EXAM SOSGEO4801 2026

1. Choose a social movement that you will use as a case. Give a short description of the movement and discuss its strategies for mobilization, communication and influence.

2. Choose one of the two attached articles from The Conversation. Discuss the text with reference to relevant social movement concepts and theories from the course.

3. Discuss how social movements use space by choosing two movement to illustrate your discussion.

SENSORVEILEDNING

1. Choose a social movement that you will use as a case. Give a short description of the movement and discuss its strategies for mobilization, communication and influence.

Students are expected to choose between the movements covered in the class (anti-autocratic movements, the gay/queer movement, the antiracist movement, the environmental/climate movement, solidarity movements with Palestine, and right-wing populist or extremist movements) or select another movement. After a short description of the selected movement, preferably with reference to context/time, they shall discuss strategies for mobilization (e.g. frames, resources, alliances), communication (e.g. use of mass and social media, demonstrations, petitions), and influence (e.g. media, emotions, tactics). These various strategies are broadly covered in Staggenburg as well as in the empirical articles demonstrating how strategies are used and evaluated among social movement constituencies and audiences. A good answer here (A or B) will demonstrate overview of central themes and concepts in the course and the ability to use theory with regard to one specific movement.

2. Choose one of the two attached articles from The Conversation. Discuss the text with reference to relevant social movement concepts and theories from the course.

The two articles are attached to the exam questions. Their titles are respectively: A) *Climate change: Radical activism benefits social movements – and history shows why* by Heather Alberro, and B) *White and Black activists worked strategically in parallel in Detroit 50 years ago, fighting for civil rights* by Say Burgin. Both articles are research-based and point to central themes in social movement literature. In discussing A, students may for example relate to literature about emotions, media strategies and different action repertoires in movements. In choosing example B, literature on collective identities and identity dilemmas, intersectionality, and spatiality could serve as relevant. A good answer to this question is recognized by the student being able to pick up on the central aspect of the article and discuss its message by the use of relevant concepts and theories from the course.

3. Discuss how social movements use space and illustrate this with examples from two movements.

Students are expected to show some familiarity with key concepts of spatiality, especially place, scale and networks, and to provide a discussion of how movements use these to build a movement and achieve its goals. This could for example be done by linking key themes and processes in social movements to spatiality, for example the role of place, scale and networks in collective identity, framing, media communication, alliance-building, political advocacy and influence. The answer can draw on the lectures and course literatures that explicitly discuss spatiality, while examples can be found or elaborated from the different movement cases covered in the course. A good answer will show both a broad overview and understanding of the role of space for social movements, and an ability to provide good examples from two specific social movements.

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



Guy Corbishley/Alamy Stock Photo

Climate change: radical activists benefit social movements – history shows why

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https://theconversation.com/climate-change-radical-activists-benefit-social-movements-history-shows-why-181977

Wynn Bruce set himself on fire on April 22 2022 – Earth Day. His self-immolation in front of the US supreme court was a protest against inadequate action on the climate crisis. He later died of his injuries.

Two days earlier in the UK, climate activist Angus Rose ended his 37-day hunger strike when a parliamentary group finally agreed to host a briefing by the chief scientific adviser for MPs and ministers.

Such radical forms of protest have historically been deployed by social movements to cast a spotlight on desperate situations, when conventional legal and political responses have been deemed woefully inadequate. After decades of international negotiations, the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change yet again warned that current emissions put countries far off limiting warming to below 2°C by 2100. Severe droughts, intolerable heat, wildfires, violent storms, crop failures, sea-level rise and social turmoil are expected to spiral once global temperatures exceed that threshold.

As such, some climate activists are likely to deploy increasingly radical tactics in the years ahead. History shows that may be a good thing for the wider movement.

Bodies on the line

In my research, I've explored what motivates radical environmental activists to engage in what's called direct action. Coined by US anarcho-feminist Voltairine de Cleyre, direct action was popularised during Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to British colonial rule in India. Its use proliferated in civil rights and anti-war demonstrations during the 1960s and 70s, namely in the form of sit-ins, marches and other forms of civil disobedience that challenged state laws.

Direct action is a mode of protest that takes place outside of parliamentary politics. It encompasses a range of tactics. Within the environmental movement, Hambach Forest activists in Germany have used direct action to occupy old-growth forests set for clear-cutting. Extinction Rebellion has blocked roads and oil depots across the UK. More controversial tactics include acts of sabotage, such as dismantling machinery. In 1986, for instance, two Sea Shepherd Conservation Society engineers destroyed half of Iceland's whaling fleet and a processing station in Reykjavik harbour, effectively shutting down the country's commercial whaling industry for 16 years.



By putting themselves in harm's way, activists demonstrate the seriousness of their cause. EPA-EFE/Sascha Steinbach

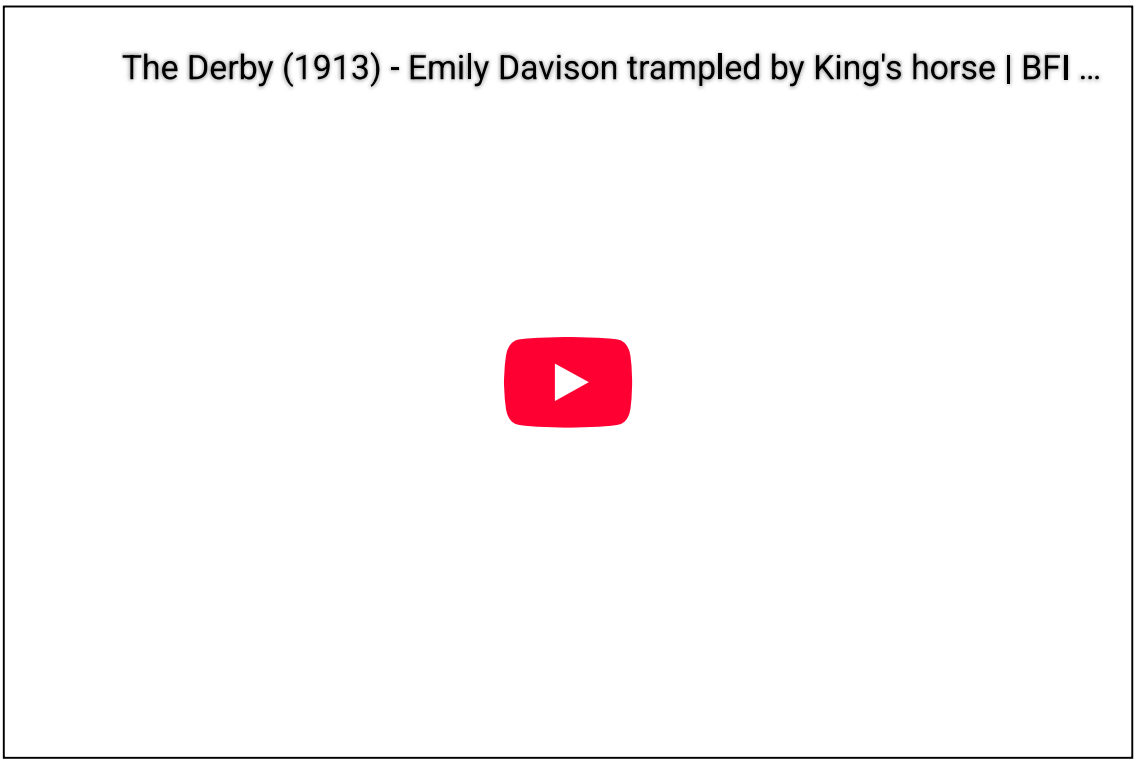
These tactics are designed to disrupt the status quo and halt an antagonistic system or process at its source. They also seek to draw media and public attention to the issue. But they tend to be adopted as a means of last resort, when a situation is urgent and more conventional modes of political participation, like voting and lobbying, are deemed insufficient.

The radical flank effect

Wynn Bruce's self-immolation recalls a similar protest in the mid-20th century. Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức set himself on fire in 1963 to highlight the persecution of religious minorities by the US-backed regime in South Vietnam.

Such radical acts of self-sacrifice have often take place where the mobilisation of a social movement is already underway. This dynamic is known as the radical flank effect. When the efforts of the movement are frustrated, radical segments emerge and deploy more disruptive tactics. These serve to render the demands of their mainstream counterparts more palatable in the eyes of governments and the public, effectively advancing the entire movement's agenda.

In the late 1950s, alongside the prospects of armed self-defence by Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King Jr's calls for dismantling segregation laws appeared less radical. Militant suffragettes destroying property made granting women the vote seem a reasonable concession. And suffragette Emily Davison's death after colliding with a horse at the 1913 Epsom Derby, whether intentional or not, attracted global attention to the struggle for universal suffrage.



Radical forms of resistance – from property destruction to hunger strikes and self-immolation – serve a similar function in the environmental movement. They highlight the urgency of the climate crisis as well as the reasonableness of demands by mainstream organisations, such as the need to swiftly phase out fossil fuel projects.

Of course, there is always a risk that more extreme tactics might alienate certain segments of the public. But research suggests that people tend to be more sympathetic towards radical tactics when they see that conventional political solutions are failing.

Sociologists Paweł Żuk and Piotr Żuk argue that tactics such as self-immolation are acts of rebellion against a deficient reality: gestures of self-sacrifice which alert observers to an entire community's suffering. These forms of protest are especially common during times of crisis – like the unfolding climate emergency – when the lives of millions – human and nonhuman – may be threatened.

These modes of environmental protest are also powerful articulations of grief over the narrowing prospects of a viable future for many of Earth's inhabitants. In his recent book How to Blow Up a Pipeline scholar-activist Andreas Malm observes that it is "better to die blowing up a pipeline than to burn impassively – but we shall hope, of course, that it never comes to this. If we resist fatalism, it might not."

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



A member of the Michigan National Guard stands at the ready as firemen battle a blaze in Detroit in July 1967. AP Photo

White and Black activists worked strategically in parallel in Detroit 50 years ago, fighting for civil rights

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https://theconversation.com/white-and-black-activists-worked-strategically-in-parallel-in-detroit-50-years-ago-fighting-for-civil-rights-231351

Since the murder of George Floyd in 2020, some white people have been wondering how they can work with Black people to fight racial inequality.

As a history professor who studies social movements, I know this is not a new question. In the 1960s, civil rights activists deliberated how to channel white support for racial equality.

These conversations took place in cities across the country. In Detroit, white residents responded with particular enthusiasm. There, as I documented in my 2024 book, their joint deliberations led to a strategic innovation in organizing that became foundational to Black Power.

A new strategy

For some civil rights activists, like the late Georgia U.S. Rep. John Lewis, interracial organizing seemed like the best tactic.

The organization that he began leading in 1963, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, had always been Black-led. But it also included white activists who did community organizing or office tasks alongside Black workers. For Lewis, when white and Black activists worked together, they represented the kind of integrated society they were fighting for.

The Civil Rights Movement, Lewis said in 1988, offered "the only real and true integration that existed in American society."

Yet, interracial organizing, as I document in my book, had obvious limitations.

White activists often assumed they knew best, and that stymied the development of local Black leadership. Moreover, as historians including myself have documented, law enforcement and some local white communities responded violently as they watched white and Black activists organizing side by side.



Michigan National Guardsmen push rioters back from a burning building on Detroit's west side, on July 26, 1967. Bettmann

The story of Detroit's chapter of the Northern Student Movement illustrates the problems associated with interracial organizing.

The group was founded in New York in the early 1960s by an interracial mix of college students who wanted to challenge Northern Jim Crow. This system of racial oppression was characterized by overpolicing of Black neighborhoods, unequal treatment in the courts, segregated and underfunded schools for Black children, and employment discrimination.

In the spring of 1964, as I note in my book, the organization realized that white women faced difficulties when they went door-to-door talking to community members in Black urban areas as part of the group's organizing efforts. These incidents suggested that interracial organizing was hindered by both gender relations and white people's unfamiliarity with Black communities.

This discovery prompted the Northern Student Movement to enact a division of labor segregated by race and gender. In all the movement's projects, white women were directed away from organizing in Black neighborhoods.

Then, in 1965, the group's Detroit chapter became embroiled in a controversial campaign that prompted it to racially divide movement work even further.

In March, a white shop owner on Detroit's west side killed a 20-year-old Black man named John Christian. Christian tried to intervene when the shop owner accused a child of stealing a 12-cent cake, and the shopkeeper shot Christian.

The Wayne County prosecutor refused to bring charges for the killing. In response, Detroit's Black community began boycotting the shop and organized a campaign to have the shopkeeper arrested.

The Northern Student Movement quickly joined the effort. But, as I note in my book, some white members in Detroit weren't sure of the boycott's moral righteousness. They were used to backing boycotts of racist Jim Crow laws in the South – not in the North. Other white members of the group took on the task of convincing their white peers that the Detroit boycott was the right move. These members knew they needed to enlarge white support for the campaign to succeed.

Meanwhile, the boycotters were being arrested, spuriously charged with conspiracy and given high bails. The government's weaponization of the legal system convinced many activists that if a critical mass of white people vocally supported Black liberation, it could better protect Black activists.

A strategy began to take shape in the Northern Student Movement. Black activists would toil away at the main movement work of community organizing in Black areas and developing local leadership. White activists would organize in white areas and institutions, showing white people the pressing problems of racial inequalities and building support for civil rights.

I call this innovation racially parallel organizing. As local Black organizer Dorothy Dewberry said, it asked white people to "begin to work in their own communities."

Racially parallel organizing in practice

The Northern Student Movement became the first group to make racially parallel organizing its official strategy. In 1965, it asked its white members in Detroit to form a parallel group, which became known as People Against Racism.

People Against Racism worked with Black-led groups across Detroit to fight such Northern Jim Crow problems as unequal education and police brutality.

For example, when Black high school students led a walkout in 1966 to demand the ouster of a school police officer and a more rigorous education, People Against Racism helped run an alternative "freedom school" for the boycotting students to attend while they fought to improve their public school.

Detroit residents line up at a food and clothing distribution center after the 1967 riots, when many lost their homes and possessions. Bettmann

People Against Racism boosted its ranks after Detroit in 1967 experienced one of the deadliest racial uprisings of the decade. Suddenly, more white people wanted to understand why Black people were rebelling — and how they could address their problems.

The group's leadership ushered them into racially parallel organizing.

For instance, People Against Racism helped to reorient a Christian group called Detroit Industrial Mission, which had consulted with industry managers in Detroit industries for years, to address racial inequalities in employment. The group took cues from People Against Racism as it developed "new white consciousness" and "new black consciousness" trainings to confront the nearly all-white world of industrial management in Detroit.

The group helped numerous companies, including Detroit Edison and parts manufacturer Borg & Beck, establish affirmative action programs to increase Black hiring.

A path for white supporters of Black freedom

Then, in 1970, members of the Detroit Industrial Mission and People Against Racism, along with other groups, teamed up to found a group that represented the height of racially parallel organizing in Detroit.

The Motor City Labor League was the white parallel to Detroit's most important Black Power group, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, a Marxist-inspired organization that sought to wage a race-conscious class struggle in Detroit industries. The Motor City Labor League, in turn, was tasked with mobilizing white communities near the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' main base in Detroit's Chrysler plants.

The group splintered due to infighting in 1972 but had some success in its short lifespan. For instance, the league helped white residents near one plant to see how Chrysler's pollution harmed both them and the plant's mostly Black workforce.

More importantly, racially parallel organizing set a clear path for white supporters of Black freedom. My research shows that in Detroit, its impacts were felt in boardrooms, factory floors, Sunday sermons, suburban neighborhoods and public-school curricula.

The genius of the strategy was that it could be practiced anywhere that white people lived, worked and worshipped. It was replicated and practiced all over the country.

More than 50 years later, it can still speak to anti-racist activists as the struggle for racial equality continues.