

# Critical Mass *Bulletin*

Newsletter of the Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements, American Sociological Association

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## Message From the Chair

Deana Rohlinger  
Professor  
Department of Sociology  
Florida State University

I've been thinking a lot about the culture war education has found itself swept up in and asking

myself, how do we, as educators, fight for our rights to freely teach and conduct research in our academic disciplines?

I started by looking to other countries. This isn't the first time, nor will it be the last time, that education has come under attack by politicians. I thought, surely, I could find lessons learned from other countries. Instead, I found stories of academics fleeing the country in search of refuge and employment, sometimes fearing for their safety and lives. The stories of those who stayed behind were not much better. Academics who stayed in Turkey, for example, after the failed military coup described hollowed out educational institutions. They detailed how they taught free classes in abandoned spaces to push back against political ideologues even as they feared for their safety.

In a last-ditch effort, I turned to my AI-enhanced Bing chat tool and asked for examples of academics who had successfully pushed back against efforts to destroy academic freedom. I asked the question several different ways, hoping that, if I could find the right phrase, an answer would become clear. It didn't. The closest I could get was an answer on how I could help defend academic freedom.

(Continued on page 2)

## IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the Chair.....	1
Featured Undergraduate Student Essays.....	3
Recent Publications.....	6
CBSM Announcement.....	8

Bing chat cheerily noted:

There are many ways you can help defend academic freedom. For instance, you can support colleagues around the world. You can also hold up your end of the bargain by playing your part in postsecondary institutions' important social function of seeking truth and advancing understanding. Additionally, you can defend academic freedom for untenured and minority scholars. The best protection for academic freedom is institutional rules and regulations that comport with procedural recommendations developed by the AAUP. I hope this helps!

While Bing's answer isn't wrong, it does underscore a key problem we face in academia. We typically think and act as individuals, not as a collective with interests in protecting the integrity of our profession. Yes, we belong to unions, protest bad policies, volunteer for professional organizations, and actively engage our communities and various ways. These activities matter. They are crucially important. But the reality is that we cannot rely on ASA or anyone else to save academia and the liberal arts.

I know that, for some, this will fall on deaf ears. Some folks feel like they are safe because they are in a blue or purple state, in a private institution, or even in another country. This safety is a veneer, not the real thing. This is something that faculty at University of Miami understand very well. If you missed it, nearly 1,000 faculty, staff and students at UM signed a letter opposing legislation in Florida and joined their Florida International University colleagues in a protest. UM professor Scot Evans told [Miami Herald](#), "We are buffered because of our private status but we only have to look at the Disney example to see how even private entities can end up getting bullied because of their stance on certain things.... For example, we have a lot of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts going on at our campus, and we teach about race here.... So, I think even though the legislation doesn't affect us, we're still at risk of some level of attack from it." Evans isn't wrong. Faculty at private institutions are coming under attack for their research and ideas – and not finding support from administrators, who fear backlash from parents and donors. And, given the tendency of conservative politicians (and others) to parrot rhetoric from the U.S., I'm not convinced that this is a problem that won't creep across North America and Europe. I don't think this is a battle from which any of us can run unless we are willing to retire or change professions entirely.

Another problem is that the attack on education really isn't about education at all. People are angry and they need bogeymen and (empty) promises of a better tomorrow. Frankly, Americans have a lot to be angry about. The income and wealth inequality gap in the U.S. is large – among the largest of developed countries – and growing. Education is still a pathway to a "better life," but the lack of state support for public institutions means the cost of admission continues to rise. As a result, in an American first, many millennials are worse off than their parents. State workers have always been an easy scapegoat, and the fact that average individuals, including our own students, don't understand the rigors of our job doesn't help our case. We, as educators, are part of the "problem," because, as the Republican narrative goes, we teach "wokeness" not skills and, worse, as a Tea Party activist once told me, we're takers who simply "suck off the teat of the state." This line of thinking provides cover for a host of more personal attacks on BIPOC faculty, LGBTQ+ faculty, and female faculty, regardless of their professional status. The worst part is that, since this argument is driven by anger rather than logic, the wokeness claims will be difficult to combat.

The goals of U.S. politicians attacking education are not new. They want power and influence, and they want us to be fearful. They want us to shrink our ideas, our courses, and our research as we desperately try to stay inside invisible lines and keep our jobs. Understanding the reality of the situation has led me to a different question entirely, will we fight back?

# Featured Undergraduate Student Essays

## The January 6th Insurrection, and its Failure as a Nationalist White Power Movement

Carly Coffman  
Sonoma State University

### Co-Editor Preface

Hello readers. The featured essays in this issue came from my undergraduate Social Movements class at Sonoma State University. The essays here are condensed versions of research papers that helped students interpret a modern social movement using any of the theories we covered in class. Carly Coffman, a Liberal Studies major and English/Sociology minors, applies Blumer's Collective Behaviorism to the January 6 insurrection. Ash Smith, a Sociology major, applies Resource Mobilization to the #NoDAPL protests. While Collective Behaviorism has been rightly criticized in the wider literature, I found it fascinating that students gravitated towards it a lot. The essays here stood out to me for their ability to lucidly analyze modern movements using these theories. I picked the best two, and I worked with these students to condense their papers to a short form. What you see is an outcome of this work. My hope is that by showcasing undergraduate work, we can start to help students get interested in social movements research and help cultivate future scholars in this field. I would like to invite instructors and faculty to select student work to showcase in future issues of the newsletter. Please enjoy these essays.

Mario Venegas, Ph.D.

While white supremacist beliefs and communities are the inheritance of American history through colonization, systemic oppression, and enslavement of Indigenous peoples and African folk, there was a resurgence of white supremacist movements following the presidential election of Donald Trump. While Trump may have served as the metaphorical messiah to the American white nationalist movement, the White House Insurrection was essentially unsuccessful. In this paper, I draw on the theory of Collective Behaviorism (CB) to explain the emergence of social movements by applying it to the white supremacist resurgence and its assault against the White House.

While dated and widely criticized, CB helps explain how movements arise and maintain emotional momentum.<sup>1</sup> To justify humans' capabilities in an excited group, Herbert Blumer created five stages; three of which this paper will focus on to signify the movement's flaws and how inadequate compliance inhibited the movement's momentum: 1) Disruption of everyday routine and stability that causes shared grievances; 3) A common, charismatic symbol – usually in the form of a leader or scapegoat; and 5) The following collective action that creates political movement.<sup>2</sup> Here, a movement is birthed by a systemic dysfunction, mobilized by individuals who gather together, and maintained by a single figure.

Trump built support for the Insurrection due to his previous success of capturing attention through conspiratorial beliefs, such as climate change being a hoax and challenging

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<sup>1</sup> Blumer, Herbert. "Collective Behavior" in Lee, Alfred McClung, and Robert Ezra Park. *Principles of Sociology*. [2d ed., rev. reprinted]. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960, 221-278.

<sup>2</sup> Blumer, Herbert. "Collective Behavior" in Lee, Alfred McClung, and Robert Ezra Park. *Principles of Sociology*. [2d ed., rev. reprinted]. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960, 221-278.

Barack Obama's birthplace.<sup>3</sup> He then expanded the Republican Party's transformation to disregard democratic norms and acceptance of authoritarianism. As Trump became the leading figure of conservatism, his "behavior and rhetoric became more authoritarian and aggression-promoting over time, those highly identified with the Republican party changed their worldview to match shared perceptions of valued norms within the party, thereby becoming even more authoritarian".<sup>4</sup>

As the movement's primary actor, Trump's characterization of his presidential campaign attacked white America's sense of "cultural displacement," and inspired community membership.<sup>5</sup> These persuasion tactics inflamed followers' aggressions towards scapegoats: Muslim/Mexican migrants, LGBTQ+ folk, and leftists. Those who participated in the Insurrection consistently used the app Parler, were socially/politically isolated, and were in close proximity to the Proud Boys.<sup>6</sup> As of January 2022, about 750 rioters were arrested, 330 were convicted with violent crimes, and four deaths were cited.<sup>7</sup> Because the Insurrection ultimately failed to meet the needs of its participants or prosper beyond the incident, January 6th cannot be considered a true social movement.

To address stage one of CB, one must ask: What was the disruption of daily life white supremacists and American nationalists faced? White America received no direct threat

against their liberties; rather their privilege had potential to be undermined.<sup>8</sup> Because many of Trump's supporters are not wealthy nor highly educated, they're vulnerable to emotional manipulation.<sup>9</sup> Such historically defended communities and spaces have the ability to "establish intergenerational movement ties" bound by "symbolic rituals that mark boundaries between activists and their opponents ... which ... helps 'normalize' [white power] practices and the beliefs they articulate".<sup>10</sup> Therefore, white power movements are a protected way of life and impossible for a social movement to ignite around lack of systemic dysfunction.

As for stage three, Donald Trump served as the symbolic leader, while using liberals and racial/gender minorities as scapegoats to blame for alleged threats against white privilege. These tactics thus create an ideological binary, resulting in outsiders of a cult or social movement unable to understand and sympathize with a coalition when so detached from its cause.<sup>11</sup> Though Trump had successfully rallied the emotions of masses, his legal scandals discredited his ambitions and the validity of his followers. Despite the emotional persuasion Trump held over his supporters, he never called for direct action besides more support for himself, thus predicting the collapse of the movement.<sup>12</sup>

These conditions result in the movement's collective action, also known as stage five of CB. While deaths, violence, fear,

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson, J. W., & Hinsz, V. B. (2022). Group dynamics and the US Capitol insurrection: An introduction to the special issue. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 26(3), 169.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, C. M., & Tindale, R. S. (2022). A Social Sharedness Interpretation of the January 6th US Capitol Insurrection, 266.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, C. M., & Tindale, R. S. (2022). A Social Sharedness Interpretation of the January 6th US Capitol Insurrection, 266.

<sup>6</sup> Van Dijcke, D., & Wright, A. L. (2021). Profiling insurrection: Characterizing collective action using mobile device data. Available at SSRN 3776854.

<sup>7</sup> Duignan, B. (2022, November 30). *United States Capitol attack of 2021*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-Capitol-attack-of-2021>

<sup>8</sup> Saunders, G. (2016, July 4). *Who are all these Trump supporters?* The New Yorker. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/11/george-saunders-goes-to-trump-rallies>

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, K. B. (2022). The January 6 Insurrection: Historical and Global Contexts. *Critical Sociology*, 48(6), 901-907.

<sup>10</sup> Futrell, R., & Sim, P. (2004). Free spaces, collective identity, and the persistence of US white power activism. *Social Problems*, 51(1), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Lalich, J. (2015). True believers and charismatic cults. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Duignan, B. (2022, November 30). *United States Capitol attack of 2021*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-Capitol-attack-of-2021>

and costly damage ensued during the riots, the Insurrection must overall be considered a failure because there proved to be no concrete political demands or economic resolution made. Trump only induced uncertainty by creating an “us versus them” “mob mentality” that manipulated the emotions of rioters to evoke chaos that only further deepened disdain amongst outsiders.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the outcomes of the Insurrection were not in Trump or his followers’ favor, as he was banned from Twitter and impeached just weeks after the White House breach.

In order to prevent such violent crimes against our nation’s democracy and to predict further incidents of ideological extremism, scholars must apply such sociological theories to analyze the social-psychology of growing political extremists. There are key concepts in Blumer’s theory that can help us understand the projection of a social movement, due to its consideration of the emotion drive within participants, the intentions of a movement, and an evaluation of the collective outcome.

## The Resilience of Dakota Access Pipeline Protests

Ash Smith  
Sonoma State University

“The Dakota Access pipeline threatens to destroy our sacred ground. I am defending the land and water of my people, as my ancestors did before me,” [declares](#) Iyuskin American Horse, a Sicangu/Oglala Lakota demonstrator in the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. The events that occurred throughout Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) being approved and constructed provide insightful perspective surrounding social justice and the continued discrimination faced by indigenous communities. The grassroots movement, which was ignited by DAPL, also acts as a significant

case study to illustrate social movement theory. In this essay I draw on [Resource Mobilization](#) (RM henceforth) to argue that the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, known as #NoDAPL, emerged due to the collective handling of resources that organizations provided, including both time, as well as physical and digital space.

[Leading up to the protests](#), in December 2015, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issued a draft of its approval of DAPL, which would be within a mile of the Standing Rock Sioux Indian reservation. On August 4th, 2016, a month after USACE permitted the construction of DAPL, the government agency was sued by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, who argued that USACE did not suitably discuss with the members of the tribal nation prior to approving the pipeline, as well as how it infringed the National Historic Preservation Act since it did not effectively take into account the potential impact of culturally significant areas. On August the 10th, a small group of DAPL protesters were at the construction site, which grew to about 100 by the afternoon.

A major actor in the Dakota Access pipeline protests is the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which organized demonstrations as well as groups who formed encampments near the project site to protest against the pipeline during construction. On September 3rd, 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe declared that Energy Transfer Partners destroyed a location that possessed Native sacred sites and artifacts. The time of this disturbance was also when protests turned [violent](#), which was ignited after security guards and guard dogs attacked protestors following them breaching a fence to enter the construction site. Another prominent actor, “[Respect Our Water](#),” rallied for clean water for Native communities and the closure of DAPL by coordinating events such as a cross-country relay run and rally at the White House in 2016.

Throughout the almost year-long social and legal battle between the main parties,

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, C. M., & Tindale, R. S. (2022). A Social Sharedness Interpretation of the January 6th US Capitol Insurrection, 263.

## Recent Publications

protestors of the pipeline contributed and utilized time to create and execute petitions, encampments, and social media campaigns. Additionally, members of “Rezpect Our Water” completed a 2,000-mile-long relay to spread awareness of the issue, while volunteers helped by providing meals and shelter during the demonstration. The element of time was a significant resource in #NoDAPL since it was used to communicate and fulfill important steps towards stopping the pipeline’s construction.

From #NoDAPL’s beginning to its end, demonstrators placed an emphasis on protesting in physical forms. For instance, protestors organized encampments, both on and off the pipeline’s construction site. These [encampments](#) acted as a physical presence of constant objection to DAPL as well as a space to have thoughtful conversation surrounding social justice. #NoDAPL’s managing of physical space dedicated to pushing its efforts aligns with RM and its characteristic of involving tangible space as a key attribute of social movements emerging.

Finally, social media was a resource that was utilized and managed by #NoDAPL protestors and supporters. Information about the issue and ways of helping demonstrators’ cause was shared through multiple hashtags. Fueled by [social media](#), “the protest caught fire, and the camp [was] larger than most small towns in North Dakota.”

According to Resource Mobilization, #NoDAPL emerged through its collective handling of resources. These resources included time, which was utilized by demonstrators in preparation and execution of protests; physical space, which was managed by protestors through forms of encampments; and lastly digital space, which was used to spread awareness of the group’s efforts. Today, #NoDAPL and its approach to social justice pursuits remain as a significant part of history for social movement theory to be applied to, as well as a model for movements that have yet to come.

Conner, Jerusha, Johnnie Lotesta, and Rachel Stannard. 2022. “Intersectional Politicization: A Facet of Youth Activists’ Sociopolitical Development.” *Journal of Community Psychology*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22941>

Foster, J., Pettinicchio, D., Maroto, M., Holmes, A., & Lukk, M. 2023. “Trading Blame: Drawing Boundaries around the Righteous, Deserving and Vulnerable in Times of Crisis.” *Sociology*, 0(0).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221137181>

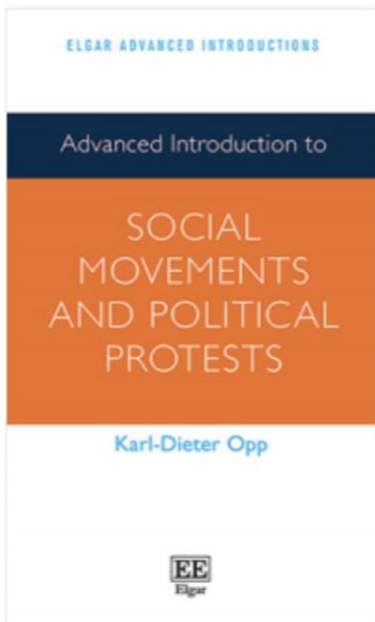
Kamenou, Nayia. 2023. “Feminism Contested and Co-opted: Women, Agency and Politics of Gender in the Greek and Greek-Cypriot Far Right.” *European Journal of Women's Studies*. Online First. DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068221145412>

Kurien, Prema. 2022. “The Racial Paradigm and Dalit Anti-Caste Mobilization in the U.S.” *Social Problems*.  
<https://academic.oup.com/socpro/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/socpro/spac035/6613071?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Kurien, Prema. 2022. “Indian American versus South Asian American Advocacy Organizations: Diasporic Political Activism in the U.S.” *Journal of South Asian Diaspora* 14(1):1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2021.2010168>

Lefeng, Lin. 2022. “Power Resources and Workplace Collective Bargaining: Evidence from China.” *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 9(1): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-022-00178-x>

Opp, Karl-Dieter. 2022. *Advanced Introduction to Social Movements and Political Protests*. Edward Elgar Publishing.



Book description (from publisher):

This Advanced Introduction is an accessible and critical review of the most important theories and concepts in the field of social movements and political protests. Karl-Dieter Opp precisely outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the different

approaches and investigates how they can be unified into a structural-cognitive model.

Scotch, Richard, and Kara Sutton. 2021. "The Disability Rights Movement," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Disability*. Robyn Lewis Brown, Michelle Maroto, and David Pettinicchio, eds. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190093167.013.44>.

Williams, Rhys H. 2022. "Mobilizing Religion in Twenty-First Century Nativism in the United States." Pp. 199-218 in *Religion in Revolutions, Revolutions, and Social Movements*, W. Goldstein and J-P Reed, eds. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003177821>

## CBSM at ASA 2023

Below is a list of ASA sessions and events hosted by the CBSM Section at the 118th Annual Meeting: The Educative Power of

Sociology. The conference will be held in Philadelphia, PA from August 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

If you are participating in a session not included in the list below (e.g., from a different section) and would like us to feature it in the next issue of *Critical Mass* (released right before the conference), please email us with the session title and date.

Please consult the [ASA 2023 Online Program](#) for more information on paper titles and updated session times. Please note that all times are in Eastern Standard Time (EST).

### Friday, August 18th

*Joint Reception: Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements; Section on Peace, War, and Social Conflict; Section on Political Sociology; Section on Sociology of Human Rights.* 6:30 to 9:00pm, Pennsylvania Convention Center, Floor: 100 Level, 103A

### Sunday, August 20<sup>th</sup>

*Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements Council Meeting.* 7:00 to 7:45am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 8

*Post Roe: Learning from the past, living in the present and planning for the future.* 8:00 to 9:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 8

*Collective Behavior and Social Movements Roundtables.* 10:00 to 11:00am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 5, Grand Ballroom Salon E

*Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements Business Meeting.* 11:00 to 11:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 5, Grand Ballroom Salon E

*Open paper session on Collective Behavior and Social Movements.* 2:00 to 3:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 8

*Mobilizing Across Difference.* 4:00 to 5:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 8

## Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>

*Violence and Activism: Past, Present, and Future.* 8:00 to 9:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 8

# CBSM Announcement

## Highlight your Accomplishments for the job market!

Are you going on the sociology academic job market this year? Do you have students who are going on the market? Critical Mass Newsletter is publishing a summer issue highlighting the accomplishments of junior social movements scholars. The issue will be published in early August, just in time to help generate buzz at the ASA conference.

To publish your profile, please provide the following:

- Name
- Photograph (optional)
- Current affiliation
- List of up to 10 representative publications (including forthcoming publications and works in progress) in ASA or APA format
- 200-word candidate statement in 1st person
- Website and email address

Please send all materials to Critical Mass Co-editors Julia Goldman-Hasbun, and Mario Venegas at [cbsmnews@gmail.com](mailto:cbsmnews@gmail.com) by July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

## NEXT ISSUE OF CRITICAL MASS

The Summer 2023 issue of the Critical Mass Newsletter will highlight junior scholars entering the job market this fall and spotlight additional ASA conference sessions.