

# Social Movements and the Food Movement

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# What is a social movement?

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- Consciously formed association whose goal is to bring about change in social, economic or political sectors through collective action and mobilization of large numbers of people.
- Involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; linked by dense informal networks; share a distinct collective identity.
- Organized yet informal social entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is oriented towards a goal. These goals can be either aimed at a specific and narrow policy or be more broadly aimed at cultural change.

# The “Food Movement” orientation

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- **Inclusion**: *get marginalized players in; immigrant farmers, food access*
- **Reformation**: *alter operating guidelines; farmers market rules, fair trade, better farm leases*
- **Transformation**: *establish qualitatively different paradigms; food as human right, land as commons*

# Power of social movements

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- Political opportunities
- Framing processes
- Mobilizing structures

# Political opportunities

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- Openings for change within political structures
- Interface with existing structures and strategic positioning
- e.g., Clean Water Act, USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach

# Mobilizing structures

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- Forms and tactics that movements take
- Organizational capacity to mobilize; what is capacity (resources, expertise, technology)?
- Many groups → hard to coordinate; compete
- Many groups also means resilience, diversity, testing various tactics and experiments

# Framing processes

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- Shared meanings and definitions that describe the problem, causes and solutions
- **The power or mobilizing capacity of a frame is how strongly it resonates and compels action**
  - *credibility*: testable, and significant to everyday life
  - *resonance*: corresponds to life experience and meaning
  - something can be credible, but lack resonance

# Historically dominant frames in agri-food work

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- **Environmental sustainability**: historically “sustainable ag”; WQ/natural resources, GMO, land use
- **Economic justice** (for farmers): concentration, viability, tenure, markets
- **Community food security**: food access; food justice/rights, for consumers; local economies
- **Health and food safety**: nutrition, diet, GMO—not necessarily tied to agriculture

# Master Frames

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- Frames vary in their comprehensiveness
- *Master frame* is most inclusive
- A unifying message that brings together various sub-issues, orgs, networks within a social movement
  - Civil rights
  - Sustainable ag v. CFS
- Has the greatest potential to resonate and mobilize

# Master frames

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- **What is our master frame???**
- Is there a BIGGER master frame?
  - Sustainable Community Movement?
  - Domestic economic disparities
  - UN Sustainable Development Goals?
- “Substantial things” – justice, ecology, equity, democracy, diversity, opportunity

# Strategic Orientation

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- How do you see your own work?
- How would you characterize your organization's work?
- What is the optimal balance for your movement goals to be achieved?

# Strategic orientation: Warrior work

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*Resistance* = Change political & economic structures

- Challenges primarily in political sector
- Defends ground gained
- Effective to mobilize: public protest is highly visible
- Can be in the trenches: NSAC and the farm bill
- Creates space for weaver work

# Strategic orientation: Builder Work

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*Reconstruction* = Create alternatives

- New models e.g., CSA, new generation coops, carbon credits
- Changes primarily in market sector
- Less contentious
- May not see as conscious resistance
- Entrepreneurial, precarious

# Strategic orientation: Weaver Work

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**Connection** = linking to foster change

- Primarily in the civil sector
- Networks, coalitions; *movement-building*
- Intra-sectoral: within specific area (e.g., organizing producer coops)
- Inter-sectoral different interests (e.g., Food Policy Councils)
- Horizontal and vertical

# What *is* our movement? What is *your* work?

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- How can we better understand and analyze our work to build the movement”?
- What strategic connections need to happen to advance our movement?
- What is your “strategic orientation”? (see handout)
- How does our individual work contribute to the movement?

# Thank you!

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*Warrior, Builder and Weaver Work: Strategies for Changing the Food System*

From: *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*

C. Clare Hinrichs and Thomas A. Lyson, editors

University of Nebraska Press, 2007