CHAPTER 3

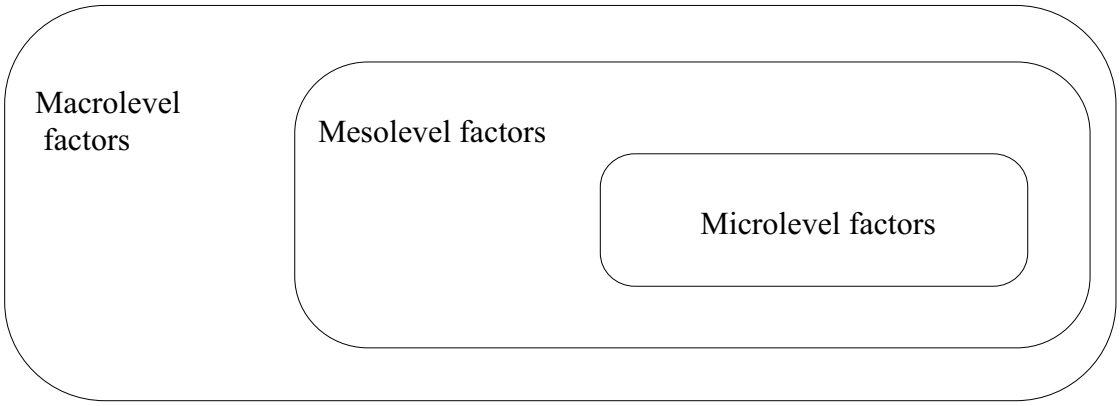
MACROMOBILIZATION: WHY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS EMERGE

The question of why social movements appear and grow in particular times and places, and not in others, is a perennial one for scholars. Recall that it was the earliest question addressed by social movement theorists in American sociology. What, then, have they found?

The first point to make is that asking why movements emerge is distinct from asking who participates in them. Even when a movement does develop, some people take part and some do not. Hence, in this chapter we address macro-level and meso-level concerns, looking for society-wide or group-level characteristics that facilitate or inhibit the emergence of social movements. In the next chapter, we ask a microsocial question: What individual characteristics and situations--social upbringing, political beliefs, friendship networks--make some people more likely, or less likely, than others to take part in a social movement that does emerge?

The characteristics that we examine here might be termed **facilitating conditions** (McAdam and Snow 1997)--they are trends, patterns, or changes in the social environment that facilitate, or help along, the formation of a movement. We can identify three such facilitating conditions. The first two are macro-level conditions: *strains*, or characteristics of the social structure that create grievances; and *opportunities*,

Figure 1. Levels of Analysis in Investigating the Formation of Social Movements



or characteristics of the external environment that encourage movement formation. The third is *organization*, or social networks that facilitate the formation of movements, which is a meso-level condition.

Finally, these are not necessarily competing theories. Movements typically do not emerge unless a number of different conditions are present at different levels in society, from the macro to the micro. Hence a multi-level analysis is necessary to fully understand why social movements emerge when they do. More recent theorists have argued that there must be some kind of strain that creates the potential for grievances; plus the opening up of an opportunity; plus the presence of "mobilizing structures"; and interpretive processes by which people are persuaded that a problem exists and that something can be done about it (McAdam 2004). Furthermore, these levels interact (Rucht and Neidhart 2002).

MACRO-LEVEL FACTORS

Modernity

Social movements are a modern phenomenon (Buechler 2000). Certainly disadvantaged groups have rebelled against their oppressors as far back as human history is recorded. But such instances were *episodic* and *local*. Collective actions like seizing stores of grain to insure that villagers were fed in early modern Europe were short-lived and were seldom part of a more widely coordinated campaign (Tilly 1975). It was not until the late 1800s that large-scale, sustained challenges to authority emerged. One theory holds that the primary sources of this change were the development of capitalism and the appearance of the nation-state (Tarrow 1998). Capitalism resulted in the dissemination of printed forms of communication, which facilitated communication between movement participants and the perception that they were equal to those in authority; and the appearance of private associations, which created networks of ordinary people. At the same time, the consolidation of the nation-state provided a new focal point for grievances, as it waged war, levied taxes, and enacted new laws. The nation-state also began to serve as a forum within which groups competed for the power to control different arenas in society.

Structural Strains

Recall from the last chapter that resource mobilization theorists rightly criticized classical theorists for assuming that the presence of macro-level strains is alone sufficient for social movements to emerge. (By *strains*, I mean pressures or demands, originating in social structures or social arrangements, that cause difficulties of some sort. Some social movement scholars also refer to these as *threats*–to the interests, values, or survival of some individual or group (Tarrow 1998).) As the critics claimed, other conditions must also be present for a social movement to develop. Strains do not automatically create grievances: one of the major tasks of social movement activists, in fact, is to mobilize support by persuading people that a problem exists and that something can be done to fix it. This is discussed later in the chapter, and in a future chapter we discuss what sociologists call *framing*--the process by which movement activists formulate and communicate a convincing message to potential supporters.

At the same time, social movements are, in fact, usually a response to some kind of strain that

results in a **grievance**. What are the sources of the grievances that compel people to act collectively? Note that strains may lead to not only the formation of social movements, but other types of collective action as well, like riots and panics. Note also that some strains are the result of stable social arrangements, while others are "suddenly imposed grievances" (Walsh 1981) that result from new policies, accidents, and the like. Sudden social changes can spur the formation of social movements by interrupting normal institutional life, hence freeing people from the established routines of everyday life (Piven and Cloward 1977). Not only do they produce grievances, then, but sudden strains may provide an opportunity for collective action.

The State

An example of a *strain*: before the civil rights movement, racial segregation in the southern United States was common, and sometimes legally required.

There are two aspects of the modern world that are important sources of strains: the *nation-state system* and the global economy, or *advanced capitalism* (Buechler 2000). In modern societies, the state, or governmental institutions, has a far reaching influence over the lives of most people. The function of the state is to create laws and enforce them, as well as to create policies and implement them. But in whose interest does the state function? Typically, privileged groups are able to wield the state's power in their own interest. For example, whites used Jim Crow laws (which mandated racial segregation) to maintain their economic, social, and political power over African-Americans in the south until the 1950s. During the workers' struggles to form unions in the 19th century, government leaders often sent in armed forces to intervene on the side of business. Hence the state is an important source of strain that contributes to grievances among ordinary people. When people form social movements, often their goal is to change state policies and practices, or to establish new ones. As historians have shown (see especially Piven and Cloward (1977)), ordinary people can sometimes check state power that upholds privilege by disrupting the social order.

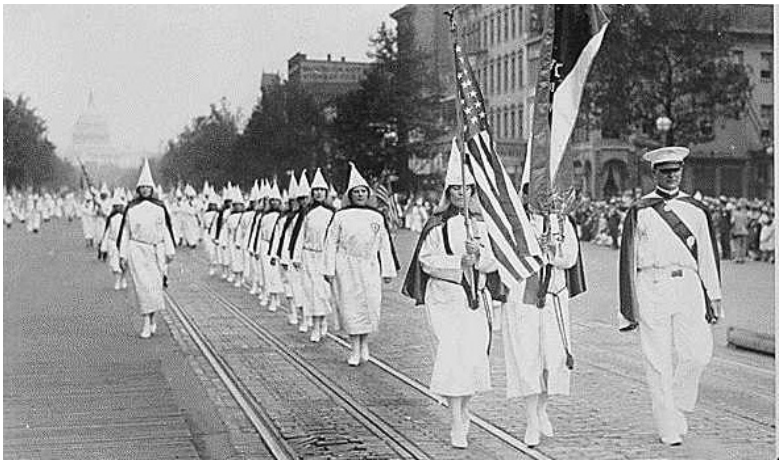
The nuclear freeze movement is an example of a movement whose emergence was prompted by state policies. It began in the 1980s with the goal of "freezing" the number of nuclear weapons at their current levels, both in the United States and the Soviet Union. At the movement's height, more than a million people marched in New York City in support of a nuclear freeze. The freeze movement began in part because of the policies of President Reagan, who took office in 1980 (Meyer 1993). Unlike his predecessor President Carter, who had been a strong proponent of arms control, Reagan spoke openly of fighting and winning nuclear wars and filled his government with foreign policy advisers who felt similarly. The American public had always feared nuclear weapons, but these changes spurred a grassroots mobilization to halt the nuclear arms race. In addition, citizens of European countries began protesting against the basing of nuclear weapons on their soil.

Economic Arrangements.

Recall that for Marx, a society's economic institutions (which function to produce and distribute goods and services) are the primary source of grievances that give rise to social movements. When material rewards are unequally distributed, people may undertake collective action to right what they see as this injustice. Hence, the labor movement has existed for hundreds of years, in the U.S. and nearly all other countries. It has focused on material goals like raising wages, increasing benefits like health insurance and paid holidays, enhanced job security, and better workplace conditions. The unemployed have formed social movements as well in pursuit of job guarantees by the government and relief or aid to the unemployed. However, the relationship between material deprivation and collective action is not simple. When people are too deprived, they may lack the time or resources to join social movements. Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone (2003) found this to be the case in their analysis of changes in the level of African-American protest from 1948 to 1997. When unemployment was low to moderate, protest was high. But when unemployment was very high, the number of protests decreased.

The struggle between the "haves" and the "have nots" under capitalism has become an increasingly global one as capitalism expands across the globe. Global capitalism has created material inequality not only within countries, but between wealthier countries and poorer countries as the former use their power to exploit the land, labor, and markets of the latter. To use another example, we usually look at white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan as caused by racial prejudice. However, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s can be traced to changes that threatened the economic and political power of whites in rural areas (McVeigh 1999). The racism and nativism (prejudice against non-natives, or immigrants) of the Klan was an attempt to exert cultural power in the face of this decline. McVeigh notes the following factors:

1. The agricultural crisis of the 1920s led to a fall in the value of farmland and the price of grain, threatening the economic security of many farmers. In addition, as property owners and employers of farm labor, many farmers felt threatened by the growing farm-labor coalitions and the socialist movement that was emerging.



A Klu Klux Klan march in Washington, D.C. in 1928 (a time of economic crisis).

2. The expansion of industrial capitalism brought the assembly line and the deskilling of production, which posed a threat to skilled producers. In addition, the rise of large firms left smaller business owners increasing unable to compete in the marketplace.

3. The granting of the vote to women in 1919 decreased the political power of Midwestern white males. As most western and Midwestern states had already granted women the right to vote, the effect of the Nineteenth Amendment was to increase the proportion of voters in the northeastern states.

The United Farm Workers is another social movement that developed because of economic strains. In the 1960s in California, agricultural workers, who were mostly Mexican and Filipino, faced low wages and difficult working conditions. At many farms, bathrooms and fresh drinking water were not provided for workers in the fields. In1965, grape pickers were making an average of $.90 per hour plus ten cents per basket picked. Wages were so low that children often had to work to help support their families. At the same time, growers charged workers $2 per day or more for housing that was dilapidated and unheated. The growers vehemently fought all attempts by the workers to form unions. It was under these conditions that farm workers organized the United Farm Workers Union. (See www.ufw.org.)

Socio-Cultural Factors

When people experience prejudice and discrimination as a result of occupying a particular social status (by virtue of their race or ethnicity; gender; or sexual orientation, for example), the resulting strain may prompt collective action. The gay and lesbian rights movement is a prominent example. Disapproval of homosexuality in American culture, supported primarily by religious teachings, has fueled a widespread and very active movement for tolerance. The gay rights movement also targets the state (lobbying for repeal of sodomy laws, for example) and economic institutions (for insurance benefits for same-sex partners, for example), but perhaps its primary goal is to change American cultural conceptions of homosexuality. A suddenly imposed threat to a population's position in the social order can prompt a social movement as well. When the city of Boston began busing students to integrate the public schools in 1974, a movement of arose among white residents opposing the practice (Useem 1980).

Demographic Factors

Demography is the study of changes in the size and composition of populations that result from births, deaths, and migrations. These changes can create conditions that are ripe for the formation of social movements. Goldstone (1991) argues that population growth was at the root of the breakdown of states in Europe, China, and the Middle East from 1500 to 1850. It increased state expenses, which led to rising taxes. Competition for scarce resources led to conflicts within elite groups, and these factions struggled for state power. Among the populace, competition for jobs and land created unrest and led to popular participation in elite-led rebellions. And, in the face of economic insecurity and a weakened state

(which also means weakened religious authority), new transformative ideologies took hold among the populations.

Another demographic change that can contribute to the formation of social movements is migration, the movement of populations from one geographic area to another. Particularly when immigrant populations are large and culturally distinct, native groups may perceive them as a threat to their own interests and values. The English-only movement that emerged in the United States in the 1980s was instrumental in getting eighteen states to pass laws adopting English as their official language. Most of the laws are largely symbolic, though others are not: Arizona's 1996 law restricted state officials from conducting official business in any language other than English (though it was later struck down by the state's Supreme Court) (Nunberg 2001). In another example, the migration of gay and lesbian Americans to major cities after World War II led to the formation of gay communities, which led to the gay rights movement of the 1970s. The rise of wage labor had made it possible for the first time for individuals to survive independently from their families: gays and lesbians could, and did, move to cities where they found like-minded people (D'Emilio 1993).

Changes in the Natural Environment

Human degradation of the natural environment has prompted the formation of many different branches of the environmental movement. The modern U.S. environmental movement began in part because of the publication of The Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, which catalogued the effects on wildlife of DDT, a pesticide that was widely used during and after World War II. Indigenous peoples around the world (also called tribal or traditional peoples) typically live in ways highly dependent on the natural environment, and they have regularly mobilized to oppose practices like mining, logging, and the damming of rivers that threaten their homelands (see Mander and Tauli-Corpuz 2006).

Other Movements

Sometimes people form a social movement in response to another movement whose goals they oppose. These are called **countermovements**. Some scholars argue that the rise of the conservative Christian movement in the 1980s was a direct response to the liberal/radical movements of the sixties, which some Christians saw as threatening their religious values.

Opportunities

While strains may "push" people into forming social movements, at times changes in society can "pull" people into collective action by increasing the likelihood of success. Social movements are more likely to emerge when the social environment within which they must operate presents favorable opportunities. Like strains, opportunities also have a temporal dimension, and so we can distinguish between **structural opportunities**, which flow from relatively stable social arrangements, and **dynamic opportunities**, which result from sudden changes (Lofland 1996). For example, a political system that is relatively open to influence provides a stable opportunity for social movements to emerge, while an

internal government crisis is a dynamic one.

Political Opportunities

Receptiveness of target institutions. Political systems can be characterized by their openness--the extent to which they allow challengers to gain access and influence. In a very open system, there is little need for people to resort to extra institutional means to influence the state (i.e. to form a social movement) because they have access through other means, such as voting. (Recall that forming a social movement is relatively costly in terms of time and energy; if a less costly alternative method of gaining influence exists, people will tend to use it.) For example, historically, the greater the number African-American representatives in Congress, the lower the level of protest among African-Americans (Minkoff 1997). However, there is a curvilinear relationship between openness of the political system and social movement mobilization (Eisenger 1973). In a very closed political system, social movements are also inhibited from forming, in this case by the low chance of success. Instead, social movements are most likely to form in political systems that are somewhere in the middle on the openness scale. The concept of openness might also be applied to other social institutions that movements target, such as businesses or colleges and universities.

When changes are initiated from within a target institution, it may signal the opportunity for opponents to act. In the late 1980s, the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikail Gorbachev, instituted democratic reforms meant to enable his country to adequately compete economically and politically with the U.S. and other countries. He allowed citizens to form small non-state associations and, in an effort to reduce the power of political conservatives to thwart his reforms, held the most open elections in Soviet history. Soviet miners who went on strike in 1989 were not prevented by the government from forming independent labor unions. These developments emboldened the Soviet people, and mass demonstrations erupted in the cities. The party elite split between Gorbachev's supporters and the conservative who opposed reforms. Small independent parties and organizations began to form. Finally, in1992 the regime crumbled. (However, the movement that brought down the government had neither the collective identity not the organization to sustain itself) (Tarrow 1998). When it became clear that Gorbachev would not send the Soviet Army to intervene in eastern European countries, reform movements grew there as well.

Vulnerability of target institutions. States can also be characterized by their strength, or their capacity to exercise control over the larger society. Social movements that target the state are more likely to emerge where states are less powerful. The Russian and Chinese revolutions both occurred after prolonged wars had weakened the state (Harper 1993). States regularly intervene in non-state conflicts, and so even when a movement's primary target is not the government, the strength of the state can hinder or facilitate the movement's development. In the history of conflicts between the labor movement and business management, for example, the government often intervened by issuing injunctions that made it illegal for workers to participate in strikes or other kinds of actions, or by sending in government troops to break up strikes (Brecher 1997). At times, the emergence of new movements can weaken the state such that other movements see an opportunity (Koopmans 2004). Finally, the labor movement provides another example of how the vulnerability of target institutions influences movement emergence: strikes are more likely to occur in times of economic prosperity. Why? Because that is when unemployment is

lower, reducing the power of businesses to simply replace striking workers with others.

When a dominant group is facing some crisis–perhaps of external origin, perhaps of internal origin–then social movements have an increased opportunity to succeed. One example is internal division among political, economic, or social elites, which weakens institutional authority and thus creates an opening for social movements to mount a challenge. The Nazi Party in Germany gained support and power in part because the political elite was in disarray (Harper 1993).

Influential allies. In some cases, an impetus to the emergence of a movement is the decision of members of some elite to lend their support to a particular cause as a way to solidify their own power. When politicians do this, it is often a response to electoral instability, when their election or reelection in uncertain and so they seek support from segments of the electorate by backing particular causes. Aid from influential allies can take different forms, such as financial help or the introduction of new legislation. For example, after Kennedy's narrow electoral victory in 1960, he courted women's votes by creating the first presidential commission on the status of women, as well as encouraging Congress to pass new legislation (Costain and Majstorovic 1994). The President's Commission on the Status of Women and the fifty state commissions that followed it issued reports providing clear evidence that women faced discrimination in U.S. society. These reports, combined with the increased expectation that government would act on women's concerns and with the networks among women that the commissions created, contributed to the emergence of the women's movement in the 1970s (Freeman 1983). Similarly, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought electoral support from workers by supporting labor struggles, and when President Reagan was elected with the support of the conservative Christian movement, he in turn supported the movement's pro-life agenda by appointing supportive judges (Garner 1996).

Repression. Generally, the threat of repression (arrest, imprisonment, torture, and other retaliatory measures) discourages people from joining social movements. When an institution's repression of protesters declines, then social movements may grow. For example, workers are more likely to go on strike during period of low unemployment, when spare workers are scarce and so there is less chance of being fired and more chance of management giving in to worker demands. However, repression can also encourage mobilization. For example, when a relatively democratic (open) state engages in repression, protest may increase as citizens object to the violation of political norms (Francisco 1995). There is some evidence too that repression of a social movement serves to strengthen the resolve of activists and increases third party sympathy, especially when the movement uses nonviolent tactics.

Cultural Factors

Characteristics of a society's culture–its shared beliefs, values, and practices–influence whether, and what kind, of social movements will emerge. Both the larger culture of a society, and specific subcultures within it, can facilitate or impede collective action. For example, during McCarthyism–the strident anticommunism that gripped U.S. society during the 1950s– many individuals were reluctant to criticize the government lest they be labeled communist. The demise of McCarthyism opened the way for the rise of activism against nuclear weapons in the 1960s (Meyer 1993). Similarly, the women's suffrage movement of the 19th century was facilitated by changing attitudes toward gender (McCammon et al. 2001).

Availability of Resources

At times, social movement mobilization is spurred by an increase in the supply of resources in a society that can be used by social movements to further their goals, or by the availability of new ones (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977). This is, of course, the central tenet of resource mobilization theory. Many scholars have pointed out that prosperity in general increases the likelihood of social movements forming. As a society becomes wealthier, resources like computers, telephones, and televisions that facilitate the spread of ideas become more abundant. At the individual level, people who are more prosperous spend less time meeting their basic needs and have more time to contribute to social movement activity. The general prosperity of U.S. society in the 1950s and 1960s helps explain why the movements of the sixties arose. Unemployment was low, college attendance was high, and young people felt optimistic about their futures. Instead of focusing on preparing for a career, they could–and did–turn to discussions of ideas and values. Similarly, feminist movements are more likely in societies with a higher level of industrialization and a larger middle class, and where women's educational achievement is higher, they have higher rates of participation in the labor force, and they work in a wider range of occupations (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986).

Research has shown that increases in education in a population increase the likelihood of social movements forming. First, education has a "tolerance effect" (Jenkins and Wallace 1996) that makes people more likely to support claims for rights and equal treatment and to support protest as a form of political expression. Second, education contributes to feelings of political efficacy, and so to political participation, including in social movements.

Funding from elites is a resource that can spur the formation of social movement organizations. Private foundations in the U.S. give millions of dollars to social change-oriented groups (Jenkins and Eckert 1986). This began primarily in the 1970s, making it possible for social movement organizations to hire paid staff (McCarthy and Zald 1973). This has created a population of **social movement professionals** who can provide leadership for emerging movements and sometimes initiate new organizations. However, the effect of elite funding on social movements is controversial–there is some evidence that reliance on resources from elites tends to de-radicalize SMO's, as they alter their goals and tactics toward what is acceptable to such funders. Indeed, some analysts assert that elites channel funding to particular organizations in an attempt to control or quell protest. Expertise is another resource that can be important to the emergence of some movements. The social movement against Black Lung disease, which results from the exposure of miners to coal dust, only began when a team of doctors confirmed that the respiratory problems that miners had been experiencing was caused by coal dust (Judkins 1983).

MESO-LEVEL FACTORS

While the two facilitating conditions discussed above–strains and opportunities--focus on the larger social environment, meso-level factors address the "internal structure of a population" (including its culture) from which a social movement may arise (Lofland 1996: 185). When an opportunity or threat makes a particular population ripe for collective action, whether or not a social movement develops to

take advantage of the situation depends heavily on the meso-level factors described below.

Social Networks

A network is simply a web of people linked by social ties. It might be based on friendship, or place of work, or membership in a religious organization, or other commonalities. When people in a particular social group are in close proximity, it becomes more likely they will engage in collective action. As Marx predicted, labor organizing benefitted from the concentration of large numbers of workers in factories in the 1800s. The concentration of unprecedented numbers of young people on college campuses in the early 1960s was a crucial ingredient in the formation of the student, antiwar, and civil rights movements.

Social networks facilitate the following processes, all of which make the formation of a social movement more likely.

1. *information sharing*. Social networks tend to spread information, such as knowledge about some social condition around which a movement has mobilized, or the time and place of an SMO meeting.

2. *the formation of a collective identity*. As a sociological term, identity refers to a sense of who one is, of one's essential characteristics. (I am a mom, a white person, intellectual, politically radical, etc.) A **collective identity**, one aspect of a person's individual identity, is a shared sense of "we-ness. The formation of a collective identity among individuals in a social network increases the likelihood that they will act together in pursuit of some goal. Some collective identities readily link individuals to a social movement, such as "Christian" or "pacifist."

3. *cognitive liberation, or the development of a shared ideology*. Simply put, an ideology is a shared set of beliefs about how the social world works. Ideologies identify a problem, specify the cause of that problem, and offer a solution. **Cognitive liberation** (McAdam 1982) refers to the process of the transformation of one's beliefs, or ideology, so that a person comes to question the legitimacy of "the system" (institutional authority and/or social arrangements); to believe that change is possible; and to believe that they can help bring it about (McAdam 1982). Cognitive liberation is a vital condition for the formation of a social movement, and it typically develops in interaction with others.

4. *the development of social incentives to participation.* Social networks also facilitate movement formation by establishing affective (emotion-based) ties–friendships–through which people spur each other into action. Simply put, you are more likely to create a social movement if people you like will be involved in the project.

The origin of the feminist movement in the late 1960s illustrates the crucial role of social networks in the development of social movements (Evans 1980; Freeman 1983). The feminist movement was actually formed from two different networks of women that developed into two branches of the movement. The "older branch" of the movement, so named both because it developed first and consisted of relatively older women, had its origins in the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women established in 1961 by President Kennedy at the request of Esther Peterson, director of the Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor (Freeman 1983). The commission was charged with documenting discrimination against women, and it led to the formation of state-level commissions to do the same. The women on these commissions developed into a social network that shared information and ideas and met at an annual conference organized by the Women's Bureau. In 1966, at one of these conferences, women decided to form the National Organization for Women (NOW), the largest feminist organization.

Women marching in New York City in 1971.

Meanwhile, younger women who were active in the civil rights and antiwar movements had begun to organize around feminist issues as well. Many of these women were dissatisfied that movement women were pushed into traditional roles, like doing clerical work, that essentially supported the mostly-male leadership. In 1964, two white women in the civil rights movement, Casey Hayden and Mary King, circulated an anonymous position paper expressing dissatisfaction with the second-class role of women in the movement (1964). Women's caucuses began forming at student and antiwar movement conferences. By 1967, small groups of female activists were independently forming around women's concerns in several cities. These early core activists began writing, speaking, and traveling to form local "women's liberation" groups across the country.

Oppositional Cultures

A social network may develop a sort of subculture (of shared beliefs, values, norms of behavior, and uses of symbols) that is based on opposition to some dominant culture. Such oppositional cultures sometimes, but not always, develop into social movements. The civil rights movement was in part an outgrowth of the oppositional culture that existed within black churches in the south. There, songs and sermons had long centered around themes of injustice and freedom. Today, one might say that in the U.S. there exists an oppositional culture of people who intermittently participate in peace and justice movement work. Its participants believe in using nonviolent methods of social change; eschew the excessive materialism of U.S. culture; dress casually; eat healthy, organic foods; and are permissive parents. The activists who participated in the movement against nuclear weapons in the 1980s came from this broader "antiestablishment subculture" (Salomon 1986). They typically had previously supported the environmental movement and the feminist movement, for example. Similarly, the anti-globalization protests that began in the U.S. in 1999 drew many participants from a pre-existing subculture of self-

identified anarchists.

Abeyance Structures

When a social movement declines, it may not completely disappear but instead may contract and continue in diminished form until the next wave of activism reignites it. Such **abeyance structures**, which keep a movement alive during down times, include activist networks, repertoires of goals and tactical choices, and a collective identity that promotes commitment to the movement (Taylor 1989). For example, it is commonly believed that the women's movement in the United States disappeared between 1920, when women were granted the right to vote, and the late 1960s, when the "second wave" feminist movement emerged. However, during that time the National Women's Party (NWP) continued its activities, primarily efforts to get the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) passed, and it contributed to the formation of the feminist movement in the 1960s (Taylor 1989). Four of the original ten founders of the National Organization for Women in 1966 were members of the National Women's Party. One of NOW's major campaigns was passage of the ERA, adopted from the NWP. Belmont House in Washington, D.C., donated by a wealthy support of the NWP, was the center of NWP activities, and continued to serve as gathering place for feminists of the second wave.

Leadership

Pre-existing groups and organizations are also training grounds that produce leaders with the skills to organize a social movement. Leaders in the civil rights movement came largely from churches. Leaders in the pro-choice movement came from other movements–family planning and women's rights (Staggenborg 1989). Leaders in the pro-life movement have come out of conservative Christian churches. "Movement halfway houses" (Morris 1984) are organizations like the Highlander Folk School and the Midwest Academy that provide training for organizers of a variety of social movements. (An organizer is a particular type of leader, who leads by helping people to organize themselves to collectively address some social problem. Typically this is done at the community level, hence the popular term **community organizer,** someone who facilitates the formation of community groups at the local level around issues concerning housing, schools, policing, city services, and the like.)

Most of us remember Rosa Parks, who sparked the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, as just an ordinary woman who decided she was too tired to move to the back of the bus. However, Parks and others had attended workshops at the Highlander Center where they learned about social movements (see the photo a and the discussion of Parks's participation at the end of this chapter in "Putting It All Together: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement").

The Diffusion of Innovative Frames, Identities, and Tactics

Social movements often emerge and decline in waves–think, for example, of the movements of the 1960s in the U.S. or the reform movements in Eastern Europe in 1989 that toppled communist governments. These waves occur in part because movements that arise early in a cycle create new frames,

tactics, and the like that can then be borrowed by "late risers" (Koopmans 2004). This diffusion, or spread, of ideas and practices may occur *directly*, through social networks, or *indirectly*, either through activists sharing some identification or through the media (Soule 2004). For example, many of the early activists in the environmental movement in Israel, which began in the 1980s, were U.S. immigrants who came with an awareness of environmental issues and knowledge of social movement.

A famous example of the role of social networks in spreading tactics involves the early student sit-ins of the civil rights movement (Morris 1981). The sit-in tactic (refusing to leave a whites-only public establishment, like a restaurant, until they were served) was not new: sit-ins had been conducted sporadically throughout the south during the late 1950s. But in 1961 a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, South Carolina by four local college students launched a wave of similar actions and galvanized the civil rights movement. The student sit-ins are typically seen as having developed spontaneously and independently of other civil rights organizations. In fact, the four students who started the Greensboro sit-in were involved in the Youth Council of the NAACP, a well-established civil rights group, where they had learned about the previous sit-ins. There were a number of black churches and black colleges in North Carolina, and the sit-in tactic spread throughout the state and into the rest of the south through these "church-student networks"; through local "movement centers" supported by churches and local organizations; and through older civil rights leaders who traveled to cities to help organize sit-ins. The result was a wave of sit-ins: by the end of March, eighteen sit-ins had occurred in North Carolina and sixty-nine throughout the south.

PRECIPITATING EVENTS

Finally, when structural conditions are ripe for the emergence of a social movement and when meso-level factors are in place to facilitate the mobilization of participants, the start of a movement can often be traced back to a **precipitating event** –some single event that ignites the movement, like a spark ignites the kindling and wood readied for a bonfire. For gay rights, it was the Stonewall riot that occurred in 1969 in New York City. Local police regularly raided gay bars and arrested or harassed customers. When the police tried to shut down the Stonewall Inn on the night of June 27, 1969 (which had operated for two years without a license), the gay clientele rebelled and were soon joined by several hundred others who rioted, throwing bottles and cans at the police and ripping up a parking meter (DeLeon 1988).

For the modern environmental movement, one of the precipitating events was the publication of The Silent Spring by Rachel Carson in 1962, which warned that continued production and use of toxic chemicals would result in a "silent spring" when wildlife is gone. For the feminist movement, a different book had a similar effect: Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, published in 1963. Friedan identified "the problem that has no name" as the rigidity of women's traditional roles–and so helped many unhappy wives and mothers realize that their problem was a social, not a personal, one. For the pro-life movement, the precipitating event was a legal ruling: the Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade that legalized abortion.

Putting It All Together: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

We should always remember that the origin of a social movement is typically complex: many factors contribute to it, and they contribute in varying degrees. Much research has been done on the origins of the civil rights movement, and it illustrates the multicausation of movements. The scholarship on the origin of the civil rights movement has identified several different factors that, in combination, were responsible for the movement's emergence (see McAdam 2004).

Martin Luther King, Jr., Pete Seeger, Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy, and Charissa Horton at the Highlander Center in 1957.

<u>The Strain of Racial Inequality</u>

In the 1950s, when the civil rights movement began, African-Americans in the southern United States lived under extreme social, economic, and political inequality. Blacks were not allowed to live in white neighborhoods, attend white schools or social clubs, eat in white restaurants, and work in some occupations. Public facilities and transportation, like buses and railroads, were also segregated. Though they had the legal right to vote, in southern states blacks had been effectively disenfranchised through poll taxes, literacy tests, and the threat of violence and job loss if they attempted to exercise that right. Violence against Blacks who fought against such injustices was common.

<u>Economic Changes and Migration Resulting in Political Opportunity</u>

In the 1930s, the introduction of the mechanical cotton picker left many Blacks without jobs. This, combined with the widespread violence against Blacks typified by the practice of lynching, induced many to migrate to northern cities where there were more jobs and less violence. In these cities, they had easier access to the polls, and for the first time African-

Americans became a voting bloc that could influence the outcomes of elections. This is one reason why presidents Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson were willing to support civil rights legislation.

Elite Support

Starting in the late 1950s, the Cold War pitted the United States against the Soviet Union in a struggle for global influence. Faced with Soviet efforts to "exploit American racism for its obvious propaganda value" (Layton 1995, in McAdam 2004), President Truman integrated the armed forces. He asked Congress to pass civil rights legislation, and instructed his Attorney General to provide legal briefs in support of civil rights cases heard by Supreme Court. One of these was Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in which the Court declared segregated schooling unconstitutional.

Prior Organization: The Churches and the NAACP

The Montgomery bus boycott that began in 1956 was the first major mass action of the civil rights movement. Rosa Parks provided the spark for the movement when she refused to move to the back of the bus, but the ensuing boycott was coordinated by local ministers who formed the Montgomery Improvement Association. The churches provided not only the leadership but an efficient way to communicate about the boycott with adherents, as the Black churches were the backbone of the community and attendance at services was widespread. The church also provided a place to meet to plan strategy. Churches have often facilitated the emergence of social movements by providing a ready-made social network, and this was clearly true in the Civil Rights movement. African-American churches "served as the main repository of Black culture...capable of generating, sustaining, and culturally energizing large volumes of protest" (Morris 1999: 424).

Black and white college students are taunted as they sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi in 1963.

Furthermore, Parks's action itself did not occur out of the blue: she had long been involved in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Founded in 1909 by

W.E.B. Dubois to combat the lynching of African-Americans, the NAACP used primarily legal means to combat racism. It brought together many African-Americans who later spearhead the civil rights movement.

Finally, few people know that four months before she refused to move from her seat, Rosa Parks had attended a workshop on racial integration at the Highlander Folk School, a center in Tennessee that still today trains community activists. Said Parks: "I found out for the first time in my adult life that this could be a unified society, that there was such a thing as people of differing races and backgrounds meeting together in workshops and living together in peace and harmony....I gained there strength to persevere in my work for freedom" (quoted in Burns 1990: 4).

Oppositional Culture

The civil rights movement did not need to convince southern blacks that racial injustice existed. Black culture, centered mainly in the churches, had long recognized this injustice and expressed a longing for freedom. Note that Martin Luther King astutely chose to emphasize Christian themes in mobilizing participants (Morris and Staggenborg 2004)–the guiding principle of love, the promise of redemption.