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The Dynamics of Power Relations and Resistance Typology in Sorkin's *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic between governmental power and social movements is a recurring theme in historical cinema, exemplifying the persistent struggle against systemic authority. *The Trial of the Chicago 7* vividly portrays this friction through the unequal relationship between the Nixon-era government and the Anti-Vietnam War Social Movement. Although power and resistance in cinematic narratives are frequently explored, limited research systematically integrates Michel Foucault's concepts of power relations with Hollander and Einwohner's multi-dimensional resistance typology to dissect the specific, underlying nature of these historical conflicts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the complex power dynamics and classify the resulting acts of resistance depicted within the film. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research analyzes the film's visual narrative and its script, evaluating the data through Foucault's framework and Hollander and Einwohner's three core resistance parameters: the actor's intent, the target's recognition, and the observer's recognition. The analysis identifies eight explicit instances of governmental power exertion (five by government officials and three by law enforcement) designed to suppress the movement's morale. In response, the study classifies 16 distinct acts of resistance based on the three parameters: nine instances of overt resistance, three of target-defined resistance, one of external-defined resistance, one of attempted resistance, and two instances of missed resistance. These results demonstrate that a repressive, Panopticon-like governmental power inevitably triggers complex, systemic forms of resistance from activists. At last, the study highlights that resistance is not monolithic. It is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped entirely by who intends it and who recognizes it within the social arena.

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INTRODUCTION

Society exists only when social beings behave toward one another in ways dictated by their recognition of one another. Certain societies may embrace the new system and accept the risk of change, whereas others may be unwilling to do so due to a fear of transformation. Those who felt wronged or mistreated by those in power began joining groups, eventually coalescing into a social movement. Many events sparked the Civil Rights Movement. One of them was the opposition to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War that began when Vietnam was divided into a communist north under Ho Chi Minh and the South under the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem (Karnow, 1984). A civil war erupted in Vietnam as Minh wanted

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to unite the North and the South under his leadership. However, The American government saw the situation in Vietnam in terms of the Domino Theory, which states that if South Vietnam falls in the hands of the communist North, communism will spread to the neighboring counties.

The timeless tension between state authority and social movements often finds its most crucial form of representation in the medium of cinema. As an ideological apparatus, cinema not only reproduces historical narratives but also functions as an instrument of social control and a vehicle for the emergence of new methods of resistance. Aaron Sorkin's film *The Trial of the Chicago 7* offers a sharp portrayal of how governmental power—in this case, the Nixon era—sought to discipline subjects considered rebellious through repressive legal mechanisms. This phenomenon reflects Michel Foucault's thinking on power relations, where the courtroom is transformed into an arena of surveillance and normalization that seeks to silence subaltern voices. However, the academic challenge that arises today is not merely identifying the existence of such injustice, but dissecting at a micro level how structures of resistance are built amidst the siege of absolute power.

The main problem in the study of cinematic resistance is that researchers often get trapped in generalizing acts of defiance without having a rigid classification. In reality, resistance is a multidimensional phenomenon heavily dependent on perception. To address this ambiguity, a systematic framework is needed, such as the typology of resistance proposed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), which categorizes resistance based on three main pillars: the actor's intent, recognition of the target authority, and recognition by observers. The "observer" pillar is the most decisive variable for international researchers because, in the context of political trials, the presence of jurors, the media, and the public acts as a moral jury that determines whether an act of "silence" or "outcry" will be recorded as a successful form of resistance or merely a failure of communication.

Aaron Sorkin's film *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is not just a historical courtroom drama, but a complex cinematic representation of the clash between state authority and grassroots movements. The film's narrative depicts how state power is used to discipline subjects deemed to be in defiance through legal instruments. In this context, power relations do not operate linearly from top to bottom, but rather through a network of disciplinary mechanisms that are embedded in institutional spaces. This phenomenon is in line with Michel Foucault's thinking on power relations, in which power is viewed as something exercised through surveillance and normalization (Foucault, 1979). Where there is oppressive power, resistance emerges as a form of affirmation of the subject's existence.

However, to deeply understand how such resistance operates in film, a framework is needed that goes beyond a description of social movements. This study employs the typology of resistance developed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), which analyzes resistance through three main interactional pillars: the actor's intent, recognition by the target authority, and—most crucial yet often overlooked—recognition by the observer. The use of the "observer" pillar is particularly vital in the context of this film, given that the courtroom functions as a social theater stage where the jury, the media, and the public act as an audience that determines the validity of an act of resistance. Without incorporating the observer's perspective, the distinction between overt resistance and resistance defined solely by the target becomes blurred.

Gamson and Tarrow (1999) defines social movement as the collection of challenges by people with solidarity and common goals in continuous interaction with elites, opponents,

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
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and authorities. Social movements differ from other types of collective behavior, such as crowd, riot, and rebel, in three ways: 1) they are structured, 2) they are deliberate, and 3) they endure (Locher, 2002). In this case, several causes in America sparked social movements for student rights, women's rights, racial equality, environmental protection, and voting rights. Social movement have the potential to devastate a society completely. Social change would only occur without social movements when leaders and elites decided it should. When people who do not have individual political power get together and form organizations, they build their power. (Locher, 2002).

Power is defined as an agent's ability to impose his will over the will of the helpless or as the capacity to compel someone to do something they do not want to (Deacon, 2002). Power is viewed in this context as a possession that belongs to individuals in positions of authority. But, according to Foucault, power is more of a tactic than a thing that can be owned; rather, it is something that acts and shows itself in a certain way (Foucault, 1979). Power needs to be understood as something that moves around or as something that simply functions as a chain. Through a network like organization, power is employed and wielded. Persons are the sources of power, not where it is used. This method of comprehending power emphasizes two crucial elements: Instead of being a relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, power is a system, a network of relations that encompasses the entire society. Moreover, people are not merely the objects of power, they are also the site of both its exercise and its opposition (Macey, 2019). All of this will lead to resistance, both planned and unplanned. Besides, Foucault argues at one point that resistance equals power, and if power is balanced, no matter how oppressive the system is, there must be a potential for resistance (Sayer, 2012). Power according to Foucault is purely relational and impersonal (Marshall, 1996). The issue of power is not a matter of possession, in the context of who controls whom or who is strong while the others are weak. Power is dispersed; in other words, power is omnipresent and exists in every social relation (Rahayu, 2021). According to Carr (1998, as cited in Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), resistance refers to an action a person engages in while in opposition. Furthermore, Foucault (1978, as cited in Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) asserts that where power exists, resistance exists. It indicates that resistance is tied to power, and the term resistance is used to define human behavior or human activity in social life (individual, collective, institutional) and varied situations such as politics and the workplace. Their resistance to change may be due to prejudices and stereotypes about the new system or culture. When someone is oppressed or dominated by another, resistance arises.

Although the representation of power and defiance in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* has sparked diverse academic discourse, the majority of studies still rely on discourse analysis, historical reviews, semiotics, and linguistic pragmatics. Research by Aşit et al. (2025) has explored this film with a focus on practices of civil disobedience and the state's ideological apparatus, evaluating how the characters within it defend their constitutional rights through discursive strategies against state power. This study successfully reveals how state power operates repressively, much like a mechanical Panopticon; both approaches have limitations as they tend to view resistance as a uniform, confrontational response. Cavender and Jurik (2020) highlight this film as a historical portrait capturing the state's brutal and oppressive response in the courtroom to the public's movement rejecting the status quo. From a semiotic perspective, Arrazi and Fuady (2022) analyze the representation of political communication in this film through John Fiske's framework, revealing how class ideology, materialism, and race are depicted both visually and through dialogue by the actors. Meanwhile, at the micro-

linguistic level, Rahayu, Abida, and Damanhuri (2025) analyze the use of commissive speech acts and find that language (such as threats from the prosecutor, warnings from the judge, and promises from the defense attorney) functions pragmatically as a tool of power, resistance, and ideological negotiation within the courtroom discourse.

Several studies have also used to explain the power relation and resistance issues in literary works. Sobo (2016), for example, makes a significant contribution to the literature on resistance by clearly distinguishing between mere passive "refusal" and "resistance," which requires active opposition to domination. Meanwhile, Lilja's (2022) study adopts and expands on Hollander and Einwohner's dimensions by emphasizing the intentional-unintentional nexus to examine how an action can be defined as resistance within a political landscape. Although the theoretical frameworks in these sociological studies are highly refined, there is a gap in their application to film analysis; specifically, regarding how a passive "refusal" can dynamically shift its status to *target-defined resistance* or *overt resistance* solely due to recognition by an "observer" (such as a jury, journalist, or the public). This study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by combining Foucault's analysis of power relations with the interactional matrix proposed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) to map the dynamics of resistance in the film *The Trial of the Chicago 7* with greater precision.

Therefore, this study aims to identify how Foucaultian power relations trigger various forms of resistance in *The Trial of the Chicago 7*. By classifying these actions into seven typologies of resistance, this study is expected to provide new insights into how the courtroom becomes an arena where public recognition (observer recognition) serves as a determining factor in the success of resistance against state authority.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using narrative and cinematic visual analysis. Given that the subject matter of this study is an audiovisual work, the analytical framework does not focus solely on text or transcripts but also adopts the film analysis methods of Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith (2017). The analysis focuses on narrative elements (dialogue structure, character motifs) and *mise-en-scène* elements (facial expressions, gestures, and spatial interactions between characters in the courtroom) to dissect how power relations and resistance are represented on screen. The primary data source for this study is the film *The Trial of the Chicago 7* (2020) directed by Aaron Sorkin, along with its official dialogue transcript.

To ensure the accuracy of the typology of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), this study specifically operationalizes three main dimensions within the film's diegetic space (story world), namely:

1. Actor (Actor): Characters who perform actions that have the potential to constitute a form of resistance (e.g., the Chicago 7 defendants or their legal team).
2. Target (Target): Figures holding state authority toward whom these actions are directed (specifically Judge Julius Hoffman and Prosecutor Richard Schultz).
3. Observer (Observer): Given that the film's primary setting is the courtroom, the observer's role is strictly operationalized as characters present in the courtroom who witness the interaction between the Actor and the Target. These observers include jurors, journalists, police officers, and members of the courtroom gallery. Their reactions—such as laughter, murmurs, or silence—serve as key indicators of whether an act of resistance is "recognized" or "noticed" by the public.

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
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Data Collection and Analysis Steps To ensure accuracy and readability, the research procedure was conducted through the following systematic stages:

1. Repeated Viewing (Close Viewing): The researcher watched the film repeatedly while synchronizing it with the dialogue transcript. This stage aims to identify key scenes containing political tension, the application of the law, and ideological clashes.
2. Identification of Power Relations (Foucaultian): Categorizing scenes and dialogues that represent the exercise of power by the government and law enforcement agencies, using Michel Foucault's framework of power relations and discipline.
3. Testing the Three Pillars of Resistance: For each scene identified in the second step, the researcher evaluates the defendants' responses through three test questions:
    - Intent: Do the characters' narratives or gestures indicate a deliberate intent to resist?
    - Target Recognition: Did the judge or prosecutor recognize and react (e.g., impose a contempt of court sanction) to the action?
    - Observer Recognition: Did the courtroom audience (jury/journalists) respond to or recognize the act of resistance?
4. Typological Classification: Classify each tested action into one of the seven matrices proposed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), namely: Overt, Covert, Unwitting, Target-Defined, Externally-Defined, Missed, or Attempted Resistance.
5. Synthesis and Conclusion: Draw connections between how the power model (Step 2) influences the prevalence of specific types of resistance (Step 4), then synthesize these into comprehensive research finding.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Manifestation of Governments Power relation

The data analysis in this study reveals that the courtroom in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is not merely a neutral venue for the administration of justice, but rather a theater of power systematically designed to repress civil liberties. As emphasized by Foucault (1980), power is always manifested in the form of structural domination that operates to discipline, monitor, and modify individual actions. In the film's narrative, the government (the Nixon era) held absolute control, using the legal apparatus to destroy the morale of the anti-Vietnam War social movement. This finding strongly resonates with the views of Cavender and Jurik (2020), who underscore that the Chicago 7 trial is a historical portrait in which the state responds to any form of challenge to the status quo with brutality and institutional oppression. Furthermore, government authority does not merely punish physically but operates as the state's ideological apparatus, silencing narratives of civil disobedience to perpetuate its political dominance (Aşit et al., 2025).

This government dominance is not only manifested through arbitrary court verdicts but also permeates micro-mechanisms such as political communication and the speech acts of those in authority. This hegemony of power is explicitly represented through dialogue saturated with the arrogance of class ideology and status (Arrazi & Fuady, 2022). Specifically, this authority is exercised through language, such as constant threats from prosecutors and unilateral warnings from judges, which is pragmatically utilized as an absolute instrument of power to silence the truth (Rahayu et al., 2025). However, the immutable law of power relations states that where there is repression, resistance is born. When defendants are

confronted with tyrannical power, passively avoiding or "resisting" in the courtroom is no longer sufficient (Sobo, 2016). Departing from the dynamics of such absolute governmental power, the data presented below will detail how state repression actually triggers defendants to transform and give rise to various complex typologies of resistance in the public eye.

Government Officials and. Anti-Vietnam War Movement

The main influence of power in a country of course comes from a government. In the film The Trial of the Chicago 7, the main influence of power relation which ended in the formation of the anti- Vietnam War movement came from government officials. This data will show how government officials systematically carry out the practice of power to fulfill the goals of their leaders. In this case, it started with Lyndon B. Johnson's statement as the American president at that time who had influence and power.

> Lyndon Johnson : I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 almost immediately. This will make it necessary to increase our active fighting forces by raising the monthly draft from 17,000 to 35,000 per month.
> (Sorkin, 2020, 00:01:00 – 00:01:23)

The data above shows how President Lyndon Johnson used his dominant power as the number one person in the country by ordering that there would be an increase in active troops from 75,000 to 125,000. President Johnson's decision to increase troop numbers and monthly drafts shows how power does not simply originate from a position of authority, in this case the presidency, but also operates through complex social relations involving military institutions, government, and society. Then there was an increase in the number of drafts and deployment of troops in other dialogues, creating conditions for the emergence or intensification of the anti-Vietnam War movement. The increase in military prescriptions announced by President Johnson himself, starting from 17,000 to 35,000 and even 51,000 men between the ages of 18 and 24 have now been called to duty per month, has caused upheaval in society, in this case those who have the impact.

Power is not only repressive but also generative (Foucault, 1979). In this case, the power represented by the government not only limits individual actions through drafts but also creates a field of debate and social dialogue. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to increase the number of troops and the military draft is an example of the execution of social control through state institutions. In this case, the governmental power, exercised by the President, implements control over the social body in two main ways: first, by increasing the number of draftees, directly intervening in the lives of individuals called to duty; secondly, through public announcements and policies, influencing society's collective perceptions and actions. As Liu (2024) argues regarding Foucault's concept of micro-power, the modern art of domination integrates discipline seamlessly into people's daily lives, alienating their utility to make them compliant parts of the state's social machine. This biopolitical control is further supported by the film's depiction of how state apparatuses utilize surveillance and discipline to enforce public consent on a macro scale (Aşit *et al*., 2025).

This of control is rooted in the understanding that the social body, which consists of populations of individuals and groups that can be regulated and manipulated to achieve certain goals. In this context, the government's goal is to increase military capacity to meet war needs. This was done not only through the physical increase in troop numbers, but also

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
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through psychological and social manipulation, namely through the creation of a climate of fear and national obligation that forced individuals to comply with the draft policies. The construction of such a climate mirrors how authoritarian structures utilize discursive formations to create a simulated reality, thereby legitimizing their absolute power and obscuring the actual oppressive reality of the war (Apriyani & Rosly, 2024). Furthermore, this top-down exercise of power operates through social knowledge that imposes specific reifying "truth claims" about patriotism, leaving the populace constrained by ideological dictates (Haugaard, 2022).

Control over the social body in this context also involves aspects of power that are not only repressive, but also productive. Power is not only about oppressing or prohibiting, but also about producing reality, knowledge and subjectivity (Foucault, 1980). Johnson's decision created conditions that not only strengthened military and war structures, but also sparked the production of forms of resistance and social dialogue, in this case the anti-Vietnam War movement. This phenomenon firmly aligns with Poorghorban's (2023) assertion that human subjectivity is ultimately shaped within the inescapable duality of power and resistance. Consequently, as explicitly evidenced in various critical discourse studies, power functions not merely as an instrument of pure domination, but inherently acts as a fundamental stimulator that awakens marginalized agency and catalyzes active defiance against the status quo (Negm, 2021).

Howard : Section 2101 of Title 18.
Mitchell : That's the federal law that was broken.
Schultz : That's the Rap Brown law.
Howard : Conspiracy to Cross State Lines in Order to Incite Violence. It comes with a ten- year maximum and we want all ten
Schultz : Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, Dave Dellinger, Lee Weiner, John Froines...and Bobby Seale?
Mitchell : I call them the schoolboys, and when I do, everyone here knows who I'm talking about. Petulant and dangerous. And we've watched for a decade while these rebels without a job who've never bothered to get their hands dirty fighting the enemy tell us how to prosecute a war. The decade's over, the grown-ups are back and I deem these shitty little fairies to be a threat to national security so they're gonna spend their 30's in a federal facility. Real time. (Sorkin, 2020, 00:10:28 – 00:11:21)

In this dialogue, John Mitchell, as Attorney General at the time, took advantage of the Rap Brown Law or Anti-Riot Act to target activists with conspiracy charges. The laws mentioned are intended to control and curb certain movements that the government deems threaten, and these initiatives demonstrate the relationship between law as a tool of power and its use to enforce social norms desired by the state. John Mitchell, then Attorney General,'s use of the law to pursue activists was not simply about the literal application of the law to specific actions but it is about leveraging the law as a tool to enforce a particular version of truth and order desired by the state. Through these laws, the government attempted to define what was socially acceptable and what was considered a threat, in this case, activism against the Vietnam war and disagreement with the status quo. By manipulating the legal framework to establish a dominant narrative, the government exercises a form of despotic power aimed at extinguishing the agency of those who dare to oppose the established order (Sanders, 2020).

Besides, Mitchell's choice of words like "petulant and dangerous," "rebels without a job," and "shitty little fairies" are not just a rejection of activism, but an attempt to shape subjects through domination of the mind, by creating narratives that discredit and stigmatize them. It shows how power uses language and law as tools to shape public perception, mark the boundaries of acceptable behavior, and marginalize challenging voices. Such discursive strategies serve as crucial mechanisms for social control, deliberately employed to delegitimize any practices of civil disobedience (Aşit *et al.*, 2025). By aggressively framing the activists' actions through derogatory linguistic markers, the state attempts to downgrade their profound political resistance into a mere pathological refusal, effectively trying to strip them of their ideological legitimacy and isolate them from broader societal support (Sobo, 2016).

On the other hand, the uncertainty expressed by Richard Schultz about the implementation of the law by saying "Well as a matter of fact, sir, we don't believe any federal laws were broken last summer. Mr Foran had our office run a thorough investigation. Plenty of trespassing, destruction of public property, lewd behavior I suppose, but nothing rising to the level of—" indicates a gap in the system of power, a place where domination can be questioned and resisted, even from within (Foucault, 1979).

Law Enforcement and Security Parties and. Anti-Vietnam War Movement

The following section will explain that apart from those in government, there are also security and law enforcement parties, where they have the same vision to achieve their goals. In this case, the groups that have power are the police, prosecutors, and judge. The actions they take are not based on their own intentions, but based on what the person's goal who have higher of power, in this case at the presidential level.

Schultz : Would you state your full name please?
Wojohowski : Stanley R. Wojohowski.
Man : (flashback) Abbie. This is Stan.
Wojohowski : Stan Wojohowski.
Abbie: How you doin', Stan?
Eddie: Stan's gonna be one of your bodyguards, he handles himself pretty well
Schultz : And what is your occupation please, Mr. Wojohowski?
Wojohowski : I'm a Chicago Police Officer.

(Sorkin, 2020, 00:54:01 – 00:55:38)

In this dialogue, several police officers and FBI agents who testify in the trial are shown. These individuals served as witnesses because they had infiltrated the anti-Vietnam war movement group under cover. The names mentioned in the scene include Stanley R. Wojohowski as a Chicago Police Officer, Detective Sam McGiven from the Chicago Police Department, Staff Sergeant Scott Scibelli from the Illinois State Police, and Special Agent Daphne O'Conner from FBI Counter Intelligence. In the context of this scene, the disguise of police officers and FBI agents as part of the anti-Vietnam War movement serves as a modern embodiment of the Panopticon principle.

The concept of the Panopticon refers to a prison structure where inmates always feel watched without ever knowing when they are being watched (Foucault, 1979). These undercover operations also demonstrate the broader control of power over the social body, by including agents who can report back on the activities and potential plans of the demonstrators. This strategy is not just about direct repression or suppression, but about

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
DOI. 10.59066/cn.v3i2.1206

manipulation and surveillance that allows authorities to anticipate and respond to protests from within. This pre-emptive policing aligns with Cavender and Jurik's (2020) observation that the state employs insidious methods to crush challenges to the status quo, transforming the very fabric of social movements into an extended carceral space. Their unknown presence within the movement places all activists in a constant state of feeling watched, even though they may not be aware of the details. This makes it possible for those undercover to provide real bad testimony or even false testimony that could worsen the Chicago 7's indictment. It shows how power, in the form of control, operates in more subtle and pervasive ways, penetrating social networks and communities to influence and shape their dynamics. It is clear that power is something that is exercised, not something that is possessed (Foucault, 1978). This invisible exercise of power validates the premise that modern domination relies heavily on the constant, internalized threat of surveillance to manufacture compliance and suppress civil disobedience before it can even fully materialize (Yu, 2024).

Judge Hoffman : (to JUROR #6) Your parents received this note in their mail this morning. They called the police as they should have done. I'd like you to take the note and read it out loud.
Juror #6 : (reading) "We're watching you."
Judge Hoffman : And you see who's signed it.
Juror #6 : "The Panthers".
Judge Hoffman : And you understand that to mean the Black Panthers, don't you? And you understand that defendant Bobby Seale is the head of the Black Panthers. He's the Chairman of the Black Panther Party. Do you still feel you can render a fair and impartial verdict. (Sorkin, 2020, 00:41:12 – 00:41:48)

The influence of Judge Hoffman's power is also shown in another scene, where he calls Jurors number 6 and 11 to his room along with the defendant's lawyers and also the prosecutor. In the case of juror number 6, he received a threatening note that read "We're watching you." and signed by The Panthers. Kunstler, who felt strange, clearly questioned this but was not given the opportunity by Judge Hoffman. He uses this information to regulate and modify juror behavior, in this case by removing jurors from the panel. This reflects how power can be exercised not only physically but also through the spread of fear and surveillance (Foucault, 1979). By orchestrating this intimidation and manipulating the jury's perception, the state effectively transforms the judicial process into an oppressive tool designed to crush any dissent and relentlessly maintain the established status quo (Cavender & Jurik, 2020).

The judge's power here is again related to knowledge and truth. The judge decides what is considered relevant facts and how those facts should be interpreted. In this case, the judge attributed threats received by the jury to Bobby Seale and the Black Panther Party without in-depth investigation, demonstrating how power often controls the accepted narrative of truth. Especially with Judge Hoffman's statement "And you understand that to mean the Black Panthers, don't you? And you understand that defendant Bobby Seale was the head of the Black Panthers. He's the Chairman of the Black Panther Party. Do you still feel you can render a fair and impartial verdict? Juror Number 6, your family has been threatened and so has you by members of an organization led by one of the defendants." increasingly clearing Bobby Seale's corner, which made Kunstler try to interrupt him several times, although to no avail. This ended in the dismissal of the jury, so that there would be no further threats to the in jurors. Jury dismissal reflects how power operates through exclusion and inclusion,

controlling who may participate in court proceedings, and thus, who may contribute to the official determination of truth. Furthermore, Judge Hoffman's leading questions function as a powerful pragmatic tool, utilizing language and speech acts to establish absolute dominance, legitimize his biased narrative, and politically corner the defendants (Rahayu *et al.*, 2025). This discursive manipulation not only reflects the systemic racial and class ideologies embedded deeply within the legal system's communication (Arrazi & Fuady, 2022), but it also demonstrates how despotic power manufactures a definitive reality to systematically deny marginalized subjects their agency and right to a fair judicial process (Sanders, 2020).

The Social Movements' Resistance

In this film, the resistance that was carried out was focused on social movement protestors who were also dictated for their actions in carrying out the anti-Vietnam-war protests. This analysis will focus on eight (later seven) protesters that are representatives of several groups such as the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (the Mobe), the Black Panther Party, the Youth International Party (Yippies), the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), as well as two lawyers accompanying the defendants. It found out that there were five types of resistance in this film: overt resistance, target-defined resistance, external-defined resistance, attempted resistance, and missed resistance, which will be discussed below.

Overt Resistance

In showing resistance through something or someone, the actors usually carry out the resistance visibly. They are recognized by both the target and the observer, making this the consensual core of resistance because it is easy to recognize. In this case, overt resistance began with the actions taken between Abbie and Rubin as the defendant and Judge Hoffman. As Hollander and Einwohner (2004) declare, this mutual recognition by both the target and the observer is what definitively categorizes an act as "overt resistance," distinguishing it from mere hidden dissent or unintentional defiance. By staging their protest so publicly, the defendants actively transform the courtroom from a space of state discipline into a visible arena for counter-hegemonic struggle (Aşit *et al.*, 2025).

In this scene, they attempt to insult the law enforcement, namely the Police and the Judge. Rubin and Hoffman wearing Judge robes and pins resembling those of Judge Hoffman, leading to them being asked to remove the robes due to the attention they drew from the entire courtroom. However, it turns out they were also wearing police. Additionally, their use of pig nametags and several other police attributes indicates that from the beginning, they intended to confront their target, focusing on Judge Hoffman. Moreover, Abbie's statement to Judge Hoffman, "It's an homage to you, sir," further clarifies that their actions were intended to insult him. In this case, the star symbol on police uniforms, which should represent law enforcement, turns into sarcasm, especially with the pig nametag, making their insult even more evident. Furthermore, Abbie's sarcastic utterance functions as a pragmatic commissive act of defiance, using language not just to communicate, but to actively dismantle the judge's political authority in the discourse space (Rahayu *et al.*, 2025).

The actions of Rubin and Hoffman as actors in this mocking trial succeeded in triggering laughter from the gallery members as observers, thereby stirring the emotions of Judge Hoffman as the target of resistance and leading him to punish them by ordering the

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
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courtroom audience to be silent and directing the Bailiff to charge Rubin and Hoffman with one count of contempt for not regretting their actions. In this context, their actions clearly constitute overt resistance as they challenge Judge Hoffman and fall into the category of sense of opposition. Their actions are part of resistance according to the explanations of many authors, where resistance can be manifested through symbolic behavior (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). The gallery's spontaneous laughter serves as the critical 'observer recognition' required in Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) matrix, validating the act not as a passive refusal, but as a successful, active opposition to dominance (Sobo, 2016). Moreover, Judge Hoffman's emotional retaliation and use of contempt charges illustrate the fragility of despotic power when confronted with defiant power from within (Sanders, 2020); proving that while the state uses the courtroom to enforce a monolithic truth, such repressive environments inevitably stimulate profound and visible forms of generative resistance (Cavender & Jurik, 2020).

Tom : Wait, Rennie Davis has just been beaten by the police! Rennie's skull has been cracked open.
Kunstler : Did you tell your crowd to stay calm or did you--
Tom : Bill--
Kunstler : I'm Richard Schultz and John Mitchell told me to win, Tom. Did you tell your crowd to stay calm or did you say--
Tom : Yes. If blood is gonna flow– (shouting into the microphone) --let it flow all over the city!
David : God damn it! Tom!
Tom : (into the microphone) If gas is gonna be used, let it come down all over Chicago! We're going to the Convention! Let's get on the street! Get on the street! (Sorkin, 2020, 01:42:50- 01:43:20)

In the flashback, Tom as an actor speaks to the crowd in response to the violence experienced by Rennie Davis by the police. His statements sparked direct action from protesters which then led to riots in Chicago. Tom took active action by using a microphone to convey a message to the crowd of protesters. These actions were not only active but also organized and deliberate, in response to acts of violence he saw. In addition, his provocative statement, "If blood is gonna flow, let it flow all over the city! If gas is gonna be used, let it come down all over Chicago! We're going to the Convention! Get on the street!" is a direct call to oppose and challenge police actions. It expresses opposition not only to specific incidents but also to the broader systems that are seen as enabling the violence. In his provocation, Tom uses the word "blood" to signify the blood of the protesters, implying "if they are going to beat us up, everyone should see it." However, because he made this statement in front of the police, who were the target of this resistance, a misunderstanding occurred right away and ended with the Chicago riot.

Tom's statement in front of a crowd of protesters ensured that his act of resistance would be recognized by those who heard it, as well as by authorities who might be monitoring or responding to the protest. Moreover, his intention was clearly to mobilize protesters and elicit an immediate response to what he perceived as repressive actions by the police. This shows an intention to rally protesters and direct their emotions into direct action. Also, his actions were highly visible and recognized as resistance by all parties, including protesters, police, and other observers present at the time. By speaking into a microphone, Tom ensured that his resistance was heard widely. His deliberate and overt actions can be categorized as

overt resistance. He clearly calls for collective action that openly challenges the authority of the police and, at a broader level, the political and justice systems that he holds responsible for violence against protesters.

Target-defined Resistance

Their resistance is not fully realized by themselves as resistance, but it could be that other people we address or even our interlocutors respond to such actions as resistance. This type of action is referred to as target-defined resistance, where the actor is not aware of his actions as resistance, and the observer does not see the actor's actions as resistance, but the target perceives otherwise.

Stahl : I'll tell you the same thing I told Mr. Hoffman, Mr. Rubin and Mr. Dellinger--
Tom : Sir--
Stahl : There will be no demonstrations within sight of the Hilton.
Tom : We need to demonstrate near the Hilton, that's where the convention is.
Stahl : There will be no demonstrations within sight of the Hilton.
Tom : Okay, but the thing is, there will be.
Stahl : Is that a threat, Mr. Hayden?
Tom : No. We're cautioning you. Thousands of people are coming to Chicago and if they're not given a place to demonstrate they're gonna demonstrate wherever they're standing. It's reckless, irresponsible and foolishly dangerous of the city not to develop a contingency plan. We're gonna need police security and first aid, traffic control, water, sanitation—

(Sorkin, 2020, 00:33:06 – 00:33:42)

In this dialogue, Tom is trying to negotiate with Stahl about the location of the demonstration, warning about the potential consequences of not making room for the protesters. Tom actively attempted to discuss and negotiate with Stahl, which was a blatant verbal act. Although Tom is not explicitly defiant in this exchange, he confirms that a demonstration will occur, which contradicts what Stahl said. This shows indirect opposition to the plans and rules established by Stahl. When Stahl interprets Tom's statement as a threat, this illustrates the dynamic of resistance.

Tom's intention was to emphasize that if protesters are not given a proper place to demonstrate, they will do so in an uncontrolled manner, which could have dangerous consequences. Stahl, as a representative of authority, perceives these attempts at communication as threats rather than logical contingency plans, indicating an inability to recognize Tom's true intentions, such that he recognizes what Tom says as a form of resistance or challenge to his authority by interpreting it as a threat. In this case, because Tom did not have the intention to resist but was considered resistance by Stahl, this action can be classified as target-defined resistance.

Kunstler : We feel that sequestration for what appears will be a considerable period of time can only serve--Judge
Hoffman : It would be a considerably shorter period of time if the defense made fewer objections.
Kunstler : --can only serve to the defendants' disadvantage. And Your Honor, the defense will make not one fewer objection than the prosecution or this Court gives us reason to.
Judge Hoffman: Bailiff, charge Mr. Kunstler with one count of Contempt.

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
DOI. 10.59066/cn.v3i2.1206

(Sorkin, 2020, 00:46:04 - 00:46:28)

Kunstler in the scene represents the defense and tries to respond or question the court's actions that he considers detrimental to the defendants. Judge Hoffman's reaction to Kunstler's efforts ended with him imposing contempt of court sanctions on Kunstler. Kunstler's actions in trying to speak out and defend the rights and interests of the defendant are an example of a sense of action. This is active verbal behavior that attempts to challenge or at least question the court's approach. Although he did not explicitly engage in physical action or show direct opposition through protest, his efforts to communicate with the court about the issue of jury sequestration and its impact on the defendant demonstrated active behavior. Kunstler can be seen in his efforts to challenge or question court decisions that he believes are detrimental to the defendant. Although his intentions may have been advocacy rather than outright resistance, his actions created conflict with the Judge, signaling a form of opposition to the way the court managed the case.

Kunstler appears to have no intention of directly challenging or undermining the court's authority but rather to ensure that the defendant is not harmed. The intention is to communicate and defend, not to engage in resistance in the traditional sense. But the admission in this case came from the court, Judge Hoffman, who interpreted Kunstler's actions as sufficiently disruptive or challenging to the court's authority to sentence him to contempt of court. This shows that the recognition of an act as resistance depends not only on the actor's intentions but also on how the target, in this case the court, perceives and responds to the act. Although Kunstler did not intend resistance in a disruptive or destructive sense, Judge Hoffman's interpretation and response to his actions indicates a complex dynamic of resistance, where intent and perception meet in the context of the power and authority of the court, so that it can be categorized as target-defined resistance. This highlights how actions intended as advocacy or critical questioning can be perceived and responded to as a form of resistance by authorities.

External-defined Resistance

Another type of resistance revealed in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is external-defined resistance, where the actor does not intend to fight, and the target does not perceive his actions as resistance. However, the observer perceives the actor's actions as resistance.

Judge Hoffman: Excuse me. Have we identified the other defendants for the record? Mr. Weener?
Weiner : Weiner.
Judge Hoffman: Mr. Froines and Mr. Dillinger?
Dellinger : Dellinger, Your Honor.
Judge Hoffman: What is going on here?
Schultz : You're Honor, you're referring to the defendant Dellinger.
Judge Hoffman: Derringer.
Schultz : It's Dellinger, sir.
Judge Hoffman: Note the prosecution was referring to the defendant Derringer, not Dellinger.
Kunstler : It is Dellinger, Your Honor.
Judge Hoffman: Can we straighten this out?
Abbie: Dillinger was a bank robber, Derringer is a gun, he's David Dellinger and the judge and I aren't related.

Foran: Your Honor, I'd like to caution the Court that this kind of disruption and display of disrespect will be a continuing tactic for defense.
(Sorkin, 2020, 00:23:14 - 00:23:57)

Abbie's response in that scene is perceived by Thomas Foran, the prosecuting attorney, as an act of resistance, where he warns Judge Hoffman that such behavior will be a continuing tactic for defense. Abbie Hoffman and Kunstler, actively tried to clarify errors and correct the Judge. This represents an active form of action, although in this context, the aim is clarification rather than explicit resistance to the court's authority.

Their intention here appears to be more towards clarification and correction than an intention to resist the court's authority. However, the way the clarifications were delivered, especially by Abbie Hoffman, could be interpreted as having elements of sarcasm or social criticism, which could be seen as a form of mild resistance to court formalities and potential indifference or lack of sensitivity from the judge. But the court does not appear to recognize these acts of clarification as explicit resistance, but the warning from Thomas Foran indicates that there is recognition of the potential for these acts as part of a defense tactic to harass or display disrespect.

In expressing his opinion, Abbie, as the actor, seems to only retort Judge Hoffman's statement with a joke. He attempts to highlight the difference and error in naming by making a joke about the clarification of the name Dillinger, associated with a bank robber and a weapon, while also referencing the previous issue where he and Judge Julius Hoffman aren't related. According to the typology of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), this action falls into external-defined resistance, where only an observer, in this case, Thomas Foran as the prosecuting attorney, recognizes Abbie Hoffman's action as resistance.

Attempted Resistance

The fourth type of resistance in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is attempted resistance. In this resistance, the actor is intended to act as resistance, but the actor and observer does not recognize the act as resistance.

Foran : (to KUNSTLER) I thought the Panthers were smarter than that.
Kunstler : They are.
Tom : Well--
Kunstler : The Panthers don't write letters any more than the mob does, and the moment I find out it was your office that did, you're gonna see the criminal justice system up closer than you ever wanted to.
Sorkin, 2020, 00:42:40 – 00:42:55)

In the scene, Kunstler's defense of the accusations insisting that the Panthers were not involved and threatening to expose manipulation by Foran's office, is also a sense of action. This indicates active verbal behavior that challenges claims and threatens legal action in response. It is also a form of opposition to potential manipulation or slander by the prosecutor's office. This shows an effort to protect the reputation and integrity of The Panthers as well as threatening to expose the truth. Kunstler's verbal defense operates as a potent commisive act, utilizing the pragmatic force of language to aggressively negotiate ideological boundaries and resist state-sponsored narratives (Rahayu *et al.*, 2025). By threatening to expose the prosecution's manipulation, he actively wields defiant power to

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
DOI. 10.59066/cn.v3i2.1206

counter the despotic power embedded within the court's structural racism and class bias (Arrazi & Fuady, 2022; Sanders, 2020).

Kunstler's response had the clear intent of defending the Panthers from false accusations and threatened legal consequences for manipulation or abuse of the court process. Thus, Kunstler's clarification and assertion that the Panthers were not involved in the act of sending the note, as well as his threat to take legal action, demonstrate a complex dynamic of resistance involving defamation defenses and efforts to preserve the integrity of the legal process. Based on Hollander and Einwohner's typology of resistance, this scene can be called attempted resistance, because Kunstler as an actor openly challenged Foran who had slandered The Black Panther, but Foran did not respond to Kusntler's actions. According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004), "attempted resistance" occurs precisely when the actor's oppositional intent is clear, yet it fails to achieve recognition from the target, thereby rendering the resistance incomplete within the interactive matrix. Foran's strategic silence and refusal to respond is not merely a passive reaction, but a calculated manifestation of state power functioning as an ideological apparatus to invalidate and invisibilize civil disobedience. Thus, the state's deliberate ignorance toward Kunstler's active opposition demonstrates how authoritative regimes maintain their hegemonic control by simply refusing to acknowledge the discursive legitimacy of those who resist them (Rai, 2023).

Missed Resistance

The last reveal of resistance in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is missed resistance. In this resistance, the actor is intended to act as resistance, but the observer does not recognize the act and is only recognized by the target. In this film, five resistances are recognized by the researcher. One of their acts was when Tom tried to deflate a police car tire because he wanted to help Rennie escape.

Schultz : Your Honor, at this time the Government would like to make a motion that Bobby Seale be separated--
Foran : Wait--
Schultz : --a motion that Bobby Seale be separated from the other defendants and that a mistrial be declared in his case.
Judge Hoffman : You want me to give him his mistrial?
Kunstler : You took their black guy and made him a sympathetic character.
Judge Hoffma : I've lived a long time and you're the first person who'ever suggested that I've discriminated against a black man.
Weinglass : Then let the record show that I'm the second.
Judge Hoffman: (pause) Step back.

(Sorkin, 2020, 01:16:52 – 01:17:30)

On trial day 90, the actions of Kunstler and Weinglass as prosecutors, who from the beginning intended to help Seale secure his rights, can be categorized as resistance based on active verbal behavior that questions the integrity and impartiality of the judge. Their statement insulting Judge Hoffman by saying "You took their black guy and made him a sympathetic character." explicitly expresses opposition to Judge Hoffman, indicating that they believe the judge has discriminated against one of the defendants based on race. Judge Hoffman, as the target, disputes this statement. He, having received the accusation of insult,

does not acknowledge it and claims to be a fair judge, yet he does not impose sanctions on the defendant's lawyers.

Although the primary aim of Kunstler and Weinglass might be to ensure fair treatment for their client, their comments also deliberately intend to present resistance against what they perceive as injustice by the judge. However, in that scene, the resistance act performed by Kunstler and Weinglass is only heard by Foran and Schultz as the prosecuting attorneys and Judge Hoffman as the target of the resistance, while the gallery members and the jurors do not hear what is being discussed by them. Based on this resistance, the scene can be concluded as missed resistance, because the act of resistance is only recognized by the actor and the target. Resistance is not always a political action but can also be identity-based, as reflected in this form of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). The fact that this interaction is deliberately shielded from the jury and the public gallery illustrates exactly how the state systematically controls the spatial and discursive boundaries of the courtroom to prevent ideological resistance from gaining public recognition. Because the observers are intentionally excluded from witnessing this clash, the act is structurally contained; fulfilling the precise tragedy of "missed resistance" where a profound oppositional intent is successfully expressed but fails to translate into a publicly acknowledged challenge against domination. Consequently, this scenario perfectly demonstrates that a despotic, Panopticon-like power maintains its hegemony not only by punishing defiance, but by strategically isolating it from the public sphere, thereby neutralizing its generative potential to incite wider civil disobedience (Cavender & Jurik, 2020).

Discussion

The Interplay of Generative Power and Resistance Typologies

The main question being studied is how power works and shows itself in resistance. This is studied by looking at a power relationship that is very uneven, which causes complicated behaviours that go against the power relationship. The findings demonstrate that the government uses its judicial and law enforcement systems to systematically suppress the anti-war movement's ideology. In direct response, the defendants exhibit sixteen distinct acts of resistance, primarily characterised by overt, target-defined typologies based on Hollander and Einwohner's matrix. This shows that the courtroom is a place where state discipline inadvertently causes visible, organised civil disobedience rather than absolute compliance.

The cinematic narrative depicts power as being generative rather than restrictive. The frequency of overt resistance is high because the defendants consciously utilise the highly publicised nature of the trial to hijack the state's narrative, transforming disciplinary proceedings into a performative platform for political expression. An unexpected result of the study is the presence of 'missed resistance', where the defence attorneys' profound oppositional intent is deliberately isolated and ignored by the public gallery. This shows that the state's best way of controlling people is not to punish them directly, but to separate those who disagree from those who agree. This stops people from doing things that they think are right.

These results strongly support and extend previous scholarly work on political cinema and state authority. In line with the historical analysis of Cavender and Jurik (2020), this study confirms that the state used brutal, oppressive methods to maintain the status quo in the courtroom. Furthermore, the findings align with those of Aşit *et al.* (2025), who argued that the judicial system operates as an ideological state apparatus designed to manipulate

Cultural Narratives
2025, VOL. 3, NO.2, 99-118
DOI. 10.59066/cn.v3i2.1206

public consent through surveillance. However, this study significantly builds upon the linguistic findings of Rahayu *et al.* (2025) and the semiotic analysis of Arrazi and Fuady (2022) by applying Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) interactional matrix. While Sobo (2016) distinguished between passive refusal and active resistance, the current research shows that transitioning from refusal to resistance in a legal setting occurs entirely through observer recognition. This adds a crucial structural dimension to existing literature on defiant power (Sanders, 2020).

Despite these robust analytical findings, the study has inherent methodological limitations that constrain the scope of its conclusions. The primary limitation stems from reliance on a single cinematic artefact, Aaron Sorkin's film, which naturally reflects directorial biases, narrative pacing and dramatised historical truths. Consequently, the analysis is strictly confined to the diegetic boundaries of the courtroom and its scripted dialogue. This framework limits the research's ability to capture the broader, unstructured realities and grassroots mobilisation of the historical anti-Vietnam War movement that operated outside the judicial framework.

Theoretically significant, this study successfully integrates macro-level Foucauldian power dynamics with micro-level sociological resistance typologies, offering a comprehensive, multidimensional framework for analysing political cinema. In practice, it highlights how legal and state institutions utilise discursive boundaries to neutralise marginalised voices in the public sphere. Future research should apply this specific Foucault-Einwohner matrix beyond Western historical dramas to documentary films or contemporary non-Western cinema portraying civil disobedience. Such investigations will help determine whether this pattern of generative, observer-dependent resistance is a universal mechanism of social movements or a uniquely American historical phenomenon.

In the end, authoritarian strength in a legal context does not just stop opposition; it fundamentally changes the setting for ideological confrontation. The state's rigid attempt to enforce compliance through the legal system inevitably forces resistance to evolve into highly visible, performative acts that depend entirely on public recognition in order to successfully dismantle established narratives of authority.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyse the complex nature of political resistance in The Trial of the Chicago 7, examining how the authoritarian mechanisms of state power can inadvertently create intricate systems of opposition. Integrating Foucault's framework of power relations with Hollander and Einwohner's multidimensional resistance typology has revealed the courtroom to be not an arena exclusive to legal arbitration, but a deeply contested ideological space where the boundaries of civil disobedience are continually negotiated.

The analysis reveals that the Nixon-era government systematically used the judicial system as an ideological tool to enforce the status quo, employing surveillance, manipulated legal frameworks and performative discourse to suppress anti-war sentiment. However, rather than achieving absolute control, this repressive environment generated active, multi-layered opposition. The findings indicate that, while the state successfully maintained the immediate legal status quo by securing initial convictions and silencing voices within the chamber, the overt and attempted resistance enacted by the defendants catalyzed a discursive paradigm shift. By hijacking the state's disciplinary tools and transforming the trial into a theatrical mockery, the activists effectively shifted the paradigm of protest from

physical street demonstrations to systemic ideological exposure, which gained recognition from observers around the world.

Theoretically, this research bridges a critical gap in cinematic discourse analysis by demonstrating that resistance in political cinema is not a monolithic concept. By applying Hollander and Einwohner's parameters, this study proves that the success of civil disobedience relies heavily on 'observer recognition', represented by the jury, the press and the public gallery. The broader implication of this finding is that, no matter how omnipotent or structurally biased it may be, state power is inherently generative; its attempts to silence marginalised voices inevitably provide the very stage upon which those voices can amplify their defiance to a wider audience.

However, the scope of this study is limited by its focus on Aaron Sorkin's cinematic representation, which carries the director's authorial bias and dramatic dramatisation. Furthermore, the analysis concentrated predominantly on verbal and spatial interactions within the diegetic boundaries of the courtroom, potentially overlooking broader historical realities and off-screen complexities of the anti-Vietnam War movement not depicted in the narrative.

Future research would benefit from applying this integrated Foucauldian and interactive resistance framework to a wider range of historical legal dramas, to establish whether this 'legal containment versus discursive shift' pattern holds true in different cinematic and cultural contexts. Additionally, future research could explore how contemporary media continues to shape modern political perceptions of historical civil disobedience by examining the real-world audience's reception of such films, treating the actual viewers as the ultimate 'observers'.

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Cultural Narratives
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