

The Two Faces of Power:

“Non-decisions”

Political scientists use the concept, **“non-decisions,”** to describe situations in which individuals or institutions limit the “scope” of discussion, debate, conflict and decision-making by excluding issues that disturb established elites.

Keeping issues out of politics is an important aspect of power-----one that is just as important as deciding issues that **are** presented to public officials.

So, power really has two manifestations or two “faces:” decisions and non-decisions-----
-making things happen/preventing things from happening.

The crucial point here is that power is not only what decides the issues, **but also decides what the issues will be!!!**

Non-decisions can occur:

- **When influential elites act directly to exclude an issue from the political arena.**
- **When subordinates anticipate the negative reaction of elites and ignore proposals or suggestions that would “cause trouble” or “rock the boat.”**
- **When the “political culture” (the underlying values of society and its institutional structure) prevent serious consideration of alternative ideas and possibilities.**

Conclusion:

One way that fundamental conflict over values and priorities is “managed” or limited is by “non-decisioning” alternatives which are most threatening or challenging to current power holders.

The fact that institutional structures maximize certain values (private enterprise, limited government, the profit system) while obstructing other values (absolute equality or “levelling” or public ownership of industry) is an important aspect of American politics.