

Gamson W A. *Power and discontent*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1968. 208 p.
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Because the term "power" evokes potential without direction, we can be simultaneously excited by its possibilities for creation and alarmed by its possibilities for injury. Both perspectives on power concern a single relationship between authorities and partisans and can be integrated in a single theory, linked by the concept of political trust. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this book has been cited in over 385 publications.]

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This book began with a desire to make sense of the intense feelings and actions generated by fluoridation controversies in a series of small New England communities. As I wrestled with these microcosms, similar stirrings were taking place in the nation as a whole. I began to hear echoes of the community conflicts I observed in the protests of the civil rights movement and student activists, in the triumphant cries of Goldwater enthusiasts at the Republican convention of 1964, and in the anguished words of urban blacks in the aftermath of riots.

What began as the theoretical introduction to a research monograph took on a life of its own. The community conflict research I had originally intended to describe was reported elsewhere in separate articles.^{1,2} The genre changed from the carefully limited explanation of well-defined phenomena to a discursive essay, with fluid boundaries, on a topic of endless complexity.

The power and discontent themes have often been treated by others with imagination and élat. I doubt that I would have had the temerity to tread this well-worked territory if I had not more or less wandered into it without premeditation. Closure was forced more by the discipline of writing than by my state of thinking about the topic. I would have included some phrase in the title indicating tentativeness if this were not such an obvious form of special pleading.

I was astounded by the book's almost instant recognition and success. Within a year of publication, returning from a dinner at Fisherman's Wharf to the San Francisco Hilton where the American Sociological Convention was being held, I was greeted by friends who informed me that the book had just received the Sorokin Award, sociology's most prestigious prize. Although written for a professional audience, the book was frequently assigned in courses in the ensuing years.

As I suspect is true with other frequently cited work, timing seems critical. The field of sociology was in considerable turmoil. Earlier sociological writing on social movements ranged from condescension to outright hostility. My work was clearly sympathetic, influenced by my students and, indeed, by my own participation. But instead of rejecting the earlier negative writings, I managed to find a way of integrating them in a larger whole. I think now that the book offered a bridge to many who were troubled by the inadequacy of past work but not ready to dismiss it wholesale. Ultimately, the book turned out to be the beginning of a new approach to social movements that, in the 1970s, became known as the "resource mobilization" perspective and today dominates the field (see reference 3).

1. Gamson W A. Rancorous conflict in community politics. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 31:71-81, 1966. (Cited 35 times.)
2. ————. Reputation and resources in community politics. *Amer. J. Sociol.* 72:121-31, 1966.
3. Tilly C. *From mobilization to revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978. 349 p.