POP Struggle!

Repression and Dissent in American

Film, Comics and Graphic Novels

Christian Davenport

The Universe is made of stories, not atoms.

> Murial Rukeyser

For reasons that lie deep in childhood learning, cultural immersion, or perhaps even in the structure of human brains, people usually recount, analyze, judge, remember, and reorganize social experiences as *standard stories* in which a small number of self-motivated entities interact within constricted, contiguous time and space. (Unfortunately) stories fail dramatically to provide viable explanations, indeed demand explanation in their turn.

> Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identity and Political Change*

Stories are more than dramas people tell or read. Story, as a pattern, is a powerful way of organizing and sharing individual experience and exploring and co-creating shared realities.

> The Co-Intelligence Institute

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Introduction

Despite numerous signs, I was incredibly slow getting to the current book. The first emerged from a class that taught several years ago called "Saving the World or Wasting Time? Understanding the Importance of Social Movements." It all started innocently enough. After about two weeks of lectures and a little discussion, I asked for someone to give me an example of a successful social movement. Upon asking the question, there was a long kind of delay that you often get in an undergraduate classroom. It wasn't quite as bad as the scene in (the classic) *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* with the teacher slowly and deliberately calling the students names one at a time, but it wasn't that far off from that. After a while, there was some activity in the back of the room. One of the slightly scruffy looking male students had raised their hand. It wasn't really enthusiastic, fully extended raise. Rather, it was a partial raise, tentative toe in the water so to speak. To this, I jumped at the opportunity to move the discussion forward and asked him what he thought. The student started off quietly, but I could not hear. I asked him to repeat what he said so that we could all hear it and to what he said, "you mean like Neo and Morpheus in the Matrix?"

Hearing this, I had to pause for a second. Part of me wanted to "correct" the student and tell them that I was talking about the "real world" and wanted something like the Gandhian independence movement in India, the American civil rights movement or the Chinese revolution under Mao. Something held me back however. I had learned something from teaching. Rather than impose my view about where I wanted to go and what I wanted to hear, I allowed this to be something of a reverse teaching moment where the students would guide me to where they wanted, were prepared and/or needed to go. "Hmmmmmm," I said. "Neo and Morpheus, huh? What was the name of their movement?" The student that answered the initial question seemed puzzled and looked to the others in the class to

help him. They in turn looked to each other and then back to me. "The movement had no name," some woman in the front of the class mentioned somewhat unsure. "It was still a movement though," she added quickly. I agreed and from that moment forward we discussed what made Neo, Morpheus, Trinity and the others a "movement" (trying to bring about change) and what made Mr. Smith, the agents and the other machines a government (trying to counter/eliminate the change-making efforts as well as the change-makers themselves). We then discussed what counted as dissent (i.e., behavior to undermine/overthrow the status quo) and what counted as repression (i.e., behavior to protect the status quo).

The two sides of mobilized and active political incompatibility (i.e., challengers and governments) rely upon force as well as coercion outside of mainstream politics. Different labels in the literature such as contentious politics, political conflict and internal war refer to the actions associated with these actors. These break down even further, by side. For example, referring to the government's behavior there is genocide, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, protest policing, human rights violation, negative sanctions, civil liberties restriction and domestic spying. Referring to challenger behavior there is revolution, civil war, insurgency, terrorism, protest, dissent and everyday forms of resistance.

The actors and the actions are as familiar to those of us within nation-states as any aspect of governance itself. Political contention is nothing less than the domestic battle for control and/or influence over the modern nation-state as each side/actor engages in behavior to defeat the opponent and/or move the citizenry caught between them to their side/objective. These are as familiar as elections, speeches and tax day. In fact, contentious activities are probably more frequently experienced than national elections and they are as important to the nation state as its borders. To Kautilya, Sun Tsu, Hobbes and Weber – some of the most prominent political

thinkers ever, the actions and actors define politics itself.

The second sign emerged by accident – also relevant to teaching and film (interestingly).
I was to teach a course on conflict processes and my book order at the University where I was at
the time was lost. I initially was going to do something off the web but could not find any
webpages that contained enough of what I wanted on the subject. I then sat back in my home,
wondering what material I could utilize for the class when I looked over at my movie collection
and realized that most of them concerned contentious politics. Utilizing film I thought would
allow me to discuss the topic (identifying actors, actions and diverse themes) but do it in a
relatively unique way and in a manner that might be more engaging for students. I was not
disappointed. After initially struggling with the idea of what repression and dissent were as well
as discussing possible sequences of challenger-state interaction, the students were immediately
captivated by the idea of discussing Robin Hood, Star Wars, Fight Club and the Matrix alongside
historically famous revolutions and genocides. Additionally, they each had examples (i.e., new
films) that they would discuss – there were always new ones.

Despite these great experiences, however, I was not quite sold on the topic until I came
across my old X-Men collection of comics while moving apartments. This was my third sign.
Like many individuals, as a child I was an avid collector and reader. The X-Men I found
especially entertaining and, indeed, the only reason I stopped reading them was because at a
certain point in the 1980s you simply had to buy too many different series in order to keep up
with any one of them. As I flipped through the old collection, I began to remember how much I
loved the story: a politically persecuted group of gifted individuals (i.e., mutants) attempted to
figure out how they could live in the world they found themselves in – a world where they were
viewed as different and outcasts. There were differences in approaches. One group decided to

fit in with the humans and use their gifts/powers to help humanity – this was the group associated with Professor X and the group was called the X-Men. Another group decided to live apart from the humans and/or to rule over them using their superior powers. This group was led by Magneto and the group associated with him was known by different names. Meanwhile, to defend themselves from the mutants, the humans engaged in a variety of different activities – some quite nasty like torture. When they found mutants, they would do even worse things like genocide.

At the time I was reading I did not know what repression or rebellion/resistance were but the story was nevertheless compelling. I also did not really start to think about what was in these comics in a deeper sense until I read some interview by Stan Lee (the Marvel comics co-creator) when he commented that Professor X's character was based on Martin Luther King Jr. and by association the X-Men were the Civil Rights movement whereas Magneto's character was based on Malcolm X and by association his group would be associated with the Black Nationalist movement. This awareness led me to do a class on comics and contention, which prompted an even greater number of insights as frequent visitation to comic stores and the comic library at Michigan State University brought me in contact with a large variety of comics but also graphic novels – longer, more serious but self-contained comics.

These experiences were useful in different ways. First, they revealed that contentious politics was pervasive in American popular culture. Second, the classes revealed that the students were aware of the basic principles of repression and resistance/rebellion but not exactly as I and other scholars typically thought about the topic. Third, it revealed that individuals not explicitly researching or advocating for one of the sides could be very interested in topics relevant to political contention. Fourth, it revealed that popular culture (film and comics in the

context of the classes) could be an important vehicle for identifying as well as examining "real" socio-political phenomenon and that the students were quite engaged with such a critical reading of the elements of the culture that surrounded them. Fifth, it was fun. How many times does one get to discuss film, graphic novels, comics, revolution, counter-terrorism, genocide and mass detention at the same time and how many times are both teacher as well as students equally engaged? I had gotten used to leaving part of my brain in my office or home as I dealt with the students, going over material that I had gone over hundreds of times before. As I had not really spoken about pop culture in my work previously, only among friends (either after a movie, a comic or graphic novel and outside of a few pieces on black superheroes and what this told us about black-white relations in the US), this was new territory and quite interesting. Indeed, for years I had searched for my voice as a writer – somewhere between what was academic but also popularly accessible. This topic seemed to provide that opportunity.

Although treading on new ground (introducing a new genre in popular culture), the book here can find its lineage in studies of political contention/conflict/violence as well as media studies which have systematically attempted to investigate how repression and behavioral challenges are covered in newspapers, newswires, government records and human rights reports as well as more recently tweets and crowd-sourced material. This research is very much interested in understanding what is covered in these sources and why (e.g., who did what to whom, where, when and occasionally why). The things being examined within this work are "real" events or conditions.

Relatively few of these works, however, are interested in explicitly examining how coverage in the different sources (i.e., stories about contention) influences our general understanding of repression and behavioral challenges; in conventional wisdom, the sources

represent events – real events – and that is what we are interested in, not stories. Such portrayals of government/repression and challengers/challenges in the sources above are deemed crucial in numerous ways. Coverage cannot influence what those uninvolved in the conflict do in the future. For example, if governments were believed to start the conflict, with repression, then this could lead to great sympathy for the challengers and decrease support for political authorities. In contrast, if challengers were believed to start the conflict with terrorism, then this would lead to greater sympathy for the government and decrease support for challengers. Coverage may not only influence the immediate participants within a conflict but they may impact the broader audience that bears witness to these interactions, potentially influencing what they do then or later as their norms/values are shaped by what they take in. Finally, related to the last point, as the material of popular culture becomes the substance of research and history, it can set the record as well as institutionalize (mis)understanding and/or hatred for some time to come influencing later generations as well as other cultures that come after it.

But this jumps a little further ahead than this book intends to go (i.e., studying the impacts of what is contained within pop culture). For now, we will content ourselves with an investigation of what stories are/are not told. Additionally, we explore stories of contention that are not even trying to be based on fact as these are the works with the greatest circulation and hence impact on the relevant society.

To begin to appreciate and comprehend the political contention genre as portrayed in popular culture we will first have to discuss what is involved when we talk about the topic. This is done below.

Understanding State Repression and Political Dissent

What is involved when challengers and governments square off against one another? Essentially, there are five elements that are worthy of attention with regard to identifying the genre proposed in this book: actions, perpetrators, victims/targets, objectives and outcomes. Each will be addressed in turn below but a more thorough discussion is found in chapter 1.

Actions. Historically, researchers have reviewed repression in a highly fragmented fashion. Some focus on only extremely violent behavior (e.g., one-sided violence, human rights violation or torture), some focus on the only behavior that responds to some overt challenge (e.g., protest–policing, counter-terrorism/insurgency) or some focus on the only nonviolent behavior (e.g., domestic spying). I believe this practice has hindered our ability to understand topics like escalation, de-escalation and tactical variation. In an effort to counter this limitation, my conceptualization of repression is purposefully inclusive. As I have said in earlier work (Davenport 2007: 2-3):

> By most accounts, repression involves the actual or threatened use of physical
> sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction
> of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring
> specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government
> personnel, practices or institutions (Goldstein 1978, p. xxvii). Like other forms of
> coercion, repressive behavior relies on threats and intimidation to compel targets,
> but it does not concern itself with all coercive applications (e.g., deterrence of
> violent crime and theft). Rather, it deals with applications of state power that
> violate First Amendment–type rights, due process in the enforcement and
> adjudication of law, and personal integrity or security. First Amendment–type

rights include (Goldstein 1978, pp. xxx–xxxi):

Freedom of speech, assembly, and travel. Freedom of the press up to a very narrowly defined "clear and present danger" point, regardless of the views communicated.

Freedom of association and belief without governmental reprisal, obloquy, or investigation unless clearly connected with possible violations of existing laws. The general freedom to boycott, peacefully picket, or strike without suffering criminal or civil penalties.

Due process transgressions involve violations of "generally accepted standards of police action and judicial and administrative behavior related to the political beliefs of the person involved" (Goldstein 1978, p. xxxi). In contrast, personal integrity rights are those concerned with individual survival and security, such as freedom from torture, "disappearance," imprisonment, extrajudicial execution, and mass killing.

This said, not everything that governments do are included in political repression. For example,

the definition does not consider the deleterious after-effects of particular structural characteristics experienced over long periods of time, such as the inequitable distribution of resources (Galtung's "structural violence"). The definition does not consider what are referred to as second-generation (economic, social, and cultural privileges) and third-generation rights (the right to peace and a clean

environment). The definition does not specify that a behavioral threat must exist, as in the case of "protest policing" (e.g., Earl 2003), nor does it specify that a law or norm must be violated, like with regard to "human rights violations" (e.g., Poe & Tate 1994). The definition does not specify the particular ends to which repressive action is put, nor how successfully authorities achieve the (diverse) objectives.[1]

Such an approach is useful because it helps us comprehend alternative government tactics (the "repertoire of control" used by political authorities). For example, if governments engage in mass killing without any provocation from those targeted, then this seems extremely vicious. Mass killing his historically viewed as less vicious however if there is some threat that one can see – like "states of emergency" at the national level. Similar governments who beat up or kill citizens without provocation are viewed one way. If the violent government is responding to a direct threat to their existence or identity however the same behavior could be viewed as justified.

This approach unifies the eclectic field of state repression, compelling isolated scholars to consider the broader literature relevant to the topic of interest. As a result, people that are interested in courts that issue coercive rulings will have to focus on the military that engages in mass killing; people that focus on the police that engage in protest policing will have to focus on militias that engage in counter-insurgency; and, those focused on legislatures that enact repressive legislation and will have to also consider the secret police that engage in eavesdropping as well as targeted assassination. Such an approach will also allow us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our theoretical explanations as they will or will not work across different types of repressive behavior.

Conceived in this manner, the approach identified above involves a wide range of

activity: domestic spying, torture, mass arrests, mass detention, instances of censorship, political bans, disappearances and mass killings. These have generally fallen under an equally wide range of labels: negative sanctions, human rights violations, personal integrity violations, state terror, state repression, state coercion, political repression, state repression, coercive capacity and political restrictions. Interestingly though, the labels have hidden the fact that the same actions are involved. Thus state repression concerns mass arrests as well as mass killing; human rights violations, personal integrity violation and state terror all consider torture, disappearances as well as mass killing; negative sanctions and political restrictions involve censorship, political bans as well as limitations placed on speech, association and assembly.

Considering activities undertaken against governments (behavioral challenges), my position is again encompassing. Here, I include overt challenges along with more covert behavior. Additionally, I include violent activity and relatively nonviolent action. Deviating from most literature, this brings together revolutions, insurgency, terrorism, strikes, boycotts and socalled "everyday forms of resistance" like slowdowns, talk backs as well as sabotage.

Similar to literature and state repression, this approach is useful because it helps bring together alternative tactics adopted by challengers–what Charles Tilly referred to as "repertoires" of contention. Within this framework, one could explore how why and when challengers moved from nonviolent and violent tactics or vice versa–a topic that is just beginning to be explored rigorously. Unlike repression however the idea of her repertoire has been around and used for quite some time with regard to nonstate conflict. This is largely explained by the extensive interest the subject garners from those within the academy as well as those in government. Although more advanced in comparison to the literature on government course of behavior, the research here still has a way to go. One can still find research that focuses exclusively on clinical

percent, insurgency or terrorism without considering any of the others.

I would suggest that for both sides the full repertoire needs to be considered. For the same theories, data sources, estimation strategies and findings appear to underlie all of them.

Perpetrators. Following the discussion above I adopt a rather encompassing view of the actors involved in contentious politics. This varies somewhat by which side of the interaction one is considering.

For example on the state sides, one has the police (federal, state and local), the military, secret service, the intelligence community, the National Guard, militias and death squads. These vary by how explicit the connection is with central political authority. Clearly, it is often to the benefit of political leadership to disassociate themselves from specific repressive behavior that might be considered too violent or illegitimate. This is normally where death squads and militias become useful. For other activities, however, the government wishes to take direct credit for as it tends to read force their position and legitimacy. The furthest extreme from a uniform agent of the government would be someone that looks and acts just like any other citizen. Here there is still some additional variation. Some (like a citizen's watch) can overly work and associate themselves directly with governments. Some (like a confidential informant) may hide their complicity with governments.

Things look roughly similar on the Challenger side except for the fact that many challenging institutions do not even have uniforms. Again, you have actors arrayed with their explicit association with the charging institution. On one extreme you have the hard-core participant; you have the occasional dissident; you have an individual that provides moral and/or financial support but does not directly engage in any activity explicitly; and you have one that is sympathetic but does not actually do anything; as one of the strategies of challengers is to make

the detection of their members difficult many attempt to blend in with the rest of the citizenry. This also communicates to authorities that anyone could be a challenger.

Victims/Targets. These actors involve a large number of individuals, varying by who one is discussing as the perpetrator. Challengers, in their struggle against governments, can target the whole continuum from uniformed authorities to plains-clothed regular looking but supportive citizens. Similarly, government can target the whole continuum from uniformed behavioral challengers to plains-clothed regular citizens who support the relevant anti-government campaign. In addition to this non-affiliation can be targeted as well. Indeed, this is where some confusion exists because there are overlaps with those members of the government and challengers who are without recognizable paraphernalia. Clearly, this is zone of overlap with un-uniformed population will be an important dimension of how characterizations of contentious politics in popular culture differ.

Objectives. As conceived, there are various reasons for political contention. These vary significantly across sides of the conflict because of the positions that they hold. On the government side, political authorities are generally interested in sustaining the status quo. This involves monitoring people who could challenge relevant institutions, personnel and policies to prevent them from pushing forward such challengers, constraining people to limit their ability to challenge or eliminating people to remove them completely. Occasionally governments are interested in shifting political, economic and/or social life in a particular direction. Interestingly, the same three techniques can be used to these ends: monitoring, constraining and/or eliminating.

In contrast, challengers have somewhat different objectives. Largely being on the outside of ruling circles and privelege, challengers are interested in having their voices/claims heard and reforming the status quo by having their voices/claims adopted or removing the existing political

leadership and/or institutionalization used by them to govern. Some also wish to dramatically transform social or political life – creating a new order entirely.

Outcomes. With all of the elements in place and after all the actions have been undertaken, we then come to the outcomes of conflict/contention. These are fairly straightforward in that the state "wins" (stays in power), the challenger's win (i.e., get a voice, some reform or assume power) or there is some form of stalemate when neither actor gets what they deserve – at least not completely. The path to the relevant outcome is a bit less straight forward. Indeed, there is a dynamic interaction between governments and challengers that serve as the essential component of contentious politics.

As conceived, typically one actor starts the conflict (i.e., they initiate coercive action) and then the other responds. Origins (i.e., who started it) are not always clear. Sometimes it may be the government exclusively, sometimes it may be challengers and sometimes it may be both acting at the same time.

Of course, the path of conflict (i.e., how governments and challenges go at one another over time and place) can vary significantly; or, at least, it should. The conflict (the contentious back and forth between governments and challengers) can go on for quite some time. Indeed, some conflicts require multiple episodes spanning over decades before things are resolved in some manner (leading to the outcomes discussed above). By this, I mean that across episodes of contentious behavior, repressive agents/challengers eat away/deplete each sides personnel, resources and mass support until something breaks or bends politically – for governments, challengers or both.

With these components in mind (i.e., actions, perpetrators, victims, objectives and outcomes) the story of contention is told. This I discuss further below.

A New(ish) Genre in American Popular Culture: Political Contention

The main premise of this book is that there is an unacknowledged genre of popular culture called "political contention". Now, genres are generally quite easily identified and understood. This is in part how we understand that there is a genre: these are quite well known as well as readily recognizable to individuals from the relevant society and perhaps across them. For example, consider the components involved in the American Western. Almost anyone in the US, West in general as well as numerous other countries as well know that these include cowboy hats, horses, open skies, guns and holsters were occasionally a rifle, as the bar were routing individuals go, a barbershop, a brothel (which may or may not be connected to the bar), a hardware store or local supermarket where individuals come into town to get their provisions and, of course, the sheriff's office where justice is delivered (or not). While these started in short written serials they were made even more popular with their depictions in movies and comics. Interestingly, this may be known even if someone has not physically seen one communicated through casual conversation, informal discussion or formal instruction. This is not the only one. There is the war film (i.e., dueling nation-states, armed to the teeth, individual stories of soldiers before, after and during war set against a backdrop of collective hostilities which occasionally reveal the impact of conflict or the civilian population. There's the gangster film. Here, there are down on your luck guys and gals (unable to save any doe [money]), a knowledgeable and earnest criminal just looking for a break but seemingly unable to go fully straight, the hooker with a heart of gold who offers comic relief and a little shoulder for the lead to lay on, a bar where one acquires hooch (liquor), some greed, a quick finger on the machine gun getting an occasionally turf war.

What is the political contention genre involve? Well, diverse combinations of the elements above give us the range of topics covered. Specifically, I identify five possible

storylines.

For example, in *So You Want a Revolution*, one finds a non-repressive, peaceful state being attacked by a disruptive challenger interested in imposing some kind of change. The government responds and the contentious interaction goes on for some time with governments enacting repression and challengers enacting dissent/rebellion/terrorism before the challenger emerges victorious. In *Big Brother Rules*, government's initiate repressive behavior against a helpless population, some resistance to this effort from a challenger emerges but after a while (i.e., after the contentious back and forth) the government vanquishes the challenger/challenge and reimposes its rule. This is quite different from *Internal War* or *Hobbes Hell*. Here, it is not quite clear who has started the contentious interaction and the story begins in a situation of overt hostility with both sides engaging in activity. This dynamic continues for quite some time but inevitably one side gains the advantage and emerges victorious. When governments win this it is called "law and order" or counter-activity as in counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency or protest policing; when challengers win this it is called "revolution". In the *Government Strikes Back*, the challenger that has initiated the conflict is soundly defeated. In this context, the threat of change from challengers prompt the authorities to marshal its forces and do what is necessary to defeat the challengers. Within the *Rebel's Backlash*, the dynamic is reversed where the government that has initiated the conflict is soundly defeated. Here, the imposition of repression prompts those in the citizenry to come together and throw out the repressive actors/institutions. In short, coercion arouses the passions of the repressed who inevitably remove the ones who attacked them.

Table 1: General Characteristics of the Political Contention Genre

	Who Starts it?	Who wins?	Who is the most important actor in the story?	Interesting spins
So You Want a Revolution	The challenger	The challenger	The challenger	The challengers are divided amongst themselves
Big Brother Rules	The government	The government	The government	The challengers are divided amongst themselves
Internal War or Hobbes Hell	Not clear	The government or the challenger	The government and the challenger	The conflict goes back and forth with seemingly no clear winner for a while
Government Strikes Back	The challenger	The government	The government	The government almost looks like they are going to lose but they pull it off in the end
Rebel's Backlash	The government	The challenger	The challenger	The challengers almost looks like they are going to lose but they pull it off in the end

Despite these basic parameters, it is possible to see some variation in pop struggle. For example, the more complex the story, the greater the amount of back and forth one might have

with occasionally challengers or governments seemingly looking like they have the advantage tactically. Everything can turn however with defeat/victory in a specific battle, the development of a new/unexpected weapon or some new information about an opponents vulnerability. Indeed, this is the stuff of great storytelling.

Now although pop struggle is concerned with political activities, it also has implications for who governs and has influence, what policies are pursued and in what manner decisions are made, not all actors are discussed at the same level of detail. While academic literature is focused on groups and nations, popular culture in the US is largely focused upon or at least finds its strongest resonance with individuals. Accordingly, one must understand how individuals relate to the others creating collective political contention. For this, I offer a simple 3 x 3 table (below) which will allow us to follow basic storylines. Additionally, this allows us to make an interesting comparisons across from pieces work.

Table 2: Basic Political Contention Model

	Government	Citizens/Civilians	Challengers
Individual	1	4	7
Group	2	5	8
Society	3	6	9

As one goes from top to bottom along the left side of the figure, they see the level of analysis for a specific story (i.e., the particular unit of observation that is being highlighted in a particular piece).

We begin with the individual – this would be a single character (e.g., Neo in the Matrix film, Jesus in the Greatest Story Ever Told film or @ in Maus the graphic novel). Moving down,

we have the group (i.e., an organization such as the "merry men" in the film Robin Hood or the X-Men in the comic as well as movies associated with it). Below this, one has the society. This is essentially the collection of all individuals and groups within a specific territorial jurisdiction (e.g., the United States in the film Malcolm X, Zimbabwe or China). These are generally alluded to within popular struggle stories with images of the masses.

As one goes from left to right along the top, we have the different "sides" of the conflict. The first column concerns the "government", including the political authorities (i.e., the president and legislature), the security apparatus (i.e., the military, police, secret service, intelligence, state militia and national guard) and the court system. Accordingly, the cell labeled 1 concerns an individual government agent/action (e.g., Darth Vader in the Star Wars movie or @ in the graphic novel Nil); the 2nd cell concerns a group affiliated with/employed by political authorities (e.g., continuing with the Star Wars theme, a unit within the Stormtrooper Corp [the 501st Legion] or the whole Stormtrooper Core itself); and, the 3rd cell refers to the nation or largest aggregation (e.g., the Empire).

The second column involves the citizen, civilians or noncombatants. Following the discussion above, and using Stat Wars as the primary referent, cell 4 concerns an individual citizen (e.g., Luke Skywalker in Episode IV before his Jedi training and incorporation into the the Order); cell 5 involves a collection of de/non-politicized citizens (e.g., Luke's family on Tatooine – Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru Lars); and, 6 concerns all de/non-politicized citizens (e.g., all subjects of the Empire not in the resistance or working for the Empire).

Finally, the third column involves challengers. Here, cell 7 concerns an individual challenger (e.g., Princess Leia); cell 8 refers to a group of challengers (e.g., an individual subsection of the resistance); and, cell 9 represents all challengers throughout the relevant

territorial unit (e.g., the full Alliance against the Empire).

I use the table above to assist me in deciphering Pop Struggle stories. Using a B to identify where a conflict in the relevant story under discussion begins, numbers (starting with 1) to identify the progression of the story in terms of each sides "turns" of note and an E to identify where a conflict ends (i.e., who wins), we can provide basic illustrations. For example, imagine that a government represses an individual, non-aligned/politicized citizen (noted with a B in the table below) and desiring to respond to this behavior the citizen move to join a social movement (1). The engagement with the challengers invariably leads to incorporation into the challenging institution as well as some dissident behavior (2) and after some time of going back and forth with government (3, 4 and 5 highlighting the initiator of the actor), the challengers inevitably win (noted with an E).

Table 3: Basic Political Contention Model – Example 1

	Government	Citizens/Civilians	Challengers
Individual		B	1
Group	3, 5		2, 4, E
Society			

In another story, some challenging behavior (like a terrorist bombing [B]) leads an individual citizen (1) to become a member of the government agency (2). The lead, now agent of political authority, engages in repressive behavior (3) and after some back and forth with challengers (4 and 5) the government emerges victorious over the challengers (E).

Table 4: Basic Political Contention Model – Example 2

	Government	Citizens/Civilians	Challengers
Individual	2	1	
Group	3, 5, E		B, 4
Society			

In another story, an individual citizen joins the government for seemingly no reason connected to political contention (B). In the employ of political authorities, the actor engages in repressive behavior against a citizen (1) and because of what the government official experiences they decide to change sides (2), joining the challengers against the government (3). There is some back and forth (4, 5 and 6) but unfortunately for the lead character, the government ends up victorious, the challengers go into hiding and political authority exert even more control over the society writ large (E).

Table 5: Basic Political Contention Model – Example 3

	Government	Citizens/Civilians	Challengers
Individual	B	1	2
Group	4, 6		3, 5
Society	E		

Now, what I have done above is strip away a great amount of the stories and storytelling involved – focusing them as it were on the bare essential of what goes on. So, for example, in my approach the love story in Star Wars (between Luke and Leia initially but later Han Solo and

Leia) is irrelevant to the struggle between the Empire and the Rebels. Similarly, the technological sophistication of the Matrix is irrelevant to the struggle between Neo/Morpheus/Oracle's group and the machines. There are a great many layers that one could place atop stories of popular struggle – this is indeed one of the ways to make the stories more interesting. Regardless, the key defining aspect of the genre and the focus of the book is on challenger-government interaction.

As one can imagine, the variation in the number of stories that could be created is theoretically quite varied. With relationships starting in different cells, moving through the various categories (at different rates and paces as well as with relatively diverse endings), there are a great number of stories that could be told. Notice that I use the word "could" – the use here is significant. I will argue that in reality what has actually been produced within existing films, comics and graphic novels in the United States (at present the most prolific creator and distributor of the genre to billions of individuals around the world), has very limited variation. Indeed, I maintain that there has been essentially one powerful recurring story that has emerged from the American context that can be seen throughout popular culture as well as throughout time. This will be discussed below.

What is Uniquely American about American Characterizations of Pop Struggle?
Within this book, I maintain that US characterizations of political repression and dissent generally follow the ***Rebel's Backlash***. Here, governments use repression part of the citizenry gets upset/enraged and some of them take up arms against them, there is a contentious back-and-forth as agents of change and the agents of the status quo do battle with one another, but in the end the challengers win! Across film, comics and graphic novels as well as across time, this is

the story that one finds repeatedly, leaving this as THE tale of contention told in/by America. As a result, the current book not only makes the claim that the Pop Struggle genre exists but that in the US case it is also myopic in its portrayal.

In large part this narrative is influenced by the meta-frame of political contention that exists in the United States (as discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2). American producers of Pop Struggle simply envision a world where the persecuted rise up to be victorious – eventually. Briefly, they believe that subject to repression, people rise up and justice will be done resulting in the repressed winning.

The history of this orientation goes back to the early Christian movement with the Romans persecuted Christ and his burgeoning religious movement (@). This movement, this belief and political organization was repressed with a barrage of tactics – bans, censorship, raids, agents provocateur, informants, torture and execution. Through perseverance as well as some luck, however, the movement was eventually able to grow and spread their message throughout the world – winning as it were.

Much later, as we are told in American history classes, persecuted masses in Europe fled to the British colonies in order to enjoy diverse freedoms – escape being a form of success in and of itself. Persecuted by excessive taxation and diverse political restrictions, American colonists fought a successful war of independence – celebrated yearly.

This general discourse continues in an interesting way with resistance against slavery and its dissolution following the Civil War as well as eventual inclusion of woman's suffrage after a relatively protracted campaign. Perhaps one of the best and most notable manifestations of the Rebel's Backlash was the successful struggle of the American civil rights movement which formally ended the most obvious forms of discrimination levied against African-Americans (the

second major appearance of this group in US history). Some have argued that the crowning achievement of this latter effort was the inauguration of Pres. Barack Obama.

Above is a somewhat brief as well as sweeping claim about the story of repression and dissent in American popular culture but regardless I would argue that the American message from the 1900s has been clear: those who suffer injustice and treated in a discriminatory as well as violent manner from those in political authority will eventually get justice by vangquishing those who coerced/wronged them.

Now, clearly many have and will continue to rail against this general narrative are doing that diverse abuses and inequalities still persist. There are discussions about disproportionate pleasing, incarceration of blacks as well as discussion of the gender gap which are very much in opposition to the narrative outlined above. Nevertheless, the American story of repression and dissent (i.e., POP struggle) exists and I will argue that his immense popularity across diverse media.

Outline

Within this book, I will begin with a somewhat more detailed discussion of what repression and dissent is. Following this, I will discuss the American penchant for believing in overcoming injustice as a general phenomenon reflected in public opinion, psychology but then specifically in the context of contentious politics.

Throughout the next chapter, I will demonstrate the existence of the Rebels Backlash through a detailed examination of three important and distinct but also mutually reinforcing media within mass popular culture: film (chapter 2), comics (chapter 3) and graphic novels (chapter 4). I was led to these three aspects of popular culture because of a deep personal

interest in them but also because of their continued importance throughout American as well as now global culture. While I believe the argument put forward is generalizable, I do not attempt to establish this here. Rather, I attempt to take an initial step and illustrate the existence of the political contention genre and the American version of it through detailed examples within each media. Specifically, I take what amounts to being some of the most popular examples within the medium of interest and juxtapose them against some of the least well known to reveal the pervasiveness of the theme identified.

For example, with regards to film (chaper 3), I will discuss several popular movies in detail: e.g., The Greatest Story Ever Told, Robin Hood, Planet of the Apes, Star Wars, The Matrix and Fight Club. These were not only crucial for establishing the genre but they figuratively and literally serve as the core storytellers around what latter follows within the genre are drawn from. I will also briefly discuss some films that are generally less familiar but which offer interesting spins on the basic themes: e.g., Running on Empty, Matewan, The Village, Antz, Happy Feet and Closet Land. With regards to comics (chapter 4), I will discuss the more familiar X-Men and Marvel's Civil War, The Authority and DMZ along with the less familiar The Invisibles, Rebels, Imperium and Fight Club 2. In order to address more or less completed stories, I have focused on either specific story arcs that have reached a/some conclusion or those depicted in a mini-series. With regard to graphic novels (chapter 5), I will discuss the more familiar Maus and Palestine along with the less familiar Nil and the Filth. By design, graphic novels are self-contained and thus the problem with comics is not faced here. All discussions are accompanied with lists of other relevant examples placed in an appendix.

In the 6th chapter, I consider comics and graphic novels that have become films (what I refer to as contentious "Hybrids") in order to demonstrate how the narrative of contentious shifts

across media. This includes Persepolis, V for Vendetta, Waltzing with Bashir and the most popular of them all The X-Men. In each, I will discuss the actors involved (i.e., the perpetrators and victims/targets), the actions, the objectives, the dynamic interactions as well as the outcomes. Again, additional examples are placed in an appendix.

Within the concluding chapter, I consider what is not displayed in American popular struggles and how other cultures appear to differ. Focusing initially on film, I discuss the Battle of Algiers, the Legends of Rita, the Lives of Others and Pan's Labyrinth. I also consider a few graphic novels, including (@) and (@). The book ends with what amounts to a new research agenda whereby other elements of American POP Struggle are noted in particular as well as the broader parameters of this genre more comparatively. Finally, I consider some of the implications of what the American version of POP Struggle means for US perceptions of state-dissident interactions and the possibilities of social change – ending with a question with which I began: how might POP struggle matter?

1. States vs. Challengers, Repression vs. Dissent

On a fundamental level, governments have been pitted against those within their territorial jurisdiction since their very creation. This tension emerged because political authorities attempt to maintain the monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion (e.g., Weber @; Hobbes @). In short, they attempt to hold the largest number as well as the most lethal weapons in the nation-state and be the ones that maintain the right to use them against those under their charge, whenever they deem this necessary. While there a great many labels used for what governments do with their coercive powers (e.g., policing, execution, negative/political sanctions, civil liberties restriction, domestic spying, protest policing, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and human rights violations [torture, disappearances, mass killing]) to establish and maintain this position domestically, this is commonly referred to as (state/political) *repression*. The tension with citizens also emerged because governments attempt to either: 1) create specific political, social or economic distributions, practice as well as policies and 2) protect specific political, social or economic distributions, practice as well as policies.

Despite the realization that political authorities generally seem to have the monopoly they wish to claim, not all individuals within the relevant territory have completely gone along with this and given up on trying to challenge the status quo. Indeed, human history has revealed that all citizens/subjects rarely accept such a situation. In these situations of disagreement, groups directly confront the relevant government with the use of diverse coercive techniques (e.g., everyday resistance, protest, terrorism, insurgency and revolution). commonly referred to as (political) *dissent*. These activities are undertaken to create alternative political, economic and sociological distribution or to modify existing ones.

The joint consideration of the two activities identified above (repression and dissent) is commonly referred to as *contentious politics* – the dynamic, behavioral elements of the

contestation that take place between those who attempt to establish and maintain a given socio-political order (political authority) and those who attempt to reform, disrupt or overthrow it (behavioral challengers).[2]

In this chapter, I will lay out the basic parameters of contentious politics. First, I will discuss the tactics applied by each of the actors involved, how the two relate to one another, how these have been studied historically (i.e., what sources and methods have been used) as well as what we know about the relevant phenomenon. Second, we move to discuss why one would want to consider coverage of state-challenger interactions in popular culture or why I focus on the particular aspects of pop culture highlighted in this book in particular (i.e., film, comics and graphic novels).

Understanding Contentious Politics

Tilly (2000: 122) maintains that contentious politics refers to

> *episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.* Roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle. Contentious politics excludes individual patron-client relations, everyday operation of bureaucracies, ordinary compliance with legal procedures, uncontested transfer of resources (e.g. taxes, personal information, and military manpower) to governmental agencies, and routine implementation of governmental programs. Yet it includes a significant share of public politics in all sorts of regimes.

Although researchers have paid attention to many elements of this interaction, it is the behavior of challengers and governments that have merited the most attention: i.e., dissent and repression. Each will be discussed below.

What is dissent? Essentially, there a multitude of definitions provided in the literature, but like repression there is a strong coherence around a commonly understood core. For example, Charles Tilly maintains that contention involves non-government actor collectively articulating a grievance against some actor (generally a government). Nearly four decades later, Sarah Soule and her colleagues maintain that the subject of interest includes "any type of activity that involves more than one person and is carried out with the explicit purpose of articulating a grievance against (or expressing support for) a target" (also generally a government). These are nearly identical in language if not sentiment, revealing a strong degree of consistency over time.

The elements of the concept under discussion are clear as well. As conceived, there are interests: i.e., the desired gains resulting from group interaction with other groups (e.g., reduced inequality, the institutionalization of political democracy or socialism and reduced coercion). There is the *organization* (the social movement institution itself), including the mandate, the division of labor, form (e.g., cells or an upside down pyramid), membership and leadership within the relevant structures involved. There is *mobilization*: i.e., the process by which the relevant organization acquires the resources needed for action as well as how they are used for collective action. There is *opportunity*: the perceived opening for exactly when the organization interacts with the world around it. And, finally, there is *collective action* which involves the outcomes (i.e., the events) that the relevant organizations engage in as they pursue their objectives.

The range of different activities/tactics/techniques falling under this category are quite large. While generally unified on the definition of the concept, the contention literature tends to divide itself by the specific activities that challengers engage in.

For example, there is *everyday resistance*, which includes

> foot-dragging (slow downs), dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threats, and so on. These techniques, for the most part quite prosaic, are the ordinary means of class struggle. They are the techniques of "first resort" in those common historical circumstances in which open defiance is impossible or entails mortal danger. When they are widely practiced by members of an entire class against elites or the state, they may have aggregate consequences all out of proportion to their banality when considered singly (Scott 1989: 17)[3]

These are employed in an effort to reduce visibility of the act and the costs incurred by them so that they may attempt to disrupt the normal functioning of diverse socio-economic political grievances and somewhat covertly communicate their displeasure in order to either gain supporters among those that have not yet selected a side or convince those with power to acquiesce to their desires.

There is *protest* which involves rallies, demonstrations, marches, vigils, picketing, civil disobedience, ceremonial events, motorcades, dramaturgical demonstrations, symbolic displays, riots, mob violence, and attacks. These are among the most popularly thought of/discussed if one were to ask about what contention is. The relevant events may occur either individually or in tandem.

There is terrorism which can defined as

> asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means
>
> that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some
>
> current regime (Tilly 2004: 5).[4]

Similar to everyday resistance, these activities are undertaken in an effort to decrease the costs

incurred by participants but rather than simply hindering functionality of an existing social,

economic and/or political system these also attempt to terrorize observers in their attempts to

achieve objectives.

And, finally, by far the most (in)famous of all, there is revolution. According to perhaps

the most knowledgeable scholar on the topic (e.g., Goldstone @), there have been numerous

attempts at defining the phenomenon of interest. Most center on some form of rapid, large-scale

transformation that takes place in the political, economic and/or social system involving some

form of contentious activity – often violent but not exclusively so (e.g., Goldstone @: 142).

Where differences emerge is with regard to who is directly responsible for the change. For

example, earlier theoretical accounts tended to highlight specific classes and/or structural

characteristics (e.g., Moore @; Huntington @; Skocpol @). Later work highlighted multiclass

coalitions (e.g., Dix 1984: Liu 1988; Goodwin 1989; Farhi 1990; Parsa 2000), mass unrest with

seemingly no class orientation (e.g., Banac 1992; Dunlop 1993; Obershall 1994a; Urban et al.

1997; Beissinger 1998) as well as religious/other identities (e.g., Keddie 1981; Arjomand 1988;

Moghadam 1989; Ahady 1991; Moaddel 1993; Foran 1993a). Different from the techniques

noted above, however, revolutions are enacted in an effort to dramatically transform political,

economic and social relations. While similarly tied to a willingness to use violence like that

found in terrorism, this tactic emerges from a major position of strength and a desire not to

influence but to displace/remove.

What is repression? Similar to the discussion regarding behavioral challenges, there have been a variety of definitions put forward over time to identify this phenomenon. By far, the broadest and one of the earliest definitions put forward is again offered by Tilly (1978). He suggests that repressive behavior includes all factors that increase the cost of collective action, making it more difficult for individuals to come together, articulate a grievance, mobilize resources and train as well as explicitly engage in claimsmaking. Although conceived broadly as it could presumably include anything and everything that raises costs, however, practically this has only been focused on a few government activities.

Trying to rein the discussion in a bit – both conceptually and operationally, Goldstein (1978: xvi) defines repression as "government action which grossly discriminates against persons or organizations viewed as presenting a fundamental challenge to existing power relationships or key government policies, because of their perceived political beliefs". This is somewhat broad as well but not nearly as inclusive as Tilly's conception. In particular, the tends to focus on applications of state power that violate First Amendment–type rights (i.e., speech, assembly, association and travel), due process in the enforcement and adjudication of law (i.e., "generally accepted standards of police action and judicial and administrative behavior related to the political beliefs of the person involved" [Goldstein 1978, p. xxxi]), and personal integrity or security (i.e., those rights concerned with individual survival and security, such as freedom from torture, disappearance," imprisonment, extrajudicial execution, and mass killing).

Earl has a somewhat different take (2003). Within this work, she retains the general conception regarding costs outlined by Tilly and the explicit political interest regarding state actors of Goldstein but extends it to include actors less tightly connected to government agents,

less observable behavior and non-coercive activity such as "channeling" (i.e., directing challengers into pre-existing, legally sanctioned institutions/behaviors) or officially regulating socio-political behavior through the law.

With this as background, the concept again gravitates around a central core of relevant activities. Again, this involves several components. There are the *interests*: i.e., the desired gains resulting from government action (e.g., continued inequality, the existence of relevant political institutions or reduced behavioral challenge). There is the *organization* (the security apparatus including the military, police, intelligence, immigration, border, prison, militas/death squads), including the mandate, the division of labor, form, membership and leadership within the relevant structures involved. There is *mobilization*: i.e., the process by which the relevant security apparatus acquires the resources needed for action as well as how they are used for coercive action. There is *opportunity* for how the organization interacts with the world around it. And, finally, there is *collective action* which includes the events that the relevant organization engages in as they pursue their objectives.

With this conception, the list of relevant activities associated with it is again quite extensive. For example, there are *wiretaps/bugs* (monitoring devices), which are employed in effort to identify and monitor targets, discourse and actual behavior. Such information is used to guide/direct other forms of repressive action (e.g., torture or raids) as well as generate information that can be used to build political cases against the targets or pursue them criminally. There are *informants*, which like bugs are used to identify and monitor individuals, thoughts and activities. Informants are human and thus provide certain advantages (e.g., the ability to verbally probe a particular line of questioning) whereas wiretaps are electronic which provides other advantages (e.g., perfect recall). Obviously being human also comes with some limitations (e.g.,

recollection and greed). *Agents provocateur* are used in order to provoke the target to engage in illegal activities so that relevant authorities can "legally" repress the challengers. *Censorship* involves restricting the expression of a target whereas a *curfew* restricts movement within the designated space. *Banning* is when the target's existence and/or behavior is classified as illegal which restricts diverse aspects of the target: i.e., assembly, association, speech, activity and so forth.

More overtly aggressive, *arrests* involve the physical act of grabbing and restricting movement of a target as well as a likely consequence of incarceration -- yet another repressive act. Individuals *beaten* but not arrested could be subject to a variety of more aggressive/violent techniques including mace, teasers and choke-holds. *Torture* involves intentionally inflicted pain or suffering for the purpose of collecting information or intimidation undertaken by a political authority. *Disappearances* involve targets being physically abducted by state agents or affiliates. More recently work has focused on *targeted assassination* or leadership decapitation which is when a target (individual or several individuals) is killed with a general interest in making the death public so as to induce fear/terror in a "viewing" audience (like with terrorism). Targeted assassination because it occurs after some process of adjudication which may or may not be seen as legitimate and/or sincere. If the behavior takes place outside of such a process, the action must be considered an instance of *extrajudicial execution*. Finally, the most lethal, discussed and criticized form of repressive behavior involves the *mass killing* of targets, which includes categories of violence/labels not just of "genocide" but also "atrocities", "crimes against humanity" and "large-scale human rights violations".[5]

Now that we have some understanding of the individual components, it is reasonable to ask: how are dissent and repression related to one another? Drawing upon numerous scholars

(e.g., Tsebelis and Sprague 1989; Francisco 1995; 1996; Moore 1999; 2000; Oliver and Myers 2002; Koopmans 2005; Davenport and McDermott 2013; Shellman @), I argue that the actions of challengers and governments are reciprocally determined. That is to say that the behavior of challengers is in part determined by the prior activities of challengers as well as the prior, current and future (i.e., expected) activities of governments, while simultaneously the behavior of governments is in part determined by the prior activities of governments as well as the prior, current and future activities of challengers. In addition, the behavior of both actors is influenced by existing opportunities for engagement as well as relevant institutional/mobilizational capacity for the respective forms of contention. This differs significantly from those in the literature who wish to say that one could understand contention or repression without simultaneously addressing the other form of conflict.

To understand the behavior as well as the outcomes of coercive challenger-government interactions, one must trace the dynamic back and forth of what transpires between the two in the streets, mountains and country-side but also what happens within the organizations that support the relevant behavior as well as what happens in the political-economic system, society and population that concerns the support each actor receives as well as how easily they can implement their respective policies.

To examine these interactions, a variety of sources have been employed – some more frequently than others.

First, researchers have used the *news media*, principally newspapers but also newswires (e.g., Taylor and Jodice 1983; Francisco 1995; Soule et al. @; Schrodt et al. @). This source is used because they are generally interested in the types of events of interest to scholars of conflict/contentious politics, they are rather efficient with regard to the rigor that they place on

documentation and verification, the source material is publicly available and it covers long periods of time as well as space. Second, researchers have employed human rights *NGO reports* (e.g., Davenport and Ball @; Conrad and Moore @; Ron @; Fariss @). These sources are generally believed to be superior to newspapers in terms of accuracy as well as the detail they provide in large part because they are generally much more focused on the topic of interest or at least one side of the topic of interest (the state side). By comparison, newspapers as well as newswires maintain a wide interest in a variety of different topics. Accordingly, human rights NGOs have developed greater networks providing them access to one of the primary sources for most information about contention: i.e., ordinary citizens that are targeted by relevant behavior. Citizens have also come to view human rights NGOs as the go-to institution for such information and thus even when these institutions are not actively pursuing relevant information, this type of information is brought right to their doorstep or, increasingly, webpage. Third, researchers have used *government records* (e.g., Ball @; Strauss @; Davenport and Stam @; Davenport 2013; Zhukov @; Sullivan @). These are useful in the sense that (when employed) they provide amazing amounts of information about the specifics regarding who did what to whom when and, most importantly, why. Fourth, forensic evaluations have been employed. These evaluations provide relatively more objective means of what transpired – especially regarding the what and potentially where. More recently, citizen crowd sourcing has been employed. For example, one could view popular discussion about police violence in the US and people posting information in their regard or individuals uploading videos to Youtube that concern human rights violations.

While useful in many ways, different sources carry with them different limitations. For example, while many are again excited about this source following the new GDELT database and readily available content analytic programs like TABARI and IDEA, this optimism is

countered by an increasingly pessimistic view of the media. In this work, it seems that the more

we find out about how news organizations create and produce stories, the less confidence we

seem to have in what they report.[6] For example, the once naïve conception that newspapers (or

any source for that matter) communicate information directly capturing the essential aspects of

the "way it was," no longer holds; and, in communications specifically. Indeed, although many

disagree about exactly how bad the situation is, most now accept that "news" is in part a record

of what takes place "out in the world" and, perhaps more importantly, a record of something that

news organizations create through their information collection processes, resource allocations,

and construction of stories (e.g., Davenport 2010).[7]

This new challenge and understanding is important for those of us who use sources in

general and newspapers in particular to study contentious politics because it is unclear whether

what we are seeing is the "real thing" (i.e., the "way it was") or merely an artifact of the

particular narrative style of the news organization consulted (i.e., "the way it was told"). Further,

another layer of story construction may be embedded within the coding process itself. Between

the point of data generation and analyzing this information systematically and with minimal bias,

the present context of news information makes us less certain about the data collected for our

inquiries. This last bit is difficult to deal with because when it comes down to it, most of us

using newspapers are not interested in news organizations, reporting practices, or storytelling. In

studying contentious politics (the subject of this paper), we simply want to know about protest,

civil war, repression or genocide – nothing more and definitely nothing less.

NGOs have some limitations as well. For example, as there is no equivalent institution

myopically focused on behavioral challengers, the information generated by these sources is one-

sided and thus our ability to identify/assess governments at the level of protestors, terrorists,

insurgents and revolutionaries is limited. In addition to this, these NGOs might provide increased access to those victimized or who witnessed relevant behavior but these same actors who frequently do not remember what they have seen or experienced simultaneously limit them. It is somewhat common knowledge that there are many aspects of contentious action that victims and witnesses are not readily able to recall. Of course, this varies in accordance to how traumatized individuals were by what transpired, how close they were to the relevant events, whether they were personally connected to the victimized, what connection (if any) that the NGO had with the person with the information as well as how much time had passed between the relevant events and when they were asked to recall them by the NGO of interest. Newer researchers have shown that the superior networks developed by NGOs have not been consistent over time and that indeed they have improved as time progresses (e.g., Fariss @).

Government sources although having a natural advantage in some respects (e.g., availability of resources) suffered from some important limitations as well. For example, although providing detailed information about behavioral challengers, governments frequently ignored, underreported, lied or restricted access to information about the activities that they engaged in. This rendered the source especially difficult. At the same time, when these reports are censored and publicly released, they might not reveal all that the government was involved with at the time – leading to important distortions regarding what people believe about what took place.

Forensic evaluations are highly detailed in a great many ways, being able to pinpoint exactly what happens to individuals when contentious politics takes place. These sources are limited however in that they have access to areas that are frequently restricted by government or that exist within areas that are physically unsafe. The media and NGOs are also limited in this

manner but the time-sensitive and precise nature of forensic investigation makes them particularly vulnerable in this regard. Additionally, as they rely upon information contained within human remains they provide less information about the intent of the actors involved. Now, this said, there can be important information contained within human remains regarding whether the perpetrator immediately eliminated the target or subjected them to significant amounts of pain before ending their life. This does not generally assist however in deciphering the reasons behind the relevant incidents in the first place.

Crowd sourcing suffers from somewhat distinct limitations compared to other sources because of how this technique of data extraction functions. For example, if individuals that could provide information are prevented from doing so because they technique needed for recording and conveying information (i.e., cell phones or internet connectivity) is hindered, then crowd sourcing would be limited. There might be difficulties with potential uses understanding the crowd sourcing program as it may be too complex for them to use. Finally, while increasingly the source material available to those interested in understanding contentious politics, there are limitations here as well. It is not often clear if the information provided is legitimate and thus a great deal of time must be spent verifying the relationship when conducted properly.

The discussion above is instructive. With the sources available, those of us interested in contentious politics have come to learn a great many things. For example, we have to come realize the ubiquity of state repression. All governments engage in repressive action to some degree. Indeed, with the pervasiveness as it is all that is left to do is to understand why some use tactics more than others or why some places are more violent than others. Since the 1970s, we have come to realize that repression (like other forms of political violence) has generally

decreased in severity (e.g., Fariss @). We now know that many countries experience behavioral challenges of different types (i.e., everyday resistance, protest, terrorism, civil war and revolution).

As for the relationship between the two forms of contentious politics we have developed some insights as well. For example, after decades of research it has been established that while behavioral challenges always lead to repression, the impact of repressive behavior on dissent has had every form of influence, including no relationship. More recent scholarship has attempted to figure out why repression has the varied effect that it does. Some have identified that it may be the selectivity in targeting (Lyall @). When repression is targeted precisely than behavioral challenges are diminished because the targets are removed and others are not brought in to replace them. Here, there is a space where individuals can avoid sanctions through disengagement. When repression is targeted indiscriminately, however, then there is a moral outrage that is prompted whereby bystanders are turned into challengers so that they may rid themselves of the government that does not allow any space to live with being repressed. There has also been an attempt to argue that the impact of repressive action on behavioral challenges is influenced by dissident organization characteristics (e.g., Davenport @; Pearlman @; Opp and Roehl @). In this literature it is believed that organizational networks/ties are strong and repression takes place, then dissent can continue or increase. This is because individual participants is reinforced through the multiple linkages that exist. If ties are limited, however, then when repression occurs, dissident behavior is less likely.

Despite the insights, however, what emerges from a consideration of all sources noted above is something at once insightful as well as somewhat troubling. For example, if what sources compile only in part represents reality (i.e., what is) but also in part what the source

wishes to convey about the world (i.e., what is worth telling), then our conceptual models need to change. For example, rather than see what is covered in sources as being a reflection of what takes place on the ground with varying degrees of accuracy (i.e., bias), we need to see what is covered in sources as being a reflection of what takes place on the ground in conjunction with what stories sources wish to tell (i.e., perspective). Such an approach becomes useful to consider because if information and models of conflict (like bargaining theory) are relevant for understanding what is taking place when challengers and governments square off, then it matters what the different sides of the conflict consulted/understood and had access to at the time of the conflict. Moreover, if what influences bystanders is the information that they receive about the conflict and this information is only partially a reflection of actual events, then it makes sense that we try to generate a better understanding of what different sources convey to distinct audiences.

Acknowledging this, however, prompts me to ask slightly different questions. For example, if sources matter so much, then researchers and students of contentious politics have limited themselves too much by only highlighting the source material noted above. Should other sources be considered and which sources merit attention. I address this below.

Popularization of Conflict and Contentious Politics

There is a presumption within existing literature that only the information contained in the source material presented above provides information about and influences contentious politics. But, the sources listed above are not the only ways that participants as well as citizens receive information about the world about them. Indeed, with the decreased readership of newspapers and books, decreased investment in foreign correspondence, increased coverage of local events and increased proliferation of webpages, blogs, videos as well as images on diverse

platforms, it is likely that general awareness of the world around us is decreasing and not increasing (with the US generally at the bottom of most evaluations). At the same time, however, there are amazing increases in the use and awareness of diverse products distributed within popular culture, which seems to be providing information as well. This includes film, comics and graphic novels that are the topics discussed within the current book but also music, fine art, dance as well as board/video games – to name but a few.

What might seem as a significant jump from sources that attempt to cover the world as it is from sources that attempt to cover a world that could be, I would argue that we have mistakenly kept the two apart from one another. Indeed, I maintain that there is a dual process at work (portrayed in the figure below).

On the left hand, there's the process of actual contention outlined earlier where 1) there is "real" contention as challengers and governments interact (at the bottom), 2) coverage of these actors as well as the actions they engage in (at the middle) and 3) the resonance of this coverage within a broader audience (at the top). The third is important for it impacts diffusion and escalation as readers/viewers/observers decide what (if anything) they should do about what is taking place (e.g., join/not join, support/not support the different sides, complain or turn the channel).

On the right hand side of the figure, there is "imagined" contention that is covered in popular culture which has been the domain of focus for those in the study of art, stories and rumors (i.e., in film, comics and graphic novels within this book but also in music, fine art, literature, dance and so forth). Some of these characterizations resonate with a broader audience whereas some do not.

Important for the current discussion, I would argue that the two processes identified

above inform one another (but this is not the subject of the current investigation). It is possible that what gets covered in popular culture gets covered in non-fictional sources. It is possible that what resonates in popular culture resonates in the real world. In fact, one could start to wonder what is the actual and what is imagined. For example, we now see Guy Falkes masks from the graphic novel and movie *V for Vendetta* at protests around the world.

Figure 1. Covering Contentious Politics - Comprehensively
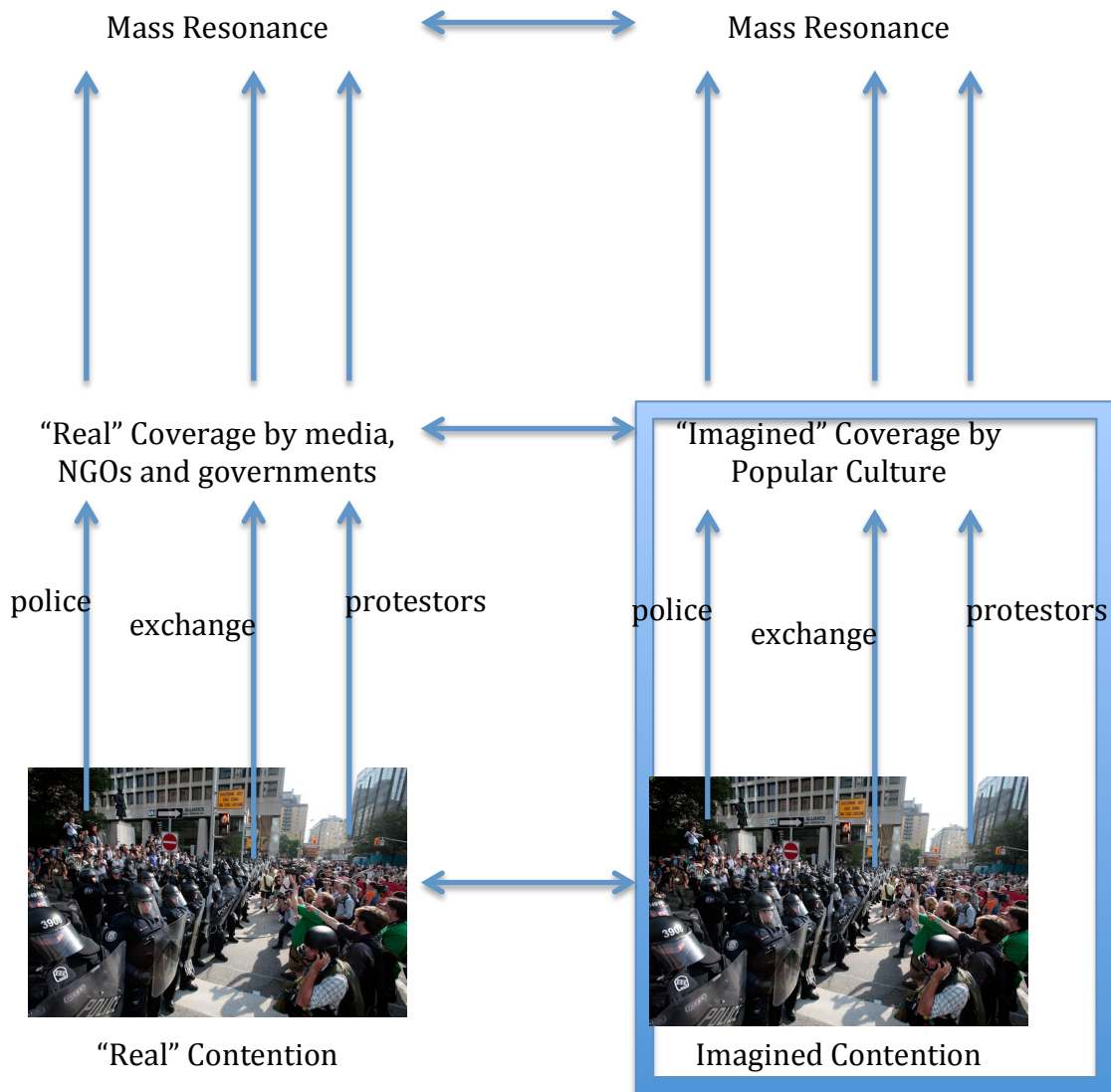
While the last few sentences outline a rather large research agenda, my objectives in the current book are more limited. Here, I only seek to understand what is imagined and what is covered. The area of interest is identified in the frame at the lower right hand corner of the figure below. I pursue this line of inquiry for a variety of reasons.

First, researchers have spent a great deal of time identified and examining the content of the sources identified above while generally ignoring the content of popular culture – in particular the more visually oriented media like film, comics and graphic novels. Second, the viewership of these more visually oriented sources far outweighs the attention given to the sources identified above and while not relevant for understanding what experts on the topic have available to them, this tells us very little about how ordinary (or experts for that matter) individuals comprehend challenger-state interactions as informed by popular culture. Third, before we begin to explore the impact of how imagined contention influences real contention and vice versa, we must develop a language and application for how to evaluate imagined contention.

2. The American Way of Contention

One of the many things provided by a nation's culture is the answer to the question: who are we (relative to some other)? This helps constitute the "US" and in a related process the "THEM". Such information comes from a great variety of sources: educational settings, parents and religious institutions – most obviously, but also from TV, videogames, film, comics, music, fine art, graffiti, instagram posts, tweets and t-shirts. Indeed, information from these sources assists in our individual as well as collective making (and remaking).

Although all stories of a collective are theoretical possible – through a process of creation, dispersion, momentum and isomorphism different members of a community will come to be aware of as well as to some extent adopt the various elements which define the relevant community. Such an argument is consistent with ideas discussed in social movement literature under the label "frames" in general and "meta-frames" in particular.

Within this work, a "frame" is a particular way of understanding a specific problem (i.e., the diagnosis of why things are the way they are and what is wrong). This involves the identity of the source of the problem or the perpetration. A frame also involves a particular resolution to the problem identified (i.e., the "prognosis" of how things could be improved). This very often involves the identification of the actor who can restore the problem or the SMO.

This literature quickly identified that not all frames work (i.e., leads to the adoption and use by others in the relevant society). Some diagnoses may not be intelligible to all but a few individuals and some prognoses may not seem reasonable given the problem identified except for a few extremists. Accordingly, researchers identify that some frames draw upon some ideas that are floating and in the culture – these are referred to as metaframes. Metaframes are composed of the cultural elements that are believed to be understood by a host of the individuals in the relevant society and using them is effective because much of the work needed to

communicate to an audience about what is going on has already been accomplished by the culture.

My favorite examples here have always been Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. These two linked the African American struggle against racism (the frame) to the American principals of Christianity, democracy and to a lesser extent capitalism (the metaframe). In doing this, they not only mobilized those sympathetic and moved those indifferent to their case but also diminished the position of those opposed for they could not go after them overtly without making themselves look bad (or worse) in the eyes of observers.

The discussion above is useful because I would maintain that for a genre of popular culture to be successful, it must tap into something central to the culture of interest. In a sense, it might be like a frame to a metaframe. In line with this, I maintain that Pop Struggle is successful because it taps into some very central ideas to American culture. Within this chapter, I will outline where I think these resonant ideas come from.

In the US case, I would suggest that three sources for mass perception of contentious politics exist: 1) Christ and the Early Christian movement, 2) the American revolution and 3) the American Civil Rights Movement.

While the religious identity of America is frequently a source of much discussion, it cannot be doubted that Christianity has played an important role within the country, influencing ideas, language, law and behavior. The founders of the country were in part composed of persecuted religious minority and even though a concerted effort was put forward to keep religion out of the political realm later there were assurances/mechanisms put in place to make sure that religious freedom was facilitated/protected. But this just concerns the broad parameters involved but not the content of Christianity itself.

In terms of content, it is Christ and the early Christian movement that serves as the core around which the relevant teachings focus and what are the elements of this story? Christ emerges as a revolutionary in his time with views different from those around him spiritually, economically and, most important for the current conversation, politically – like many of the time.

On the basis this belief system, Christ seeks out followers, creates a challenging institution (a movement of sorts) and proceeds to move about the relevant territory engaging in diverse acts that seek to inform people about his opinion about the world (i.e., his diagnosis of the problem) and what individuals can do about it (i.e., his prognosis of the problem). The movement grows but he is famously betrayed, arrested, tried and tortured to death. Allegedly Christ briefly returns to life/earth but much later the primary message of the claimsmaking effort is distributed to others throughout the world – achieving the ultimate victory. This victory is celebrated at least weekly somewhere in the US but is literally enshrined in diverse places throughout the relevant jurisdiction.

The next formative event involves the American revolution. For quite some time after establishing the American colony, diverse opinions began to emerge about how unfair the treatment was that the colonists were receiving. The burden was not simply political in the sense that they were not able to exercise diverse freedoms but also economical in the sense that the majority of the profits were returning to the UK despite the significant amount of effort as well as risk being put forward by the colonists. The rest is, as they say, history.

To protest this situation, colonists engaged in a variety of challenging tactics: boycotts, work slow downs, tax evasion, strikes, demonstrations, terrorism and civil war. Of course, against all of these activities, the British fought back and after various rounds of engagement the

colonists came out victorious to (again) be celebrated and remembered yearly.

The third core event involves the African American Civil Rights movement. Americans were initially split on the "Negro question", with some wanting to keep things as they are, some wanting to have gradual change and some wanting to have change that was more immediate. Essentially, the African American Civil Rights movement was able to overcome the first and second while sustaining themselves through a host of terroristic and repressive activities directed against the organizational leadership, its membership and participation (at relevant events as well as at home). Again there was a contentious back and forth between the Civil Rights movements and government which resulted in a significant loss of life. Interestingly, this movement used the examples of the two successes noted before in the discussion of their diagnoses and prognoses.

Now, I do not mean to suggest that some group of actors specifically set out to create an American conception of popular struggle – working through what should and what should not be included (similar to Tilly's conception of a repertoire) but I wish to suggest that at some point in time individuals do research and come up with some information that tells such stories. Additionally, I would note that over time these stories accumulate in some fashion, allowing those who follow them to pick them apart and fashion distinct combinations with greater/lesser degrees of success. Culture while being in some respects inherited from the past does allow individuals within it to use it, recreate and try to modify it.

These events proved crucial to American conceptions of contention for establishing the foundation upon which not only the nation was created but also who the nation appeared to be. The US wished to characterize itself or rather the storyteller within American culture wish to create a society where it was believed that those who were subjected to the vagaries and lethality

of state power had recourse to confront as well as overcome the relevant problem. Here the aggrieved could seek and obtain redress. This became the predominant American story – the one created and the one consumed time and time again.

Now, clearly actual US history is not comprised of challenges and challengers who always win. There is a certain degree of selectivity that went into the grounding core narratives. Many a failing social movement was not considered. For example, the South's attempted secession from the Union sits as one of the biggest losses observed in the US. This loss does not detract away from the general narrative that challengers generally win. In part, this is because they were simply the wrong challenger and this loss allows us to distinguish between those challengers that we can think of as "righteous" and those challengers we can think of as "unworthy". One could spin this story to be consistent within the challengers viewing the anti-slavery movement as the challengers and the slavery establishment as the government at the time. Clearly, the anti-slavery movement in the US was not in a position of power and they attempted a great many ways to get information out about their cause and bring about change but to no avail until this turned into an outright struggle between dueling regions. I am not sure if such a characterization would be historically accurate but nevertheless it has significantly colored contemporary discussion about why the civil war was fought.

Other challengers that lost can be readily found as well. For example, the Anarchist movement of the 1800s emerged with some immediate interest but quickly fell after 1919 bombing and Palmer raids that followed. Indeed, the persecution of this group and seeming eradication from US culture (with regard to everything associated with them) are only matched by the demise of the communists and socialists in the period between 1930 and 1965.

Finally, I would note the loss of the Black Nationalists during the late 1960s and early

1970s. Emerging after the period of the African American Civil Rights movement effort to more comprehensively address the problem confronted by African Americans. The Black Nationalist movement emerged in diverse locales throughout the North with slightly varied understandings of the problem and slightly different resolutions to how it could be addressed. Regardless of this variation, however, the movement was resoundingly attacked and effectively destroyed. This was so much so that within a few years there was almost no organizational action.

[1] Several scholars (including myself) are now rethinking some of these categories: Oliver, Earl and Davenport.

[2] Refering to the interaction between governments and challengers as contentious politics, Tilly (2000) maintains that the topic refers to *episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.* Roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle. Contentious politics excludes individual patron-client relations, everyday operation of bureaucracies, ordinary compliance with legal procedures, uncontested transfer of resources (e.g. taxes, personal information, and military manpower) to governmental agencies, and routine implementation of governmental programs. Yet it includes a significant share of public politics in all sorts of regimes.

[3] Scott (1989: 34-35) continues:

> (i)t may be useful to distinguish everyday forms of class resistance from the more typical forms of political conflict which dominate the historiography of the peasantry and other subordinate groups. The easiest way to highlight the distinction is to contrast paired forms of resistance. The first in each pair is "everyday" resistance in my definition of the term while the second is a more direct, open confrontation having the same objective. Thus in one sphere lies the quiet, piecemeal process by which peasant squatters or poachers have often encroached on plantation and state forest lands; in the other a public invasion of property that openly challenges property relations. Each action aims at a redistribution of control over property; the former aims at tacit, de facto gains while the latter aims at formal, de jure-- recognition of those gains. In one sphere lies a process of cascading military desertion; in the other an open mutiny aiming at eliminating or replacing officers. In one sphere lies the pilfering of public and private grain stores; in the other an open attack on markets or granaries aiming at the redistribution of the food supply. The contrasts illustrate that those who employ everyday forms of resistance avoid calling attention to themselves. Such techniques are relatively safe, they often promise vital material gains, and they require little or no formal coordination let alone formal organization - although they typically rely on a venerable popular culture of resistance to accomplish their ends.

> In each of these paired comparisons, the presumed objective is similar. Both squatters and land invaders hope to acquire the use of property; both deserters and mutineers may wish to end a costly battle or war. The relative safety - and it is only a relative safety - of everyday forms of resistance has much to do with the small scale of the action. Squatters virtually seep onto the land in small groups, often at night to avoid calling attention to themselves; deserters are likely to slip away unnoticed when the opportunity arises. Each of these small events may be beneath notice and, from the perpetrator's point of view, they are often designed to be beneath notice. Collectively, however, these small events may add up almost surreptitiously to a large event: an army too short of conscripts to fight, a workforce whose footdragging bankrupts the enterprise, a landholding gentry driven from the countryside to the towns by arson and assault, tracts of state land fully occupied by squatters, a tax claim of the state gradually transformed into a dead letter by evasion.

[4] Tilly (2004: 9) continues that

> No useful generalization covers all the different sorts of political interaction for which observers, analysts, and participants sometimes use the term terror, much less for terrorists and terrorism. But we can identify some order in the phenomenon by means of four steps: (1) noticing that a recurrent strategy of intimidation occurs widely in contentious politics and corresponds approximately to what many people mean by terror; (2) recognizing that a wide variety of individuals, groups, and networks sometimes employ that strategy; (3) relating the strategy systematically to other forms of political struggle proceeding in the same settings and populations; and (4) seeing that specialists in coercion ranging from government employees to bandits sometimes deploy terror under certain political circumstances, usually with far more devastating effects than the terror operations of nonspecialists.

Another project, the Global Terrorism Database (2013: 7-8) defines the subject in greater detail as

> *the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.* In practice this means in order to consider an incident for inclusion in the GTD, *all three* of the following attributes must be present: 1) *The incident must be intentional* – the result of a conscious calculation on the part of a perpetrator; 2) *The incident must entail some level of violence or threat of violence* -including property violence, as well as violence against people; and, 3) *The perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors.*

In addition, *at least two* of the following three criteria must be present for an incident to be included in the GTD:

> Criterion 1: The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic (beyond s   imply profit), religious, or social goal.

> Criterion 2*:* There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims.

> Criterion 3: The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.

Clearly this category is associated with a wide variety of activity but most recently it has been associated with suicide bombing with an individual, strapped with explosives blowing themselves up in a crowd or with some vehicle being driven into a crowd or building as in 9/11.

[5] While generally unified on the definition of the concept, the repression literature tends to divide itself by the specific activities that governments engage in and different researchers focus on. Accordingly, there are scholars of human rights violation (e.g., torture and mass killing) who ignore scholars of civil liberties restriction (e.g., limitations on speech, assembly and religion); there are scholars of protest policing (i.e., police action that responds to protest) who ignore scholars of counter-insurgency (i.e., military action that responds to insurgency and civil war). Similar to the contention literature, within more recent work these differences are now starting to wane a little, with a few researchers becoming a bit more encompassing in their conceptions, measurements and analyses but the majority of scholarship is still focused on one or two forms at a time. Again, I make no such distinction here.[5]

[6] Several highlight the limitations of online services.

[7] There is some variation across sources. Significant attention has been paid to the validity of news coverage of contentious events by comparing local sources, local sources against more national presses, national against international presses, national presses against foreign presses as well as comparing newspapers against police records, wire services and oral histories. This research is important because it identifies the circumstances under which coverage of news events is likely to take place, and it has led to a particular understanding about what counts as reliable source information. One conclusion implied in these studies is that the newspaper that pays the most "attention" to the conflict events, in magnitude, is the best source available. More coverage is better coverage.