

Movement Capture

By Amanda D. Clark

Definition:

Movement capture refers to the process where a larger, well-financed benefactor or partner “captures” the social movement by overly influencing or redirecting entirely the original goal or mission of the movement. This is also known as cooptation.

Significance to Civic/Political Engagement:

Social movements can last for months, days or years depending on many different factors including the resources available, the dedication of the people within the movement, or the successful achievement of the movement goal. As social movement ideas become more widely accepted and integrated into existing institutions, movements are phased out naturally. Movement capture and cooptation are usually used to indicate a more negative environment.

Although many instances of movement capture are unintentional, cooptation can also be a direct tactic used to weaken the original movement. As powerful interests begin to see the political ramifications of not addressing societal problems outlined by the social movement, efforts are made to either stop the movement or placate it through other means. Sometimes this means offering movement leaders “a seat at the table”, weakening the independence of the movement. Social movement activists are often wary of collaboration due to the threat of movement capture or a weakening of the original mission.

Further Scholarly Resources:

Scholarly Articles:

Coy, P. G. (2013). Co-Optation. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm054>

Coy, P. G., & Hedeem, T. (2005). A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation: Community Mediation in the United States. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(3), 405–435.

Francis, M.M. (2019), The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture. *Law & Society Rev*, 53: 275-309. DOI:[10.1111/lasr.12384](https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12384)

Holdo, M. (2019), Cooptation and non-cooptation: elite strategies in response to social protest, *Social Movement Studies*, 18:4, 444-462, DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2019.1577133



Books:

From the Ground up: Grassroots Organizations Making Social Change by Carol A. Chetkovich and Frances Kunreuther. (Cornell University Press, 2006).

Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970, by Doug McAdam. (The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982]).

Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. (Vintage books, 1979).

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