This course covers key frameworks, concepts, and tools related to the study of contentious politics. It has three central goals. First, it is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature, which encompasses social movements as well as phenomena variously referred to as collective behavior/action, revolutions, political violence, industrial conflict, and the like. This literature is best engaged as a theoretical, conceptual, and analytic toolkit, so rather than focusing on a diverse range of applications (e.g., youth movements, movements occurring in particular regions or nations, feminist movements, etc.), we will organize our explorations conceptually around varied aspects of contention, including: the broad contexts within which individuals are able to come together to achieve politicized goals, the particular conditions within which these individuals are coerced, enticed, or propelled to participate in collective projects, the strategies and frames employed by existing organizations to connect with these individuals and subsequently work toward specific ends, and the ways in which outcomes are shaped by interactions among these participants, social movement organizations, broader publics, and the state. Advances in this literature have been coming fast and furiously over the past several years, and our second goal is to evaluate the historical trajectory of explanatory models in light of current (and anticipated future) sociological understandings of contentious political action. To this end, a portion of each week’s reading and discussion will center on a general “discussion paper,” usually tied to contentious politics but sometimes oriented to more general social phenomena. Our third goal follows from the idea that our thinking is best enhanced through applying models and ideas to cases that interest each of us. Much of our work this semester will involve relating general approaches, ideas, and processes to substantive cases of your choosing, with an eye toward extending these frameworks by evaluating them in light of the nuances and messiness associated with real-world settings.

Readings
Four books are required for this course:

*Democracy in the Making: How Activist Groups Form*, by Kathleen Blee

*Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, by Kristin Luker

*Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, by Doug McAdam

*Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, by Sidney Tarrow
Each should be available at the campus bookstore and through the usual online outlets. The bulk of our reading, however, can be found in major Sociology journals. I have included full citations for each of these articles in the course outline – all should be accessible through databases available on the LTS webpage and/or held in the Brandeis library. I will also be sure to post all non-optional readings on our course Latte page at least one week in advance.

Any dismay over the length of the reading list should largely be assuaged by noticing that each week’s readings fall into multiple categories, denoted by handy symbols: discussion papers (分期付款), foundational readings (里程碑), topical overviews (里程碑), key empirical studies (*, ?), and further (optional) readings (??). For a typical class, you should be prepared to thoughtfully read four papers: the main discussion paper for that week, the foundational reading, the topical overview, and one of the two key empirical studies (i.e. either * or ?; note that beginning in Week 3, I will assign you to one or the other group). For topics of special interest – i.e. those tied to your article framing assignment, or your particular research focus – the optional further readings are highly recommended.

Class Format
Class meetings will typically begin by broadly situating the topic at hand, making use of the “foundational reading” and “topical overview” as well as integrating other important works into our discussion. We will then move to a consideration of the week’s “discussion paper,” which ideally introduces an innovative, promising, or otherwise provocative approach to the class topic. Finally, we will break into smaller groups, divided by your chosen “key empirical study” and guided by that week’s discussion memos. When we then conclude by coming back together for a full-class discussion, our aim will be to assess how best to use the empirical studies and other readings to evaluate the state of the field.

Assignments and requirements
To extend our discussions beyond general theoretical, methodological, and analytic considerations, we will approach most course topics with an eye toward applying them to empirical cases of your choice. To support this endeavor, assignments and in-class discussions will focus on extending, critiquing, or testing ideas related to each week’s theoretical or substantive topic. More specifically, I expect that, over the course of the semester, you will:

• write one extended (15-25 page) paper, roughly in the form of a refereed journal article. By Week 4 of the semester (corresponding to our September 25th class meeting), each of you will have selected and familiarized yourself with an empirical context/case that will serve as the applied “topic” of this paper. I encourage each of you, to whatever extent reasonably possible, to access data (broadly construed) related to your context/case (I am happy to provide feedback about how to most effectively engage in data-gathering), and use this case as a vehicle to develop an original argument. This paper will be due at the close of the semester, sometime during the final exam period.
• write a brief (3-4 page) article framing essay, which will take the form of an introduction to a longer, original (but unwritten) journal-type article. The goal of this framing assignment is to clearly and efficiently introduce a particular critique/idea that you see as contributing to the literature, demonstrate how that idea links to existing research, and explain how your empirical case informs your (again, unwritten) analysis. It is acceptable and even recommended, though not required, for this essay to serve as a foundation for your longer final paper. I also recommend that you coordinate the paper with one of the sessions in which you lead discussion. This essay can be submitted at any point in the semester, but no later than Friday, November 15th.

• twice over the course of the semester, serve as a discussion leader for an assigned “key empirical study.” For both of your assigned sessions, you should prepare and post to Latte no later than 5pm on the day prior to our class meeting a brief (350 word maximum) memo succinctly summarizing the main argument of the article and a set of 3-5 questions that you see as productively situating and structuring our in-class discussion. While you should strive to present clearly the author’s intended argument and contribution, in general you should not think of these memos as polished products but rather as thought pieces to aid our conversation. Everyone should familiarize themselves with each posted memo prior to that week’s class session. During class, discussion leaders will orient and facilitate small-group discussion of the article and later summarize for the full class the key points that emerged from that discussion.

• actively participate in all class meetings. For the most part, this class works best as a conversation rather than as a lecture or monologue. In that spirit, your engagement is key, and therefore strongly encouraged (i.e. expected). I take this component as seriously as your written assignments, and recommend (i.e. expect) that you come to each class session having reflected upon the required readings and your colleagues’ discussion memos. As you read assigned articles, it might be useful to consider: 1) what seems praiseworthy about the paper; 2) what you might have done differently; 3) particular ideas or approaches that you feel were mistaken or otherwise misguided; 4) aspects that were unclear or confusing; 5) aspects that seem to require further elaboration; 6) advantages and limitations to the author(s)’ overall approach and analysis; and 7) the ways in which you and/or the author(s) might productively extend the research. I also encourage you to suggest or bring in ideas for teaching related ideas to undergraduates, and to pay attention throughout the semester to news coverage of any ongoing cases of political contention.

University Policy on Academic Accommodations
If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services (x63470 or brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
Course Outline

Week 1 (September 4th): Introductory business

Section I: Foundations

Week 2 (September 11th): Situating and bounding social movements and contentious politics

Discussion paper (🔗):

Foundational readings (🔗):

Topical overview (🔗):

Key critical studies (⭐, ⭐️):

Further (optional) readings (🔗):

Week 3 (September 18th): Resource mobilization


Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970, Ch. 2.


Week 4 (September 25th): Political opportunity structure

James M. Jasper, “From Political Opportunity Structures to Strategic Interaction”

Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970, Ch. 3.


Sidney Tarrow. 1998. “Political Opportunities and Constraints.” Ch. 5 in Power in Movement.


One-page final paper topic proposal/description due

Week 5 (October 2nd): Mobilization and participation


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**Week 6 (October 9th): Interpretive processes**


🌟 David A. Snow, “Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields.” Chapter 17 in the *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*.


🌟 Doug McAdam. 1996. “The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement.” Chapter 15 in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*.


Section II. Challenges

Week 7 (October 16th): Assessing structuralist and culturalist approaches (tentative readings)


Tilly rebuttal (“Wise Quacks”)

Tarrow rebuttal (“Paradigm Warriors”)


Week 8 (October 23rd): New directions: mechanisms, culture, institutions, & selection effects


Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. “What are They Shouting About?” Ch. 1 in Dynamics of Contention.


Section III: Extensions

Week 9 (October 30th): The patterning of contentious action: Diffusion and cycles of protest


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**Week 10 (November 6th): Grievances and the mobilization of threat**


Week 11 (November 13th): State control and repression


Week 12 (November 20th): Emotions and collective identity

Week 13 (November 27th): No class (Thanksgiving break)

Week 14 (December 4th): Movement trajectories and outcomes

★ Kathleen Blee, *Democracy in the Making*


