271 The Sociology of Social Movements

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Someone needs to explain to me why wanting clean drinking water makes you an activist, and why proposing to destroy water with chemical warfare doesn’t make a corporation a terrorist. An anonymous anti-coal activist

The Sociological Imagination and the Promise of Sociology

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.

…those (social analysts) who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked *three sorts of questions*:

-What is the structure of this particular society as a whole?
-Where does this society stand in human history?
-What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period and what varieties are coming to prevail?  

*C. Wright Mills. The Sociological Imagination. 1959.*

Course Description

One of the central ideas behind sociology is that society is shaped by an ongoing and dynamic interplay between seemingly permanent social structures (governments, economies, religions, cultural norms and values, etc.) and the agency or actions of people. Social movements are collective efforts to challenge existing social arrangements by actively and deliberately intervening in history. In this course we examine, from a sociological perspective, how and why people decide to join and lead others in social movements. Some of the key questions we will explore about these social change efforts include:

*When and why do movements emerge?*  
*Who joins or supports movements?*  
*Who remains in movements and who drops out?*  
*What movement participants think and feel?*  
*How are movements organized?*  
*What do movements do?*  
*How do institutions influence social movements?*  
*Why do movements decline?*  
*What changes do movements bring about?*
Learning Outcomes
The overarching goals of this course are:
1) to develop your ability to critically evaluate and apply the sociological scholarship on social movements.
2) to hone your skills in sociological research through qualitative fieldwork with an activist organization.
3) to enhance your ability to access and digest media information about contemporary social activism.

By the end of the semester you should be able to:
- Examine the interplay between social structure, culture, and the deliberate, sustained, and organized collective resistance of people through a sociological lens.
- Critically assess the development of social movements through key theoretical perspectives in social movements research.
- Systematically collect empirical data on social movement processes.
- Clearly communicate what you have learned orally, visually, and in writing.

Course Format
This class will be conducted as a seminar. While I will give brief lectures from time to time, our interaction will mainly be based on participatory dialogues about the course material. We will also be attuned to current events and social movement organizations’ and activist groups’ responses through regular discussions of information provided by the media. Our goal is to understand and interrogate these texts in light of their historical period and also to discuss their continuing relevance to our contemporary social worlds. Please bring the materials we are reading to the class in which we discuss them. Also bring an electronic device for exploring online sources. If you do not own one, the CLC provides a laptop checkout system.

Required Materials


Additional readings are posted on the course Canvas site. Course documentaries are on reserve in the CLC.

Course Requirements
Exams (40%)
There will be two exams, a midterm and a final, worth 20% each. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay in format.

In-class Reflections on Reading (10%)
I will frequently ask you to write short reflections on assigned readings. These will be written in class and will require the use of a computer. The reflections will serve to help you keep up with the reading and to provide direction for our discussions of the material.

Local Organization Research and Presentation (30%)
This project will involve conducting fieldwork on a local movement organization (attending several meetings, conducting interviews with participants, and analysis). More details on this project are forthcoming.

Leadership on Social Movement Reading and Discussion (5%)
With a partner you will identify a social movement you are interested in exploring (beyond those we already cover). In consultation with me, you will be responsible for identifying two readings on your movement that will serve as the course reading for your assigned week. In addition to giving general background on the movement, you will lead the class in the discussion of the articles. You may also choose to invite local activists engaged in some aspect of this movement (or a relevant speaker) to the class or short a segment of a relevant video during your session. More details on this activity are forthcoming.
Participation (15%)
Your participation will be evaluated on the consistency and thoughtfulness of your contributions to our conversations.

Your participation will be evaluated in terms of the following:

A You were consistently well prepared for class, actively listened, and contributed thoughtful insights and questions to both group and class discussions.

B You were mostly prepared for class and frequently demonstrated thoughtful engagement with the material in both group and class discussions.

C You were inconsistently prepared for class and infrequently engaged with the material and group and class discussions.

D You were minimally prepared and showed a lack of interest in the course material and group and class discussions.

F You showed a lack of interest in the course and regularly demonstrated a lack of commitment to the class through non-participation in group and class discussions.

Attendance Policy
I expect you to attend every class. Multiple absences and/or consistently coming late or leaving early will negatively impact your participation score.

Grading Scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93% - 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90% - 92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87% - 89%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83% - 86%</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80% - 82%</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73% - 76%</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67% - 69%</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60% - 62%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Below 60%</td>
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Course Schedule
The course schedule and materials are subject to change so it is important to check Canvas regularly for updates to our course plan.

Additional Course Policies

Missed Reflections, Exams or Late Assignments
In-class writing exercises may not be made up. I will only offer make-up exams in cases I define as extreme emergencies. Any emergency must be documented. In these rare cases, I will determine a make-up exam period and process.

Technology
All electronic devices must be turned off and stored by the beginning of class. 5 points will be deducted from your total course points each time I see you using these devices for any purpose. Computers may not be used in class unless we are doing research.

Communications and Office Hours
We will use Canvas this semester. The syllabus, additional materials, and any changes to the schedule or to course information will be posted there. Please consult your email and Canvas regularly for information about possible changes. I will give a posting date for any modifications. If you need to meet with me outside of the hours I have listed, please make an appointment. I am often in my office and encourage you to drop by or schedule an appointment if you have a question or concern.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities
Students who feel they need some additional help to perform at their best in the classroom should contact the Disability Services Office for assistance. This includes note taking, exam proctoring, alternate form textbooks, sign language and C-Print, and additional assistance on in-class writing assignments. If you do require any of these accomodations please let me know as soon as possible.
Tentative Course Schedule through Midterm Exam

CV  Canvas by author(s)
PSM  *A Primer on Social Movements* by David Snow and Sarah Soules
DM  *Democracy in the Making* by Kathleen Blee

**Week One**

8/27  *Course Introduction and the Sociological Imagination*
     The Promise (Mills, on front of syllabus)
     *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot* (film clip)

8/29  *Sociological Approaches to Social Movements*
     Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Social Movements (PSM)
     “Editor’s Introduction” to *Social Movement Reader: Cases and Concepts* (CV)
     *Black Diamonds* (film clip)

**Week Two**

9/3  “Chapter 2: Mobilizing Grievances” (PSM)
     Assigned activist/movement statements

9/5  *Declassified: Radical Left and Right in America* (film)
     “Chapter 3: Contextual Conditions” (PSM)
     “Preface” and “Chapter 1: Hidden Spaces of Aryan Hate” (CV)

Relevant lecture: “Illuminating the Dark: The Poetry and Poetics of Tuvia Ruebner” by Rachel Tzvia
Back.  4pm Logan Hall, Room 100.  Sponsored by XU Department of English and XU Jewish Studies Program

**Week Three**

9/10  “Chapter 4: Participation” (PSM)
      “Chapter 3: Aryan Hate in the Home” (CV)

9/12  “Assigned Chapter 4, 5, or 6 in *American Swastika* (CV)
      Chapter 5: Dynamics” (PSM)

**Week Four**

9/17  “Chapter 8: Enduring White Power Activism: Estimating the Aryan Threat and What to Do about It” and
     “Appendix: Making Contact and Developing Rapport” (CV)

9/19  Discuss white power movement book and plan for interview with co-author Pete Simi
     Bring draft of potential interview questions

**Week Five**

9/24  Telephone interview with Pete Simi
     *Democracy in the Making* (Chapter in DM to be announced)
     Activist Project planning

9/26  *Democracy in the Making* (Chapter in DM to be announced)
     Activist Project planning

**Week Six**

10/1  *Democracy in the Making* (Chapter in DM to be announced)
     Activist Project planning

10/3  *Democracy in the Making* (Chapter in DM to be announced)
     Activist Project planning

**Week Seven**

10/8  Midterm Exam
10/10  Fall Holiday—no class