

Lesson Plan: The Work of Protest

How does protest work? How do social movements work?

Objective: To understand how protest works. To illustrate how protests and social movements are part of the political process. Citizenship is not just about voting.

Mini-Lecture: How does protest work?

Main point: protests and social movements are a part of political process; they expand the notion of legal citizenship (franchise); show participation isn't just about voting. Protests and movements allow for marginalized, powerless, and folks who feel alienated from the system, to participate in politics.

- **Even violent protests can elicit results (and typically a violent response from the state):**
 - The Detroit Rebellion in 1967 reordered the city's political landscape and stimulated the flow of more resources from the public and private sectors into the "riot zone" (Twelfth Street, now Rosa Parks Blvd).
 - The Detroit Rebellion led to further radical organizing.
 - The Detroit and Newark Rebellions forced President Lyndon Johnson to call for the creation of more inner-city jobs and a commission to study the uprisings, which he later ignored.
 - Rebellions also contributed to police repression of black movements.

- **Why Protest? Why March?**
 - Draw attention/dramatize issue.
 - Form of communication – can communicate grievances and demands.
 - Show solidarity; expand base.

- **Types of Protest (includes, but not limited to):**
 - Demonstrations
 - Marches
 - Strikes
 - Boycotts
 - Sit-ins

- **Social movements can develop out of sustained protest and organizing. What's a social movement?**
 - *Social movement*: a sustained and collective action aimed at achieving social, cultural, and/or political change by groups who lack power within political process at a particular moment. These groups can organize around a particular idea to achieve a particular set of goals, which may include enacting, resisting, or undoing social change. “Successful” social movements are able to get demands incorporated into the state, or, in the case of revolutionary movements, they are able to overturn the state, or particular economic, political, social, and cultural arrangements.
 - There are various social movement theories (will not discuss):
 - Classical models (behavioral, psychological, etc.) – these models stress the existence of social and psychological strain, alienation, and isolation as sources for social movement. These are grounded in seemingly apolitical and/or pathological explanations.
 - Charismatic leadership – social movements arise due to the presence of a charismatic leader:
 - Resource mobilization: emphasis on the ability of activists to acquire and mobilize resources and people toward a particular goal.
 - Political opportunity/Political process: movements arise out of political opportunities.
 - Discursive framing: movements arise out of the ability of activists to construct a narrative and mobilize folks to support it.

Activity: What does it take to organize a successful protest?

Ask class to outline the elements of protest:

- Need to define strategy:
 - Strategy: campaign plan or “a proposed set of actions that each individual can undertake to protest injustice.” Includes:
 - Tactics: i.e. sit-in/occupation, picketing, boycotts, artistic performance, marches and demonstrations, etc.
 - Goals: dramatize situation, policy change, build base, etc.
- Need a clear target:
 - Identify targets and pressure point(s).
 - Focal point theory: Antiwar activist, Tom Hayden devised and articulated the concept guiding my talk, “focal point theory.” Hayden stated that the theory was “an activist’s way of seeing that the best way to have an effect is to mobilize strength against the weak point of a system you’re trying to change.”
 - Focal points can also be issues.

- Messaging/Framing/Demands:
 - Need clear and effective communication between organizers and base; between movement and non-participants, and, depending upon the type of movement, between the insurgency and those in power/institutions.
 - Do you need demands? (i.e. Occupy Wall Street.)
 - Devise and know talking points.

- Organization and Mobilization:
 - Organizing includes the various daily tasks it takes to coordinate action, campaigns, and movement.
 - Building relationships with other activists and community members:
 - *“A social movement is a string of interdependent, positive, strong, and productive relationships between organizers and/or organizations....”*
 - Develop trust:
 - Having informal conversations, canvassing, etc.
 - Identifying influential members and institutions in the community. Who can help you reach your goals?
 - Canvassing, then mass meetings.
 - Organizing a group to help carry out protest and boycott, preferably from the community you are appealing to.
 - Engaging in rhetorical politics – framing your issue around compelling arguments/narratives and undermining arguments/narratives of your targets.
 - Mobilizing event draws attention to your cause, places pressure on your targets to act (in the way you may want them to act).
 - What kind of leadership is needed? Why?
 - Charismatic? (top-down)
 - Group-centered leadership? (i.e. Ella Baker)
 - “Leaderless”? (i.e. Occupy)
 - “Leaderful”? (i.e. Barbara Ransby’s explanation of BLM)

What makes a protest or a movement a success or failure?

- Achieve specific goals?
 - Unintended positive consequences?
 - Change political discourse.
 - Build capacity and morale.
 - Forge new alliances and solidarities.

An example defining success:

- “The success of social movements is therefore dependent upon the ability of their leadership to articulate a message that convincingly links ideology (an analysis of the causes of a social

injustice and a vision of a socially just world) to a strategy (a proposed set of actions that each individual can undertake to protest injustice) for achieving a goal (a specific remedy to a specific injustice). Such a formulation suggests that social movements should be viewed as a kind of conversation between and among would-be leaders and their potential supporters. In such a dialogue, leaders' efforts to mobilize potential supporters are continually evaluated by the participants as they decide whether their participation in the movement is worth the potential costs and benefits." Matthew J. Countryman, in *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*.

Shaun King and the Injustice Boycott:

- Have students read Shaun King [essay](#).
- What are the targets and goals of the Injustice Boycott?
- What and who are King's inspirations?
- Using your own knowledge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, what are the similarities and differences between his and the Montgomery Improvement Association's strategies?

Compare Injustice Boycott to Montgomery:

- Local target – segregation on buses.
- Clear, yet escalating, demands:
 - Started as blacks sit back to front, white folks, front to back.
 - Escalated to eradicating segregation.
- There was a process: organizing, negotiation, and action:
 - Black women from the Women's Political Council (i.e. JoAnn Robinson) were organizing around issues of race and gender in Montgomery years before.
 - They started the boycott – 1 day boycott that escalated.
- It took an incredible amount of solidarity – folks willing to walk, donate cars, black taxi drivers:
 - Solidarity buoyed by mass meetings, charismatic leadership, organizing, and material support.
- People could “see” progress (empty buses).
- Montgomery was organizing & boycott & litigation (*Browder v. Gayle* ruled segregation laws for Alabama's buses unconstitutional; upheld by the Supreme Court).

Classrooms must be spaces where we talk about histories of protest, policing, and the myriad forms of state violence in relation to our current moment. Students have found that state violence and protest can be dialectical -- stigmatizing policing practices often provoke protests from marginalized groups, and then institutions targeted by protest often adjust. There are parallels between President Donald Trump's recent executive orders [issuing temporary bans](#) on Syrian refugees and immigrants from Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan, and past laws restricting the passage of people from China, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Mexico. Yet, as we have seen with the [protests](#) erupting at various

airports across the country, these forms of surveillance and policing also elicit protest. Resistance and protests against state violence has formed a crucial aspect of U.S. history.

Further Reading

Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Boggs, Grace Lee (with Scott Kurashige). *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Boycott. New York: HBO Home Video, 2002.

Engler, Mark. *This is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt is Shaping the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Nation Books, 2016.

Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. *March (Books 1-3)*. Marietta: Top Shelf Productions, 2013.

Mann, Eric. *Playbook for Progressives: 16 Qualities of the Successful Organizer*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Morris, Aldon, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.

Payne, Charles. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

_____. "Ella Taught Me: Shattering the Myth of the Leaderless Movement," Colorlines. June 12, 2015, <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/ella-taught-me-shattering-myth-leaderless-movement>.

Web Resources:

[Albert Einstein Institution: Advancing Freedom with Nonviolent Action](#)

[Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda](#)