, then, the patterns of behavior motivated by economic rationality and political rationality are basically cooperative: There is no long-term basis for division or conflict. Such a model need not examine the detailed structure of subcultural traditions, for each more detailed tradition is principally derived from the roots and structures of a single more generalized cultural theme. Not surprisingly, therefore, for Parsons and Platt it is rationality itself that is the object of analysis. When problems of disequilibrium are analyzed, as they are in some detail, the issue of intersystemic conflicts is given rather short shrift, for such an analysis would lead to an emphasis on cultural refraction. Disequilibrium is analyzed, rather, in terms of the inadequacies in the generalized value pattern itself, in this case the overly instrumental aspects of contemporary Western rationality.

This analysis of *The American University* in terms of the specification model should not be taken as purely pejorative. To the contrary, it seems to me that in American culture instrumental

rationality is, in fact, a widely shared value, one that different institutions often merely specify in different ways without substantially challenging or refracting. In part this occurs because American society is, compared with others, functionally well integrated. This specification pattern also occurs because this particular value, rationality, is widely shared in American life. Despite this empirical applicability, however, one wonders whether Parsons and Platt may not have underemphasized the possibility that economic and political rationality form competing subcultures, or similarly, underplayed the conflict between ethical or value rationality and instrumental political expediency that Weber so profoundly articulated as the tension between the politics of responsibility and the politics of expediency and faith.[3]

The difficulties of such a pure specification perspective are most apparent when it is more directly applied to political mobilization and group conflict. The functionalist tradition has emphasized the significance of the cultural generalization that occurs during periods of intense political and social conflicts, when the anxiety produced by disequilibrium pushes significant elements of the population to focus on the most fundamental and simplified value concerns—that is, on the general cultural themes from which the society's specific institutionalized patterns have been derived. This analytical theory of generalization is a fundamentally important contribution, but insofar as it has been applied empirically only in the context of an insistence on cultural specification, it has been treated in a flawed and partial way. The flaw is apparent in the ease with which such generalization is assumed to proceed and, hence, the ease with which particular social crises are seen to be resolved. In Parsons and Smelser's (1956) account of the Progressive period in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, movements to reform the business structure are presented without sufficient attention to the fundamental social and cultural polarizations of the day. In Smelser's own first book (1959), the problem is much the same. The issue is not whether, as Smelser rightly insists, an activist Protestant culture is widely shared, but whether the competing economic groups during the early industrial period developed sharply divergent subcultures to express this common value. If such subcultural development took place, and I believe it did, then the process of cultural generaliza-

tion that Smelser describes could have occurred only under conditions that would have allowed the end of such subcultural conflict: either some kind of genuine reintegration—produced, for example, by the decline of group conflict or by ritual renewal—or the dominance of one subcultural position over another. In the particular English case, I suspect, there were elements of both.

At the opposite end of the continuum from such cultural specification is what I have called cultural columnization. The situation portrayed here could not be more different, for not only is a much more fundamental conflict on the social system level portrayed, but this conflict is seen as building on fundamentally divergent themes in the general national culture. Such columnization brings to mind, of course, societies subject to revolutionary upheaval from either the left or the right; indeed, my theory of columnization is, in part, an attempt to help illuminate such processes. In his *Ancien Régime* Tocqueville portrayed France as radically divided on the cultural level between a new tradition of critical rationality, carried by the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, and a culture of tradition, deference, and hierarchy, carried by the church and the aristocracy. These cultural groupings were presented as radically heterodox, as emerging from antagonistic cultural developments such as feudalism and the Enlightenment. They were, moreover, viewed as cultures that were specified by fundamentally conflicting institutional interests—estates whose economic and political positions were in fundamental functional antagonism. In this situation of columnization, it is clear, no common ground could be found. Raymond Aron's (1960) theory of modern functional elites as completely segmental and fragmenting can be seen as the contemporary French analogue to such earlier columnization theories. That Aron completely ignores the cultures of his elites demonstrates merely that they are, indeed, so columnized that they offer no integrative support.[4]

The extreme polarization of columnization most likely occurs in societies where traditional and modernizing cultures are carried by vigorous and contentious social groups. In Italy, for example, Robert Bellah (1980) has described "five civil religions," suggesting that the Italian cultural system contains sharply divergent traditions that extend all the way from a form of primitive naturalism to an ultrarationalistic Marxism. The case of pre-World War II

Germany has been more extensively documented. Guenther Roth (1963) has written about the "negative integration" of the German working class. It seems indisputable that in Germany the sharply antagonistic class groupings became organized around traditions that were felt to be radically antagonistic: The small radical intelligentsia and the large socialist working class followed a self-consciously rationalistic and modernizing Marxism, while the middle classes, state-supported intellectuals, and aristocracy followed a strong antimodern traditionalism fundamentally influenced by Lutheranism. Ernst Nolte (1966) has described the conservative side of this polarization as culturally "antitranscendent," a description that effectively portrays its radical antipathy to the Enlightenment tradition. It is no wonder that in such columnized situations the unified "generalization" so necessary for cultural and social reintegration in crisis situations can hardly ever occur. It is not simply that functional interests diverge, but that the anxiety that leads to value ritualization and to the urge for renewal occurs within the "column" of divergent cultural groupings rather than within some more general and widely shared cultural belief. Cultural celebrations in 1848 revolutionary France did occur, but they engaged a cultural heritage fundamentally at odds with the commitments of a significant, if not at that time dominant, segment of the French nation. Four years later, the ascension of Louis Bonaparte allowed generalization to occur in another cultural "column," that of tradition or at least the column of modernity very traditionally defined. The "two cultures" in a columnized society, then, provide ritual experiences that serve merely to reinforce the different faiths and interests of already polarized groups.[5]

For the middle case of cultural refraction, divergent social tasks and interests are portrayed as drawing on fundamentally similar cultural themes. It should not be surprising that the United States has been considered a prime example within which such refraction occurs. The famous dichotomy in American culture between "equality of opportunity," a theme that emphasizes equality in an individualistic way, and "equality of results," a theme that combines equality with more collectivist concerns, is a good example of such refraction. In this case the common cultural commitment to equality is accepted, while conservative and liberal groupings are described—for example, in the work of Lipset (1965)

—as refracting this commitment through the more individualistic or collectivist interests of different economic and political groups. The implication is that sharp conflicts do in fact occur in American society but that even such polarized groupings as conservative businesspersons and liberal trade unionists share a commitment to the value of equality, a shared commitment that allows for some ultimate consensus and cooperation. Louis Hartz (1955) has applied the same kind of refraction analysis to the value of individualism rather than equality. Arguing that the bedrock of all American ideology is the commitment to a Lockean emphasis on individual liberty and rights, he suggests that trade unionists and businesspersons, for example, merely offer interest-bound refractions of individualism in their purportedly radically different ideologies.[6] Similar arguments have, of course, been made for the conflict groupings of countries other than the United States. Jesse Pitts (1964), for example, has suggested that the sharply divergent themes of French society can be traced back to internally contradictory themes within Catholicism.

It should be clear that when cultural refraction is the model used for an empirical case, the opportunity for reintegration of cultural and social conflicts is presented in a more complex and open-ended way than for the two other ideal types. Because sharp subcultural conflicts exist, generalization to a shared common culture is by no means automatic, for powerful general themes do underlie the subcultures themselves, and these subcultural themes may become the object of polarizing ritual and generalization. Reintegration certainly is a possibility, however, for with refraction, in contrast to columnization, strong common themes do exist. Whether generalization will actually lead to convergence on these shared general cultural themes is a matter for particular analysis of specific empirical circumstances. Although close attention must be paid to divergent interests and to subcultural values, common commitments cannot be ignored. I will present some aspects of such an analysis in the discussion of the American Watergate crisis that follows.

Watergate: A Case Study in Refraction and Reintegration

Although every advanced industrial society experiences elements of specification, refraction, and columnization, the structural

and cultural characteristics of each national society incline it in one direction or another. For the United States, with the possible exception of racial conflicts today and the definite exception of sectional conflict before 1865, the refraction model seems most appropriate. American conflicts have been serious, but they have rarely produced ideologies that have seriously violated the consensual framework composed by America's principal cultural themes.

The Watergate crisis[7] must be placed into the context of social conflict in America in the 1960s. If we want to understand the situation in America in that time, we must recognize both the intensity of social system conflict and the areas of common perception. That is, what we have to recognize is the fundamental fact of refraction in American society in the sixties.

In its broad outlines, the decade of the sixties was a period of intense, modernizing social change. It was a period of rationalization and differentiation in every institutional sphere, in politics and education, family, law, religion, civic solidarity, and economic life. The reforms introduced in these spheres revolved around issues that might be called late modernization. They demanded and involved more equality, more participation, the expansion of the notion of the individual, and the rationalization and secularization of values. In sum, they revolved around a radical kind of universalism that created and unleashed pervasive criticism of all traditions and authority and that demanded continual change of self and institutions.

The groups that initiated these changes might be called vanguard modernists—middle-class, highly educated reformers, both whites and racial minorities, government planners, intellectuals and students, liberal church men and women, and selected professionals, for example, activist lawyers and teachers. These groups sometimes draped themselves in antimodernist garb, harking back to the *Gemeinschaft* and community, to the need for affectivity. Although these traditionalistic strands are not irrelevant, I think that, considered as a whole, the subcultural orientation of these groups presented a radicalized left-wing version of the mainstream of American political culture—namely, critical universalism tied in with activism.

Against this culture of critical rationality there emerged a backlash that was more of a departure from the dominant Ameri-

can civic tradition, although in no sense was it a complete repudiation. This backlash promoted the drastic reduction of universalism and transformative values. It promoted particularistic values such as loyalty to family, to race, to ethnicity, to the nation—in the form of excessive patriotism—and loyalty to the authorities that represented and ruled each of these diffuse collectivities. It was anti-intellectual and often explicitly and fundamentally, or rather fundamentalistically, religious. The backlash tended toward deference and obedience. Hence, it was termed the "silent majority," as opposed to the group that emphasized critique and dissent. It emphasized stability and order, not change.

Yet this broad outline of social division conceals common cross-cutting ties that remained salient sociologically even if they were not experientially salient to citizens of the day. The social changes so spectacular in the 1960s actually can be traced back to changes initiated in the late 1950s, the later years of the Eisenhower administration. The establishment of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, vigorous educational expansion and upgrading, religious ecumenicism, economic expansion and rationalization—all these initiatives commanded an extremely wide consensus. This social cohesion continued in the early 1960s, during which time the radical left and right continued to be marginal groups. This consensus broke down only gradually and in complicated ways.

The intensification of change in the 1960s created increasing polarization into right and left. The first phases of this division proceeded in a fairly straightforward, Hegelian way, with reformers grouped together under critical universalism and reactors grouped under more conservative, backlash particularism. Liberals moved leftward, renewing their emphasis on equality and remaining united in their support of political, integrative, educational, and religious change. Conservatives united around the backlash libertarianism of the Goldwater campaign. Modernizing groups championed equality and tied their critical position to universalism; conservative groups championed liberty and tied their defensive position to particularism. Both groups, all the same, embraced at a more general level certain common notions. Opinion polls of the 1960s show that support for inclusion and economic democracy expanded in every segment of the society. For the emerging left, indeed, equality did not seem to deny liberty; in fact, the left

often championed equality in the name of greater individual freedom. For the right, liberty was often seen merely as emphasizing a particular kind of equality, the equal rights of individuals to buy and sell and to be protected from government intrusion. The tension these commitments produced within both backlash and frontlash moralities are clear in retrospect, but they had not yet surfaced at the time.

This invisible, generalized common ground became concretely explicit in the later phases of 1960s polarization. During the period from 1966 to 1969 various forms of critical particularisms emerged within the modernizing movement, producing uncomfortable combinations of modernity and primordialism within the left itself. Racial separatism and color consciousness opposed norms of universal inclusion; the revolutionary culture of violence and confrontation produced significant strands of internal authoritarianism opposed to critical rationality; the diffuse affectivity of the counterculture counteracted the impersonal standards on which other strands of the modernizing movement were based. None of these developments, however, completely undermined the critical activism, inclusiveness, and universalism on which so much of the earlier liberal-left movement had depended. The black power movement still demanded equal rights; the militant student left mobilized its movements in the cause of critique; the hippies envisioned universal brotherhood and championed the autonomy of the individual at all costs.

Nonetheless, the lines of polarization had become significantly blurred. It was in the same period of 1966-1969, partly in response to this further leftward movement in the party of reform and partly in response to the changes that actually initiated it, that a distinctly more moderate segment of the liberal movement emerged. This more conservative group of *Commentary* liberals and politicians such as Moynihan vacillated between upholding the liberalism of the earlier phase and moving toward some accommodation with backlash values.

This splitting of the left was mirrored—indeed, directly related to—equally significant changes in the right. In the wake of Goldwater's defeat and increased leftist activism, the conservative movement became fissured into more and less radical forms of backlash antimodernism. In the later 1960s, an explicitly reaction-

ary strand emerged under the banner of nationalism and anticivility, calling for social order at all costs and the abandonment of constitutional protections for dissent. Other rightists stressed not simply antimodernist anxiety but the loss of liberty as well. This latter group sought to maintain its connection to the "center," forcing its backlash views into the mainstream. Its moderation allowed it to make growing alliances with the rightward-moving segment of liberal reformers, and the neoconservative movement was born.

This refracted character of the 1960s polarization is crucial for understanding the orientations out of which Watergate arose and the resources that allowed it eventually to be resolved. On the one hand, there was the fact of intensely polarized social groupings, the antagonism between particularistic backlash and vanguard modernist frontlash. Little conscious sense of commonality existed in the America of that day, and this climate of confrontation produced exclusionary and conspiratorial politics. Demands for total political control were encouraged, each side making efforts to silence the opposition. Sectarian politics became the order of the day, and this sectarian politics threatened the common normative of rules of the game, which often seemed threatened and about to give way. On the other hand, behind this polarization, I maintain, there was a less conscious backdrop of common culture, "modernist" commitments to forms of universalistic activism that were accepted without regard to the particular stands of any conflict group.

To see the relation between this political-cultural refraction and Watergate, we have to turn to Richard Nixon and the presidency. Nixon brought both strands of the backlash movement to power. He had always conceived of himself as a victim of social change and a champion of grass-roots movements against it. At the same time, he conceived of himself as a cosmopolitan, educated, enlightened figure, a modernist whose duty it was to control the lunatic fringe of the right wing as well as the left—so his slogan to build a "new American majority" was not a lie. His administration coopted and sponsored certain issues of the left, particularly environmentalism and to a lesser degree economic equality (welfare reform) and women's rights; it brought American troops home; it called for quiet in the streets and a renewed dedication to "tradi-

tional" forms of American activism, such as reform. This was the Nixon who gained support from the growing neoconservative movement and who put Moynihan in his cabinet.

It is true, nonetheless, that Nixon was also elected in 1968 as the factional leader of the backlash culture. He appealed to patriotism over dissent, tradition over modernity; he invoked paternalistic authority and attempted to wield it against the forces of change in the name of the nation, in the name of the family, and in the name of "the people." Drawing on the authoritarian resources of the American presidency, Nixon sought to push his "new American majority" in a backlash direction. He emphasized the pomp and circumstance of the office. He remained remote, inaccessible, and mysterious. He utilized the extraordinary instrumental power of secrecy and the powers of coercive control that were at his command. He tried to set in motion a movement of counterchange against the agencies, leaders, and ideas of vanguard liberalism. Spiro Agnew took the role of spear carrier in this, rallying "the folks" against "the cosmopolitans," initiating a sectarian politics that was unprecedented for the presidential center and connecting the powerful and factious behavior of the backlash movement to the personalistic, quasi-patrimonial form of presidential authority. The result was a presidency that often showed little regard for the abstract and generalized rules of the game that, according to a consensual model, govern conflict in the political system. It is not surprising that this combination of power and will led to a series of illegal and dangerous abuses of power.

The moderate and extreme dimensions of the Nixon presidency were by no means sharply demarcated. This was precisely its great danger. While more right-wing, anticivil elements could be pushed toward cooperation and reform, the support of more traditional movements often legitimated the administration's most anticivil trends.

Nixon and his staff began immediately in 1969 to try to control cosmopolitan and dissident enemies. They justified their actions—some of which were visible, others private and concealed —on the grounds that they were dealing with enemies outside the boundaries of civil society. These actions ranged from illegal arrests and extensive bugging of subversives to spying and provocation and to the infiltration even of their own eastern-educated

staffs, and, finally, to extensive institutional maneuvers to restrain liberal institutions and their elites—for example, the news media. It is important to understand that such illegal tactics received at least passive consent from the silent majority that they helped to shape. There was a more general moral code to justify these actions: The president's illegal, conspiratorial tactics were justified in terms of the conservative subculture. The "refraction" made liberals and radicals into an "other" with whom, Nixon's supporters believed, they had little in common.

The break into the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in the summer of 1972 was simply one part of this overall activity. McGovern was the symbol of aggressive modernization and radical change, not only for Nixon but for the silent majority itself, and it was McGovern and his potential supporters who were the objects of the Watergate break-in. It was for this very reason—the refracted atmosphere of the time and the legitimation it gave to activities like the break-in—that Watergate received scant attention and generated little outrage at the time. There were no cries of outraged justice. There was the acceptance of Nixon's rationales, respect for his authority, belief that his version of the facts was correct despite strong evidence to the contrary. With important exceptions, the media did not even pick up the story, not because they were coerced not to do so, but because they subjectively felt it to be an unimportant story. Even after a long, hot election, 80 percent of the American people found Watergate hard to believe; 75 percent felt it was just plain politics; 84 percent said that what they had heard had not influenced them.

Two years later, it was generally agreed, this same incident, still called "Watergate," had initiated the most serious institutional crisis in American history. It had become a riveting moral symbol that was responsible for the first resignation by a president.

How and why did this perception of Watergate change? To understand this, we must first see what this extraordinary contrast in these two public perceptions indicates—namely, that "Watergate" in itself was nothing. It was a mere fact, and contrary to the positivist persuasion, facts do not speak. Watergate could not, as the French might say, tell itself. It had to be told by society; it was, to use Durkheim's famous phrase, a social fact.

To understand how this telling of a crucial social fact changed, I must introduce a notion that was implicit in my earlier discussion of generalization—namely, that there are different levels at which every social fact can be told. These levels are linked to different kinds of social resources, and the focus on one level or another can tell us much about whether a system is in crisis, is in a period of great conflict, or is operating routinely and in equilibrium. Here I draw on Parsons.

First and most specific is the level of goals. Political life occurs most of the time on this relatively mundane level of goals, power, and interest. Above this, as it were, at a higher level of generality, are norms—the conventions, customs, and morals that regulate this political process and struggle. At a still higher point there are values: those aspects of the culture that inform the codes which regulate political authority and the norms within which specific interests are resolved. When politics operates routinely, the conscious attention of political participants is on goals and interests; that is, it is relatively specific attention. Routine politics means, in fact, that these interests do not seem to violate more general values and norms. Nonroutine politics occurs when tension between these levels is felt—either because of the shift in the nature of political activity or because of a shift in the general commitments that are held to regulate it. In this situation, a tension between goals and higher levels develops. Public attention shifts from political goals to more general concerns, to the norms and values that are now perceived as in danger. In this instance we can say there has been the generalization of public consciousness I referred to earlier in this chapter.

It is in light of this analysis that we can understand the shift in the telling of Watergate. It was first viewed merely as something on the level of goals, "just politics," by 75 percent. Why? Because it was legitimated by the general values of each political subculture. The silent majority felt that such behavior was justified by the times. The left thought it merely confirmed their own views on the politics of the right. For both groups, therefore, the event remained simply political because it was compared only to the refracted subcultural expectations, not to the broader universalism and constitutionalism that, unacknowledged, remained hidden beneath these polarized beliefs and that would have viewed Watergate in a more critical way.

Two years after the break-in, in summer 1974, public opinion had changed sharply. From purely political goals Watergate was now regarded as an issue that violated fundamental customs and morals, and eventually—by 50 percent of the voters—as a challenge to fundamental values, the fundamental values that sustained political order itself. By the end, almost half of those who had voted for Nixon had changed their minds. Two thirds of all voters thought the issue had now gone far beyond politics. What had happened was a radical "generalization" of opinion. The known facts were not very different, but the social context in which they were seen had been transformed.

In the two-year transformation of the context of Watergate, we see the creation and resolution of a fundamental social crisis, an extraordinary generalization of opinion vis-à-vis a political threat that was initiated by the very center of established power, and the successful struggle not just against that social power but against the powerful cultural rationales it mobilized. We see, in other words, a movement beyond cultural refraction to genuine reintegration and renewal. On what does such a successful process of crisis creation and resolution depend? Let me lay these factors out generally, and then I will discuss briefly how each became involved in the instance of Watergate.

First, sufficient consensus must exist so that the label of deviant can be applied to the disequilibrating event. If this occurs, the event will disturb more than a mere fragment of the population; to this extent, "society" itself is aroused and indignant.

Second, significant groups in this emerging consensus must perceive that the event threatens the "center" of society.

Third, institutional social controls must be invoked or operationalized. These further legitimate attacks on the source of this disequilibrium—which is presented throughout as somewhat frightening and powerful—and these controls also begin to mobilize force and the threat of force to bring it to heal.

Fourth, elites and publics that are differentiated and relatively autonomous from the structural center of society must be drawn into the struggle. "Countercenters" must be formed.

Finally, there must be effective processes of symbolic interpretation—that is, ritual and pollution processes that continue the labeling process and enforce the strength of the symbolic center of society at the expense of the now deviant structural center. In so

doing, such processes not only demonstrate conclusively the deviant qualities that are the sources of this threat, but they constitute social control processes that help to correct them.

In briefly elaborating how each of these five factors came into play in the course of Watergate, I will be illuminating how cultural refraction provides the possibility of reintegration, a reintegration that, far from being automatic, relies on the contingent outcomes of particular historical circumstances.

First, the factor of consensus. Between the Watergate break-in and the election, the necessary consensus did not occur. This continued to be a time of intense polarization politically, although the social conflicts of the sixties had begun to cool. McGovern was the very symbol of vanguard modernism on which Nixon built the backlash elements of his presidency. McGovern's continued presence allowed Nixon to continue to promote these politics and to continue to keep his moderate/conservative coalition together. It was because of this continued dissensus—the continued refraction—that the process of generalization could not take place. There could be no movement upward toward shared general values; because there was no generalization, there could be no societal sense of crisis; because there was no sense of crisis, it became impossible for the other forces I have mentioned to come into play. There was no perception of the threat to the center. There was no mobilization of social control, for those who exercised social control were afraid to act. There was no struggle by differentiated elites against the threat to and by the center—they were divided, afraid, and immobilized. Certainly, there were no deep symbolic processes emerging, for these would respond only to tensions generated by the first four factors.

Yet during the six months following the election, the situation began to be reversed. First, consensus did begin to emerge. The end of an intensely divided election period allowed the realignment that had been building since the late sixties to continue; once McGovern was eliminated, the more centrist elements of Nixon's presidency were not nearly so eager to align themselves with the extreme right. Yet this movement was itself part of a larger development that had been building since at least two years before Watergate. The social struggles of the sixties had long been over. Left groups had largely disappeared from public view. Social change

had decelerated, and reactive movements had less of an immediate base. Critical universalism could now be readopted by centrist forces without its being linked to the specific ideological themes or goals of the left. With this emerging consensus the refraction of common politics into abrasive, distinctive subcultures began to dissipate. The possibility for a common feeling of normative violation emerged, and with it began the movement toward generalization vis-à-vis the Watergate events. Once this first resource of crisis creation and renewal had become available, the other developments could be activated.

What of the second factor, perception of threat to the center? With the new public redefinition and generalization processes beginning, anxiety about the threat that Watergate posed to the center began to frighten significant publics and elites. The question about proximity to the center preoccupied every major group during this early postelection Watergate period. "How much did the president know, and when did he know it?" became the telling phrase of the day. This anxiety about the threat to the center, in turn, only intensified the ongoing sense of normative violation; it increased consensus and contributed to generalization.

The third factor concerns the bringing into play of institutional social control. The developments during the early postelection months provided a much more congenial, legitimate atmosphere for the operation of social controls. I am thinking here of the activity of the courts, the justice department, various bureaucratic agencies, and special congressional committees. These social control institutions, in turn, legitimated the growing public feeling that Watergate was in fact a serious crime. They also forced more facts to surface. Of course, the ultimate level of generality and Watergate's final relationship to the center still remained undetermined.

The fourth factor is elite conflict. The generalization process I described, pushed by consensus, by fear of the center, and by the activity of new institutions of social control, was during the postelection period fueled by desire for revenge against Nixon by alienated institutional elites. Most functional elites were on the side of reform, and insofar as Nixon had supported the particularism of the radical right, he had done battle against them. During the postelection period, these elites constituted themselves as

countercenters—professional associations such as the American Bar Association, newspaper reporters, intellectuals, universities, liberal religionists, many corporate figures, and last but not least, authorities in various public agencies who represented the modernists whom Nixon had earlier moved against.

By May of 1973, then, all these forces for crisis creation and resolution were in motion. Significant changes in public opinion had been mobilized, and powerful structural resources were being brought into play. It is only at this point that the fifth crisis factor emerged—namely, the deep processes of symbolic patterning, particularly ritual and pollution/cleansing processes, although there had certainly been important symbolic developments all along.

The first fundamental ritual event of the Watergate crisis occurred in May of 1973, the Senate Select Committee's televised hearings. This event had tremendous repercussions on the symbolic patterning of the entire affair. The decision to hold and to televise the Senate Select Committee hearings responded to the tremendous anxiety that had built up within important segments of the population. The symbolic process that ensued functioned to channel this anxiety in certain distinctive and more consensual symbolic directions. The hearings constituted a kind of civic ritual that revived very general yet crucial currents of critical universalism in the American political culture. Through television, tens of millions participated symbolically and emotionally in the deliberations. Viewing became obligatory for many. Old routines were broken, new ones formed. What these viewers saw was a highly simplified drama—heroes and villains formed in due course. But this drama created a deeply serious symbolic occasion. It re-created a generalized morality by evoking the mythic level of national understanding in a way that few other televised events have.

The senators who were the "stars" of the Watergate hearings managed to isolate and condemn the backlash values that had motivated and legitimated Watergate. They coupled a strategy of "bracketing" the 1960s with a ringing and unabashed affirmation of the universalistic myth that is the backbone of the American civic religion. Through their questions, statements, references, gestures, and metaphors, the senators maintained that every American, high or low, rich or poor, acts virtuously in terms of the pure universalism of the civic republican tradition. Nobody is selfish or

inhumane. No American is concerned with money or power at the expense of fair play. No team loyalty is so strong that it violates the common good or neutralizes the critical attitude toward authority that is the basis of the democratic society.

The senators' questioning of administration witnesses focused on three main themes, each fundamental to the moral anchoring of a civic democratic society. First, they emphasized the absolute priority of office obligations over personal ones: "This is a nation of laws, not of men." Second, they emphasized the embeddedness of such office obligations in a higher transcendent authority: "The laws of men" must give way to the "laws of God." Or as Sam Ervin put it to Maurice Stans, "Which is more important, not violating laws or not violating ethics?" Finally, the senators insisted that this transcendental anchoring of interest conflict allowed America to be a true *Gemeinschaft,* in Hegel's term, a true "concrete universal." As Lowell Weicker said in a famous statement: "Republicans don't bug, Republicans don't cheat. They regard their fellow Americans as people to be loved and not as enemies."

The hearings ended without laws or specific judgments of evidence, but they nevertheless had profound effects. They established the framework that would henceforth give Watergate its meaning. They accomplished this by organizing the actual political events of the Watergate episode in terms of the higher antitheses between the sacred and profane elements of American civic religion. The hearings resacralized the Constitution, laws of fairness, and solidarity. They profaned sectarianism, self-interest, and particularism, and with these profaned elements they aligned Richard Nixon, his staff, and backlash values in general. The presidential party and the elements of civic sacredness had now become antithetical to each other, so antithetical that the American public now found them more and more difficult to bring together. It was this symbolic patterning, along with the other pressures I have described, that eventually drove Nixon from office one year later.

That Watergate did not prevent conservatism, after four short years of respite, from continuing its relentless assault on liberal reform misses the meaning of that fateful crisis entirely. Even the best of societies will move back and forth between left and right, change and reaction. The decisive question is not whether

but how. Will the polarization produced by social change be so severely divisive that conflict is transformed into antidemocratic civil war? This has, indeed, been the fate of most modern and modernizing nations. Why it has not been so for the United States —as yet—is a cause for study. The place to begin such a study, I have suggested, is Watergate. That Reaganism sometimes feels drawn to anticivil extremism is clear from the morning newspaper. That, for now, fairly strict limits are set against this inclination is also manifest. These limits reside not only in "structure" but in the minds of men and women; they represent values that in crises are reproduced, extended, and internalized in turn. That Reaganism is democratic conservatism is thanks to Watergate.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a rather esoteric theoretical problem and concluded with a detailed case study of a gaudy and famous political scandal. My point has been, first, that social system conflict cannot be analyzed without reference to deeply felt social values, and, second, that the relation between such values and social integration can by no means be easily understood. I have offered three ideal-typical models of this relation, each of which presents different possibilities for reintegration in social crisis. I have tried to indicate, with this concluding analysis of Watergate, not only some of the empirical details that such models imply but, further, the more specific social processes on which the institutionalization of specification, refraction, and columnization depend.

Perhaps I may conclude on a more general note. The last two decades have witnessed a massive assault on functionalist theory. Much of this criticism was richly deserved; much of it also was misguided. Those who would wish to reclaim the most important contributions of that functionalist tradition are faced with a choice. They can focus on the undeserved and misguided elements of the critique, drawing further into themselves and developing a rigid orthodoxy, or they can learn from the accurate criticisms, developing a more flexible and sensitive variation of functionalist analysis. The latter path leads toward a neofunctionalism, and it is based on a combination of critique and inclusion. Conflict theory,

neo-Marxism, interactionism, phenomenology—all make significant contributions. Yet functionalism, broadly defined as continuous with the traditions of Durkheim and Weber, still remains the most viable general sociological theory. It is the only theory that, at its best, can be fully multidimensional, combining individual voluntarism with structural determinism. It is the only theory that promises to successfully interweave value and force. Neofunctionalism must demonstrate that this general framework places no a priori limitations on the actual structure of any society. Conflict must be analyzed as successfully as change. The question, once again, is not whether but how.

Notes

1. "Conflation" is a concept I developed (Alexander, 1982) to explain the very common tendency to eliminate the relative autonomy of different levels of theoretical commitment. The discussion here takes off from a general criticism I made of Parsons (Alexander, 1983, particularly chaps. 6-7), that Parsons often cross-cut his differentiated understanding of order with a more "reduced" and conflated one, in which three relatively autonomous aspects of order are viewed as synonymous: presuppositional order in the sense of nonrandomness, model order in the sense of systematicity, and empirical order in the sense of cooperation and harmony.

2. It can be argued, if only on logical grounds, that there is a fourth ideal type, one in which social system integration is maintained despite cultural conflict. This combination is often implicit in the sociological literature on modern societies, for though formally acknowledging the cultural level, it makes this level actually impotent: Social life can proceed its merry way no matter what the condition of "culture." Among the classical theorists, Simmel's theorizing about conflict and the network of plural associations would seem to support this view, yet even Simmel makes residual reference to culturally integrative "forms" and "concepts" —for example, the "rules of the game" whose presence distinguishes competition from more brutal conflict. In contemporary discussions, the "politics of accommodation" evinced by Dutch society (Lijphart, 1974) would seem to be another such case. I be-

lieve, however, that this fourth possibility is a logical illusion, sociologically unfounded. If social system processes bring people together in cooperative ways, they either draw on earlier cultural commonality or will soon produce some. The literature on the Dutch case, for example, contains frequent references to Dutch nationalism, to shared material values and democratic ethos (Coleman, 1978). Whether this process issues in refraction or columnization remains an empirical question. Even societies in which there is columnization, of course, can be stable given a temporary balance of forces (see, for example, Rex's, 1961, discussion of the "truce situation").

3. Schluchter (1979), for example, writes about these as the "paradoxes" of rationalization produced by differentiation rather than as specifications. His Weberianization of Parsons's theory adds another dimension to it. Still, the notion of paradox should not entirely replace specification; this would reintroduce the type of atomism of which Parsons rightly complained. "Specification" must be retained as an *analytical* concept, even while its empirical application is limited. Even value "paradoxes" are specified, in this analytical sense.

4. For a good contrast between columnization and specification theory, one might compare Aron's analysis with the cultural emphasis of Suzanne Keller's (1963) theory of functional elites, which argues that they carry out complementary functions of the same general culture.

5. By the time of his second book (1963), Smelser had already realized this important fact, for he acknowledges that a significant element of revolutionary movements is their production of widely divergent value patterns. Although Smelser ascribes this value divergence primarily to structural rigidity, it should be linked to cultural as well as structural arrangements.

6. For an extremely acute discussion of American conservative ideology as a variation on individualism, see Nakano (1981).

7. The following analysis draws from an ongoing research project I am conducting on Watergate, including examination of the complete news reports from 1972-1974, review of the televised hearings, review of the extant secondary literature, analysis of the links between 1960s movements and Watergate, study of elite relations to the presidency during the Nixon era, and quanti-

tative analysis of public opinion between 1972 and 1974. The research has been supported by the Guggenheim, Ford, Markle, and Sage foundations (and conducted, in part, at the Vanderbilt Television Archives in Nashville, Tenn.) and by grants from the UCLA faculty senate. To document the generalizations offered here would require a great deal more space than this chapter provides. For this reason, the facts must be offered in terms of their "plausibility" in light of the theoretical considerations presented.

References

ALEXANDER, JEFFREY C.

1982 *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*. Vol. 1: *Positivism, Presuppositions, and Current Controversies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1983 *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*. Vol. 4: *The Modern Reconstruction of Classical Thought: Talcott Parsons*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

ARON, RAYMOND

1960 "Social Class, Political Class, Ruling Class." *European Journal of Sociology* 1:260-281.

BELLAH, ROBERT N.

1980 "The Five Religions of Italy." In Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. New York: Harper & Row.

COLEMAN, JOHN A.

1978 *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958-1974*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E.

1953 "The Nuer Concept of the Spirit in Its Relation to the Social Order." *American Anthropologist* 55:201-241.

HARTZ, LOUIS

1955 *The Liberal Tradition in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

KELLER, SUZANNE

1963 *Beyond the Ruling Class*. New York: Random House.

LIJPHART, AREND

1974 *The Politics of Accommodation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

LIPSET, SEYMOUR MARTIN
1965 *The First New Nation.* New York: Basic Books.
NAKANO, HIDEICHIRO
1981 "Conservatism as a Political Ideology in Contemporary America." *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Bulletin* 30:95-108.
NOLTE, ERNST
1966 *The Three Faces of Fascism.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
PARSONS, TALCOTT
1968 "On the Concept of Value-Commitments." In Talcott Parsons, *Politics and Social Structure.* New York: Free Press.
1971 *The System of Modern Societies.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
PARSONS, TALCOTT, AND PLATT, G. M.
1973 *The American University.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
PARSONS, TALCOTT, AND SMELSER, NEIL J.
1956 *Economy and Society: A Study in the Integration of Economic and Social Theory.* New York: Free Press.
PITTS, JESSE
1964 "Continuity and Change in Bourgeois France." In Stanley Hoffman (Ed.), *In Search of France.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
REX, JOHN
1961 *Key Problems in Sociological Theory.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
ROTH, GUENTHER
1963 *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany.* New York: Bedminster Press.
SCHLUCHTER, WOLFGANG
1979 "The Paradoxes of Rationalization." In Wolfgang Schluchter and Guenther Roth, *Max Weber's Vision of History.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
SMELSER, NEIL J.
1959 *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution: An Application of Theory to the British Cotton Industry.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1963 *Theory of Collective Behavior.* New York: Free Press.