The Politics of Turmoil
by Richard A. Cloward
and Frances Fox Piven
(Pantheon; 365 pp.; $10.00)

Norman Markowitz

One can talk about social change, one can state all kinds of desirable goals but in the final analysis it comes down to where the political muscle is going to come from to force these ends. If the crisis we are advocating can be created, hopefully some form of economic reform will come.

—Richard A. Cloward

Cloward and Piven wrote Regulating the Poor, an influential critique of the welfare system. Now they have put together a collection of many of their most controversial articles on poverty, race, and the urban crisis. For the most part it is disappointing, hastily assembled, repetitive, often turgid in style. Yet, in addition to its occasionally valuable critical points, the book is interesting in both thesis and timing. It represents and at points almost caricatures certain "anarchist" and "populist" tendencies that flourished in radical circles in the late 1960's.

The thesis, stated consistently through the collection, is that a strategy of independent and spontaneous disruption of the welfare system by the ghetto poor is the only possible method to achieve substantive social change in the slums. While this strategy had potentially positive manifestations in creating the National Welfare Rights Organization and the demand for a guaranteed annual income, it also had enormous flaws—flaws that went to the heart of much that was wrong with what was called the "New Left" of the 1960's.

For a brief time poverty almost became big business in America. Along with the traditional social work bureaucracies, such apparently antiestablishment elements as minority cultural nationalists and rhetorical champions of community organizations and autonomy proliferated in the ranks of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. During the Johnson Flush Times it became a cliché in liberal and radical circles, and among many of the poor, that the best way to get federal aid was to have a summer of riots. In the aftermath of riots those whom the poor came to call ghetto hustlers and poverty pimps moved in on the ad hoc programs cynically tossed in by the authorities as the carrot in a program of urban pacification.

Among the privileged but alienated faculty and university students, among authentic street militants, and even among reactionary ghetto hustlers there developed in the late 1960's a crude ideology that divided the world into People vs. Pigs, placed the overwhelming majority of Americans in the pig category, and proclaimed a confrontation politics that would sweep away the aged and the bureaucratic, allowing the wretched to finally inherit the earth, or at least permitting the deserving friends of the people to get a piece of the action. What this ideology represented, most concisely, was a populism that rejected the masses of people, a weird, negative populism that cursed America's citizens instead of its ruling class, reviled its national symbols, and, from the safe harbors of foundation grants and parent bank accounts, proclaimed as most everything philistine, corrupt, and a ripoff. In retrospect the theorists and popularizers of this negative populism were rather like the Young Hegelians whom Karl Marx satirized in the 1840's: young men busily packaging their criticism as universal, liberating truth, debunking philosophical elders for the hell of it, and smugly perceiving their negation as an end in itself rather than as a beginning.

In Cloward and Piven the negative populism of the 1960's comes to a dead end. Attacking venal bureaucrats, racist and reactionary majority opinion, as well as the cooptive and hopeless nature of movements for desegregation and advocacy planning, Cloward and Piven fall back in part on the old anarchist fantasy of a spontaneous uprising of the people to generate the end of oppression. The authors, however, have no wish to smash the state, as did the anarchists, nor to destroy the trusts, as did the real Populists. They have neither a new society to create nor an old republic to restore. Rather, they wish the poor to risk life and limb for "small gains" within the system, hoping eventually that the accumulation of these gains will cripple the system and produce something better.

In a wildly contradictory way they perceive public agencies as cruelly repressive and impervious to traditional reform or revolutionary agitation while simultaneously claiming that those agencies and the social forces that support them are infinitely cooptive and responsive to the pressure of disorganized and violent minorities. They appear to be saying either that public welfare authorities are virtually independent from the overall system of bourgeois power or that the makers of napalm and H bombs cannot deal with the disruptive actions of the ghetto dwellers. At best this viewpoint may be a portrayal of events literally from the bottom up, a fanciful scholarly defense of the consciousness and style of the lumpenproletariat. At worst it is a call to suicidal struggle for the poor. And suicidal struggle to achieve only a slightly bigger piece of the action.

How could two seemingly intelligent scholar-activists make such a mess? Perhaps because Cloward and Piven understand neither the class nature of political power nor the dynamics of the class struggle. Their
shill attacks upon the existing welfare bureaucracies, the professional planners, and the proponents of consensus politics and desegregation are a transparent attempt to evade the poverty of their social analysis and the nihilism of their disruptionist strategy. Robert Shrank, one of the more perceptive critics whom they include in their collection, summed up much of their problem: "Having spent a lot of years in both the labor movements and political movements that were expert at creating crises, I know that the whole problem in creating a crisis was to have alternatives for what happens after the crisis. That's the key and I don't think you can have an alternative unless you have an ideological base."

Chester Hartmann, another perceptive critic, presented in the volume, offers an alternative in the form of "political action" that "derives from a radical analysis of the reasons why the system has not produced adequate results." Socialists would of course see that analysis uniting the organized struggle for reforms with the long-range solidarity of all workers, aiming at the abolition of monopoly capitalism and the creation of a workers' state. Such a strategy would be worth serious risks, for it offers oppressed national minorities and desperately poor whites a chance to end their parish status and achieve liberation with the rest of the working class rather than the bloody circus of disruption that Cloward and Piven propose.

American Religious Thought
by William A. Clebsch
(University of Chicago; 212 pp.; $6.95)

Eugene Fontnell

This is a "history" in a very special sense. It makes no attempt to present even a semiehaustive treatment of the figures, movements, institutions, and ideas relevant to the religion of Americans. Rather, the author has chosen the more difficult, imaginative, and controversial attempt to grasp the vital thrust of American religious experience as it is manifest in, and created by, three key thinkers. In an illuminating "Prelude" Clebsch states his thesis: Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James resisted the drift of American spirituality toward moralism "by translating the religious impulse into being at home in the universe."

Clebsch contends that there is a distinctively American mode of spirituality which was initiated by Edwards, developed by Emerson, and brought to a fulfillment (though not final realization) by James. This spirituality or religiousness is the lived awareness of being in a fundamentally hospitable universe (though not one free from pain, suffering, and struggle) in which "God is for us, nature is in us, humanity is our métier."

While Clebsch avoids chauvinistic special pleading, he does not hesitate to affirm the positive possibilities of this American spirituality and to offer it as a corrective to the dominant contemporary modes of spirituality. He maintains, correctly in my opinion, that we are at present offered three kinds of spirituality. The first might be called biblical or doctrinal religion, in which God's law is believed to have been presented in a final and definitive form. The second is dedicated to social reform, which can be realized only through a spirit of rebellion. The third is that which calls for "sensitizing the soul to its wider range of feelings either as the core of reality with which it deals or as the doorway to an unknown divine power."

In contrast to these modes of spirituality Clebsch describes a heritage in which "our relations to nature and to humanity and to God are inseparable."

Edwards is presented as the unconscious and indirect initiator of this American heritage. Thus, while conceding he never denied the orthodox Christian worldview, Clebsch maintains that Edwards started the shift from theology to religious thought. This distinction between theology and religious thought is central to Clebsch's thesis, and it is unfortunate that he does not articulate it more fully. What he seems to be saying is that "theology" centers upon church doctrines, dogmas, and documents, while "religious thought" focuses upon the religious dimension of human experience.

According to Clebsch, these three thinkers brought forth a sensibility which was more aesthetic than theological or moral. Again, I wish that Clebsch had explained more explicitly just how he understands these categories.

Each of these terms—aesthetic, theological, and moral—is weighted with a history and range of meaning which precludes their being presented as self-evident. In any case, it is clear from his usage that Clebsch does not understand "beauty" in any superficial or subjectivistic sense. Nor is he suggesting that this reality played exactly the same role in each of the thinkers under consideration. For example, though Edwards in his later work made beauty the central category, Clebsch insists that this was not a negation of Edwards's theological orthodoxy. It was, however, a step in a new and different direction, and it was Emerson rather than the "Edwardian theologians" or the revivalists who carried this new spirit forward.

In presenting Emerson's "vision of religion" Clebsch is able to make the strongest argument for his thesis that the distinctive American spirituality is aesthetic. Emerson describes a world in which man and God are intimately bound together without being identical. Clebsch