Social movements have shaped every facet of social life—from the eight-hour day, to the terms we use to describe gender identity, to the geopolitical map of the world. This course begins with the premise that the best way to learn how social movements work—both for academic and practical purposes—is to study concrete examples in specific historical and social contexts. We begin by developing a core set of questions in the sociology of social movements: When and why do movements occur? How does the political and institutional context of movements shape their success? What strategies do movements use—how are they organized, and what are the pitfalls of different strategies and organizational forms? And what cultural processes shape how activists come to think of themselves as activists, remain committed to activism, and frame their ideas in the process of struggle? After reading key sociological texts on these questions, we move into studying the history and social dynamics of specific social movements in more depth, using a mix of primary sources and social science scholarship. Throughout these case studies, we remain attentive to the connections, synergies, and overlaps between movements, and the intersection and co-constitution of dynamics such as class, race, gender, and sexuality. We place a particular emphasis on tensions and alliances through and across these dynamics. While we focus our attention on the United States, we also draw on some case studies in other countries, as well as paying close attention to how activists have built and navigated transnational connections, not just in the era of neoliberal globalization, but also in anticolonial struggles.

In addition to building a broad appreciation of an array of social movements, over the course of the semester you will work on a series of short projects in relation to a specific social movement theme of your choosing. You are encouraged to follow the progress of “your” movement throughout the course. At the end of the semester, you will combine your shorter projects into a longer paper that relates your topic to the core questions of the class.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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

- Distinguish major concepts in the sociology of social movements and be able to explain their relevance (and limitations) with concrete examples
- Discuss, write, and ask questions about social movements with insight and precision
- Build a basic working knowledge of the history and social dynamics of major social movements in the US
- Appreciate transnational connections and parallels to social movement struggles in the United States
- Use tools for qualitative research—interviewing and participant observation—to analyze social movements sociologically
1. Attendance and Participation (15%)

Class attendance is mandatory! You are allowed 2 absences during the semester. For each additional absence, I will deduct 10% from your attendance grade. It is your responsibility to sign in at the beginning of every class, or you may be considered absent. It is also your responsibility to find out what you missed and make up any missed work. Keep in mind that if you repeatedly arrive late to class, you may be marked absent.

Participating means engaging actively with ideas from readings, lectures, and your peers. You might participate in a number of ways—sharing your own ideas and critiques, working collaboratively in small groups, listening and responding to your classmates, asking thoughtful questions, bringing in relevant articles, or talking to me in office hours. Speaking comfortably about social movements is an important part of your learning in this class, so if you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom environment, I encourage you to see me about it early on.

2. Project Topic Summary (5%)

On Friday, February 3rd, you will submit a 1-page, double-spaced summary of the movement you will focus on during the semester. It could be broad (“transgender activism”) or specific (“transgender bathroom debates at Brandeis University.”) Keep in mind that you will be thinking and writing about this theme all semester, so choose something that interests you and about which you will be able to access information. In your essay, explain your topic, what interests you about it, and 5-7 proposed academic sources.

3. Quiz (10%) 

On Friday, February 17th, you will take a 20-minute in-class quiz on basic concepts and theories from the first four weeks of the semester.

4. Biographical Analysis (10%)

On Friday, March 10th, you will submit a 3-page, double-spaced biographical analysis based on an interview with an activist. Ideally, you will conduct the interview yourself, but you may also choose to find an interview from a news article or other documentary or digital source. You may define “activist” as broadly or narrowly as you wish, and you may interview friends, roommates, family members, or activists you may contact specifically for the project. The essay should touch on themes such as: how drew your interviewee to activism and what kept them there? What challenges did they face as an activist?

5. Symposium Reaction Essay (5%)

You are encouraged to attend as much as possible of the Brandeis Symposium, “Black Lives Matter: Local Movements, Global Futures,” on March 23rd and 24th, with Khalil Gibran Muhammad and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Your grade for this assignment is based on your attending the symposium and writing a 2-page, double-spaced reaction essay about your experiences and questions about it. The essay is due on Tuesday, March 28th.

6. Transnational Connections Essay (10%)

On Friday, April 7th, you will submit a 3-page, double-spaced essay on a transnational connection to your chosen movement. This could be a parallel to your movement in another country—for example, if you’re focusing on Black Lives Matter, you may focus on movements of racial minorities in Brazil. Or you might focus on a specific transnational alliance.
7. Movement Event Analysis (15%)

On Friday, April 21st, you will submit a 3-page, double-spaced essay analyzing an event related to a social movement. The event could be a protest, a rally, a training session, an organizing meeting, a public forum, a march, or even a digital forum—any of the many types of organized sites for collective action we will discuss this semester. Your analysis will focus on the event’s goals, ideology, framing, targets, strategies, and participants, and any further questions the event raises for you.

8. Films (5%)

Films evoke the texture and emotional content of social movements in ways books and articles are not always able to do. Throughout the semester, in addition to portions of films we will watch in class, we will hold screenings of the following documentary and feature films relevant to the course: She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry (2014), Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015), Pride (2014), and Gulabi Gang (2012). Your grade for this assignment is based on attending at least one of the movie screenings and participating in a discussion about it. You are, of course, welcome to attend all of them, and may receive extra credit for doing so. Films will also be made available in the library for you to watch on your own.

9. Final Research Project (25%)

The final project is a 10-page, double-spaced research essay on the movement or category of movements you have focused on throughout the semester. The essay asks you to draw on the core questions from the first part of the course to develop an original analysis of a social movement. If you have done your work well, this essay should be easy to produce: you will pull together your biographical analysis, movement event analysis, and transnational connections essay, and build on it by relating it to relative academic sources and media reports. This is not a project that can be completed at the last minute. In addition to following any news you can get your hands on about your chosen topic throughout the semester, I encourage you to discuss it with me early in the semester. I will be happy to suggest topics if you are unsure of where to begin. The final paper is due on Friday, May 5th. No extensions will be granted except in cases of documented disability or health emergency. In our final class, you will discuss your paper with your classmates. This is not a formal presentation, but rather just a chance for you to learn from your classmates’ expertise.

COURSE POLICIES

Office Hours. If you are unable to attend my regular office hours, feel free to email me to set up an appointment and I’ll do my best to accommodate you. Please come and see me at least once.

Email. I will (try to) respond to emails within 48 hours. If I can’t answer your question in a sentence, office hours are best. I cannot answer questions about course material over email.

Grading. If you’d like me to reconsider a grade, you must submit a detailed written explanation. A request for a grade change can result in a higher or lower grade.

Gadgets. Use of laptops and cell phones is not allowed in class.

Writing. For support with writing, one place to start is the Writing Center (http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/index.html). Feel free to talk with me about it if you have specific concerns or goals related to your writing.

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 at 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 a 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, 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. If you need an accommodation and have not yet obtained one, please set up an appointment with Beth Rodgers-Kay (brodgers@brandeis.edu), in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, access@brandeis.edu).

**Readings.** All articles and excerpts will be posted on Latte.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

I. **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND APPLICATIONS**

**Week 1. Introduction**

**Tuesday 1/17 Introduction**


**Friday 1/20 Core Questions and Concepts**


Chapter 1, “Making Claims,” pp. 3-24


Chapter 1, “Editors’ Introduction,” pp. 3-8

**Week 2: Why Movements? Marxist, Feminist, Antiracist, Intersectional Theories of Justice**

**Tuesday 1/24 Marxism and Feminism**


Read pp. 473-491, pp. 499-500; focus on pp. 480-481.


Friday 1/27 Antiracism and Intersectionality

Chapter I, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” pp. 3-12

Week 3. Theories of Social Movements

Tuesday 1/31 Resource Mobilization Theory


Read at least ONE of the following articles:


Friday 2/3 Political Process Theory

Topic Summary Due


Week 4. Culture and Mobilization

Tuesday 2/7 Recruitment into Movements

Chapter 2, “Learning to Care,” pp. 18-45
**Friday 2/10 Collective Identity and Leadership**


**Week 5. Mobilizing Culture**

**Tuesday 2/14 Framing**


**Friday 2/17 Emotion in Movements**

In-Class Quiz


In-Class Film Excerpts: *How To Survive a Plague* (2012)

**MIDTERM RECESS**

**II. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN HISTORY AND PRACTICE**

**Week 6: Labor (and Gender)**

**Tuesday 2/28 The Bread and Roses Strike**


**Friday 3/3 Domestic Worker Activism**


**Read at least one of the following articles:**


**Week 7: Feminism (and Race)**

**Tuesday 3/7 First-Wave Feminism and Abolitionism**

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. 1848. “Address on Women’s Rights.” [http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/ecswoman1.html](http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/ecswoman1.html)


**Friday 3/10 Race, Class and Gender in the Second Wave**

Biographical Analysis Due


Film: *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* (2014)

**Week 8: Antiracism (and Class)**

**Tuesday 3/14 Civil Rights**


“Letter From Birmingham City Jail” (1963) pp. 289-302

“Where Do We Go From Here?” (1967) pp. 245-252


**Friday 3/17 Black Power**


Week 9: Black Lives Matter

Tuesday 3/21 Black Lives Matter


Chapter 7, “Ferguson is Everywhere,” pp. 141-155

Friday 3/24 Symposium on Black Lives Matter

Week 10: Sexuality and Health-Based Movements

Tuesday 3/28 LGBTQ Activism

Symposium Reaction Essay Due

Chapter 6, “Success,” pp. 113-133
Chapter 7, “Exclusions,” pp. 134-153

Film: Pride (2014)

Friday 3/31 Health-Based Activism


Week 11: Transnationalism

Tuesday 4/4 Transnational Solidarities, Part I: The US and Anticolonialism

“The Color Line Belts the World” (1906) pp. 33-34
“The World Problem of the Color Line” (1914) pp. 35-36


Friday 4/7 Transnational Solidarities, Part II: Responses to Neoliberal Globalization
Transnational Connection Essay Due

In-Class Film Excerpts: This is What Democracy Looks Like (2000)

Film: Gulabi Gang (2012)

SPRING RECESS

Week 12: Environmentalism

Friday 4/21 Environmentalism
Movement Event Analysis Due


Week 13: New Formations

Tuesday 4/25 The Tea Party

Chapter 1, “Traveling to the Heart,” pp. 3-24
Chapter 9, “The Deep Story,” pp. 135-152
Chapter 4, “Getting the Word Out: The Media as Cheerleader and Megaphone,” pp. 121-154

Friday 4/28 Millennial Activism


Week 14: Conclusion

Tuesday 5/2 Final Presentations
Final Paper Due May 5th