Movements (social)

By Amanda D. Clark

Definition:

Social movements are comprised of people and groups that are seeking to change something in society. They can be described as networks, coalitions, or collaborations that work through informal or formal structures, strategically amplifying problems and solutions through collective action (Diani, 1992; Tarrow, 2011; Turner, 1969).

Historical Roots:

Social movements were once thought to be spontaneous uprisings, synonymous to mobs. However, social movements, even informal ones, are much more than that. They are organized, have clear goals, and utilize specific tactics. One of the original social movements is the international abolitionist movement of the 19th century. Other key social movements include woman's suffrage in both the United Kingdom and United States, the Civil Rights Movement, Occupy Wall Street, The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement (Palestine solidarity), March for Our Lives (gun violence), Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Indigenous Environmental Network's fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Significance to Civic/Political Engagement:

Social movements are integral to civic engagement. They provide a focus for action, a way in which people can identify themselves within society and offer tools with which people can affect change. Without personal connection to an issue or larger group that holds those same values, many people would not be able to effectively advocate for change. Social movements can be violent and contentious, or nonviolent but equally contentious.

Key Theories:

Resource mobilization theory: this concept criticizes the notion that social movements only arise when circumstances are dire, or when people are feeling left out of mainstream society. Resource mobilization theory argues that most social movements are successful when they have access to established resources (money, organization, mounting campaigns that target those in political power).

"Leaderless" movements: this concept describes a specific type of leadership structure within some movements like Black Lives Matter that eschew traditional hierarchical organization. The term leaderless is misleading and often attributed to Ella Baker, however, she wanted to emphasize the importance and agency of grassroots organizers that did not need to be told what to do from the top. Leaderless movements are still organized and are sometimes described as "leaderfull".

Movement capture (follow link)

Further Scholarly Resources:

Scholarly Articles:

- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 611–639.
- Diani, M. (1992). The Concept of Social Movement. *The Sociological Review*, 40(1), 1–25.
- McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6), 1212–1241.
- Turner, R. H. (1969). The Theme of Contemporary Social Movements. *The British Journal of Sociology,* 20(4), 390–405.
- Walker E.T. & Stepick, L. (2020). Valuing the Cause: A Theory of Authenticity in Social Movements. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 25 (1): 1–25. doi: https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-25-1-1

Books:

- *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, (Haymarket Books, 2016).
- *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics* by Sidney G. Tarrow, (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* by Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, (Oxford University Press, 2012).
- *What is a Social Movement?* By Hank Johnston, (Polity Press, 2014).

Websites:

- Diane Nash and the Sit-ins, https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/iml04.soc.ush.civil.nash/diane-nash-and-the-sit-ins/
- Mobilizing Ideas (A product of the Center for the Study of Social Movements at the University of Notre Dame), https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/
- Zinn Education Project, https://www.zinnedproject.org/