Social movements are shaped by, and transform, nearly every facet of social life. The sociological study of social movements is today a relatively well-defined subfield, but the questions and empirical sites of the study of social movements extend into many others, including the sociology of labor, gender, sexualities, race, and immigration; the sociology of organizations; the sociology of knowledge; the sociology of health and medicine; global and transnational sociology; political sociology; and, of course, Marxist theory. This course will introduce you to core texts, frameworks and questions in the sociology of social movements, while inviting you to explore the significance of social movements to other areas of social life—and of sociological inquiry. Rather than exhausting the canon, we will read in a selection of key texts in depth. Our aims are 1) to orient ourselves to the diversity of ways in which sociologists have studied social movements, and 2) to relate social movements to broader political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics.

The course is organized around a series of core questions: Under what conditions do people mobilize successfully to achieve collective goals? What factors mobilize and sustain participation in social movements? How do ideologies, cultural frames, narratives, and emotions shape movements? How do activists form collective identities, and what conflicts emerge in the process? How have movements organized transnationally? And what unique challenges does our current political moment pose to social movements and the sociologists who study them? We will examine these questions with careful attention to historical contexts of a diverse array of social movements, and apply a critical, intersectional, and transnational lens to our readings. We’ll aim to understand the development of the sociology of social movements in the context of the “big questions” of sociology. That said, this is not an intellectual history course, nor is it intended to leave you hopeless about the possibility that sociology might have something useful to say about the problems facing our planet. We will anchor our discussions in a theoretical as well as strategic political commitment to understanding how movements come about, and what positions them (or constrains them) in effecting social change.

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Distinguish major theories in the sociology of social movements and be able to articulate the relevance and limitations of each to empirical contexts
- Relate social movement studies to other subfields (and other disciplines)
- Discuss, write, and ask questions about social movement theory with insight and precision
- Appreciate a range of methodological approaches for studying social movements, with an emphasis on qualitative methodologies
- Develop a research paper and position it effectively in relation to course texts
A note on the learning objectives: This course is designed for graduate students. What this means is that the work you do in this class is meant to prepare you to be a producer of sociological knowledge, not just a passive receptacle for it. For you, that may mean anything from asking the most penetrating questions in a meeting of your radical feminist group or your advocacy organization; to writing a think-piece for a political blog that’s a cut above the average; to being able to comment intelligently, as a sociologist, in conversations about social movements with your grandmother or your taxi driver or your roommate; to asking an interesting question at a panel about social movements at a conference; to becoming an excellent teacher and researcher of social movements; to, well, providing the theoretical direction for the revolution. The point is that this course will be wasted if you are just here to go through the motions. You are here to grapple with the literature, to fall in love with some parts of it, and maybe to develop deep-seated grudges against other parts of it that will push your own thinking forward. Now, as much as ever, is a time when the world needs good sociological analysis about how movements work.

**Course Requirements**

The course requirements depart from the assumption that you are here because you want to be here. I trust you to invest your full energy into readings, discussions, and written assignments for this course. That’s the most important thing. So, here are the basic expectations:

1. **Attendance and Participation**

   You should come to class ready to engage: to discuss and develop ideas with your peers. I will spend very little time lecturing, so the success of the course is in your hands.

   The easiest way to prepare yourself for meaningful participation is to read. Don’t skim (unless I tell you to), don’t just read the first few pages, don’t read a Wikipedia article. Read and re-read, mark it up, and think about it. This is a reading-based course, and you are expected to read around 250 pages a week. If you really do all that reading, it’s unlikely that you’ll be left with no questions or comments.

   Speaking comfortably about sociological writings is an important part of your graduate education. My role is to make sure to create an environment that is safe and inclusive for discussion (though safe does not mean it will always be comfortable!) and I take that responsibility very seriously. I will generally open class by giving everyone an opportunity to raise a few key questions and comments; these will guide our discussion and ensure that everyone shares thoughts at least once. If any of this terrifies you for any reason, I encourage you to come and talk to me about it one-on-one.

2. **Short Essays**

   Four times this semester, you will submit a short (1-2 page, single-spaced) essay about the readings for the week. You’ll submit the essay on Latte in a public forum by 11am the day of class. I encourage you to read others’ essays before class; you may also refer to and respond to others’ essays in your own essay or in class discussion. The aim of the essay is to push you to distill and refine your reactions to the reading before we discuss it as a group. Ideally, your essays will become long-term resources for you. Your colleagues’ essays may become resources for you too—seeing ideas expressed through others’ words can elevate your own understanding. Essays like these help you document the shifts in your thinking as you develop as a scholar. The hope is that someday, when graduate school is a happily distant memory, and you want to refresh your memory on some nuance of new social movement theory, you will be able to dig up these essays. You may be embarrassed, you may be impressed, you may notice how far you’ve come—but in any case, you will be glad you have it.
3. **In-Class Presentation**

Once during the semester, you are required to give a 15-minute presentation about the topic for the week. I will pass around a sign-up sheet for presentations in the second week. Think of this as your opportunity to set the agenda for the day. The goal is to provide an opening and a frame of reference for the rest of the class. The presentation helps to get us all on the same page, remind ourselves of the basic contours of the argument, and outline a path forward. I don’t expect pyrotechnics; just a clear summary, 3-5 thoughtful, nuanced discussion questions, and a commitment to taking an especially active role in the day’s discussion. You may want to prepare a handout before class; if you email it to me by noon the day of the presentation I can print copies for the group.

4. **Final Research Paper**

At the end of the semester, you will submit a 20-25 page, double-spaced research paper related to the questions and topics of the class. I expect you to be thinking about your final paper early in the semester, and after the February break we will hold discussion in class of your evolving ideas about your paper. The paper should, ideally, be something useful to you—the groundwork for a new project, an application of social movement literature to data you have already collected, an original synthesis or critical re-evaluation of existing literature. It should not be something you pull together at the last minute, turn in, and never look at again; it should be something you continue to work on, ideally on a path toward publication. **The final paper is due on Tuesday, May 16th.**

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**COURSE POLICIES**

**Office Hours.** If you are unable to attend my office hours, feel free to email me to set up an appointment. Please come and see me at least once. It really helps.

**Academic Integrity.** Don’t plagiarize. If you feel overwhelmed by the material or by an assignment, come and see me instead. The University’s policy on academic integrity can be found in the [Rights and Responsibilities Handbook](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/rr/). Plagiarism can carry severe consequences, including failing the course and/or suspension.

**Classroom Environment.** We will discuss difficult topics in this class, and it will take all of our trust, sensitivity, and maturity to create an inclusive and safe environment for conversation. Please remember that your classmates have a range of experiences and be thoughtful when you speak and listen. If you have any concerns about your ability to participate actively in class, because of personal experience, trauma, or something else, please do not hesitate to talk with me about it—the earlier in the semester, the better.

**Accommodations.** If you have been issued a letter of academic accommodation from Disabilities Services and Support, please see me in the first two weeks of the semester to work out the necessary arrangements.

**Readings.** All readings marked with an asterisk (*) below will be uploaded to Latte. In addition, the following required books will be available at the bookstore and placed on reserve at the library.

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**1/23 Introduction: Defining (and Debating) the Subfield**


Epilogue, “Reactionary and Revolutionary Imagery,” pp. 484-508


Chapter 1, “Contentious Politics and Social Movements,” pp. 16-34

**1/30 Revolutions and Counterrevolutions**


Epilogue, “Reactionary and Revolutionary Imagery,” pp. 484-508

**2/6 Movements and Organizations**


Read Introduction and Chapter 1 closely; skim the rest if you need to


Part 6, Chapter 1, “The Conservative Basis of Organization,” pp. 333-341


**2/13 Resource Mobilization**


2/27 Political Process and Political Opportunity Structure

*Bring to class a paragraph about your planned final paper topic.*


Read Chapter 3 closely; skim the rest if you need to


3/6 New Social Movements and Debates Over Culture


3/13 Micro-Processes of Mobilization


Chapter 2, “Learning to Care,” pp. 18-45


3/20 Framing and Ideology


3/27 Emotion and Narrative


4/3 Collective Identity


SPRING RECESS

4/19 [Brandeis Monday] Transnationalism


4/24 Right-Wing Politics


5/1 New Political Formations

https://viewpointmag.com/2016/05/01/the-idea-of-may-day-on-the-march-1913/

