DISORGANIZATION AND THE NEW MEXICO PRISON RIOT OF 1980*

BERT USEEM

University of Illinois at Chicago

"Breakdown" theorists postulate that collective action results from social disorganization and increased levels of discontent. Data on the 1980 New Mexico prison riot provide support for certain aspects of this model. From 1970 to 1975, the State Penitentiary provided inmates with employment opportunities and recreational programs. These integrating activities were sharply curtailed after 1975. As a consequence, inmates experienced strong feelings of deprivation, and inter-inmate violence increased. The 1980 riot reflected the disintegration of the previous five years. No one element was in control of the riot, and the level of brutality surpassed that of any other U.S. prison riot.

Few researchers now defend a "breakdown" or "disorganization" model of collective action, even though it dominated the field just two decades ago (Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1962; Davies, 1962). According to the model, collective action arises from a breakdown in the structures of solidarity—church, family, work, and voluntary organizations—that normally channel people into conventional behavior.

The fact that the "breakdown" model is called what it is—rather than the "crisis" or "shock" model, say—reflects an underlying presumption that in normal times social structures exist which keep people from mobilizing for conflict. Two complementary facets of the breakdown model emphasize different sets of these controlling structures.

A Durkheimian (and Parsonian) facet emphasizes control over the individual's emotions, thoughts, and appetites. In normal times, the individual is integrated into the social whole; he feels a sense of commonality with other sectors of the society; his appetites are restrained to a manageable level. According to this view, then, disorganization produces collective action for two reasons. First, disorganization frees individuals from the regulatory mechanisms that inhere in social organization. Urbanization and migration, for example, uproot individuals from their social, political, and recreational activities, producing a mass of isolated, anomic individuals. These marginal individuals are then readily "available" for mobilization (Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1962).

Second, disorganization increases "discontent" within a population. The isolated, anomic individual develops new, unpredictable, and potentially unfulfillable desires; he develops irrational beliefs about how they can be fulfilled; he seeks to escape and overcome his isolation and discontent through collective action (Smelser, 1962; Davies, 1962, 1969).

The second, more economically-oriented facet of the breakdown model emphasizes society's ability in normal times to meet people's needs that are considered as given and somewhat stable. Thus, the effect of unemployment on the individual is traded through his empty pockets rather than through his isolated condition. Without the rewards of work, discontent results, followed by protest (Piven and Cloward, 1977).

Of course, discontent need not be conceptualized as the result of "breakdown." Theorists of "pure" deprivation and relative deprivation emphasize the effect of discontent on protest without necessarily attributing it to the failure of pre-existing control mechanisms. Increased perceived deprivation, however, can be treated as the expression of "breakdown" if one adopts the assumption that a stable order normally has the mechanisms, cultural or economic, to ensure stable levels of contentment for all its constituents.

The breakdown model is consistent with the idea that protest occurs in periods of high rates of personal pathology and antisocial behavior, such as suicide, dissolution of families, alcoholism, vagrancy, and crime. Protest and high

rates of pathology covary, according to breakdown theory, because both are products either of the dissolving of social controls or of increased deprivation.

The most ardent critics of breakdown approach are researchers working within the "resource-mobilization" tradition: "Breakdown theories of collective action and collective violence," the Tillys (1975:290) state, "suffer from irreparable logic and empirical difficulties." There are four major arguments against the breakdown model. First, resource-mobilization theorists claim that grievances are sufficiently widespread through all societies at all times that, as a constant, they explain little of the variation in collective action. Although resource-mobilization theorists would agree with the proposition that individuals who engage in collective action are dissatisfied with the existing order, they assert that this proposition has no predictive power (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Oberschall, 1978:298; McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1214–15; Snyder and Tilly, 1972). Second, they maintain that the barrier to insurgency is the access to resources, and that disorganized groups are least likely to have the requisite resources. Disorganized populations will tend to be powerless and unable to launch an insurgency. Third, the resource-mobilization theorists argue that collective action flows out of struggles among well-defined groups. They find implausible the idea that collective action occurs when groups becomes less organized, rather than more organized.

Finally, resource-mobilization theorists rest much of their charge against the breakdown model on the purportedly negative evidence they and others have collected. Collective action does *not* covary with indicators of personal pathology (e.g., crime, suicide, alcoholism) (Lodhi and Tilly, 1973:296; Tilly et al, 1975:76–81), non-membership in secondary and primary groups, (Gerlach and Hime, 1970; Useem, 1980), and changes in the level of deprivation (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Snyder and Tilly, 1972; Skocpol, 1979:115).

One focus of this research has been the urban riots of the 1960s. The evidence indicates that the rioters compared to their non-rioting counterparts, were more likely to be politically sophisticated, racially conscious, socialized in the North, victims of racial discrimination, and similar to their counterparts on such variables as income, education and occupation (Bryan, 1979; Caplan and Paige, 1968; Feagin and Hahn, 1973; Sears and McConahay, 1973; Tomlinson, 1970). Further, rioting tended to occur in cities that had blocked political opportunities for blacks (Eisenger, 1973), whereas variation in the so-

cial conditions in the cities, such as percent of dilapidated housing as a measure of social disorganization, did not have an impact on riot propensity (once controls are introduced for region and percent of nonwhite population) (Spilerman, 1970; 1976). The Tillys sum up their interpretation of the evidence:

> As the dust settled and evidence accumulated, people began to see the discrepancies between what happened in Watts, Detroit, or elsewhere and theories which emphasized the explosion of accumulated discontent. . . . [The evidence] dispel[s] the idea that the participants came disproportionately from the ghetto's marginal, depressed, disorganized populations (Tilly et al., 1975:293).

These arguments have convinced most researchers in the discipline. Even those researchers otherwise critical of the resource-mobilization approach have sided with its stand against the breakdown model (Pinard, 1983). Social movement/collective behavior textbooks now routinely report that breakdown model has, as Miller recently put it, "yielded few explanations of social movements that have withstood the probings of critics" (Miller, 1985:319; see also, Wood and Jackson, 1982:63–77; Washburn, 1982:201–203).

Despite the general opposition to the breakdown model, there is still research claiming support for it. One example is Piven and Cloward's (1977) work on the conditions that give rise to "poor" people's movements. They argue that "profound dislocations," such as massive unemployment or large scale migration, are needed "to virtually destroy the structures and routines of daily life" before protest can occur (1977:10). A second exception has been Gurr and his collaborators, who found that "crime waves"—sharp increases in crimes of violence and theft—coincided with episodes of civil strife in London, Stockholm, New South Wales, and Calcutta during various periods in the 19th and 20th centuries (Gurr, 1976:82–90; Gurr et al., 1977:666–76).

Third, a number of researchers have found flaws in the standard research on the 1960s urban riots, and reported that properly assessed, the data support a breakdown model. Miller and associates (1976) show that many of the key tables supporting the resource-mobilization interpretation of the riots are percentaged in the wrong direction and conflate a critical distinction between nonviolent protesters and rioters. Once these errors are corrected, Miller and associates (1976:361) argue, the data reveal that the rioters were the "least socially integrated and lower elements of the community." Lieske (1978) found that cities with higher levels of social disorganization

were more likely to experience a riot than cities with lower levels. Family disorganization (as measured by divorce and separation rates and illegitimacy rates), demographic dislocations (as measured by nonwhite population change and percent nonwhite change in residence), and high levels of criminal activity (as measured by police density) each contributed to the outbreak of the riots.

Finally, a greater number of researchers have been persuaded that deprivation and protest are causally associated (Unseem, 1980; Walsh, 1981, 1983; Pinard, 1983). These researchers, however, still tend to reject the picture of collective action as the behavior of uprooted, disorganized people, and argue instead that organization and solidarity generate protest. They see the "breakdown" element as the failure of social mechanisms that were previously supposed to satisfy the needs of the discontented group, and not as the disruption of ties *within* that group.

This paper takes a new look at the breakdown model. We show that the breakdown model can more adequately account for a particular instance of collective action, the New Mexico prison riot of February 2, 1980, than the rival resource-mobilization model.[1]

DATA AND RIOT

Before describing the data, we consider whether evidence on prison riots, in general, can be used to help adjudicate the debate between the breakdown and resource-mobilization approaches. Two considerations suggest it cannot. A mandated purpose of prisons is the deprivation of its clientele. Sykes (1958:63–83) describes five deprivations—liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security—that together lead all inmates to feel that "life in the maximum security prison is depriving or frustrating in the extreme" (1958:63). As a possible consequence, the effect of deprivation on protest may be different in prisons than it is elsewhere.

Further, inmates in maximum security prisons are (of course) convicted felons. The factors that cause this atypical subpopulation to rebel may differ from those that generate rebellion in the populations considered by

resource-mobilization and breakdown proponents.

While these considerations serve as an important caveat—cautioning researchers not to overgeneralize the results from prisons to collective action elsewhere—it would be unwarranted to draw the stronger conclusion that the evidence on prison riots does not bear on the central controversies. Although all inmates experience a profound deprivation by virtue of their imprisonment, inmates do develop standards of just deprivation. It is the violation of these standards which, as in the non-prison world, is hypothesized to motivate protest.

The breakdown and resource-mobilization models, furthermore, have been applied to a heterogeneous assemblage of phenomena, including peasant involvement in revolutionary movements, strikes by workers in the early stages of industrialization, unionization of farmworkers in the United States, and participation in the U.S. civil rights and new Christian right movements, to name a few recent examples. These diverse foci make less troublesome the argument that prison populations are atypical of those usually studied. Additionally, both resource-mobilization theorists (e.g., Zald and Berger, 1978:843, 846, 847) and breakdown theorists (e.g., Smelser, 1962:236–37, 251–52, 254) *have* drawn on data on prison riots to support their respective models.

Finally, the resource-mobilization theorists emphasize protest by integrated, skilled, intelligent, organized sectors of a group, and oppose the image of rebellion as the work of the *canaille*. It is somewhat problematic for them, therefore, if the *canaille do* rebel. Because prison inmates often lack social skills and invariably lack organizational and material resources, pure resource-mobilization theory would predict their being a passive and easily-controlled group. Their high levels of deprivation ought not to alter this, because everyone has grievances. If they do rebel, a resource-mobilization theorist would be forced to posit some causative increase in resources or internal organization. It is therefore particularly problematic if prisoners rebel precisely when their deprivation is greatest, resources fewest, and social structure most atomized—as was the case in New Mexico.

The data on the New Mexico riot are drawn from two principal sources. As part of the official investigation of the riot, the New Mexico Attorney General's office interviewed, shortly after the riot, a random sample of 49 inmates and 28 guards. Of those selected to be interviewed, only three inmates and six guards refused to grant interviews (OAGSNM, 1980:A–2). The interviews lasted from two to

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[1] Because the resource-mobilization model has been discussed extensively in the recent social movement literature, we do not further elaborate it here. See the useful overviews by Jenkins (1983), Wood and Jackson (1982:141–47), and Marx and Wood (1975), as well as the original formulations by Gamson (1975), McCarthy and Zald (1977), Oberschall (1973), and Tilly (1978).

four hours, and involved questioning the inmates and guards about prison conditions over a ten-year period. Verbatim transcripts of these interviews were obtained. The author and co-worker, in addition, interviewed 36 inmates in February, 1985. The sample consisted of all inmates in the penitentiary who had been there during the riot.[2]

The 1980 New Mexico prison riot is perhaps the most brutal (33 inmates killed, 400 injured [Lapham et al., 1984:218]) and costly ($200 million [Morris, 1983:225]) U.S. prison riot. It began when several inmates overpowered, stripped, and severely beat four guards who were conducting a routine inspection of a dormitory in the prison's south wing. Guards stationed at other south wing dormitories were quickly subdued. A number of security lapses allowed the inmates to take control over the entire institution: a security gate separating the south wing from the rest of the institution was left unlocked; a recently-installed, purportedly impenetrable window fronting the control center gave way when bashed by inmates; and renovation crews left behind acetylene torches that were used to burn open locked gates (OAGSNM, 1980; Serrill and Katel, 1980; Colvin, 1982).

No group of inmates attained clear leadership status. Control over hostages, walkie-talkies, and negotiations was fragmented, personalistic, and ephemeral. Some inmates, alone and in groups, took advantage of the situation to beat, rape, torture, and mutilate other inmates. One inmate had his head cut off with a shovel; another died from a screw-driver driven through his head; several others were immolated in their cells when inmates sprayed lighter fluid on them; and still others were tortured to death with acetylene torches. No inmate group made a serious attempt to prevent this. One inmate wrote:

there were many such group . . . ferociously slashing open stomaches, cutting of genitalia, beating on corpses that were strewn over the catwalks. The floors were covered with clotted pools of blood, the cells with bloody drag marks, the air with cries of men being tortured (Stone, 1982:126)

The assaults and killing were selective. The primary targets were inmate informants ("snitches") and objects of personal grudges. An inmate stated,

[M]ost of the people [attacked] were rats or they had jackets . . . Some of them were killed over little petty beefs . . . There was a reason behind every one of them. There wasn't, you know, helter skelter killing. (A.G. Interview)

Autopsy reports listed thirty of the thirty-three deaths as inmate-inflicted homicides (the cause of death could not be determined for the remaining three bodies, which were incinerated). (Lapham et al., 1984:222).

Twelve guards were taken as hostages, some of whom were repeatedly beaten, sodomized, and threatened with death. A hostage reported that an inmate approached a group of hostages with the severed head of a black inmate, saying, "This is what can happen to you . . . We'll cut you in pieces and throw you out the window" (Quoted in Hillman, 1981:1194). Another hostage reported that an inmate said to him: " 'First we're going to stab you fifteen times, then we're going to cut your hands off, then we're going to cut your head off.' " (Quoted in New Mexican, February 3, 1985, Sec. E, p. 3.)

Inmates killed no hostages for two reasons. First, they believed that a hostage killing would swiftly bring an armed assault. Second, as one inmate put it,

a dead man does not suffer and they [the inmates] wanted to fuck them [the guards] up . . . They succeeded in every case. Fucked them up bad. They didn't want to kill them . . . [T]hey've been hurt for years by those fucking guards, and they wanted to get back at them, wanted to hurt them.[3] (A.G. Interview)

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[2] Interviews conducted by the Attorney General's office and by the author and Peter Kimball are designated "A.G. Interview" and "U. and K. Interview," respectively. Wherever possible, we have relied on the Attorney General's interviews rather than our own. First, the Attorney General's researchers obtained a sample representative of the inmate population at the time of the riot, whereas our sample overrepresented inmates with long sentences and recidivists. Second, the Attorney General's interviews were conducted soon after the riots, whereas ours occurred almost five years later. At this point, inmates' memories may have faded. This is especially salient in regard to inmates' assessment of changes in the prison from 1975 to 1980, for which we rely almost exclusively on the 1980 interviews. Still, we noticed no major discrepancy between the two rounds of interviews.

[3] A psychiatrist who treated 9 of the 12 guard hostages reports that the inmates did, indeed, "succeed" in terrorizing the hostages (Hillman, 1981). In addition to the physical brutality, most experienced extreme feelings of fear and helplessness. Many of them said "goodby" in their minds to their loved ones; they imagined the grisly ways that inmates would kill them; and they visualized their dead bodies being discovered after the riot. Most experienced acute and disabling aftereffects for at least one year following the riot.

However, some guards received better treatment than others, and some were helped to escape by sympathetic inmates.

Not all inmates participated in the violence. This included the prison's 120 blacks (nine percent of the inmate population). They organized themselves for self-protection and eventually fled from the riot (OAGSNM, 1980:49).

Other inmates not participating in the brutality included a small group who had been active in prison reform and class-action suits. Led by respected jail-house lawyer Lonnie Duran, the group tried to transform the riot into a protest for prison reform (Colvin, 1982:459). Duran's group formulated a set of demands and established negotiations with the administration. Many inmates, however, simply paid no attention to or were unaware of these activities, and they had little impact on the course and outcome of the riot (Serrill and Katel, 1980; Colvin, 1982).

FINDINGS

Both the inmate and guard interviews support a deprivation explanation of the riot. Most inmates reported that the conditions in the penitentiary before the riot were insufferably bad. One inmate, for example, stated:

It was unlivable before the riot . . . It's been too crowded, the food is bad, the goddamned guards talk to you like you're a dog. We're not dogs. (A.G. Interview).

Another inmate described the prison as a place of chronic violence:

There was one dormitory designed for 45 men, and they had 120 in there. It was a jungle after lights out. You couldn't go to the restroom at night without stepping on someone, and that was all it took for a fight to break out. The guards stayed down in the mess hall, drinking coffee. (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2/3/85, Sec. B, p. 4.)

A U.S. Justice Department study concluded that the Penitentiary was, before the riot, "one of the harshest, most punitive prison environments in the nation." (*Albuquerque Journal*, 9/24/80, quoted in Morris, 1983:111).

This evidence, though, does not persuade resource-mobilization theorists. Deprivation may have been a "constant" feature of the penitentiary, and thus cannot explain why the riot happened when it did. Indeed, Colvin (1982) rejects a deprivation explanation of the riot for just those reasons. He argues that inmate food and "services" had always been bad, and that while some services had deteriorated, others had improved. Further, guard

brutality had been a permanent feature of the prison.

We found, however, that inmates perceived a dramatic worsening of conditions. The turning point, according to most inmates, occurred in 1975 when the deputy warden was fired and the warden (Felix Rodriguez) was transferred (under allegations of personal corruption) to a make-work job in the central administration. One inmate stated:

When we had Rodriguez everything was running good . . . Ever since he left we got the rest of them wardens, they all change everything, from better to worse. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate invidiously compared the Rodriguez period with the one that followed:

When Mr. Rodriguez was here you had programs here . . . They had people going to college and everything. They had good programs . . . They give them something to do and it improves their minds and their spirits and everything. We had a good year when they had those programs here. (A.G. Interview)

One inmate, himself, perceived a link between changes in the level of deprivation and an increased likelihood of a riot:

Inmate: [Before 1975] there was only about eight officers in the corridor at night, . . . and they'd call chow just about everybody at the same time, so there'd be 700 people out in the corridor.
Question: So it was easier to pull off a riot in those days?
Inmate: Oh, yeah, much easier . . .
Question: But nobody wanted to?
Inmate: Yeah. Nobody cared about that thing because the conditions weren't that bad. I mean, the conditions were bad . . . we've always had rats and the water has always been cold in the showers and stuff like that. [B]ut people can live with that if they're treated like human beings. . . . It's really hard to live here. You just got that hatred in your mind all the time. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate described the transition:

Inmate: It's just been getting worse ever since I got here. In '74 it was pretty mellow. It was alright. Shoot, by '79 it was smokin' hot. Just making you do things you didn't want to do . . . just to give you a hard time. Locking people up left and right. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate stated:

Question: You've been here for the last five wardens . . . Give me an idea as to how programs change when the wardens changed?
Inmate: They've all gone worse. Straight down hill.
Question: No bouncing around?
Inmate: No, no bouncing around, just boom, right from ten to zero. (A.G. Interview)

The guards also stated that the prison conditions for inmates had worsened, although some regarded this change as appropriate. One guard stated: "During [Rodriguez's] tenure, there was no escapes. There was no major stabbing, there was no killings, and that's because they [the inmates] had everything they wanted. It was ridiculous, but they did." (A.G. Interview)

The evaluations made of different administrations in the 1980 inmate interviews also support the deprivation argument. Inmates compared the conditions under the various wardens 181 times. One-hundred-sixty of these comparisons indicated that conditions were better under Rodriguez. Table 1 classifies these comparisons by the area of prison life commented upon. In every area, inmates reported that the conditions under Rodriguez were better than under any of the other wardens.

According to breakdown theory, unemployment and absence of voluntary organizations make individuals more "available" for mobilization. When applied to the prison setting, the argument implies that inmate programs and jobs make riot participation less likely. The data support this hypothesis. Under the Rodriguez regime, the majority of inmates

participated in a wide range of programs and activities (OAGSNM, 1980:14). Programs included a college associate of arts program (213 inmates); a school release program for inmates nearing parole (20); an IBM key-punch work shop (184 inmates); counseling programs for drug, alcohol and sex-related offenders; and a number of clubs and community contact programs, such as the Outside Friends, Bible Study, Jay Cees Club, and Toastmasters. On their own initiative, inmates formed Toys for Tots, Concerned Convicts for Children, and other charitable activities (OAGSNM, 1980:14). According to the Attorney General's report, "programs and activities during the period (1970–1975) involved a majority of the inmates in some meaningful activity" (OAGSNM, 1980:24). The administration that replaced Rodriguez's sharply reduced the number of programs in the prison and stopped community-contact programs entirely (Colvin, 1982:454). The inmates were aware of these changes. One inmate commented:

Inmate: I joined one of those clubs.
Question: This was when Rodriguez was warden?
Inmate: Yes, and when the other wardens came in, they just stopped it.
Question: They closed down the other clubs too?
Inmate: Everything, everything. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate stated:

I'll give Mr. Rodriguez credit for he knew how to run this goddam penitentiary for the things that were important to the inmates in

Table 1. Comparisons of Prison Conditions Under Various Wardens[a]

Condition Mentioned	Prison Better Under:						
	Baker (1968–1969)	Rodriquez (1970–1975)	Aaron (1975–1976)	Malley (1976–1978)	Romero (1978–1979)	Griffin (1979–1980)	Same Under All
Officials/warden fair, competent, or "cares"	—	21	—	—	—	2	—
General Conditions	1	20	—	—	—	—	—
Food, Mail, TV, Case Workers, Recreation, Psych. Services, Canteen, Visitation	—	17	—	—	—	2	5
Inmate Programs	1	45	—	—	—	—	—
Inmate Informants	—	15	1	—	—	—	—
Treatment by guards	—	18	—	—	—	—	2
Discipline, restriction on movement, disciplinary segregation	—	24	—	—	—	—	7

[a] This table is based on the 1980 interviews only. The distribution of responses among the categories in part reflects the questions asked. For example, the inmates were asked to evaluate the programs under each of the wardens since 1970 but were not asked about changes in the quality of the food. Thus, we cannot infer from the table that inmates were more concerned about the inmate programs than, say, the food (although this is probably true). The table does demonstrate that inmates believed that the quality of prison life had declined in virtually every area.

here. He was a strong believer in programs. He knew when you have 'em in, you got to give 'em something to occupy their dead time. He was damn good at that, but it hasn't happened since then. (A.G. Interview)

The termination of the programs appears to have had many of the effects that breakdown theory would suggest. One decreased inmate incentives to comply with institutional rules.

Question: How has [the Penitentiary] changed over the years?
Inmate: I think it changed when Warden Rodriguez resigned . . . That's when the big change came.
Question: What did they do?
Answer: They stopped all the programs. They just took everything away and nobody had anything to look forward to or no more incentive to try for. [Rodriquez] had programs . . . that a convict could shoot for. Now in this institution there's nothing to try for. (A.G. Interview)

The inmate added:

We had outside entertainment at least once a month. It was something to look forward to, something to stay out of lock up. There wasn't near as much tension . . . When Aaron came in [in 1975] he stopped all outside programs, everything. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate offered this reflection:

Every one of these wardens, I have begged 'em until I was blue in the face to get programs back in this institution. I've gotten other inmates together to get the lifers program here in this institution. The men that's here doing life and more you'd have to give them something for an incentive or you can't hold em. You're going to have to kill 'em or let 'em hit the fence. (A.G. Interview)

Breakdown theorists posit that there is an association between crime, interpersonal violence, and protest, since they stem from the same cause. Evidence on the ten-year period leading up to the riot supports that contention. Both inmates and guards report a dramatic rise in the level of inter-inmate assaults and assaults against guards. In an interview conducted in 1985, an inmate stated:

Question: Did it make any difference when Malley and Aaron came in?
Inmate: They introduced death here. In 1970 there was maybe one stabbing a year. I wasn't here in '71 and '72. I came back again in '73. There was maybe a few gang fights but no stabbings, not any real bad things. It didn't really start until '76 or '77. There was a guy killed in five, next month after that was

another guy who got killed in cellblock 2 . . . Then it started increasing two or three (stabbings) every month. (U. and K. Interview)

Another inmate, in the same round of interviews, stated:

[Malley] came in like a real maniac. People can say what they want about Rodriguez, and maybe he did have his finger in the pie, but all I know man, all I know empirically, when he was warden here, you didn't have guys stabbing each other in wholesale numbers, you didn't have guys breaking out and running up the fence 15 or 20 at a time because it was too heavy for them to do time here. . . . It was a mellow, laid-back place under Rodriguez. (U. and K. Interview)

The trend toward greater inmate crime and violence after 1975 is also reflected in the number of inmates housed in solitary confinement (punishment) and protective custody. During the early 1970s, one cellblock housed both the prison's disciplinary cases and its protection cases. It averaged around 50 inmates, representing less than 5 percent of the population, and held as few as 13 in 1971. By 1976, over 20 percent of the inmates were either in protective custody or in segregation units, forcing the administration to designate one block for segregation and another for protective custody. Each block had a rated capacity of 90 inmates, but held as many as 200 inmates. Two and sometimes three inmates lived in a cell designed for one (OAGSNM, 1980:18, 27).

Further, a "breakdown" in the prison community appears to have heightened the level of deprivation experienced by inmates. Inmates experienced deprivation in the late 1970s, not only because of the direct effect of the institutional conditions, but because inmates preyed upon each other. One inmate stated:

Most trust was back in '69 and '70. It seemed like everybody trusted each other more. There wasn't too much ripping off the canteen and . . . a person didn't have to go to sleep with a shank in his pillow. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate stated:

Inmate: Inmates get up with there's nothing to do . . . They're mad. They ask the case worker, "Why don't you get me a job, or work somewhere, or something." [They answer,] "Nah, you don't need no job."
Question: Inmates sitting in a dormitory all huddled together, does that cause problems between [sic] the inmates?
Inmate: Yeah, it's just like a snake pit. Inmates that don't do nothing, they build up

and build up and they get tired of it. Maybe the inmate has borrowed something and they just going to jump him. But if they had something to do, this place [would] be better. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate observed:

Aaron came in, security tightened up, people started escaping, people started stabbing each other, people started killing each other. Sure, they got rid of the drugs, but the violence got worse. Your opportunity to go to school lessened, the educational services, the psychological services, everything was shrinking. (A.G. Interview)

Another factor causing inmates to distrust one another was the institution, by the administration, of a system of inmate informants. Prior to 1975, prison officials gathered information through several channels, including an inmate council consisting of inmates elected from each living unit. Inmates also passed information to the directors of the various inmate programs who, in turn, forwarded it to the warden. These avenues of communication were closed after 1975 with the abolishment of the inmate council and the curtailment of the inmate programs (OAGSNM, 1980:12, 23). In place of these programs, officials began a coercive "snitch" (informant) system. Officials threatened inmates with punishment unless they provided information on other inmates' misbehavior. The punishments included both direct disciplinary actions and the disclosure to other inmates that a noncooperative inmate was a "snitch" (OAGSNM, 1980:24). The snitch system increased the enmity among inmates.

Question: During the six months before the riot, did inmates trust each other?
Inmate: No. Hardly anybody trusted anybody else.
Question: Why do you think that was?
Inmate: It was because all that snitching was going on. (A.G. Interview)

There were fewer informants under Rodriguez's administration.

Question: Is the snitch system pretty prevalent?
Answer: Sure
Question: Under Rodriguez? Is that something that's changed?
Answer: When Rodriguez was Warden there was no such thing as a protection unit [for snitches] and I think it was a whole lot better. (A.G. Interview)

Another inmate stated:

Inmate: Just about three fourths of the inmates are snitching.

Question: Really?
Inmate: You can't hardly trust anybody.
Question: Are there more [snitches] now than there used to be or are there less?
Inmate: Seems like there are alot more now than there was before . . . Hell, you can't even trust your best friend anymore . . . They'll snitch on you.
Question: When did it start getting to be that bad?
Inmate: In about seventy-six.

Finally, in a 1985 interview, an inmate reported that he believed that the increased use of snitches after 1975 contributed to the violence in the 1980 riot.

It's [the snitch system] a real trashed out system. If that riot would have come down when Rodriguez was warden, I don't think 33 people would have died because I don't think there were 33 snitches in this whole penitentiary. When the riot [did] come down there was about a hundred and some odd down in Cell Block 4 (the protective custody unit), all of them stoned rats. (U. and K. Interview)

OUTCOME OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Breakdown theorists and resource-mobilization theorists also disagree over the effectiveness of protest in solving the problems of an aggrieved constituency. Resource-mobilization theorists argue that protest can be an effective lever for change, but this depends upon the presence of a protest organization that can mobilize and channel unrest (e.g., Gamson and Schmeidler, 1984). In its absence, the resources and skills necessary for effective protest cannot be aggregated and used efficiently. Breakdown theorists are internally divided. Traditionally, they have tended to dismiss protest as an agent for change. Protest was presumed to be an irrational response to the breakdown of the social order, and one incapable of forcing constructive change (e.g., Smelser, 1963; Kornhauser, 1959).

Writing more recently, breakdown theorists Piven and Cloward (1977; see also, Cloward and Piven, 1984) share the resource-mobilization theorists' supposition that protest can effect change, but challenge the strategic value of building a protest organization. Piven and Cloward posit that "poor" constituencies do not have the skills, money and other resources needed to build and sustain an effective protest organization. The most effective option is to create pressure for reform through a strategy of mass defiance and disruption.

From our 1985 interviews, it was apparent that the 1980 riot was directly responsible for

significant improvements in the living conditions, including the elimination of overcrowding, suppression of guard brutality, increased programming, less reliance on snitches for information, and fewer restrictions on personal property. One inmate stated:

> At that time [before the riot], they wasn't giving up anything. I mean it was a real fucked up place to be. You know it's still a real fucked up place to be. But at least a guy can live here with relatively safety, and you get fairly decent food and clean linen, showers and exercise . . . I have been in better joints than this, but the improvement now compared to before 1980 was—man—it's one-thousand percent better. Now they have pay jobs, and there is industrial jobs where your can work a day and get a day cut off your sentence. There's different pay jobs, but before the riot none of that. Shit, you know, probably seventy-five percent of the population was on idle. No one worked. (U. and K. Interview)

Speaking in 1985, a 1980 riot participant observed that he probably would not participate in another riot, because of the improved conditions.

> Myself I wouldn't feel near as good about participating in another one because there have been some things that have gotten better. They've gotten off my case and they've gotten off a lot of people's cases, for the most part . . . It's never going to be enjoyable but it's livable. . . . Now, that that [harrasment] is not happening, well you feel a little better about yourself. You do your time. You know you got "x" number of years to do. You gonna do it the best way you can and hopefully get out in one piece. And I think you stand a better chance of that now then you did before. (U. and K. Interview)

Another inmate reported that the riot had caused groups outside of the prison to take an interest in the welfare of the inmates, which he and other inmates "appreciate a lot." Prior to the riot, he stated, "we had nothing coming from the public; nothing at all from the public." (U. and K. Interview).

As further evidence that riot contributed to the improvements in the penitentiary, the Department of Corrections Secretary, interviewed on the fifth anniversary of the riot, stated that the 1980 riot had motivated him to try to improve the prison (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2/3/85, Sec. E, p. 4). He said that, in his opinion, the riot was the product of inmate idleness, crowding, and understaffing, and that he was seeking to remedy these problems. Call-

ing the snitch system "disgusting and immoral," he stated that it had been banned. He felt that these changes would decrease the likelihood of another riot. (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2/3/85, Sec. E, p. 4).

DISCUSSION

During the 1970s, the State Penitentiary changed from a relatively benign and well-run institution, to one that was harsh, abusive, painfully boring, and without the "regulatory mechanisms" that had been in place in the early 1970s. With few programs or work assignments available, inmates remained confined to their living units with little to do or look forward to. Inmates became increasingly hostile not only toward prison officials and guards, but also toward one another.

The processes of disorganization within the prison not only increased the likelihood of a riot, but also determined its form. The fragmenting of bonds among inmates appears to have contributed to the weak and chaotic structures of leadership among the inmates during the riot, as well as to the brutal attacks of some inmates against other inmates.

This case study has a number of implications for the study of collective action. It demonstrates that researchers have been too quick to reject the breakdown model. The New Mexico riot appears to have been (in part) a response to the prison disorganization that began dramatically around 1975. The riot was a product of the termination of inmate programs, crowding, idleness, and a generally poorly-administered prison system. Furthermore, the alternative resource-mobilization model cannot account for the riot. There is no evidence whatsoever that the prison riot occurred in 1980 because of an increase in inmate resources or solidarity, which resource-mobilization theorists say must precede collective action.

At the heart of controversy between breakdown and resource-mobilization theorists is the issue of the relationship between crime/deviance and collective action. Resource-mobilization theorists hold that crime/deviance and collective action arise from different, if not opposite, processes. They argue that crime/deviance and collective action should not covary or, if they do, the links should be weak and negative. Breakdown theorists argue that crime/deviance and collective action covary because they arise from the same underlying condition. On this point, the New Mexico data support the breakdown position. The 1980 riot followed a period of dramatic increase in the level of personal violence in the prison, as described by the inmate interviews and as seen in

the large increase in the number of inmates in protective custody and segregation.

Black (1984) has recently argued that much crime is an effort to seek justice by those who have a grievance but to whom law is relatively unavailable. Youths may vandalize property, for example, because they have grievances against adults but no legal recourse. Seen in this light, crime has much in common with protest (even as resource-mobilization theorists conceive the latter), in that both express a grievance by one person or group against another person or group. Resource-mobilization theorists have failed to see this link between protest and crime, not so much because of weaknesses in their model of protest, but because they underestimate the moral component of crime.[4]

The interviews and increasing punishment suggest, as well, a causal connection between crime and collective action. A secure, low-crime environment is a valued condition, and its absence may produce anger toward authorities or toward others in the community, or toward both. In New Mexico, inmates complained bitterly about the beatings and the absence of security in the prison before the riot. This dissatisfaction appears to have fueled the riot. When authorities respond regressively to increases in crime/deviance, but do not destroy all forms of resistance, the increased repression may add a further impetus to collective action. This proposition fits well with the evidence for the New Mexico riot. The prison administration responded to the increased level of crime/deviance with a coercive snitch system and a greater use of solitary confinement. Both of these policies appear to have angered inmates and to have helped motivate them to start the riot.

These findings, though, do not indicate the utility of accepting the full breakdown model as a general account of collective action. The case study provides no support for the presumption held by some breakdown theorists that collective action inevitably fails. The living conditions of the State Penitentiary were substantially better in 1985 than they were before the riot. The 1980 riot contributed to these improvements.

Furthermore, the evidence does not give

much support to the Durkheimian strand of breakdown theory which emphasizes anomie, egoism, and the breakdown of a group's internal structure as causes of collective action. A similar model was applied to prisons by Sykes (1958), who argued that riots occurred when authorities suppressed the pre-existing social order and allowed unruly, violence-prone inmates to gain pre-eminence.

In examining both sets of interviews, we found no evidence that there was much of an inmate social order even under the Rodriguez administration, that any group of inmates lost or gained relative power after 1975, or that such processes had anything to do with the outbreak of the riot.

Neither did we find the actions of most inmates during the riot to be irrational or characteristic of "magical beliefs." Most of the inmates we interviewed in 1985 described the riot as a more or less justified and successful attempt to relieve unjustly bad conditions of life. In fact, the quantity and quality of the violence, in its apparent savagery and irrationality, may have been the most effective possible strategy to motivate the state government to make sweeping improvements (Morris, 1983:225–26).

The evidence does, though, support Piven's and Cloward's thesis of the advantages of mass defiance, at least in the prison setting. The New Mexico riot forced substantial prison reforms in the absence of a protest organization. Although work comparing the relative "success" of prison riots is needed before we draw any firm conclusion, it would appear that fear of another high-cost prison riot provides a deeper impetus for prison reform than the concessions that inmate negotiators sometimes force officials to agree to during a riot. Once order is restored, inmates have no means to ensure compliance with these concessions, nor are state and prison officials likely to feel bound by them since officials agreed to them under duress.

Furthermore, collective action may have distinct subtypes, some promoted by the processes identified by the breakdown theorists, others by the processes specified by the resource-mobilization theorists. One possibility is that relatively spontaneous, short-lived actions, such as riots, arise primarily from breakdown processes, whereas the more enduring forms, such as social movements, flow from resource-mobilization processes. We find, however, no support for this proposition in the current theoretical literature. Breakdown theorists apply their model to social movements (Kornhauser, 1959; Piven and Cloward, 1977), and resource-mobilization theorists see their model as able to account for

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[4] Based, as it is, on Black's view of crime, this observation is tentative. Black and his associates (e.g., Baumgartner [1984] and Rieder [1984]) have opened a new perspective on crime and its relationship to other forms of "social control." The effort is still in its early stages, however, and lacks confirmatory evidence. It may turn out that Black and his associates are explaining the exceptional case rather than the modal one or even a frequent one.

riots. More important, perhaps, are the prevailing historical and cultural conditions within which the collective action is embedded. For example, it could be argued that resource-mobilization processes—such as increased solidarity and heightened political struggles—were responsible for the urban riots of the late 1960s and the Attica riot of 1971. In contrast, both the black riots which occurred in Miami in 1980 (Porter and Dunn, 1984) and the New Mexico prison riot of 1980 may have been breakdown riots, in part because of the demise of a culture of opposition in the United States.[5]

The breakdown model, over the past decade, has fallen into disfavor among social movement researchers. This case study suggests that breakdown processes can contribute to at least certain instances of collective action. Furthermore, as noted at the outset, the evidence on the breakdown model in other contexts is equivocal, despite the claims of resource-mobilization theorists otherwise. The brief against the breakdown model rests on shaky empirical grounds.

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[5] Elsewhere, we have developed a theory to explain the variation in the form of prison riots. "Identification" is the key independent variable, which refers to a state in which individuals either model their behavior after other actors or choose their actions according to their effects on others (Useem and Kimball, 1985).

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