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The Rise of the Democratic Socialists of America: A Qualitative Analysis of the Contributing Factors to Insurgent Mobilization

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The Rise of the Democratic Socialists of America:
A Qualitative Analysis of the Contributing Factors to Insurgent Mobilization

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

Although there are other more conventional means through which aggrieved populations can voice their concerns, social movements have long served as important vehicles for articulating and advancing a group's interests and claims. Indeed, some of the most significant developments in the history of the modern era are bound up with social movements. As a result, social movement analysts are interested in understanding the protests, conflicts, and other forms of resistance that have challenged the prevailing social order. Scholarly interest in collective action has engendered a proliferation of empirical studies, igniting a series of theoretical debates. These debates are animated around concerns regarding movement emergence, the significance of formal organizations, and the role of elites in social movements. Contemporary movement scholars have underscored the ubiquitous presence of social movements in modern society as an exemplar of their continuing significance as vital agents in generating social change. The Bush administration's neoconservative foreign policy, the Great Recession, and persistent social inequalities once again inspired the launch of a myriad of protest activities. Inspired in part by Bernie Sanders' runs for the presidency, a new wave of activists mobilized under the banner of democratic socialism as tens of thousands of them joined the Democratic Socialists of America. This dissertation argues that Sanders, along with likeminded politicians, represents an opportunity for the growth and development of a unique version of socialism in the United States.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) emerged as a social movement organization in the 1980s as a response to corporate domination during the Reagan-Thatcher era. The organization's formative years were marked by a long-term rightward shift of global politics and persisting Cold War paranoia. Despite the sociopolitical taboos associated with socialism in the United States, DSA boldly assumed the label to describe their struggle against economic, gender, and racial inequality. Nearly 40 years after its founding, DSA's call for progressive reforms resonates with more people than at any point in the organization's history.

Lawrence Dreyfuss, program associate for DSA, informed me that in 2014 DSA had 6,500 members. By September 2017, the organization had grown to 28,200 members. Today, DSA has over 70,000 members in 425 local groups located in every state in the nation (email message to author, July 7, 2020). Intrigued by this development, my dissertation explores the growing interest in socialism in the United States by investigating the factors that contributed to the recent increase in DSA membership. I surveyed this phenomenon by analyzing DSA digital content (e.g., podcasts) and articles from the *Democratic Left* (DSA's magazine). In addition, I attended DSA events and meetings in Knoxville, Tennessee. In a series of one-on-one interviews, I asked 46 current DSA members to share their stories on what led them to DSA. I asked research participants questions regarding their activity within the organization, recruitment strategies, and DSA's work with marginalized populations. I wanted to learn how people from all over the United States came to view democratic socialism as a favorable alternative to the current capitalist system.

Adhering to a perspective that views social movements as tactical responses to the closed and coercive U.S. political system, my dissertation represents a sociological account of the

structural and ideational factors that prompted participants to join an avowed socialist organization. Although empirical and theoretical work has been conducted on movements organized around a myriad of issues spanning the political continuum, my study most closely resembles the research of scholars interested in the progressive movements of the 1960s. Therefore, equipped with a framework that explains movement emergence in terms of its ability to acquire resources and take advantage of political opportunities, in addition to subjective phenomena related to cognitive liberation, I examine the ways participants describe their recruitment into DSA. I contend that this study offers a valuable contribution to social movement scholarship by identifying a case in which elite sponsorship of an insurgent social movement provides the necessary resources for insurgent emergence and longevity. Finally, by transcending the artificial barrier between institutionalized and insurgent politics, my research offers an account of the ways a refined social movement theory can anticipate similar linkages in future protests.

The Case of DSA

In the decades following its founding, DSA, along with other organizations on the U.S. sectarian Left, existed in relative political anonymity. More recently, however, growing concerns about the widening income gap, the persistence of gender and racial injustices, and the rise of the alt-right (often associated with the election of President Donald Trump) have mobilized a new wave of activism in the United States. The concerns and actions expressed through these movements engender a disapproval of capitalism that results in an openness to socialist ideas among millennials and a significant increase in DSA membership.

One factor instrumental in moving socialist ideas into mainstream political discourse is the 2016 presidential campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Sanders, whose history of

progressive activism dates to the early 1960s, attracted national attention with his opposition to the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Citizens United*—a decision many on the Left feel contributes to the erosion of U.S. democracy. The *Citizens United* decision allows the wealthiest people and the largest corporations unlimited campaign spending, and Sanders's call for campaign finance reform energized a new generation of progressives frustrated with the failures of the Democratic Party. Much of the generation who came of age after the Cold War is open to political alternatives, and that openness found expression in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests, which, in the wake of the financial crisis, created an environment that made the option of socialism suddenly appear viable (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012; Soule 2012). For millennials politicized around the 2008 financial crisis, Sanders—a popular Democratic presidential candidate who identifies as a democratic socialist but is not a member of DSA—became the embodiment of their vision of an alternative to the political establishment.

Sanders' emphasis on reversing economic inequality can be traced to his involvement in progressive organizations, including the youth affiliate of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), which he joined while attending the University of Chicago in the early 1960s (Kruse 2015). The SPA was formed in 1901, and in its first two decades, drew considerable support from segments of the U.S. working class. Trade unionists, immigrants, and farmers were attracted to the party's promise of economic and social reforms (Bell 1952; Ginger 1947; Ross 2015). The SPA's most notable leaders include Eugene V. Debs (whose portrait hangs in Sanders's Senate office) and Michael Harrington, a founding member of DSA. During its 1972 convention, the SPA changed its name to Social Democrats, USA (SDUSA), due to the prevalence of negative attitudes towards Soviet communism. This move, however, was no mere rebranding, because it was here when the governing faction renewed its support for the AFL-CIO and their pro-war, socially

conservative federation president George Meany (Gorman 1995; Ross 2015). During this conservative shift, Harrington's caucus launched a failed attempt at generating organizational support for George McGovern's anti-Vietnam War position. He later resigned from SDUSA, and, in 1973, Harrington and his caucus founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) (Gorman 1995; Ross 2015; Schwartz 2017).

Harrington and DSOC broke from socialist orthodoxy by deemphasizing labor organizing in favor of building a strong coalition of middle-class political activists who would participate within the Democratic Party. However, this shift did not signal a break from working-class politics, and instead, DSOC's realignment strategy focused on expanding the progressive elements in the McGovern wing of the Democratic Party, which included activists of color and feminists while maintaining ties with the labor-Left (Gorman 1995; Schwartz 2017). In many ways, Sanders' call for a "political revolution" in the United States represents a return to the challenges that Harrington faced in his attempt at advancing a socialist agenda within the Democratic Party, and the democratic socialist movement Sanders helped mobilize is currently formalizing its own claims-making strategies.

DSA was formed in 1982 out of the merger of Harrington's DSOC and the New American Movement (NAM)—an organization composed of New Left veterans (Gorman 1995; Ross 2015; Schwartz 2017). NAM's democratic socialist-feminist orientation contributed to the realignment strategy introduced by Harrington a decade earlier. Thus, the newly formed DSA coalesced around concerns regarding gender and racial issues in addition to Reagan-era neoliberalization. But at its core DSA, still held fast to the belief that corporate exploitation would mobilize aggrieved groups into a working-class movement (Schwartz 2017). However, this optimism was quickly dampened as the Reagan administration took advantage of various

ideological and cultural mechanisms (e.g., the American ethos of individual freedom) in a successful drive toward the consolidation of class power to a small elite. Popular consent legitimized the neoliberal turn, which forced democratic socialism to the fringes of the sectarian Left (Gorman 1995, 2004).

After more than two decades of movement abeyance, DSA's belief that class antagonisms would generate support for socialist ideas would finally bear out in the Occupy Wall Street protests (Gitlin 2013; Schwartz 2017). During the recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, millennials faced increasing student loan debt and an unfavorable job market, and these problems contributed to the politicization of a new generation of radicals (Calhoun 2013). The Occupy protestors, who originally gathered in Zuccotti Park near the New York Stock Exchange, were notably different from their mainstream predecessors in that they embraced rather than rejected the once pejorative socialist label. These protestors challenged the ethical basis of a class-based society as they mobilized under the banner of "the 99 percent"—a slogan that refers to the unequal distribution of wealth and power under capitalism (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012; Soule 2012).

The movement eventually spread to more than 1,000 locations across the country, and the mass media began discussing issues related to economic inequality, corporate greed, and the influence Wall Street has on U.S. policy (Calhoun 2013; Pickerill and Krinsky 2012; Soule 2012). After a two-month encampment, the protestors were evicted from Zuccotti Park, and Occupy soon splintered and faded (Gitlin 2013; Kreiss and Tufekci 2013). However, in Sanders and his list of economic grievances, former Occupy participants and sympathizers found an ideological ally (Schwartz 2017).

Occupy drew criticism from political commentators due to its inability to convincingly articulate its objectives, a problem many commentators attributed to the movement's fetishism for horizontality and consensus (Abidor 2019; Gitlin 2013; Kreiss and Tufekci 2013). For millennials politicized by the issues surrounding the 2008 financial crisis, Sanders appeared to not only symbolize the energy and concerns of Occupy but perhaps more importantly, he could help translate them into an electoral strategy. Sanders' bids for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, and the democratic socialist movement tailing his campaign, represent a potentially different type of social movement. Democratic socialists, including Sanders, are attempting to build a social movement that not only represents the working class and other subaltern groups but also advocates the active participation of those groups within the democratic socialist movement.

A 2019 Gallup survey of 1,024 adults found that 43 percent of citizens believe that some form of socialism would be beneficial to the United States (Younis 2019). Previous Gallup research shows that U.S. citizens' definition of socialism has changed over the years, with almost a quarter of them linking socialism to equality and 17 percent associating it with the more orthodox conceptualizations of proletarian control over the means of production (Newport 2018). Additionally, a majority of Democrats report that they view socialism positively in Gallup polling since 2010. The most recent survey in 2018 shows that 57 percent of Democrats have positive views of socialism (Newport 2018). According to poll results from 2020, three out of four Democratic voters said that they would vote for a socialist president. My research starts from the premise that the case of DSA denotes a notable shift in U.S. attitudes towards socialism and investigates the factors contributing to the dramatic increase in membership using a combination of case study and participant observation methods. The purpose of my study is to

advance the scholarly understanding of insurgent challenge in order to contribute to the pursuit of social justice.

Social Movement Theory

Sociological research regarding social movements focuses on the causes of mobilization as well as the dynamics of movement development and decline. Initially concerned primarily with the psychology of movement participants, the study of social movements took a dramatic turn when, in the 1970s, researchers began investigating the political and organizational determinants of the various movements of the 1960s. Resource mobilization theory emerged from this paradigmatic shift as the dominant approach, reconceptualizing social movements as a set of preferences for social change shared by an aggrieved population (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Informed by elite theories of the U.S. political system—which underscore the existence of unequal access to political power in modern society—resource mobilization theorists view both institutional politics and social movements as rational attempts to pursue collective interests (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973). Equipped with a perspective that sees movements as explicitly political phenomena, I view the democratic socialist movement as a collective of political actors dedicated to the advancement of their influence within the polity.

A social movement organization that does not merely represent oppressed groups but enlists their participation and leadership could potentially avoid some of the problems faced by constituency-based movements. But democratic socialists working within the Democratic Party reintroduce the perennial insider versus third-party strategy debate for U.S. radicals (Piven and Cloward 1988). Just as Sanders eventually reconciled himself with the Democrats, DSA, too, is

operating mostly *within* the Democratic Party. On DSA's webpage, the organization summarizes its electoral strategy:

> Like our friends and allies in the feminist, labor, civil rights, religious, and community organizing movements, many of us have been active in the Democratic Party. We work with those movements to strengthen the party's left wing, represented by the Congressional Progressive Caucus. The process and structure of American elections seriously hurt third party efforts. Winner-take-all elections instead of proportional representation, rigorous party qualification requirements that vary from state to state, a presidential instead of a parliamentary system, and the two-party monopoly on political power have doomed third party efforts. We hope that at some point in the future, in coalition with our allies, an alternative national party will be viable. For now, we will continue to support progressives who have a real chance at winning elections, which usually means left-wing Democrats.

The establishment of elite linkages is often viewed by resource mobilization theorists as crucial to the successful development of a movement (Gamson 1975; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Oberschall 1978; Olson 1965). McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), for example, argue that aggregate levels of discontent within the aggrieved population have little explanatory value in accounting for movement emergence. They instead identify group access to resources and shifting patterns of elite patronage as the central explanatory variables for the generation of a social movement.

Since movement survival is dependent on resource acquisition, social movement organizations such as DSA must rely on the provision of moral, cultural, social-organizational, material, and human resources from external sponsors (Edward and McCarthy 2004). Sponsors

external to a movement can include elite institutions such as trade unions, religious groups,

charitable foundations, and the federal government (Oberschall 1973). Since ordinary citizens

are understood as having virtually no bargaining power, social movement organizations are

thereby dependent on the sponsorship of these elite institutions (Gamson 1975; Jenkins and

Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1978). According to proponents of the

resource mobilization model, excluded groups lack the power to generate a movement entirely

on their own. For that reason, the role of progressive Democrats and other elite sponsors may be

important to the democratic socialist movement because they can function as patrons seeking to

create a sustained flow of resources into DSA.

While scholars associated with the resource mobilization paradigm claim that elite

involvement benefits certain movements, McAdam (1982) argues that elite linkages often

contribute to the demise of radical and even moderate reform movements. His critique begins

with the assumption that all social movements represent an implicit challenge to the power of the

elite due to the willingness of insurgents to bypass institutional channels. Insurgency, which

refers broadly to the change efforts of excluded groups in modern society, represents a

restructuring of polity membership and thus would necessitate the intervention of elite members.

In other words, elite involvement seems to occur only as a tactic designed to mitigate the threat

posed by the mobilization of excluded groups. Thus, it is unlikely that elites would move to

promote a social movement (Cloward and Piven 1984; McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977;

Tilly 1978). Given that elite involvement is more likely to take the form of a conservative

reaction to, rather than sponsorship of, mass-based movements, implies that not all excluded

groups are as powerless as the resource mobilization account suggests. Resource mobilization

theory, according to McAdam, is useful when explaining organized reform efforts by established

polity members. It is less applicable, however, as an account of the role of a movement's mass base in the generation of insurgency.

Political process theory represents McAdam's corrective to resource mobilization theory. The political process model, which is also based on the assumption that wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a small elite, seeks to account for the successful mobilization campaigns by excluded groups—such as those represented by DSA. Political process theory signals a departure from the power-elite model and instead employs a Marxist political-economy interpretation of power (McAdam 1982). Marxists acknowledge the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of an elite minority, yet, unlike elite theorists, they believe the contradictions of the capitalist system itself point to the possibility of the accession of power by the working-class.

Another way Marxism informs McAdam's perspective regards the subjective meanings that actors assign to their objective conditions. Borrowing directly from Piven and Cloward (1977), McAdam (1982) identifies cognitive liberation—the collective recognition of a favorable political opportunity by a deprived group—as a necessary precondition to the facilitation of collective protest. Accordingly, events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the *Citizens United* decision have been identified by analysts as harbingers of the Occupy movement (Graeber 2013; Pickerill and Krinsky 2012; Soule 2012). Although McAdam does not posit a causal link between rapid social change and movement emergence, his model suggests that resource mobilization proponents oversimplify the nature of grievances. Here, in addition to insights from resource mobilization research, I apply McAdam's political process model to my analysis of the recent rise in DSA membership.

Even though political process theory provides the resource mobilization paradigm with a valuable corrective, the political process framework, too, has been the target of criticism. McAdam (1982) criticized resource mobilization theory for overstating the role of elites and underemphasizing the importance of the mass base. Yet though his theory allows greater space for the role of grievances, critics argue that political process theory is generally inattentive to the role of ideational factors (see Buechler 1993). Klandermans (1984), and others sympathetic to symbolic interactionism, claim that the structuralist orientation of the resource mobilization paradigm is overly dismissive of social psychology. The combination of resource availability and political opportunities is, indeed, acknowledged by certain critics (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992) as critical structural components for movement mobilization. These critics also see the need to fill a significant lacuna by illuminating the ways shared meanings, interpretations, and definitions are constructed and reconstructed by movement actors regarding grievances.

Lastly, just as the resource mobilization paradigm has marginalized grievances, Buechler (1990, 1993) asserts that it also has paid insufficient attention to ideology. In a general sense, ideology operates as a means to express the values, beliefs, ideas, and meanings which motive individual participation and guide collective action. Ideological beliefs typically offer an explanation and evaluation of societal conditions, binds a political community together, and tenders a prescription for how the problematic present can be overcome (Buechler 1990, 1993; Hybel 2010). For the ideology to become viable, deprived individuals need to feel optimistic that participating in collective action can redress the problem (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Based on framing processes and theories of ideology, it is important for me to include an analysis of the cognitive dimensions of motivation and recruitment of DSA members.

Sociology as Advocacy

Understanding the ways that social movements shape our sociopolitical world has been a consistent driver of my work. I first became interested in social movement research as a student of environmental sociology. I eventually authored a master's thesis on the evangelical Christian countermovement in the United States. My continuing interest in social movements has recently shifted leftward towards an inquiry into contentious politics, specifically the U.S. socialist movement. However, my interest in socialism is not motivated purely by academic inquisitiveness. As a Marxist scholar, I have a vested interest in making socialist politics a reality. Ultimately, it is my hope that the findings presented herein will help clarify the tasks and goals of a truly emancipatory politics. And furthermore, that my research will assist in this development by dissolving and clearing away the ideological obstacles that impede the organization of a mass movement for socialism.

Laue (1978) asserts that all human social action is value-laden and political, and incidentally, that all sociology is a form of advocacy. These assertions, however, do not mean sociological research is devoid of methodological rigor and scientific merit. Far from it. As Shefner and Gay (2002) demonstrate in their study of Latin American social movements, what is required by advocates is a renewed commitment to dispassionate political analysis. They contend that sound methods are not only a requisite for producing good data, but they are also necessary for advocates who wish to improve social conditions. Sensitive to the implications of my work, I have designed a research project that brackets my biases to produce data that are useful to movement scholars and DSA members (Shefner and McKenney 2018).

Currently, DSA is mobilizing a general wave of resistance to President Trump. But otherwise, the organization's multi-tendency orientation is somewhat reminiscent of Occupy's

pseudo-political anarchism. One important way DSA differs from the decentralized and leaderless Occupy movement is its emphasis on electoral politics—canvassing for progressive candidates and launching electoral campaigns. My study offers a critical evaluation of these characteristics, as revealed through the standpoint of leaders within DSA and its general membership. If DSA is going to succeed where Occupy and other progressive movements failed, their objectives must be articulated and their outcomes evaluated.

Guiding Question

What are the factors that contributed to the dramatic increase in DSA membership starting in 2017? In the following section, I provide a more detailed account of my methodological approach, in addition to an overview of the data I collected.

Data Collection Strategy

I began my study of DSA in January 2020, approximately three years after the organization's initial membership surge. In the constructionist tradition (Melucci 1989), I have designed a study that incorporates the paradigmatic assumptions of a context-dependent investigation that relies on inductive data analysis. The study was also bounded by time (four months) and by a single case (DSA members). Consistent with the case study approach, I gathered data from multiple sources in order to learn what led to the increase in DSA membership starting in 2017. Sources included newspaper and magazine articles, DSA digital content (e.g., podcasts), the organization's newsletter, and other materials found on DSA's website (www.dsa.org)—coding relevant snippets of information into my fieldnotes. Additionally, from January to March 2020, I attended organizational events and meetings in Knoxville, Tennessee from which I collected observational data, documents, and visual materials

Participant Observation

I used participant observation methods of data collection to understand the way DSA structures its meetings and how members interact with one another in various settings. Specifically, I attended two general meetings at the St. James Episcopal Church in Knoxville, I went to the Bernaroo music event, and I was in attendance for a film screening of the 1979 Sanders' *Eugen V. Debs: Trade Unionist, Socialist, Revolutionary* documentary. As is the case with other qualitative methods, focus group analysis occurs concurrently with data collection. Therefore, I analyzed my observation notes taken during the events and my summary notes taken at the conclusion of each event. Through this process I began identifying significant statements and grouping them by themes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I also relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with DSA members from across the United States. Semi-structured interviews are designed to "elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subjects' thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about study-related issues" (Berg 2009:105). This method enabled me to collect qualitative data restricted to participants' reflections on the recent surge in DSA membership. Research participants were recruited in person and via email with the assistance of gatekeepers who are DSA members. Inclusion criteria consisted of being 18 years of age or older as well as being a due-paying member of DSA at the time of the interview. I relied on a purposive sampling technique to contact research participants. The result was 46 interviews consisting of DSA members representing 22 states. I interviewed 30 men and 16 women. I did not document race or sexuality.

Procedure. The implementation procedures for the semi-structured interviews consisted of chronicles told in one recording session, in a short time (approximately 30 minutes), and to one person. I recorded the interviews with a portable digital audio recorder, and all interviews were transcribed verbatim. In order to assure confidentiality to all participants only the interviewer and interviewee were present at the time of the interview. Participant names were numerically coded, and aliases were assigned, and only I am aware of their identities. Finally, the identities of third parties named through the course of the interview sessions were not included in the transcripts.

CHAPTER II SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Introduction

Social movement scholarship has, in recent decades, developed some of the most active areas within the discipline of sociology, producing a tremendous body of knowledge on various aspects of collective action. Much of the earlier research was concerned with collective behavior, which tended to emphasize the irrationality of movement participants and the discontinuity between institutionalized political activity and spontaneous movement behavior (Blumer 1951; Smelser 1962; Turner and Killian 1957). Following the political turbulence of the "long decade" of the 1960s, however, scholars from various disciplines began to develop new insights into the origins and emergence of social movements (Gamson 1968, 1975; Jenkins 1981, 1983; McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977; Tilly 1978). Although the resource mobilization paradigm has been criticized as a grand theory that suffers from a structural bias (Goodwin and Jasper 1999), it is my contention that it remains applicable to the study of movement emergence, development, and outcomes within Western liberal democracies. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief historical overview of the early period of social movement theory to historicize the debates that contributed to the emergence of resource mobilization theory (e.g., Blumer 1951; Smelser 1962; Turner and Killian 1957). Next, I review the development of the resource mobilization paradigm, and informed by McAdam's (1982) critique, I discuss the ways political process theory offers a necessary corrective to the entrepreneurial version of the theory (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977). Finally, I summarize literature pertaining to the relevance of interpretative framing processes, and related constructs such as ideology, to social movement research (e.g., Benford and Snow 2000; Diani 2004; Snow 2004). Throughout my literature review, I outline not only political process

theorists' transcendence of earlier theoretical traditions, but also their indebtedness to those traditions. The result signals the establishment of a new synthesis represented by three broad sets of interrelated factors: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. I rely on the resulting synthesis, as described by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), to guide my analysis of participants' mobilization into the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

Classical Collective Behavior Theory

Understanding the mix of factors that give rise to a social movement is the oldest and arguably, the most important question in the field. This question corresponds to the proliferation of social movement theories developed over the second half of the twentieth century. Classical collective behavior theorists (e.g., Blumer 1951; Smelser 1962; Turner and Killian 1957), whose ideas were popularized during the postwar era, sought to address the question of movement emergence through a psychological account of individual participation in noninstitutional collective action. For instance, Blumer (1951) located social movements within a broader category of phenomena that included crowds, panics, crazes, and the like. Since Blumer saw these phenomena as interchangeable manifestations of collective behavior, he implied that all forms of collective action could be analyzed with the same conceptual tools. This unitary conceptualization of collective behavior issued an implicit challenge to the political legitimacy of social movements.

Classical theorists not only shared a unitary conceptualization of collective behavior, but they also equated all types of the phenomenon as essentially apolitical. This assessment is related to the ways collective behavioralists understood social movement emergence. Working within the symbolic interactionist tradition, Blumer's (1939; 1951) version of collective behavior theory, sometimes referred to as circular reaction theory (Buechler 2000), underscored the

importance of fluid and dynamic social processes as well as the active and creative role of social agents. For symbolic interactionists, subjective meanings arise out of an ongoing interpretive process constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. Thus, interactionists, like Blumer placed great importance on the ways people responded to changes in society based on the meaning they assigned to those changes. The disruption of standard routines and social norms, according to Blumer (1939; 1951), could provide the structural antecedent for new forms of collective behavior—including the emergence of a social movement. This disruption was taken by Blumer to trigger some behavioral, emotional, or ideational response, which spread rapidly in a disorderly and unstructured manner within a collective. Collective behavior theorists understood movement participation as one means by which people could seek to resolve or manage anomic symptoms stemming from social change. The implication of this interpretation was that social movements were seen as essentially psychological rather than political phenomena (Buechler 2000; Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982).

Despite the emphasis Blumer and other collective behavior theorists placed on disruptive system strain, they were more directly concerned with the psychological impact system strain has on individuals. Blumer (1939; 1951) described a causal sequence in which, following some initial state of arousal, deprived individuals experience a sense of restlessness and become susceptible to increased suggestibility. This restlessness, he explained, has a reciprocal character. In other words, when a collective engages in some erratic, random, and uncoordinated behavior, there is a tendency for individuals who are copresent to respond to and reproduce those behaviors. Instead of studying movements as purposive, goal-directed political phenomena, Blumer was concerned with the impacts circular reactions and social contagion has at the individual, microlevel of analysis. He wrote:

An individual loses ordinary critical understanding and self control as he enters into

rapport with other crowd members and becomes infused by the collective excitement that

dominates them. He responds immediately and directly to the remarks and actions of

others instead of interpreting these gestures, as he would do in ordinary conduct. (Blumer

1939:180)

Blumer described the mechanisms through which movements developed as consisting of a

transition from agitation to the construction and maintenance of a collective identity guided by

group ideology that informs strategies and tactics. Although Blumer (1939; 1951) formulated a

standard life history of social movement development, which included both formalization and

institutionalization stages, he still regarded movement participation as a cathartic exercise.

A peculiar aspect of Blumer's model, given the premises of symbolic interactionism, is

his assertion that the individual is transformed by the collective in a nonreflective and

mechanistic manner (see McPhail 1989). Other symbolic interactionists who followed Blumer

attempted to infuse the social actor with greater reflexivity. This theoretical shift underscored the

rationality of movement participants. Turner and Killian (1957), like Blumer, saw collective

behavior as the spontaneous response to the process of social disintegration. However, their

analysis of collective behavior deviated slightly from Blumer's model by placing greater

importance on communication. Collective behavior, Turner and Killian explained, "must still be

understood as relying upon communication which flows through channels ranging from the

formal and far-reaching to the informal and intimate" (1957:38). Therefore, while Turner and

Killian located movement emergence within the interaction processes that give rise to the

formation of new norms, they saw social contagion as a rational process of communication. The

norms that are produced through this process, in turn, orient participants' actions. Thus, when

individuals face social strain, they first search for socially sanctioned meaning of their situation and then decide collectively on a course of action (Turner and Killian 1957).

Despite Turner and Killian's focus on human agency contra structural determinism, they still assumed a causal relationship between macrolevel strain and microlevel behavior. In their discussion on the effects of social strain, the authors stated that "[m]ost theorists agree that one of the significant conditions giving rise to collective behavior is a real or perceived conflict, ambiguity, or change in the normative order" (Turner and Killian 1957:40). Here, we see the reoccurrence of a representation of a social world usually free of strain, which once again yielded an atomistic analytical focus. Like Blumer, Turner and Killian developed a life history through which social movements pass, and they acknowledged that movements could eventually become institutionalized if the movement maintains its utility to participants. Despite Turner and Killian's insistence on the reflexive capacities of human agents, the Chicago school of collective behavior—of which each of these authors is associated—was ultimately preoccupied with the therapeutic basis of extra-institutional action.

Limitations of collective behavior theory. Classical theorists from various traditions, the breadth of which is beyond the scope of my literature review, supported the contention that individuals' motives for movement participation had more to do with managing psychological tensions than a desire to attain political goals. This contention led some researchers to conclude that movement participation was a form of deviant behavior enacted by an aggregate of discontented individuals (e.g., Hoffer 1951; Kornhauser 1959; Lang and Lang 1961; Le Bon [1895] 1960; McCormack 1957). However, their conclusion was challenged by a new generation of scholars who view social movements as an effective and purposive vehicle for sociopolitical change (Gamson 1968, 1975; Jenkins 1981, 1983; McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1973,

1977; Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977; Tilly 1978). Historical events, such as the abolitionist, women's suffrage, and labor movements, inspired these scholars' rejection of classical formulations of social movement emergence and development. Furthermore, the societal turbulence of the 1960s, and the myriad of movements it generated, prompted students of collective action to develop new frameworks to account for the substantive impact social movements have had on the modern world.

Gamson (1975) and McAdam (1982) identify the influence of pluralism as a political theory as the basis of their critique of the classical model. The pluralist model, which claims that in liberal democracies there exists an open polity in which competing groups can express their goals and register their grievances, represents a challenge to organized activity operating outside of institutionalized politics. The pluralists (e.g., Dahl 1967; Galbraith 1963) understood power as a widely distributed resource that ensured the openness and responsiveness of liberal democracies, rather than as a resource concentrated in the hands of any particular segment of society. The "existence of multiple centers of power," according to Dahl, "will help tame power, to secure the consent of all, and to settle conflicts peacefully" (1967:24). Dahl and the pluralists, however, were not without their detractors.

Smith, for example, charts the transformation of American pluralism "from a normative theory—this is how things should be—to an empirical theory—analyzing how power is distributed," and he asserts that pluralists "confuse normative claims with empirical reality" (2005:25). Likewise, Merelman (2003) cautions that the pluralist model's affirmative character often serves to secure legitimation for the institutional elite. And Buechler (2000) reminds us that the foundational assumptions of specific theories are reflections of the distinct, historically specific, sociopolitical eras in which they are produced. Therefore, it is advantageous for

students of social movements to be mindful of the fact that pluralism was widely accepted by researchers during an era in which, as Buechler (2000:32) states:

> relations between management and labor appeared harmonious, when race relations had yet to 'heat up,' when images of marital bliss and familial harmony pervaded gender arrangements, when unprecedented educational and housing opportunities were becoming available to untold millions of Americans, when images of technological progress and material affluence were ubiquitous, and when the United States was the indisputable leader of the 'free world' . . . .

Using the sociology of knowledge approach, as described by Buechler (2000) and Garner (1997), offers a more complete understanding of the context that marked the paradigmatic shift in collective action research.

The consequences of the pluralist model are now widely known. Most importantly, if the sociopolitical system is viewed by ordinary citizens as stable, then movement participants are distinguished from "rational" citizens by some personal pathology or individual malintegration. If the motives of movement actors are generated by psychological phenomena, then the legislative outcomes of movements (see Amenta and Caren 2004) are interpreted as a symptom of social disintegration. In view of this perspective, social movements are simply unnecessary in pluralist democracies. However, McAdam, in his review of this debate, concludes that the pluralist argument is "neither theoretically nor empirically convincing" and if "one rejects the pluralist model in favor of either a power elite or Marxist view of power in America, the distinction between rational politics and social movements disappears" (1982:18-19). Questions of movement recruitment, motivation, and participation, McAdam argues, are better understood

using power elite or Marxist perspectives, which presume that groups in modern society possess dramatically different levels of power.

Resource Mobilization Theory

The debates between resource mobilization and classical theorists, especially collective behavioralists, largely stem from competing conceptions of social movements. Turner and Killian's classical definition describes social movements as "a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is a part" (1957:308). Collective behavior theorists maintain that grievances and societal tensions are the catalysts for the emergence of elementary forms of collective behavior that could give rise to a social movement. Resource mobilization theorists such as McCarthy and Zald, in contrast, see social movements as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (1977:1217-1218). Informed by the power elite perspective, resource mobilization theorists have reoriented the analytical focus towards movements that attempt to organize marginalized groups—who may be excluded from the polity—against the oligarchical rule of institutional elites (Gamson 1977; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978).

Most of the disputes in social movement scholarship are generated from these conceptional disagreements, and relatedly, to different accounts of movement emergence. Pushing back against classical explanations of movement emergence, which emphasized sudden increases in grievances produced by structural strains, proponents of the mobilization perspective have argued that grievances are relatively constant and, in fact, of secondary importance (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1973). In a society defined by systemic inequality, any number of groups will be subjected to grievances stemming from that inequality. That is, many

groups in various geographic locations throughout modernity have had grievances but did not build social movements. Therefore, grievances cannot be the causal factor for movement emergence. Following this logic, resource mobilization theorists (e.g., Jenkins and Perrow1977; McCarthy and Zald 1973; Oberschall 1978; Tilly 1978) developed frameworks that underscore the structural conflicts of interest inherent to institutionalized power relations. Accordingly, movements form, not from social disintegration as collective behavior theorists insisted, but rather from the changes in the availability of resources and political opportunities to contest inequality.

This conceptual shift contributed to the formation of McCarthy and Zald's (1977) entrepreneurial theory of social movement emergence in which the primary factor is group access to and control over the various resources necessary to support collective protest activity (Meyer 2004; Simmons 2014). Since these theorists shifted the explanatory mechanism of social movement activity from the variable factor of grievances to resources, social movement organizations are identified by McCarthy and Zald as essential to a movement's development and longevity. They define social movement organizations as "a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement . . . and attempts to implement those goals" (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1218). These social movement organizations, in turn, are grouped into a social movement industry, which comprises all the social movement organizations that share the goals of a particular social movement. The existence of a social movement sector, which is comprised of all the social movement industries, implies that social movements have indeed become an integral part of Western liberal democracies.

In the resource mobilization model, social movements are understood to be dependent on some combination of formal and informal groups for their success and survival. Jenkins and Perrow highlight this relationship by stating that "discontent is ever-present for deprived groups, but . . . collective action is rarely a viable option because of lack of resources and the threat of repression. . . . When deprived groups do mobilize, it is due to the interjection of external resources" (1977:251). Because movement survival is dependent on resource acquisition, and because of the relative resource poverty of the aggrieved group, the responsibility usually falls on external sponsors to provide a sustained stream of resources. McCarthy and Zald (1977) refer to these sponsors as conscience constituents.

Conscience constituents are "people who do not stand to benefit from the movement's successes, but nonetheless contribute resources to a social movement out of a feeling of social and/or moral obligation, solidarity, personal convictions, values and the like" (Klandermans, van Stekelenburg, and Damen 2015:155). In a word, they are adherents motivated by their conscience. Resource mobilization theorists are also interested in understanding the attitudes and behaviors of potential beneficiaries. Gamson describes beneficiaries as the "individuals or groups whom the challenging group hopes will be affected positively by the changes that it seeks from its antagonist" (1975:16). That is, these are the adherents who could potentially benefit directly from the successes of a social movement.

The patronage that resource mobilization scholars consider vital to a movement's success can be found in many sectors of society. Church groups, the federal government, charitable foundations, and wealthy elites are common examples of external sponsors (McCarthy and Zald 1987; Oberschall 1973). The role of constituents is critical because they often function as entrepreneurs seeking to establish a consistent flow of resources into the organization. The need

for resources has promoted a high degree of professionalization in the leadership of most social movement organizations (McCarthy and Zald 1977). The model's emphasis on the necessity of an entrepreneurial class professionally trained to solicit resources on behalf of a resource deficient mass base has drawn the criticisms of movements scholars—particularly those interested in contentious politics and insurgent movements.

Limitations of resource mobilization theory. McAdam (1982) provides a valuable critique of the entrepreneurial version of resource mobilization theory that scrutinizes several core assumptions of this approach. He argues that the fundamental limits of the model "stem from the failure of its proponents to adequately differentiate organized change efforts generated by excluded groups and by established polity members" (McAdam 1982:24). Gamson (1975) differentiates between established polity "members" as groups possessing sufficient politico-economic resources to ensure that their interests are routinely considered in decision-making processes. Excluded groups, or "challengers," are groups who are routinely denied access to institutional decision-making processes because of their lack of power (Gamson 1975). Due to this central difference, organized change efforts on the part of members and challengers are likely to differ in many important ways. These differences, according to McAdam, include the "extensiveness of the changes sought, the change strategies employed, and the relationship of each to elite groups" (1982:24).

McAdam (1982) further develops his critique to include a discussion on elite involvement in social movements. He argues that resource mobilization theorists imply that "elite institutions provide insurgent groups with resources in the absence of indigenous pressure to do so" (1982:25). As a result of its overwhelming poverty and political powerlessness, a movement's mass base is seen as ineffective on its own. Therefore, a movement must await facilitative action

on the part of external sponsors because it is incapable of exerting pressure on its own behalf.

These contentions imply that elite patrons are valued as enthusiastic supporters of social

insurgency—an implication in which McAdam is in complete disagreement.

Although the resource mobilization approach is applicable to change efforts by

established polity members, McAdam's critique demonstrates its inadequacies as a general

explanation of insurgent movements. First, he points out that the political resources mobilized by

efforts such as public interest lobbies are enough to ensure the receptivity of polity members.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that such change efforts will be universally embraced

by all segments of the elite. Rather McAdam points out that the political resources commanded

by the elite grant them access to institutional forms of power inaccessible to challengers. Second,

these reform efforts pose no threat to the stability of polity membership since they are generated

by elite members. Lastly, such reform efforts, as is likely recognized by the more reflexive

members of the elite, ultimately serve to strengthen, rather than challenge, the status quo ante

(McAdam 1982). Such reformism is likely to appease aggrieved populations by assuring them

that the problem in question is being addressed.

Elite control of political processes, however, is maintained by confining change efforts to

institutional forms of political participation. Piven and Cloward point out that "when insurgency

wells up, apparently uncontrollable [sic], elites respond. And one of their responses is to

cultivate those lower-class organizations which begin to emerge in such periods . . . ." (1977:xii).

Constituency-based reform efforts, when viewed this way, may be seen by elite members as a

necessary form of sociopolitical intervention to prevent major social upheaval. Therefore, due to

these reasons, various sectors of the elite may elect to sponsor member-generated reformism.

McAdam (1982) explains that the accuracy of the entrepreneurial version of the resource

mobilization model must be increasingly questioned when we transition to a discussion of excluded groups participating in insurgent activities.

McAdam asserts that "*all* social movements pose a threat to existing institutional arrangements in society" and that the "basis of this threat is only partially a function of the substantive goals of the movement" (1982:26). The goals of a particular movement are typically just as reformist in character as elite-sponsored policies. So, what makes social movements inherently threatening to the polity establishment? McAdam's answer is that social movements implicitly challenge the legitimacy of the political system demonstrated by their willingness to bypass institutional forms of politics. "Emerging, as they do, among excluded groups," McAdam states that "social movements embody an implicit demand for more influence in political decision making" (1982:26). All components of the elite would then become concerned with the threat of a restructuring of polity membership. The threat is intensified when the demands of excluded groups deviate from institutional channels. The power disparity between members and challengers is greatest within such channels. Institutional channels, in effect, enable elite members to monitor and control any perceived threat to their authority. Piven and Cloward (1977:30) note that:

> political leaders, or elites allied with them, will try to quiet disturbances not only by dealing with immediate grievances, but by making efforts to channel the energies and angers of the protestors into more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behavior, in part by offering incentives to movement leaders or, in other words, by coopting them.

Members, furthermore, can mitigate any threat without having to resort to more costly and crude control measures that could delegitimize their actions. McAdam (1982) adds that the control of

insurgent challenges is rendered both costlier and more difficult if political actors stray from institutional channels.

McAdam's critique of the entrepreneurial model carries with it the implicit conviction that elite involvement in social movements is not as benevolent as some resource mobilization scholars suggest. Indeed, it is unlikely that members of the elite would actively promote social movements considering the substantive and strategic threats which they pose (McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977). Elite involvement, McAdam explains, only occurs as a strategy designed to mitigate the threat of the emergence of a mass-based social movement. The elite select from a wide range of strategies, depending on the severity of the threat to which the movements represent when confronted with such an insurgent challenge. The various components of the elite, if the threat is severe enough, may well be united under a collective effort to suppress the threat. McAdam argues that "even in the case of less threatening movements, member response typically consists of a two-pronged strategy that combines attempts to contain the more threatening aspects of the movement with efforts to exploit the emerging conflict in a fashion consistent with the members' own political interests" (1982:26). Elite involvement in social movements, according to McAdam's critique, is therefore not likely to benefit insurgents.

Another deficiency of the resource mobilization model identified in McAdam's critique is related to the inability by many of its proponents to acknowledge the political capabilities of the movement's mass base. If in its account of the generation of social insurgency, the model grants too much importance to elite institutions, it grants too little to the aggrieved population. Indeed, these two aspects of the model are clearly linked. However, Piven and Cloward note that "[i]f, in the ensuing competition for dominance, some among the elite seek to enlist the support

of the impoverished by naming their grievances as just, then the hopes of the lower classes for

change will be nourished and the legitimacy of the institutions which oppress them further

weakened" (1977:13). Here, Piven and Cloward describe the conditions that would allow for an

empowered mass base. The importance of elite support is magnified, in the resource mobilization

model, by the political powerlessness ascribed to the mass base. In effect, we are told, without

such support, social movements are highly unlikely. Deprived groups, according to Jenkins and

Perrow's (1977) conclusion, are usually incapable of generating a social movement independent

of the sponsorship of elite members.

In contrast to the implicit thrust of the mobilization argument, the various components of

the elite would appear to share an abiding conservatism that does not predispose them to initiate

any insurgent activity that might conceivably prove threatening to their interests. Accordingly,

their involvement in insurgency is more likely to take the form of reaction to mass-based

movements rather than the aggressive sponsorship of the same (McAdam 1982; Piven and

Cloward). The latter statement carries the important conviction that not all excluded groups are

as politically impoverished as some resource mobilization theorists suggest. The fact that

challengers face real disadvantages in their attempts to organize and that many insurgent efforts

never materialize as visible political phenomena are readily conceded by McAdam. Nonetheless,

the very fact that such attempts are made and, on occasion, carried out with considerable success

suggest a greater capacity for insurgent action by excluded groups than is ordinarily

acknowledged by proponents of the resource mobilization model. Therefore, McAdam (1982)

offers his political process model as an alternative to the resource mobilization perspective.

Political Process Theory

As I discussed above, McAdam's political process model is in dialogue with the classical and resource mobilization perspectives, and he deems both models as incomplete in their approach to social movements. Thus, McAdam (1982) introduces the political process model as an alternative to these perspectives, and his model is organized around two central tenets. The first is that social movements are political rather than psychological phenomena. And the second is that social movements constitute an ongoing process from emergence to decline (1982:36). The political process model holds that most of the power in the political sphere is concentrated in the hands of an elite minority, which is consistent with the view of resource mobilization theorists. Following a Marxist approach, however, McAdam asserts that excluded groups do have the capacity to initiate social change. Considering these factors, McAdam (1982:40-48) identifies the three facets of the political process model: the structure of political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and cognitive liberation.

Political opportunities refer to "any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured" (McAdam 1982:41). Examples typically include "wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic changes" (1982:41). McAdam is underscoring the significance of the relatively long-term social processes that disrupt the political status quo, which can produce political opportunities. However, the implication of these opportunities does not automatically generate a social movement. The "social processes . . . promote insurgency only indirectly through a restructuring of existing power relations" (1982:41). Furthermore, these restructured power relations "can facilitate increased political activism on the part of excluded groups either by seriously undermining the stability of the entire

political system or by increasing the political leverage of a single insurgent group" (McAdam 1982:42). Political opportunities, as depicted by McAdam, can represent various possibilities for insurgent challengers. Although political opportunities have diverse implications for various groups, he does not imply that this will automatically generate insurgent action. Thus, McAdam underscores the significance of indigenous organizational strength—the second key element to the political process model.

The resources possessed by an aggrieved population, referred to as "indigenous organizational strength," enable insurgents to mobilize due to the opportunities introduced by the shifts in the political opportunity structure. Without these resources, McAdam (1982) points out, it would be difficult for challengers to sustain a social movement. Resources that enhance the organizational strength of the aggrieved population include: (1) The existence of formal and informal social movement organizations within the aggrieved population. (2) What McAdam refers to as the "established structure of solidary incentives." Meaning "the myriad interpersonal rewards that provide the motive force for participation" (1982:45). (3) An effective communication network or infrastructure. (4) And, finally, organizational leaders. It is imperative that excluded groups exploit each of these resources to have a successful insurgent campaign.

The final key element to the political process theory is "cognitive liberation," a concept McAdam borrowed directly from Piven and Cloward (1977). Consistent with the resource mobilization paradigm, the model stresses the importance of the structural factors that contribute to the emergence and development of movements. However, McAdam attempts to recover some of the subjective dimensions of collective action introduced by collective behavioralists. In addition to the objective elements delineated above, it is necessary that members of excluded

groups (1) recognize that their aggrieved state is not inevitable, (2) that their deprivation is tied to the political system, (3) and that their marginalized status can be changed. In other words, a transformation of consciousness must occur within a significant portion of the deprived group to trigger collective action (McAdam 1982).

Political process theory, composed of expanding political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and cognitive liberation, represents a viable alternative to the pluralist model and a valuable corrective to resource mobilization theory. Building on the resource mobilization approach, McAdam attempts to account for internal factors, in addition to external ones, that impact social movement emergence, development, and decline.

Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields

As I outlined above, both resource mobilization and political process theory developed as a critical response to collective behavior theory and other classical social psychological models. In the decades following the development of the resource mobilization paradigm, movement scholars have shown renewed interest in the social psychology of collective action (e.g., Cohen 1985; Diani 2004; Klandermans 1984). Despite McAdam's emphasis on cognitive liberation, critics of the political process model note a persisting structural bias that overlooks the importance of the subjective dimensions of collective action. These social psychological frameworks seek to address the deficiency in the political process approach while attending to the key problems related to the classical model. As Gamson summarizes, "resurgent social psychology has jettisoned the old baggage of irrationality and social pathology" (1992:54). In Polletta's critique of McAdam's model, she calls for a "social movement theory that pays closer attention to the cultural traditions, ideological principles, institutional memories, and political taboos that create and limit political opportunities" (1999:64). Snow (2004) examines ideational

factors and interpretive processes associated with the operation of social movements by drawing on the framing perspective and related constructs such as ideology and discursive fields. Other scholars, such as Giugni (2004), are concerned with the unintended personal and biographical consequences of movement participants. And Klandermans brings to light the social-psychological dimensions of "grievance formation, the formation of identity, and social cognition and emotion" (2004:374). Taken collectively, these theorists offer critical insights into the subjective factors related to social movements.

In the 1980s, social psychologists criticized the resource mobilization model for treating social movements only in organizational and political terms, thus neglecting the role of social construction. Snow et al.'s (1986) article on framing processes represents a significant development in this social-psychological shift, and the article is widely cited due to its attention to the subjective dimension of ideas. Framing theory provides a way to link the social construction of ideas with the more structural dimension of organizational and political processes. Melucci makes a case for an interpretive approach stating that "constructivist theories of human action help us consider collective phenomena as processes through which actors produce meanings, communicate, negotiate, and make decisions" (1989:20). Therefore, these frames not only address organizational factors but biographical ones as well.

Many social movements rely on interpretive framing processes to define a particular issue as an expression of injustice (Snow 2004). Klandermans highlights the process of transforming sociopolitical issues into collective action frames, which he says "does not occur by itself. It is a process in which social actors, media, and members of a society jointly interpret, define and redefine states affairs" (1997:44). In this way, meaning and mobilization are mediated by interpretive processes that can contribute to the understanding of the operation of a movement

organization. Personal and biographical consequences of social movements impact the life course of movement participants, and these effects are in some part due to involvement in movement activities.

Informed by McAdam's (1988) work on the Freedom Summer campaign, interpretive framing processes guides my investigation into the construction and maintenance of identity between and within social movements. This research also describes the impact movement involvement has on movement participants and provides insights into how participants perceive their political identities and their involvement in an insurgent movement. Giugni summarizes his findings by stating that "participation in social movement activities appears to have profoundly affected the biographies of former activists and to have left a strong imprint on their personal lives" (2004:494). In addition to in-group identity construction, this model describes how participants develop a sense of collective identity in opposition to mainstream institutions and culture. Movement actors rely on interpretive framing processes to identify with beneficiary constituents and against political adversaries. These insights are essential for unpacking the complex ways participants see their current role in the political arena and the long-term consequences of the movement's perceived successes and failures.

Implicit in any understanding of interpretive frames in the construction of collective identity are questions on the relationship between frames, culture, and ideology (Abercrombie and Turner 1978; Hybel 2010; Gramsci [1929] 2000; Scott 1990). The relevance of ideology to discussions of the emergence and mobilization of social movements has had an inconsistent history. After several years in which movement scholars dismissed issues associated with ideology, the concept of ideology was reintroduced in the discussions surrounding movement emergence and mobilization. In a general sense, ideology operates as a means to express the

values, beliefs, ideas, and meanings that motivate individual participation and guide collective

action. Ideological beliefs typically offer an explanation and evaluation of societal conditions,

binds a political community together, and tenders a prescription for how the problematic present

can be overcome (Buechler 1990, 1993; Hybel 2010). For the ideology to become viable,

deprived individuals need to feel optimistic that participating in collective action can redress the

problem confronting the aggrieved population (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Conclusion

In the past couple of decades, one finds movement scholars representing different

theoretical traditions illuminate the importance of three broad sets of factors in analyzing the

emergence and development of social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). The

first factor is in this synthesis is political opportunities or the structure of political opportunities

and constraints confronting the movement. The second factor is mobilizing structures, which

represent the forms of organization informal and formal available to insurgents. And the final

factor is the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate

between opportunity and action known as framing processes. I rely on this synthesis to analyze

the mobilization of participants into the DSA.

CHAPTER III A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. SOCIALISM

On May 11, 1894, 3,000 railway workers left their jobs in the Pullman Palace Car Company shops initiating a series of events that would chart the course for the future of American socialism (Ross 2015). The strike that originated in the small Chicago suburb of Pullman, Illinois was an expression of a national crisis, generated by the socio-economic turbulence of rapid industrialization that had been dramatically transforming the United States in the decades following the American Civil War. Striking workers organized by the recently established American Railroad Union (ARU), were responding to reduced wages and the generally harsh conditions of life in the company town of Pullman. What began as a local conflict quickly expanded into a national boycott, bringing the nation's rail traffic to a standstill from Detroit, Michigan to the Pacific coast. The Pullman Company and the owners and management of other lines reacted to the Pullman boycott with defiance eventually securing the support of President Grover Cleveland who ordered federal troops to break the strike. The fierce, hard-fought Pullman boycott represented the culmination of years of severe labor strife led many workers to more militant forms of collective action (Schneirov, Stromquist, and Salvatore 1999). Among the unionists radicalized by the events of this turbulent period was the labor organizer and socialist Eugene V. Debs.

The Roots of Debsian Socialism

Eugene Debs is universally acknowledged as one of America's foremost figures in the socialist movement. Born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1855 to French immigrants, Debs witnessed the rapid expansion of industrialization in the American Midwest, and the socio-economic challenges related to those developments. Mining, finance, and the factory system each experienced increasing importance during the Gilded Age, but the railroads were the major

growth industry and the industry through which Debs would develop his political perspective. In 1870, Debs took a job with the Vandalia Railroad Company, which led to work as a firefighter and, by the middle of the decade, although no longer employed by Vandalia, Debs had become a prominent member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF). Critical of the great Railroad Strike of 1877 and strikes in general, the BLF instead focused on providing disability benefits and affordable life insurance to workers. Despite his awareness of the financial crisis that triggered an economic depression that lasted from 1873 to 1877, Debs, sharing the BLF's conservatism, opposed strikes and proselytized the Brotherhood's message of "Benevolence, Sobriety, and Industry" (Debs 1879:113). By the 1880s, Debs had also become a respected civil servant and was elected as a Democratic state representative in the Indiana General Assembly in 1884. However, Debs was ill-suited for political life and, after serving only one term in the state legislature, he returned to the cause of trade unionism.

Although Debs remained loyal to the Democratic Party, campaigning for Cleveland in 1892, he gradually became more skeptical of the political establishment as he watched the country slide into yet another financial crisis. The Panic of 1893, which plunged the United States into a full-blown economic depression lasting five years, was the culmination of a quarter of a century of volatile economic development and growing sociopolitical unrest. That same year, Debs strategized a way to meet the crisis, and his plan resulted in the formation of the ARU. The newly formed union faced intense opposition from corporate executives, craft-union leaders, Brotherhood officials, and even from American Federation of Labor (AFL) leader Samuel Gompers, who "regarded any dual union as treason to the labor movement" (Ginger 1947:95). The opposition from corporate elites and labor leaders, however, did not deter underpaid railroaders from enthusiastically joining the order.

The ARU, which originated through a series of meetings in Chicago, was on a collision course with George Pullman, the inventor of the luxurious railroad sleeping car, and his nearby Pullman Palace Car Company. George Pullman personally controlled the company town of Pullman which he built as workers' housing for employees of his company. Pullman, citing falling profits after the economic Panic of 1893, fired a third of his workers and drastically cut the wages of those who remained, as rent and food in the company town remained high. Not surprisingly, labor unrest accompanied these measures, and on May 7, 1894, a committee of 40 employees presented their grievances to the company's vice-president. When, after it became clear that the vice-president was not going to grant their grievances a hearing, the frustrated and angry workers voted unanimously to strike.

The May 11 walkout was peaceful and orderly, and Debs, after being notified that the strike had begun, traveled to Pullman to investigate. The ARU had not called for the strike, so Debs was sent to assess the justification for his fellow members' actions. Debs, who initially advised caution, eventually authorized the strike when the Pullman Company refused to arbitrate its wage reductions. Speaking at a meeting of Pullman employees, Debs declared that the "paternalism of Pullman is the same as the self-interest of a slave-holder in his human chattels. You are striking to avert slavery and degradation" (in Lindsey [1894] 1943:124). On June 26, the impact of the strike began to expand beyond the confines of Pullman, Illinois to a nationwide boycott of Pullman cars effectively shutting down much of the United States' freight and passenger traffic west of Detroit. Never in U.S. history had there been such a challenge to the power of capital (Ginger 1947). However, opposition to the boycott was intense, and on July 2, the federal judiciary intervened, claiming that the boycott interrupted mail service and ordered strikers back to work. Opposition took a violent turn when President Cleveland dispatched

federal troops to Chicago to enforce the injunction. The Pullman boycott was crushed, and Debs and several other ARU officials were arrested for violating the injunction.

In June 1895, Debs began serving out a six-month jail sentence in Woodstock, Illinois, and it was during this time that he was won over to socialism. The events surrounding the Pullman boycott clearly demonstrated to Debs the collusion between capital and the state (e.g., government by injunction) and demonstrated further the necessity of independent political action on the part of the working class.

> [T]he American Railway Union again won, clear and complete. The combined corporations were paralyzed and helpless. At this juncture there were delivered, from wholly unexpected quarters, a swift succession of blows that blinded me for an instant and then opened wide my eyes—and in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle *the class struggle was revealed*. This was my first practical lesson in Socialism, though wholly unaware that it was called by that name. (Debs 1902)

This would turn out to be a significant development in the history of American socialism because Debs, after serving out his sentence, would spend the remainder of his life building and leading a political party for proletarian socialism.

The Socialist Party of America

The Socialist Party of America (SPA), established in 1901, came out of a series of organizational splits and mergers and helped usher in a golden age of socialist popularity in the United States. The party grew rapidly in the years before World War I, as evidenced in the hundreds of party affiliated newspapers and the election of over 1,000 government officials in more than 300 cities (Bell 1952; Ross 2015; Salvatore 1982). Other radical organizations and figures grew to national prominence during this time including the Industrial Workers of the

World (IWW) whose charter members, in addition to Debs, included William D. "Big Bill" Haywood and Marry Harris "Mother" Jones. While the Pullman boycott appeared in many respects to represent a defeat for the U.S. labor movement, the boycott lent impetus to both radical labor currents and more moderate social reformers. It also led directly to what has become known as the Progressive Era of 1900 to 1920 and to the welfare policies of the New Deal.

The Origins of Fragmentation

The SPA enjoyed its greatest measure of success during the first two decades of the twentieth century, with the culmination of its early success in the 1912 presidential election in which Debs campaigned against Democratic nominee Woodrow Wilson, incumbent President William Howard Taft, and former President Theodore Roosevelt. Debs received 6 percent of the popular vote, the highest percentage of votes of his five campaigns. However, the early years of the party were also marked by ideological and tactical conflicts, both internal and external. Despite a myriad of disagreements on esoteric ideological issues, most of the factional disputes regarded the trade-union issue (Bell 1952). Although the "Leftwing" of the SPA resembled nothing close to a homogenous group, the organizational ties of scores of party members to the AFL (i.e., the party's "rightwing") energized a united front against them. When the labor movement showed signs of independent political action, the Leftwing responded with hostility. The SPA's Leftwing were opposed to so-called "class collaborationist" policies, while the AFL faction took the path of negotiation out of an eagerness to avoid violence and persecution. These conflicts eventually led to the creation of the Union Labor Party (ULP) in 1901. As time wore on, internal quarreling about the role of organized labor would only intensify, and it was soon

clear that the disagreements between the AFL faction and the party's Leftwing represented an irreconcilable division (Ross 2015).

The Industrial Workers of the World. In the winter of 1905, Debs and five other socialists sent out a covert invitation to 30 radical leaders across the United States. In the letter, leaders were asked to meet in Chicago on January 2, 1905, "to discuss ways and means of uniting the working people of America on correct revolutionary principles" (Ginger 1947:237). What ultimately resulted from this meeting was the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) later that June. The emergence of a new "revolutionary industrial union" greatly alarmed Gompers and the AFL, and even the SPA would disavow the IWW's anarcho-syndicalist tactics (Bell 1982). The IWW, organized around industrial and general unionism, embraced a militantly anti-capitalist agenda. The organization's glorification of marginality and violence was unmistakably stated in the preamble to their constitution, foreshadowing a course of events that would thrust U.S. radicalism to the frontpages of America's newspapers.

On December 30, 1905, Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg was assassinated by a bomb detonated outside his home. Elected as a populist, Steunenberg had called in federal troops to put down the Coeur d'Alene riots of 1899 and was branded a class traitor by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), a radical labor union that counted syndicalist "Big" Bill Haywood among its ranks. Arrested as a suspect in Steunenberg's death, an Idaho miner informed the police, in exchange for leniency, that he was hired by WFM leadership to assassinate Steunenberg. In February 1906, "Big" Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone were arrested in Denver, Colorado, and extrajudicially transferred to an Idaho jail to await trial (Bell 1952). The labor-Left responded with outrage. With Debs leading the way, both the AFL and the SPA set aside their differences with the IWW and came to the defense of the three suspects. Debs, in his

characteristically dramatic fashion, compared the trial to that of the abolitionist John Brown, prophesying the coming of a great cataclysm (Ross 2015). The trial radicalized the SPA, and by the time Haywood and his co-defendants were acquitted in August 1907, an actual revolutionary wing had emerged within the party. Historians note that this development was a source of persistent tension that ultimately provided the foundation for the U.S. communist movement (Bell 1952; Ross 2015).

World War I

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, initiated a series of events that would result in a global armed conflict, greatly altering the course of the U.S. socialist movement. Against this backdrop, a delegation of U.S. socialists traveled to Vienna for the International Socialist Congress to express their opposition to U.S. military involvement. However, the U.S. delegates found that the European socialist parties were supporting their governments' war efforts. When the delegates returned to the United States, they discovered that a small group of propagandists had organized to advocate for intervention on the Allies' side. Despite the efforts of this minority, the election of 1914 represents a highwater mark for the SPA—electing a total of 33 state legislators in 14 states (Ross 2005). However, the specter of the European war would not vanish.

Woodrow Wilson was elected president in 1912 on his New Freedom platform that promised progressive changes which resonated with U.S. workers. The sociologist Daniel Bell claimed that the President's New Freedom policies "furnished tangible evidence that labor could promote gains through legislative activity" (1952:90). Industrial safety laws, union protection, and social legislation were enacted at the federal level and in many states. The emerging alliance between the labor movement and U.S. militarism signaled a turning point that produced factional

feuding which further splintered the socialist movement. Once the war broke out in 1914, Gompers had resigned from numerous peace societies and he began to promote military intervention on the side of the Allies (Ross 2015). By the end of 1915, the SPA was devoting most of its energies to keeping the U.S. out of the European conflict.

The first red scare. Originally committed to a position of neutrality, the United States, under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, entered World War I on April 6, 1917. The AFL, who had forged an alliance with the Wilson administration, coordinated with the government to support the war effort. Antiradical hysteria soon gripped the country and the Espionage Act, which made expressions of antiwar sentiments a federal crime, was passed in June. Just months later, Russia's Provisional Government collapsed due to its unwillingness to pull out of the war following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. The Bolshevik Party exploited the miscalculations of Alexander Kerensky and the Provisional Government and seized power in November. The Bolshevik victory, combined with evidence of lingering socialist support in the 1917 municipal elections, emboldened the Wilson administration to move swiftly against socialist agitators (Ross 2015).

The Espionage Act, which had been drastically broadened to include a range of offenses, was used to crush radical organizations such as the IWW and the SPA. Hundreds of radicals across the country were indicted, yet Debs remained uncharacteristically inactive during this period. Debs broke his silence when, outraged by socialist Representative Meyer London's public endorsement of Wilson's war aims, he issued a statement declaring his opposition to the war. Debs was once again attracting the attention of the federal government.

On June 16, 1918, Debs arrived at Nimisilla Park in Canton, Ohio, to deliver his greatest speech against the war. "In the years ahead," writes Freeberg, "Socialists would look back on the

speech Debs gave that afternoon as a grand gesture of defiance, a willing embrace of martyrdom. But only a small portion of his talk involved the war" (2008:73). Debs was arrested by federal agents on July 1 while at a socialist picnic in Cleveland, Ohio. He was charged for 10 violations of the Espionage Act but was quickly released on $100,000 bail. His trial began on September 10, 1918, in the U.S. District Court in Cleveland, and Debs utilized that platform to raise questions about the limits of free speech during wartime (Freeberg 2008). I would be remiss if I did not include this often-quoted passage Debs (1918) delivered before the sentencing:

> Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.

He received a 10-year sentence and was sent to a federal penitentiary.

The SPA met in New York on May 8, 1920, for its national convention. Despite the fact Debs was serving time at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary the party chose once again to make him its presidential nomination. Federal Convict #9653 would receive 913,917 votes the highest total of his five presidential runs (Ross 2015). Appeals for Debs' release intensified following the election, with even Gompers and the AFL advocating for amnesty. President Warren G. Harding commuted Debs' sentence, and he was released from prison on Christmas Day. Eugene Victor Debs died at Lindlahr Sanitarium the evening of October 20, 1926.

The Rise of Communism

The Communist Party (CPUSA), like the SPA, was formed out of a series of splits and mergers. In addition to the controversies described above, the SPA, behind the leadership of Adolph Germer and Morris Hillquit, began purging the party of supporters of Bolshevism.

Germer and the National Executive Committee (NEC) moved to expel the state party of

Michigan along with most of the SPA's foreign language federations. After Germer and Hillquit

overturned the election results for the NEC in March 1919, an election dominated by the Left,

the deposed committee members moved to retaliate. The Leftwing held its own convention in

June which prompted executive secretary Germer to call for a Socialist Emergency Convention

to convene in August. A group of insurgents, led by the journalist and deposed member Jack

Reed, plotted to seize the delegates' floor and demand recognition. When a bartender who

overheard the conspirators' plan alerted Germer, he had the would-be-insurgents ejected from

the convention.

During the socialists' Emergency Convention, Reed and his thwarted co-conspirators

founded the Communist Labor Party, while the deposed foreign language federations created the

Communist Party of America. The following year, Moscow forced the two parties into a merger

(CPUSA). Meanwhile, the SPA had suffered the loss of populist support, wartime repression,

and an inconsistent wartime message. Add to this the communist split, and one gets a sense of

why the SPA was in decline.

New voices. Following the death of Debs in 1926, Norman Thomas developed into the

most prominent spokesperson for the SPA. The son, grandson, and great-grandson of Protestant

ministers, Thomas was expected to make the ministry his career. Thomas excelled during his

time at Princeton, where he developed an affinity for political economy and an admiration for the

Social Gospel movement. Nevertheless, after graduating class valedictorian, Thomas followed

the wishes of his family and took a job at the Presbyterian Spring Street Settlement House in

New York. Working as a social worker, he was moved by the conditions facing the urban

proletariat. Thomas would go on to graduate from Union Theological Seminary and be ordained in the Presbyterian ministry.

Thomas' work in the ministry was informed by the Social Gospel movement as he continued to work with New York's urban poor. His experiences working with oppressed communities eventually turned him towards socialism. Thomas' biographer writes:

> The New York which Thomas had chosen as his home had become a city of the very rich—who could virtually buy their way out of its loneliness and corruption (for which they might indeed be to blame)—and the poor, who could not escape from the city's deleterious effects. The middle class fled to the suburbs. (Johnpoll 1970:18)

Thomas was also a Christian pacifist who was attracted to the SPA's antiwar message, which was espoused by much of the party at the time. After participating in the Hillquit mayoral campaign, Thomas joined the SPA in 1918 out of a strong sense of moral conviction. The Hillquit campaign was also notable for bringing future civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph into the SPA.

The son of a Methodist minister in Florida, Randolph was radicalized by reading W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1911, Randolph moved to New York to attend college and pursue an acting career. While at the City College of New York, he became involved in radical circles which drew Randolph further to the socialist Left. Following a failed attempt at establishing a black trade union, Randolph joined the SPA in 1916. After joining, Randolph led an enthusiastic campaign for Hillquit's mayoral run which established Randolph as a prominent figure in the socialist movement. Despite the party's hardships during this time, Thomas and Randolph would develop into two of the leading figures of the socialist movement.

Death Spiral

When the October 1929 the stock market crash, heralding the Great Depression, neither Thomas nor Randolph were surprised; socialists had been predicting the collapse of capitalism for decades. The Communist Party took the occasion to attack Thomas, who was running for mayor of New York, and denounced his reformist perspective, which communists claimed would lead to the same outcome. The rivalry between the parties would continue through the Depression era. During Thomas's second presidential campaign in 1932, the socialist candidate offered U.S. citizens a plan designed to lead the nation out of the economic depression. Specifically, he pledged to allocate federal funds for immediate relief, unemployment insurance, elderly pensions, government assistance to small homeowners, government employment agencies, and similar measures. Franklin D. Roosevelt, however, easily won the election, and within the next few years he would incorporate many of the measures listed by Thomas into the New Deal program.

In the 1930s, the CPUSA had surpassed the SPA in dues-paying membership, but by the end of the decade, both parties had been outflanked by Roosevelt and his New Deal. The Communist Party that had early on charged the New Deal with fascist tendencies, would come to support Roosevelt and his policies (Klehr1984.). Similarly, many aging veterans of the SPA were drawn to Roosevelt, "if as much by despondence over the implosion of the SPA as genuine admiration for the New Deal" (Ross 2015:373). By 1936, the New Deal successfully co-opted, or at least marginalized, all radical opposition in the United States (Ross 2015).

American socialism would continue to face opposition from reactionary forces, but none more severe than what it would face in the years following the Second World War. The Soviet Union and the United States, allies against the Axis Powers, emerged from the war as rival

superpowers engulfed in the arms race and ideological struggle known as the Cold War. The immediate postwar period may have been the historical high point for the popularity of communist ideology, and the U.S. government feared this popularity had a good chance of leading to global communist dominance. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union lasted for decades and resulted in the Red Scare, a period of anticommunist paranoia. American socialists faced a Red Scare following the Russian Revolution in 1917, but the Red Scare that occurred after World War II, popularly known as "McCarthyism" after its most famous prosecutor, Senator Joseph McCarthy, would prove to have far broader and deeper consequences for the U.S. socialist movement.

While the SPA struggled for half a century for political relevance, particularly behind the leadership of six-time presidential candidate, Norman Thomas, the 1950s would mark the party's terminal decline. Sectarian splits, conflicts with the CPUSA, the Khrushchev revelations (denouncing the crimes of former Soviet premier, Joseph Stalin), the brutality of the Soviet response to the Hungarian Uprising, and the two Red Scares would prove devastating. In 1958, the former Trotskyist and anticommunist, Max Shachtman, liquidated his International Socialist League (ISL) into the SPA, and he and his followers would realign the party along the lines of democratic socialism. That same year, Shachtman would help recruit a 30-year-old democratic socialist from St. Louis, Missouri named Michael Harrington into the SPA. The two men would eventually fracture the party, ultimately leading to its final demise in 1972 (Ross 2015).

Democratic Socialism

Harrington, a highly educated man, grew up in a progressive, middle-class household and, at a relatively young age, would be anointed as "democratic socialism's heir-apparent" by Thomas and others on the democratic Left (Gorman 1995:4). Combining serious analysis with

moral passion, Harrington's ascension in the party was swift, becoming the editor of the SPA's official journal in 1958, *New America*, and by 1968, he was the party's national co-chair. Harrington's popularity came amidst the factionalism of the 1960s. The New Left had soured on traditional socialist parties, including the SPA, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. created a moral vacuum on the Left. The pendulum of black liberation soon swung toward racial nationalism rather than economic justice, and the civil rights coalition of blacks and whites splintered into feuding factions. Of course, at the heart of all this tension was the Vietnam War, which elicited emotional appeals for and against U.S. involvement. Reflecting the turbulence of the era, by 1968, the SPA was fractured into three groups: Shachtmanite Cold Warriors who supported U.S. war efforts; the militantly antiwar Debs Caucus; and Harrington's Realignment Caucus, which opposed both the war and unconditional withdrawal (Gorman 1995).

During its 1972 convention, the SPA became the Social Democrats, USA (SDUSA), and followed the hawkish AFL-CIO in their refusal to back George McGovern and his anti-Vietnam War platform. Harrington submitted his resignation from the SDUSA in 1973, which was documented in a dramatic five-page letter (Gorman 1995). Earlier that year, Harrington and his closest confidants had laid plans to launch what they called the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC). DSOC held its founding convention in New York that October with more than 400 attendees (Ross 2015). Harrington announced his program bluntly: "We must go where the people are, which is the liberal wing of the Democratic Party" (cited in Ross 2015:545). In addition to the McGovern wing of the Democrats, DSOC aimed to build a strong coalition of progressive trade unionists, civil rights and feminist activists, and college students.

Harrington made an earnest plea for the quarrels of the 1960s to be laid to rest, and many aimless New Left veterans were in attendance to give his appeal a hearing (Ross 2015). The

history of the 1960s, however, could not be easily dismissed. Many middleclass, antiwar activists were highly critical of a labor movement (led by the prowar, socially conservative George Meany) that they saw as bureaucratic, antidemocratic, sexist, and racist, and which had implicitly supported Richard Nixon over George McGovern in the 1972 presidential race. Furthermore, labor leaders and mainstream Democrats often urged civil rights activists and feminists not to challenge the status quo by demanding equality through their respective social movements (Schwartz 2017). Harrington's realignment strategy ambitiously envisioned getting feminists, trade unionists, blacks, Latinos, and socialist activists in the same space to establish commonality. By the late 1970s, coalition politics had been embraced by trade unionists, activists of color, feminists, and the LGBTQIA+ community, and Harrington followed suit.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) was formed in 1982 out of the merger of Harrington's DSOC and the New American Movement (NAM)—which came out of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Although NAM sympathized with anticolonial struggles in the Global South and opposed U.S. intervention abroad, its main emphasis was on community action and cultural transformation (Gorman 1995). The two organizations appeared to represent different tendencies, yet as Gorman states: "NAM needed DSOC's organizational and national leadership, and DSOC needed NAM's energetic activism" (1995:145). During the Reagan years, the newly formed DSA and Harrington's New Socialism would struggle to affect the everyday lives of U.S. workers. Harrington soon realized that his coalition had been ruptured by the proliferation of special interests and by the lack of a coherent economic message. In the meantime, Harrington encouraged democratic socialists to remain alert for a political opportunity to pull socialists back into the political arena (Gorman 1995).

       The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 offered new opportunities and introduced new challenges to the U.S. socialist movement. Gone was Soviet-style communism and the Cold War. These developments, however, engendered new doubts about the salience and efficacy of socialism. The democratic Left existed in relative obscurity during the 1990s, but the irrational exuberance of the decade would eventually come to an abrupt halt. On the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the U.S. suffered four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda. What followed was the Bush administration's Global War on Terrorism, a militarized domestic police force, and a global financial crisis. These events represent an expanded opportunity for the reemergence of U.S. socialism.

CHAPTER IV MOBILIZING SOCIALISTS

Introduction

In a nationwide study of 46 DSA members, I employed a semi-structured interview protocol that consisted of questions regarding participants' political views and activism, political strategy and potential results of socialism, and DSA's work with marginalized groups. Specific questions addressed in this section include: When and why did you join DSA? What are DSA's recruitment strategies? What do you think led to the increase in DSA membership over the past few years? How does DSA's views differ from progressive Democrats? How does democratic socialism differ from previous forms of socialism? My narrative structure describes details, incorporates verbatim quotes from informants, and states my interpretations of events, especially an interpretation of social-psychological issues.

Ice Breaker

On February 3, 2020, I stepped into the St. James Episcopal Church in Knoxville, Tennessee for the DSA's monthly general meeting. After signing an attendance sheet where attendees can opt to be included in the chapter's listserv, I found my way to an information table stocked with various promotional materials pertaining to local and national DSA activities. There I found information and signup forms for working groups within the chapter. These groups are organized around topics ranging from religion to environmentalism to mutual aid. The table also included information on national campaigns such as the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and, of course, Senator Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential campaign.

After looking through a generous collection of flyers, buttons, and pamphlets, I found myself a seat and settled in for my first Knoxville DSA meeting. The meeting began with a brief announcement by the chair of the chapter. In her announcement, she outlined the meeting's

agenda, explaining that all discussions related to the agenda would be guided by the eight community agreements posted on a small poster behind the podium. The agreements are: 1. Assume good faith 2. Step up/step back 3. Why are you talking? 4. Recognize and respect feelings, backgrounds, and differences 5. No interrupting/side-talk 6. Respect progressive stacks 7. Have a sense of humor 8. Call in, not out. These agreements are representative of not only the manner in which the chapter arranges its meetings but also of the organization's values in general: being focused while trying to create community, and opening the venue for maximum participation while demonstrating respect for all.

The meeting then moved to introductions, where attendees were encouraged to share their personal pronouns. A few attendees had to be reminded to share their personal pronouns, but most did so readily. There was one exception, however, an older man explained that he was "a man, obviously." I could hear groans and murmurs reverberating through the room, but the man was not openly reprimanded. After the introductions, several speakers came to the podium giving reports on various organizational projects. However, it was the Sanders campaign that would dominate the evening. That night, DSA members made plans for a Democratic debate watch party, and they continued to coordinate canvassing and phone banking strategies. A Sanders delegate from his 2016 campaign instructed attendees on how they could pursue becoming a delegate in 2020. There was no doubt; Knoxville DSA was once again feeling the Bern. A veteran member led the group in the singing of "We're Gonna Roll this Movement On!" and with that, the meeting adjourned.

Building Coalitions

My experience from that February evening made it clear that DSA members in Knoxville are enthusiastic supporters of Senator Sanders. But what effect has the Sanders presidential

campaigns had on mobilizing participants into DSA (both locally and nationally)? To answer

that question, I asked members across the United States why they joined DSA. "So, I started with

Bernie," Michael says as he began to describe his mother's medical issues. "I have a mom who

had fibro issues when she had my little sister, and she was never able to get operated. Because

she was faced with the question of whether I get operated and go into a ton of debt, or I just roll

with it? And she's just rolled with it." As a Cuban immigrant, Michael is frustrated by the U.S.

healthcare system, a system that he says is failing his mother and millions of other Americans.

"The same people that throughout my whole life," he said with an exasperated chuckle, "that

were telling me how bad Cuba was were telling my mom to go to Cuba to have the surgery!"

Michael's concerns for his mother resulted in an openness to political alternatives to the current

system. His concerns found expression in Sanders' political platform: "So, when Bernie's

message came along, and I heard it. I completely resonated with it." After entering college in

2017, Michael came into contact with students who share his political views. Soon thereafter, he

joined the student section of DSA, the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA).

Like Michael, interviewees across the United States consistently cited the Sanders

presidential campaigns as a primary reason for their involvement in the organization. Sanders

was endorsed by DSA both in 2016 and in 2020, and its working group, Democratic Socialists

for Bernie, is highly invested in strengthening the public's perceived linkages between Sanders

and DSA. On their webpage, the Democratic Socialists for Bernie boast that "Bernie Sanders'

campaign is a historic opportunity to bring democratic socialist politics to millions of people."

Proponents of political process theory, such as McAdam, point out that "successful insurgency . .

. [is facilitated by] broad processes that strengthen the political position of the challenging

group" (1982:42). Accordingly, my findings consistently reveal a pattern related to the

facilitative effects of the Sanders campaign representing an expanded political opportunity for DSA as a social movement organization, and, to some degree, the broader radical Left social movement industry.

Radical Organizations. DSA was not the only organization to be revitalized by Sanders. The historically sectarian and fragmented U.S. Left coalesced around Sanders' presidential campaigns which introduced new political networks for radicals and progressives alike. Cristopher described how he went from a volunteer in Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign to being exposed to radical organizations, eventually settling on joining DSA:

> I joined [DSA] after 2016, I'd been involved in volunteering for the Bernie campaign and was disappointed to see it not win. And [I] also felt like it was the first campaign that actually fit with my values. And so, after I worked for a state senate campaign after graduating, I looked at a bunch of socialist meetings kinda like after Trump. DSA felt like the group that was actually doing something where I could make a difference, and because of that, I stuck with it. There were some really great campaigns [within DSA] that got me more deeply involved.

Christopher provides my study with an example of one way Sanders' campaign exposed progressives to radical organizations, including DSA. That is, the Sanders campaign enabled the democratic socialist movement to take hold and spread an insurgent message in part due to the presence of an interorganizational network. In McAdam's (1982) initial outline of political process theory, he incorporates cultural diffusion literature to demonstrate the means by which a movement, as a new cultural item, is dependent on associational networks as mobilizing structures.

Disaffected Democrats. Our Revolution, and other mainstream organizations associated with the Sanders campaign, were placed into a broader network that introduced some Sanders' supporters to more radical groups such as DSA. DSA often takes advantage of online resources (e.g., DSA's webpage, social media, etc.) to coordinate and promote its partnerships with other radical organizations including the Socialist Party USA (SPUSA), Solidarity, Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), Socialist Alternative (SAlt), and the recently defunct International Socialist Organization (ISO). These interorganizational linkages provide DSA with the communication network or infrastructure by which the central tenets of democratic socialism can be disseminated throughout the population of challengers. After discovering DSA, progressives, especially mainstream Sanders' supporters, usually described their willingness to join the organization based on a perceived ideological commonality between DSA and Sanders.

Most of my research participants, however, had no experience with radical organizations prior to becoming active in DSA. Instead, informants routinely cited various levels of involvement with the Democratic Party before discovering DSA. Jennifer explained that she inherited a "strong FDR" vision for the Democratic Party from her parents. In 1972, Jenifer's progressive vision compelled her to work on George McGovern's presidential campaign while she attended college. When I asked Jennifer how she transitioned from being a lifelong Democrat to a member of DSA, she said "I joined it because I think it best represents my political views." Jason, similarly, associated DSA's political views with earlier Democrats such as President Jimmy Carter. Speaking about his presidency, Jason said Carter "actually noticed other people besides the clique that surrounds the president . . . That was the last president, I feel like, of the people." Jason added that he joined DSA because he "had to show solidarity with other people that had a similar worldview."

Although Jason and Jennifer indicated that they had supported the Democrats in the past, they have become increasingly critical of the party. Jennifer noted that the Democrats continue to drift rightward away from the New Deal polices that appeal to her and likeminded progressives: "People have just been upset with the Democratic Party. It's just become more and more corporate. And more anti-social justice." David, who worked on the Carter presidential campaign in 1980, was critical of the neoliberal policies embraced by Democrats such as 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Motivated by a desire to move the party to the Left, David revealed that most of his work with DSA to this point has revolved around Sanders' campaign efforts. Senator Sanders' political message would energize many disenfranchised progressive voters, which incidentally, expanded the political opportunities for DSA.

Occupy Wall Street. Although some younger members traced a similar trajectory from support for the Democratic Party to being active DSA members, most were politicized through more recent events, namely the Occupy Wall Street protests. Amanda explained that, while she has been a progressive activist since high school, it was her participation in the Occupy movement that facilitated her conversion to socialism. The protestors she encountered in lower Manhattan had mobilized in opposition to the 1 percent—a reference to the corporate elite who had reaped enormous profits on their way to destabilizing the economy—which brought popular attention to a political discourse on economic inequality.

Considering the pervasiveness of income inequality since the early 1970s, it is not surprising that a social movement would emerge focused on the redistribution of wealth. However, political process theorists insist that grievances have little explanatory value in the emergence of a social movement. Instead, they identify political opportunities as the most crucial variable in the generation of a successful insurgency campaign. The political opportunity that

arose, according to Dube and Kaplan (2012), was the inability of President Barack Obama, along

with a solid Democratic majority in Congress, to enact effective reforms to address the causes

and consequences of the financial crisis. Unlike older participants, DSA members who were

children and young adults during the Great Recession were politicized during an era where the

U.S. capitalist system itself came under increased scrutiny. James, who was 32 at the time of this

study said:

> The general atmosphere of the country, and you know, going through the wars in Iraq, the
>
> torture programs in the Middle East, the Great Recession in '08, to Occupy Wall Street,
>
> to Black Lives Matter, there was kinda a larger awakening of what . . . [we] might call
>
> class consciousness . . . . Really just a recognition that we need to restore a sense of
>
> humanity, sense of cooperation with each other.

Robert reported that at a young age, his parents instilled in him an awareness and appreciation of

events shaping the political world: "When I was like 10, I learned about stuff like Occupy Wall

Street." Similarly, Christopher explained that he "was always interested, from a young age, . . .

[in political movements] like Occupy Wall Street." This was the political climate that

conditioned the formative years of younger DSA members. Their dissatisfaction with the

moderate reformism of the Obama administration would play a role in Sanders' campaign

success, and relatedly, to the dramatic increase in DSA membership.

The Bernie Effect

The data I gathered from participant observation indicates that members of Knoxville

DSA devoted a considerable amount of time, energy, and resources to the Sanders 2020

presidential campaign. Informed by these findings, I proceeded to investigate the effects Sanders

had on his supporters' mobilization into DSA. I found evidence through interview data that

Sanders' presidential campaigns helped establish new communication networks, as described by McAdam (1982, 1988), between progressive Democrats and DSA. Furthermore, younger DSA members frequently expressed discontent with the Democratic political establishment choosing instead to seek alternative political strategies such as Occupy Wall Street. The issues raised by Occupy, namely grievances related to wealth distribution, found institutional support in the Sanders presidential campaigns. Sanders' political philosophy of democratic socialism would find support from welfare state progressives as well as young people politicized around the Occupy movement.

The first protestors began their occupation of Zuccotti Park, located in New York's financial district, on September 17, 2011—over four years before Sanders would announce his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. Looking back over the past decade, Daniel declared that "Occupy Wall Street made the explosion in DSA possible." Events such as the Great Recession and the resulting Occupy movement compelled disenfranchised voters to consider new political options. In Sanders, they found a candidate whose progressive message resonated with that of their own. Joseph captured the enthusiasm of the movement when he remarked that an alternative to the Democratic political establishment is viable "because of Bernie. He opened a door, so we could do this."

Not only did DSA members frequently cite the Sanders presidential campaigns as instrumental to their electoral work, but many participants extended Sanders' significance to include a general explanation for DSA's growth. The political opportunity thesis, as expressed by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), claims that social movements emerge as a result of expanding political opportunities. Accordingly, the inability and/or unwillingness of established polity members to advance effective economic solutions introduced a vulnerability in the system

broadening the opportunities for insurgent change efforts (Dube and Kaplan 2012). Having uncovered this political opportunity, my next task was to identify the resources available to the democratic socialist movement and the formal organizational manifestations of those resources.

I asked research participants to describe the factors they thought contributed to the recent increase in DSA membership. "Oh, Bernie Sanders would be my two-word answer," stated Melissa matter-of-factly. Nicole, who was active in the Sanders 2016 presidential campaign, said with conviction that "it's definitely Bernie Sanders, it's like without a doubt the biggest reason that people have joined DSA." Results from my interviews indicated embeddedness in the Sanders' campaign could result in a discovery of radical organizations such as DSA. However, even if Sanders' supporters were aware of DSA, it still was not clear exactly how Sanders' supporters were mobilized into the organization. Therefore, I asked respondents to describe how they were recruited into DSA. Justin said his route to DSA began with an internet search of student organizations at his university:

> So, by the time I got to college, I was looking for different student organizations to join. And I know that I wanted to join a political one, and I wanted one that was relatively Left-leaning. So, I was looking at the College Democrats, but I felt like I wanted something a little more niche than that. . . . And so, I remember, we have this data base for student organizations at our school called Maize Pages, and which it just popped up my head to look up the word 'socialist.' And I think at the time it was called Ann Arbor Young Democratic Socialists at the University of Michigan . . . . And so, I reached out to that organization. They told me when one of their meetings were, and I just showed up. And that's how I got involved.

James, along with other members, offered a practical explanation for why Sanders' supporters joined DSA:

> "Obviously, the Bernie Sanders campaign just using that phrase 'democratic socialism.' I don't have the Google numbers in front of me, but I think just people looking into democratic socialism. Almost the very fact that DSA, *Democratic Socialists of America,* have that in the title . . . was a method where people found that group."

Similarly, Crystal added "we [DSA] have the luxury of having democratic socialist being part of our name." Only a couple of respondents mentioned any deliberate recruitment efforts, and some respondents seemed reluctant to explicitly targeting recruits.

Even though DSA, as Joshua mentioned, has "done some occasional like tabling at events," the majority of DSA members were not recruited through any formal enlistment strategy. Again, Sanders is invoked: "A lot of Bernie stuff push people towards us who've worked with Bernie stuff, and then said hey by the way if you're interested in DSA you can do this. But I think most of our recruitment has been people that for one reason or another heard of DSA and decide to seek us out and then reach out to us."

Other participants mentioned that they had discovered DSA during and after Sanders' failed attempt to grab the Democratic Party's nomination. Sanders supporters, such as Rita, learned of DSA while searching for other outlets for their organizing energies: "So, then for several months after the election, I just started listening to more like Leftist podcasts, and I heard of DSA." This form of self-recruitment is a theme articulated by several participants. When I asked respondents to describe DSA's recruitment strategies, the most common response was that Sanders' frequent use of the term "democratic socialism" had a serendipitous result. Inquisitive Sanders' supporters searched online for information on democratic socialism, which invariably

channeled their inquiries to DSA. Crystal confessed that she, in fact, "only knew of DSA through Bernie identifying as a democratic socialist." According to DSA members who participated in this study, DSA does not deploy a consistent recruitment strategy.

Bernie and Beyond

DSA took advantage of the serendipitous "democratic socialist" search result by bolstering their online presence to propagate their political message and to promote their endorsements of political candidates. Their political visibility would take another leap with the election of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018. DSA members Stone and Gong (2018) wrote in *Jacobin*:

> On June 26, 2018, everything changed for the socialist movement in the United States. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and a candidate in the NY-14 Democratic primary, not only won her insurgent race against a longstanding, corporate-monied incumbent, but catapulted the politics of democratic socialism onto the national stage.

Unlike Sanders, Representative Ocasio-Cortez is a current member of DSA, and her election added further momentum to the democratic socialist movement. Ryan explained that "when Sanders campaigned in 2016 and he was sorta proudly wearing the democratic socialist banner, and certainly when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez began her movement, I, you know, became like these are the people whose policies and platforms I agree with." A younger woman of color, Ocasio-Cortez represented the model of what the movement could accomplish through electoral strategies. Christopher explained that the best political strategy is one that demonstrates to the working class that electoral success is possible:

We need to change people's expectations, give them hope that things can change, it

comes from our, you know, our like catchphrase, if you will, 'a better world is possible' .

. . . Our highest period of membership growth was after Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's win.

. . . And so that's really it, I'd say strong campaigns that make a difference for working

people.

DSA members expressed that did not want to allow the movement to fade following the

momentum of Sanders' strong bid for the Democratic Party nomination. Instead, DSA built on

the electoral success of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez by endorsing candidates across the United

States.

If institutional political systems shape the prospects for insurgent challenge and the forms

the movement takes, their influence is dependent on the various types of mobilizing structures

through which movement participants seek to organize (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

By mobilizing structures, I am referring to the informal and formal resources at the disposal of a

particular social movement. DSA continued the momentum of the Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez

campaigns by emphasizing electoral strategies at the local level. Heather explained that the

"willingness of people to show up and organize. And the recognition of how important local

elections are" helped continue to strengthen her local chapter. Jennifer, similarly, states that:

"Some of the success that we have had with Lee Carter in Virginia, getting elected to the

statehouse, a very openly pro-union, DSA member. And Mark Elrich at the county

executive in Montgomery County. And we got two other people elected to the statehouse

in Maryland from my district and an adjoining district who are both DSA members.

Brian adds that "two local reps in Pittsburg were endorsed by DSA, and I canvassed for them before I was an official member." And in Knoxville, Jeremy noted that he "participated in the City Council Movement, which was made up entirely, I think, of DSA members."

Christopher spoke at length the success local DSA electoral efforts are having on the organization:

> DSA quite simply can provide numbers. We've got a lot of people who are willing to volunteer, that's our biggest strength. Other people got organized money, control of media institutions, they've got, you know, they'll be listened to if they go on cable news. For us, it's we can bring hordes of volunteers out who will work hard if we make an endorsement on a campaign. We did that on campaign against school suspensions with a bunch of racial justice groups. We did that in our campaign for bail reform, you know, [we] worked with the Upstate-Downstate Coalition on rent reforms . . . we had the benefit of Julia Salazar, our elected official, to put pressure on the inside, and give us information on how things were going, so we could better understand what was working and what wasn't. . . . We do a campaign really well. We don't just partner with local groups we help locals organize their own groups, and, you know, you can see that in tenants' unions across the country, that DSA has helped start, and activist groups that DSA has helped start even if they haven't joined DSA.

Under ordinary circumstances, excluded groups like those represented in DSA face enormous obstacles in their efforts to advance group interests. Challengers are excluded from routine decision-making processes due to their weak bargaining position in relation to established polity members. But as the campaigns described above indicate, the particular set of power relationships that define the political environment at any point in time hardly constitutes an

immutable structure of political existence. Although resource mobilization theorists claim elite

linkages with established polity members are essential to movement emergence, proponents of

the political process model argue that such linkages may, in fact, impede social movements

through processes of bureaucratization and cooptation. However, my data would seem to suggest

that DSA's reliance on the Sanders campaigns has developed into a successful electoral

movement.

Normalizing Socialism

If the combination of discontent with the Democratic political establishment and the

Sanders campaign affords DSA the structural potential for action, then the subjective meanings

movement participants assign to their situation is also a contributing factor to movement

emergence. "Conditioning the presence or absence of these perceptions is that complex of social

psychological dynamics—collective attribution, social construction—that David Snow and

various of his colleagues have referred to as framing processes" (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald

1996). Therefore, members of DSA construct and reconstruct the meaning of democratic

socialism through their various interactions. Building off the surprising success of Sanders's

2016 presidential campaign, Ocasio-Cortez's election helped normalize the concept of

democratic socialism. Jeremy commented: "I think the thing that led to the increase in

membership is democratic socialism becoming a term that everyday people now know."

However, most respondents credited Senator Sanders for bringing socialist ideals to the forefront

of U.S. politics.

Jason explained that he thinks Sanders is at least partially responsible for destigmatizing

the idea of socialism in the United States: "I think it's mainly thanks to Bernie Sanders. His

campaign in 2016. I think that he probably defining himself as a democratic socialist . . . kinda

took some of the fear away from it." Once again, Jason was clear that the form of socialism that Sanders endorses has little if anything in common with the Stalinist regimes of the twentieth century. What Sanders was offering was a solution to the socioeconomic hardships that concerned most of the participants in my study. Other members, like Christopher, agree with Jason claiming that Sanders helped frame socialism in a way that applied to recent events: "Bernie put a name to the frustration that was already there with Occupy Wall Street, and DSA was the only socialist group to really actively endorse him and campaign for him." For Jason and other activists politicized during the Great Recession, Sanders offered a political alternative to the status quo ante.

Respondents routinely differentiated democratic socialism from the policies of progressive Democrats by identifying capitalism as a systemic problem confronting U.S. citizens and indeed the world. This problem, they explained, could not be adequately addressed through progressive reforms. Instead, the U.S. capitalist system itself must be overthrown in order to bring about a just and truly democratic society. Victoria provides a particularly concise description of her idea of democratic socialism:

> The DSA is the largest socialist organization in the United States, and we believe that
> working-class people should run both the economy and society demographically to meet
> human needs. Human needs like . . . healthcare, or education . . . decent wages, for
> example. And not to make profits for few, but to provide for everybody.

Several members emphasized concerns related to LGBTQIA+ issues, gender inequality, racial discrimination, environmental degradation, and immigrant rights. Thomas explained that:

> I would say specifically democratic socialism as compared to just like progressive
> Democrats is, you know, considering things like immigrant rights, LGBT issues, climate

change, that sort of thing. But it's also going the extra mile. Instead of just saying, let's

work within capitalism, specifically within the two-party structure that gets brought up, is

not an effective way of doing things. And the basic dem-soc proposal is moving outside

of that capitalist system and trying to bring some sort of socialism into the U.S.

Most respondents identified democratizing control over the economy and workspaces, in

addition to "radically" addressing gender and racial inequality, as the principle differences

between democratic socialism and progressive reformism.

Other DSA members explained that, even though Sanders was their introduction to

socialism, their conceptualization of socialism has continued to develop during their time in

DSA. Respondents described situations where members meet formally and informally to share

their thoughts on social and political issues. During these engagements, participants reshape their

conceptualizations of socialism. "So, it was a mixture of being active in DSA and doing just a

ton of reading that kind of really radicalized me as well as being active in the YDSA," Michael

said, describing his political evolution. Social movement scholars, such as Snow (2004) note that

subjective meanings arise out of an ongoing interpretive process constructed and reconstructed

through social interaction. Therefore, DSA members participate in an ongoing interactive

process of collectively constructing new meanings regarding socialism.

An additional theme that emerged was related to DSA as a multi-tendency, decentralized

organization. In other words, DSA, as a national organization, does not adhere to a unified

political vision. Christopher explained to me that this multi-tendency approach is partially

responsible for the organization's success and stability:

I think DSA looks at that history [of sectarianism] and doesn't want to repeat it. That's

one reason it embraces multi-tendency work and explicitly tries to organize in such a way

where each chapter can decide their you know their priority campaigns based on what's

important in their neighborhood. And where we can work with other groups and build the

movement as a whole by making sure that our electoral work is conscious and actively

building movement.

Michael also sees DSA's multi-tendency approach as beneficial: "I see DSA focusing more on

policy issues that unite all sorts of tendencies on the Left rather than on strictly ideological

issues." This multi-tendency, decentralized approach allows participants greater flexibility in

what constitutes "socialism" for DSA members.

  A multi-tendency approach. Despite the organization's lack of orthodoxy, which several

respondents found appealing, socialist ideology was less important to a few respondents than

dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party. Jennifer said that "people have just been upset with

the Democratic Party. It's just become more and more corporate. And more anti-social justice."

Piven and Cloward (1977), McAdam (1982), and other social movement scholars have found

that insurgent movements are usually incompatible with elite patronage. Consequently, the major

source of respondents' hostility towards the Democrats was with their inability to field a

candidate that could have defeated Donald Trump in 2016 and their rejection of Sanders. These

respondents pointed to the election of Trump and his subsequent presidency as a major factor in

their decision to join DSA. "I would say mostly it's directly related to Bernie," Nicole explained,

"but some of the interest was also, I think because Donald Trump was elected . . . . Socialists see

Donald Trump as a natural outgrowth of the social conditions in the U.S. for the last, you know,

40 years." Responses like Nicole's, however, are not formulated in isolation. The social

construction of a socialist ideology is clearly at work. Specifically, Nicole's explanation that

Trump's presidency is "a natural outgrowth of the social conditions in the U.S." is consistent

with the historical materialism perspective. Admittedly, Trump came up less in my interviews than I anticipated. DSA's online content, magazine articles, and activist demonstrations are dominated by opposition to Trump. Most importantly, however, for a discussion on the increase in DSA membership, DSA recorded a significant increase in membership immediately following the election of Trump. One respondent referred to this phenomenon as the "Trump bump."

Conclusion

Unlike most of the rest of the world, the United States has not had a major socialist party following World War II. Nevertheless, it always had its supporters, including a number of political activists, trade unionists, and prominent intellectuals. The Occupy Wall Street Movement, along with the Sanders presidential campaigns, created new networks that brought DSA into dialogue with members of these groups. The Great Recession, and the ineffectiveness of the Democratic political establishment in the face of the crisis, introduced a political opportunity for the emergence of an insurgent movement. Unlike the predictions of political process theorists, the Sanders campaign did not impede the successful development of the democratic socialist movement. Instead, Sanders' presidential campaigns helped mobilize participants into the organization. Finally, DSA members have developed a unique definition of socialism that differs from previous forms of socialism.

Although opponents of U.S. socialism quickly draw comparisons to Soviet-style communism, the socialism most DSA members are embracing is what Europeans would call social democracy, a view associated with mainstream parties like the Labour Party in the United Kingdom and the SPD in Germany. This vision of socialism advocates an extended welfare state where citizens enjoy greater income equality, affordable healthcare, as well as other government-subsidized benefits. Some of the members I interviewed emphasized progressive welfare state

policies that they associated with Democrats prior to the neoliberal turn. DSA members add to this conceptualization of socialism an increased emphasis on issues related to gender and racial inequality. DSA members, particularly younger members, were particularly concerned with achieving representativeness in their local chapters as well as the national organization. The success of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez has contributed to an inspired base that works to promote DSA endorsed candidates at both national and local levels. In the next chapter, respondents discuss how DSA has become just as important as a source of community as it is as a political organization. Lastly, I ask DSA members to discuss the organizations work with marginalized groups and how they enlist their participation and leadership.

CHAPTER V A COMMUNITY OF COMRADES

Introduction

For this section, I analyze data gathered through participant observation with Knoxville DSA members from January to March 2020. My interaction with the organization occurred at monthly general meetings, a film screening of the 1979 Sanders' *Eugen V. Debs: Trade Unionist, Socialist, Revolutionary* documentary, and a Sanders themed concert event. Informed by Leach and Haunss' (2009:275) work on scenes—defined "as *simultaneously a network of people* who share a common set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms, and convictions *as well as a network of physical spaces . . . .*"—I investigate the role DSA activities play in the construction and maintenance of a collective identity and other movement processes related to mobilization. Through participant observation, I was able to familiarize myself with the issues important to DSA, learn how the Knoxville chapter's meetings are structured, and observe the ways members interact in informal settings. I deliberately distanced myself from the various settings to maintain a critical perspective by consistently interrogating my observations and consulting with colleagues to formulate an etic analysis. I was particularly attentive to the patterns revealed in the interviews I conducted up to the time of the events I attended.

I also continue my analysis of the 46 semi-structured, in-depth interviews I conducted of DSA members throughout the United States. To expand my knowledge of DSA members beyond Knoxville, I sought telephone interviews with adherents from 22 states. Here, I focus on questions consisting of informants' involvement in DSA related activities. Since social movement scholars such as Cloward and Piven (1984), Piven and Cloward (1977), Piven (2013), and McAdam (1982) are skeptical of constituency-based movements, I am particularly interested in understanding the ways DSA works with marginalized populations. Specific questions

addressed in this section include: When and why did you join DSA? What efforts has DSA made to work with marginalized groups? And what steps have been made to enlist the active participation and leadership from members of these groups?

To record and organize my data, I took brief notes at Knoxville DSA general meetings and other events that I immediately afterwards expanded into more complete fieldnotes on my laptop. Beginning the process of organizing data into useful and interesting categories, I coded data according to particular topics of interest using headings and subheadings. Throughout my research, I identified significant statements and grouped them into thematic clusters. Reexamining my interview transcripts and fieldnotes led me to analyze other themes as I gathered more data through emergent, inductive analysis.

A Scruffy Socialist Scene

In his second bid for the White House, Senator Sanders promised to mobilize new and infrequent voters, which include young people, progressives, and people of color. Three days following the chaos of the 2020 Iowa caucuses—in which the Iowa Democratic Party failed to report results from several precincts due to complications with a new process of tabulating results—Sanders would begin the race with a self-proclaimed "decisive victory." The momentum of his campaign continued, securing a victory in New Hampshire on February 11. Energized by these early successes, Knoxville DSA had a number of events scheduled to help ensure a Super Tuesday victory in Tennessee. After winning Iowa and New Hampshire, and later recording a major victory in Nevada, it appeared that Sanders had established himself as the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination.

On a chilly night in February, DSA lent "organizational support" to Bernaroo 2020, a musical event hosted by a collection of volunteers called Knoxville for Bernie. The event was

held at Scruffy City Hall, a live music venue located in downtown Knoxville. The event featured speeches from local politicians and activists in addition to musical performances from several Knoxville area artists. The room was near full capacity with DSA members and other enthusiastic Sanders supporters shouting campaign slogans, singing, dancing, and just having a good time in general. Various petitions were circulated through the room, along with an array of propaganda material. And interspersed throughout the night were spontaneously chants of, "Bernie, Bernie, Bernie!" In this very limited sample, it seemed Sanders, or at least his supporters, were making good on his campaign promise of mobilizing young and progressive voters.

As the evening progressed, I encountered and spoke with a few of my informants including, Jeffrey, Thomas, and Benjamin. Struggling to be heard over the music, they each reminded me to vote Bernie on March 3. Looking around at the relatively large crowd of Sanders' supporters, the vast majority of whom are not DSA members, I considered how a shared message of democratic socialism rendered everyone in attendance a potential DSA recruit. Indeed, Leach and Haunss (2009:270) note that the "most straightforward way in which the scene enhances mobilization is by providing a ready pool of potential recruits." A shared sense of fashion, activism, Scruffy City Hall, artists, progressive academics, indie music, linguistic patterns, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and so forth [reword this part] compositely represent the social and spatial infrastructure of the scene (Leach and Haunss 2009). Not only are social movements generated by the availability of objective resources emphasized by theorists associated with the resource mobilization paradigm (McCarthy and Zald 1977), but they are also generated by the cultural dimensions of those resources (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Polletta 1999). In other words, the Sanders campaign does not merely represent an objective

political opportunity for DSA. The scene I observed at Scruffy City Hall that spirited winter's night had also culturally attached itself to Sanders and *de facto* to the democratic socialist movement.

Since, as Leach and Haunss (2009) suggest, scenes can serve as entrance points to greater involvement in a social movement, Bernaroo attracted a broader audience and exposed them to the democratic socialist's lifestyle and ideology in a casual environment. Their research indicates that certain "discursive characteristics of scenes may also influence mobilization . . . ." (Leach and Haunss 2009:271). A few days before Bernaroo, I attended DSA's screening of Sanders' Debs documentary at Central Cinema in Knoxville. Following the film screening, DSA hosted a Democratic debate watch party at the theater. At each of these events, I observed the use of insider linguistic codes, which Leach and Haunss claim can contribute to dense social bonds among movement participants. Accordingly, DSA members speak openly about "revolution" and call their organizational activities "praxis." The "bourgeoise" are the wealthy, while marginalized populations are named "proletarians." "Reactionary" is used by members as a synonym for conservative, and DSA members typically refer to fellow members as "comrades." In fact, the Knoxville chapter uses the hashtags #knoxrades, in addition to #yallidarity, on social media. To be sure, DSA has benefited organizationally from this scene to facilitate mobilization, construct insurgent collective identities, and develop a sense of community.

The Continuing Relevance of Collective Behavior Theory

As Buechler (2000) and Gamson (1992) tell us, attempts at theorizing contemporary collective action underscore the importance of the classical behavioral approach once rejected by proponents of the resource mobilization paradigm (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977). For example, Polletta (1998) connects everyday life and collective action with the links between individual

and collective identity. Blumer's (1939, 1951) analysis of crowds is revisited by McPhail (1991), who examines spontaneous collective behavior yet avoids the biases that originally discredited the field. Similarly, more recent work has turned to the exploration of the intersection of lifestyle and social movements. Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones suggest that lifestyles consciously and actively promote a way of life as a "primary means to foster social change, politicizing daily life . . . ." (2012:14). "Creating an emotional bond is part of what is meant by collective identity and social movements must bond disparate individuals, even those who may already form some sort of 'network,' together in an emotional way" (Eyerman 2006:193). For this section, I ask DSA members what brought them to DSA. Many of the DSA members I spoke with described DSA in terms of a "community" or a sense of belonging. Guided by theoretical insights that emphasize the ways identities are fused into a collective characterized by feelings of group belongingness, what follows is my analysis of DSA as a "community."

Sweet Home DSA

From their daily life experiences, DSA members described a theme of belongingness and a sense of community. This theme, drawn from a combination of shared convictions and an integrated network of specific locales, described DSA as a "home," "family," and most frequently, as a "community." It was here that interviewees reported their interpersonal linkages to other DSA members. Nicole said that "[DSA] could provide us with friends as well as you know stimulating conversations, and you know allies of our ideology and all of that." "We are not just a collection of individuals. We are a community," asserted Joshua. "To me, it's more, you know, it's more about being around people who think the same way," explained Rebecca, "and being around people where we can think the same way and try collectively to solve problems." Likewise, Angela said that she primarily socializes with other members. "I've

become friends with a number of folks," she explained, "like the friends I currently have, I met through the DSA. Angela also stressed the need for strong social bonds within the organization. She stated:

> And especially that's something that we as part of the socialist feminist branch [is] something that we try to do. I'm actually a co-chair for the socialist feminist branch, and part of our focus is allowing people to make those connections that will help to sustain movements, because just having a group of very loosely affiliated people, it's really easy to break away from that or to not feel as invested in that if you don't have those strong relationships with people. And concerns that people might have about not getting the support that they need if things get really hard like they are right now, those are the kinds of things that can pull people away from a movement. So building those strong connections and recruiting people into a movement with each other I think is really important.

Networks have been identified by Fernandez and McAdam (1989) as an important predictor of movement participation. Some members, such as Michelle, expressed a greater sense of optimism, and thus, a greater sense of commitment as a result of the personal connections they have made in the organization. Michelle said that "it's [being in DSA] made me feel a lot less hopeless, and it's made me feel a lot less alone." Dan, additionally, discussed developing a sense of community as essential for the growth of DSA:

> In my experience, where we get more members is by building relationships on local levels and building community, because that's one of the things I feel DSA is actually doing really well is building a community of people who work together. It's not

necessarily the best community, but it's a community of people who work together, so I mean it's going okay, we grow from it.

Social movement scholars often treat social networks as predictors of individual participation. Networks may increase individual chances to become involved and strengthen activists' attempts to further the appeal of their causes. There is a dynamic element to this process. While people often become involved in specific movements through their preexisting relationships, their very participation also forges new bonds, which in turn affect subsequent developments in their activist careers (Diani 2004).

According to Cohen (1985), part of the self-understanding of many progressive activists is that they exhibit historically novel identities and movement goals. Unlike the Old Left, activists involved in the contemporary movements are mostly critical of class-reductionism. Therefore, class background is no longer the key determinant of collective identities or the stakes of their action. Heather sees an emphasis on a plurality of views infused in DSA's multi-tendency approach: "the focus actually on building consensus and building community and building the structures that allow all of these people of different you know belief systems [to work together]." Most contemporary social movement participants have abandoned the workerist model of the Old Left in favor of grassroots politics characterized by horizontality, representativeness, and direct democracy. As Joseph said, "we're trying to do everything to build a community to take that power." Contemporary insurgents target the state and the workplace in a collective effort to democratize all sectors of society.

DSA also offers a place for people who feel marginalized by conservative social norms. Some members, such as Nicole, explained that she felt socially isolated prior to discovering DSA. "Growing up in the South, I was one of the only people in my age group that wasn't

supportive of the Bush administration and things like that. Having to seek out opinions, especially online, from other sources informed my political development." Nicole goes on to explain how a strategy of community building she developed in college transferred over to her work in DSA:

> I have been trying to increase the number of just like the purely social things we do in DSA. That aren't just about going out to the bar and talking about socialist things. So, like, for example, now that the coronavirus is going on, we're having like Zoom movie nights and stuff. Just to hang out and like watch, you know, silly movies and talk or whatever about not politics things. I was on the executive board of my college's chapter of Secular Student Alliance. . . . I also did that there, because that drastically increased our membership. From just a core group of people who only cared about atheism or whatever to like a wider net of people who were just vaguely secular but not really like gun hoe about atheist activism. But still came to our meetings to talk or hangout people because they wanted to be part of the social milieu. So, I'm trying to do that same thing with DSA.

Therefore, for Nicole, building strong social bonds within the organization is an important part of not only sustaining group activities but also for expanding membership. Diani states that "social movement activities are usually embedded in dense relational settings," and that social movements are made up of a "web of multiple ties" (2004:339). Ashely also mentioned a coordinated effort by her chapter to build a sense of community:

> I think I'm kind of a special case, because I struggle with kind of connecting with people on a personal level. But everybody is super, super friendly. I have just, but I've only very, very recently been becoming friends with anybody in the DSA, because I volunteered to

start or lead our mutual aid project in Vegas. So, I've been more forced to interact with

them, so I've been getting closer to them in that way. But yeah, there's definitely a social

aspect too. Like, our chapter does what they call like 'socialism night,' where the

education committee will put on a presentation about something related to socialism. And

I know that those are always one of my favorite ones to go to, because it's kind of more

like a small group. Like let's talk about these things together. Our feeling, if that makes

sense.

These strong bonds that are forged through group activities related to DSA were consistently

mentioned as key to participants' involvement. Ashely also made a brief comment regarding the

emotional dimensions of social movements. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta claimed that social

movement scholarship that considers emotions will result in thicker descriptions as well as a

more complete understanding of their microfoundations: "Because emotion, like culture

generally, is a dimension of all social action, attending to emotions will illuminate more clearly

all of the key issues that have exercised scholars of movements" (2004:425).

Mostly, DSA members expressed a sense of belonging and of community within their

chapters. This interconnectedness could take the form of a shared ideology, or it could be

something far more casual. Brandon voiced his concerns that DSA could be reduced to nothing

more than a "social club." He stated that some chapters get stuck in a "hang out and be friends

with us for a period of time and then maybe you get to do something eventually." He added that

there are chapters that "are still very much a social group and they are trying to figure out like

some way of like what can we do how do we like turn into a practical organization." However,

most members saw the community aspect as a positive. Michelle explained:

I think the whole message of um when you combine forces you are less powerless. So

alone in the sense of like a sense of community, but also alone in the sense of like there

are ways to have agency in your own life. And there are options for that, and it's like

yeah. And it's been really nice from a standpoint of just you know now I have some

friends, and we'll, you know, get pizza sometimes. And we can, kind of you know, have

a base level understanding of what our politics are.

Social movement scholars, such as Diani (2004), map out social networks to predict individual

participation. He found evidence that suggests networks encourage participants to be more

committed to a group's causes and goals. Diani points out that this is a dynamic process. Social

movement actors are often mobilized through their preexisting links, and their subsequent

movement activities help to establish new bonds. Another way of conceptualizing the

significance of networks to movement participation, according to Diani (2004), is an instance of

the link between identity and membership. Participants' identities are constructed through their

engagement with various social groups, and by being members of these groups, they establish

linkages that open up a space for potential organizational expansion.

Work with Marginalized Groups

A social movement that does not merely represent oppressed groups but enlists their

participation and leadership could potentially avoid some of the problems faced by constituency-

based movements. Conscience constituents, a category introduced by McCarthy and Zald (1977),

contribute resources to a movement, but they will not benefit directly from the movement's

success. They are guided by a sense of moral obligation and are typically members of the elite,

including the political establishment. Far from being enthusiastic supporters of social insurgency,

a conservative bias among polity members is often reported by researchers concerned with

legislative outcomes. McAdam highlights the conflict inherent in the relationship between institutional decision-makers and insurgent groups, stating that "elite groups did not so much stimulate black protest activity as seek to respond to it in ways that would minimize the threat it posed to their interests" (1982:233). Therefore, I wanted to learn how DSA is attempting to address these problems by asking informants: What efforts has DSA made to work with marginalized groups? And what steps have been made to enlist the active participation and leadership from members of these groups?

For the most part, respondents cited DSA's work with marginalized groups as a major deficiency confronting the organization. Heather explains that although she is frustrated with the lack of work her chapter has done with people of color, she is pleased with the work they are doing with the LGBTQIA+ community:

> One of the areas that Leftism historically struggles a little bit, and I think that's still evident in the DSA both at the national, from what I understand, level and at our local level. So, for example, we don't have any POC members at the local level, and you know that fixing that is something that we struggle to do. And I think representation at the national level is also not great, and I mean we tried to do some stuff at the local level. Like a few of our members from the education committee ran a month-long series on the Black Panthers. Well it was on Black liberation, and it included like Black Lives Matter and the Black Panthers.

Heather goes on to describe her chapter's work with the LGBTQIA+ community: "We run queer craft night, to you know create space for our queer members and members of the local queer community to get together, but yeah I think that's sort of the work we do with marginalized groups." Several other members shared Alexa's frustrations in their chapters' shortcomings when

effectively appealing to communities of color. Additionally, members such as James was

cautious not to make DSA appear to take the form of a vanguard organization. He explained that

something to bear in mind when approaching "marginalized populations is not to preach oh you

have to do come join DSA we're here to help you. We have all the solutions."

Rebecca said, "I mean that would be one of my biggest criticisms of the DSA is that I

don't necessarily see a lot of direct help and direct action [work with marginalized groups]."

Daniel agreed, "DSA's had kind of a complicated relationship with marginalized groups, the

hegemony within the DSA, unfortunately, is cisgender straight white people." He added, "class

is still a thing the DSA's struggling with. We need to do better outreach to lower-income

communities. Dan emphasized DSA's need to keep their relative privilege in perspective: "DSA

has a lot of downwardly mobile people, but we'd still be consider privileged over a lot of

marginalized people. We need to find ways to activate them while also respecting their resource

restraints." Melissa said, "we really are trying to keep our focus on class politics." And Jason

simply stated, "we're not doing enough." Many participants discussed the challenges of seeding

a new chapter and not being able to yet implement all the plans they have for DSA.

Although DSA's lack of work with marginalized groups was a point of contention for

most informants, there was some evidence of progress being made in that area. There were

several chapters that reported some measure of success working with marginalized groups.

Thomas described the work chapters in Tennessee have done:

> There was transporting a lot of detained immigrants from Texas up to New England, and
>
> they were putting them on Greyhound busses. And there were three stops in Tennessee
>
> that they were moving towards, I think Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville. And so all
>
> the DSA chapters in Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville organized a sort of relief,

reliefment [sic] effort at the Greyhound bus stops where those immigrants were being

taken. Oftentimes without any of their own family, and no translators of any kind, you

know. . . . So, a lot of DSA volunteers were there providing food or blankets or

translators if they were available. Trying to get them in contact with lawyers. That's just

like one general way reaching out to marginalized and oppressed communities. Looking

at the struggle they are in and trying to provide any assistance possible that we can as

socialists.

Although DSA members voiced criticism and frustration in the area of work with marginalized

groups, informants were able to articulate specific ways they are working as allies. Jeremy, also

with the Knoxville chapter, expanded on Thomas' comments:

So you know DSA, DSA members rather are heavily involved in things like ICE out of

East Tennessee, Allies of Knoxville Democratic Neighbors, Black Lives Matter. A bunch

of what I would describe as grassroots organizations that are led by not necessarily DSA

members as far as I'm aware, but again those people that are DSA adjacent. So that's

where I see most of the work.

In addition to its work as a community of allies supporting such efforts as mentioned by Thomas

and Jeremy, informants acknowledged the need to developed DSA in a manner that will

eventually attract the participation of members of the communities they have been working thus

far to assist. Amanda added talked about DSA's work in New York:

We have different working groups, and so it really just takes a lot of different forms. We

do a lot of coalition work across all of those working groups and our tenants. Like for

instance, I live in a community that's a strong West Indian West African population. And

my friend and I organized a tenant association in our building, which we did through

DSA work. And as part of that tenant association, we brought in the local tenant

coalition, which is made up of largely like West Indian people, and they also were a

partner to our push to strengthen renters' laws in Albany last year. We work a lot with

Make the Road. Which is a largely Latina organization. They've co-endorsed a number

of our candidates and worked on several of our issues groups together. We have

specifically in our North Brooklyn community in Senator Salazar's district. We have a

pretty active outreach campaign . . . and there's a Spanish language coordinator on the

branch organizing committee there who tries to provide work to plan events for Spanish

speakers and that kind of thing. But it really depends, most of our candidates, at least in

New York, are not white candidates, and those campaigns turned out to be a boom for

organizing with a coalition partner called Decriminalize New York. It is based around

decriminalization of sex work. Yeah, a lot of it takes different forms depending on the

work that you're doing.

Therefore, DSA's appears to be successfully working with marginalized communities, and in

some chapters, this has contributed to mobilization into the organization.

Other informants explained that DSA does a fairly good job of working with the

LGBTQIA+ community, but a real challenge thus far has been appealing to communities of

color. Brian explained:

We've tried to do different things. We've done like brake light repair sessions, which you

know at least in theory, should be of particular note for you know African Americans.

African American males especially. . . . I think there's an ongoing problem with working

with marginalized groups outside of LGBTQ+ folks, which I think DSA has a strong

representation from LGBTQ. Probably, overrepresentation from which is not like in a bad

way. We're generally 20-something, we're generally white, so how to expand that I think

that's struggle and I think that's something we need to do better.

Other informants described the measures their chapters are taking to enlist greater

participation and leadership from members of marginalized populations. "individual chapters

have set up some leadership quotas for non-men and people of color in the bylaws." Daniel

explained. "They said okay some members in the steering committee, or the leadership team

have to be non-white and non-male, that's been fairly easy to abide by for most chapters.

However, it comes off as tokenization frequently." Despite the challenges and perceptions of

tokenism, the literature on social insurgency would suggest that this is a necessary move. But as

Brandon said, "I mean you cannot expect that just because you are fighting for a police

accountability board that suddenly people of color are going to show up and get heavily

involved." Anthony said that efforts to work with marginalized groups have at times yield

negative responses: "They [DSA] lost a little bit of credibility in the Native American

community, I don't understand what's going on." Even though many chapters are actively trying

to address the lack of involvement with marginalized groups, other informants explained the

frustrations of trying to implement an effective strategy.

The dissenting voices represented by the political process perspective regarding suspicion

of the elite is incorporated into DSA practice. This could mean DSA may not apply as readily to

such criticisms. Members of the organization appear to be very much aware of the importance of

enlisting the participation and leadership of members of oppressed groups. Thomas, for example,

said:

Reaching out and working with marginalized and oppressed groups is one of the things I

think socialists are really learning as a failure for their own pasts. Just like broadly in

academia, that's why intersectionality now is more discussed more than it would've been 20 years ago. Because it's academically valuable and applicable to real situations around us, so helping out and reaching a helping hand to other communities that are being oppressed and struggling.

Occupy Wall Street was often critiqued for being too resistant to organization and institutionalization. This resistance, the criticism went, contributed to its ephemerality. Preoccupied with avoiding cooptation and institutionalization, Occupy protestors were unable to translate its protest into a lasting movement. It appears that DSA may have both been inspired by the Occupy protests and learned from some of its struggles. In particular, DSA has a much more established plan regarding, for example, how to incorporate members of oppressed populations into their organization. A step that they view as necessary for the success and longevity for building democratic socialism in the United States.

Finally, Angela explains that what she means by marginalized groups extends to include other aggrieved groups not mentioned in other interviews. Angela said:

I am primarily involved with the socialist feminist branch, and I'm a member of the eco-socialist group. And I've taken part in some of their actions, and through both of those, there's been a number of connections that we've made with indigenous folks in Minnesota. I think with eco-soc, I've mostly taken part in actions focused around the pipeline that is under construction in northern Minnesota, but that's still being fought. Because it goes through indigenous land and impacts indigenous water supplies and cultural sites. And I had another connection that kind of bridges the eco-soc and socialist feminist agendas in some ways is the they're called man camps. I think that's the colloquial term for them that popup around pipelines when they're being constructed, and

there's this a very strong connection between these man camps coming up and around

pipelines and an increase in rape and other things happening to folks. So that's been

something that we've been involved with. Indigenous-led campaigns. And we just

provide support. Showing up in person to rallies and protests at the capital and

participating in educational events too that are led by indigenous folks too. And better

train allies and accomplices so we can better support the folks that are leading these

efforts in the way that they are looking for support.

Angela introduces the idea of lending organizational support to progressive causes as a tactic.

This tactic was mentioned in other interviews, as well, and is something DSA emphasizes in an

attempt to not appropriate the activities of marginalized groups or their already established

organizations.

Conclusions

From the participation observation data I gathered, the scene I described about helps

facilitate mobilization, construct insurgent collective identities, and develop a sense of

community for DSA members. These members spoke of DSA in terms of a community where

they could socialize with people who share a common worldview. Social movement scholars

suggest that these linkages strengthen organizational bonds and may assist in the mobilization of

individuals occupying the same scene. Furthermore, if DSA is going to succeed where other

insurgent movements failed, the literature indicates that it needs to enlist the active participation

and leadership from the groups it represents. In other words, to avoid the challenges faced by

constituency-based movements. Although most of my informants expressed at least some level

of frustration with the DSA's failure to successfully appeal to marginalized populations

(particularly communities of color), DSA does appear to be aware of the problem as an

organization. This problem, faced at the nation level as well as most local levels, has led to the development of strategies designed to address this problem. The findings presented above demonstrate the structural and cultural dimensions of political opportunities as well as the importance of the construction and maintenance of a group identity to the further development of an insurgent movement.

Informed by the movements that followed Occupy Wall Street, from the Fight for $15, to the Black Lives Matter movement, to Sander's presidential campaigns, DSA appears to building the foundation for a political strategy to build socialism in the United States. These movements are expressions of a broad wave of moral outrage captured by the collaborations noted by several of my informants. DSA is establishing several collations from organizations from a variety of different issue orientations into its orbit. This connects these organizations to one another in ways that they have not been connected before. This, in turn, is expanding the scope of collaborations that these organizations could imagine undertaking in the future. Marginalized groups previously disconnected or only tangentially connected to one another are being absorbed into the same social movement community.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont ended his presidential campaign on April 8, 2020, concluding two runs that had elevated him as the symbol of the democratic socialist movement, and ushered in a new wave of progressive insurgents. Social movement organizations that are associated with the U.S. radical Left, most notably the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), endorsed and campaigned for Sanders in 2016 and again in 2020. By endorsing Sanders, DSA committed to participating in an electoral strategy on a national level, which mobilized tens of thousands of participants into the organization. Sanders' exit, following a strong performance in the first three states that voted in the presidential primaries, capped a stunning reversal of fortune for his supporters. The Democratic nomination had appeared to be in Sanders' grasp; by the end of February, however, Joe Biden surged to a decisive victory in South Carolina that initiated a rallying of moderate voters around the former vice president. The race ended as the United States found itself in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted in-person campaigning for both candidates and forced many states to delay their primary elections. To be sure, this was not the end that DSA had hoped for, yet several of the organization's ideological values were brought to the foreground through Sanders' campaigns. In recent years, the U.S. public discourse shifted towards questions regarding health care as a human right and how to empower the working class, effectively reshaping the rhetoric of the Democratic Party and leading some concerned citizens to DSA. However, Sanders' second failed presidential bid raises serious questions about the relevance and longevity of DSA and the future of socialism in the United States.

The Entrepreneurial Trace of an Insurgent Movement

The relationship between social movements and elite constituents has long been the source of debate for movement analysts. Resource mobilization theorists, such as McCarthy and Zald (1977), argue that social movements are dependent on elite sponsors to provide resources that facilitate movement emergence and ensure success. Meanwhile, critics of this entrepreneurial model have highlighted the ways in which elite patrons institutionalize or coopt movement goals (Cloward and Piven 1984; Piven and Cloward 1977; McAdam 1982). Resource mobilization theorists (e.g., Gamson 1975; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Oberschall 1978; Olson 1965), critical of the pluralist assertion that liberal democracies are open and accessible to all groups, assume that groups in modern society hold markedly different amounts of political capital. Only established polity members, groups possessing sufficient socio-economic resources, are insured that their interests are routinely considered in decision-making processes (Gamson 1975; Tilly 1978). Lacking such political power, most groups in liberal democracies hold virtually no bargaining power with which to advance their collective interests (McAdam 1982). Challengers, groups who lack bargaining leverage, therefore demonstrate relatively low levels of political participation despite the continuing provocation of inequalities under capitalism (Gaventa 1980; Gramsci [1929] 2000). What is required for movement emergence, according to resource mobilization theorists, is a generous contribution of resources from members of powerful groups external to the movement's mass base.

McAdam, conversely, argues that proponents of the resource mobilization perspective fail to "differentiate organized change efforts generated by excluded groups and established polity members" (1982:24). He adds that member-generated reform activities, illustrated by resource mobilization theorists to exemplify the beneficiary effects of elite sponsorship, "involve

only limited reforms pursued exclusively through institutional channels" (McAdam 1982:24).

McAdam, along with Piven and Cloward (1977), claims that elite involvement in social protest

may, in fact, impede insurgent movements through the process of cooptation. Although McAdam

claims to be motivated by a desire to develop a perspective that illuminates the continuities

between insurgent movements and institutionalized forms of politics, he inadvertently

reintroduces this dichotomy. The data I gathered from participant observation and in-depth

interviews reveal an artificial barrier between insurgent social movements and the

institutionalized political establishment.

Political Opportunities and Mobilizing Structures

Political process theorists (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996) claim that exogenous

factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization. These theorists attempt to demonstrate that

insurgent movements operating outside of mainstream political institutions are closely related to

more conventional political activity. The challenge facing researchers concerned with political

opportunity and insurgent politics is explaining which aspects of the external world affect the

development of social movements and how this development is impacted. McAdam describes

resource mobilization theory as a "deficient alternative" to classical collective behavior models,

which emphasized the causality of grievances to movement emergence and the irrationality of

participants (1982:20). One of his primary criticisms of the resource mobilization approach is its

insistence on the necessity of elite involvement in the insurgent efforts initiated by excluded

groups. He instead warns that constituency-based movements will likely contribute to the demise

of insurgent campaigns. In my research, however, I found evidence that an elite constituent, in

this case, Sanders, represents a political opportunity that mobilized some of his supporters into

DSA. Sanders, who as a member of the U.S. Senate certainly qualifies as a member of the

nation's elite, was routinely mentioned in my interviews as a major factor in participants'

decision to join DSA. The relative success of Sanders' presidential campaigns represented, to

several of my informants, the relevance of the principles of democratic socialism, and therefore

their motives for maintaining an active role in DSA. Many of my research participants were

made aware of DSA through the associational networks that the Sanders campaign helped forge.

Social movements scholars such as Diani (2004), treat social networks as predictors of individual

chances of becoming involved in a social movement. Specifically, movement participants often

become involved in specific social movements through previously established contacts. Many of

the DSA members I interviewed indicated that they discovered DSA either through their direct

involvement in or general interest in Sanders' presidential campaigns. The Sanders campaigns at

times placed disaffected Democrats, frustrated by the inability of the Obama administration to

effectively address the hardships related to the Great Recession, in contact with DSA. These

Democrats often expressed dissatisfaction with the corporate shift they observed in the

conservative transformation of the party, and in Sanders, they found a candidate that represented

their more progressive views.

DSA endorsed Sanders both in 2016 and in 2020, and their campaign efforts often placed

them into contact with other Sanders' supporters. DSA, as a social movement organization,

represents what proponents of the resource mobilization paradigm refer to as a mobilizing

structure, or an enduring organizational structure designed to sustain collective action (McAdam,

McCarthy, and Zald 1996). This social movement organization also mobilized participants in

associational networks that extended beyond disaffected Democrats. These networks include

members of aggrieved groups who were politicized during the turbulence of the 2008 financial

crisis and the ensuing Occupy Wall Street protests. Members of these groups were typically

younger in age and were generally more hostile to the Democratic political establishment. Sanders, to these participants, introduced an electoral strategy that could elevate many of the concerns of the Occupy protests to challenge the political establishment.

Sanders, who describes himself as a democratic socialist, represents a valuable resource to DSA recruitment. Participants often explained that their discovery of DSA, along with their mobilization into DSA, was due to Sanders' use of the democratic socialist label to describe his political perspective. At times, this self-recruitment technique was as simple as an internet search. DSA's webpage would appear in the search results, and inquisitive Sanders' supporters reported contacting the organization after reviewing the information available on the webpage. Although Sanders' use of democratic socialism as a concept to describe his political views is a significant resource for DSA recruitment, its effect is not limited to the serendipitous manner some participants were recruited into the organization. Democratic socialism represents a discursive framing device that organizational participants use to enlist new participants into DSA.

Framing Processes

The ideational factors and interpretive processes that were introduced by classical collective behavior theorists has been recovered by contemporary movement scholars concerned with framing processes, ideology, culture, and identity (Buechler 1993; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Polletta 2004; Snow 2004). Some of the primary critiques of the political process model advanced by these scholars concerns the alleged structural bias that they claim leads to the dismissal or misunderstanding of the relationship between culture, identity, and structure in movements. DSA members often reported a sense of community in their chapters that contributed to a collective identity constructed around an

evolving conceptualization of democratic socialism. Through participant observation, interviews, and DSA's propaganda materials, I was able to develop a composite definition of democratic socialism that emphasizes the need for the greater distribution of wealth in society, and the need for stronger policies designed to combat racial and gender discrimination. These concerns were present upon the organization's inception following the merger of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM) in 1982. DSOC, in conjunction with NAM's socialist-feminist ideology, sought to mobilize activists of color and feminists while continuing to work with organized labor (Gorman 1995; Schwartz 2017). Consistent with the historic roots of the organization, DSA members continue to regard gender and racial issues in addition to economic inequality as the primary social problems that democratic socialists seek to resolve.

Although DSA members described the organization's strategy designed to push the Democratic Party further towards the Left, they insisted that their political perspective differs from mainstream Democrats in one significant way. The DSA members I spoke with identified capitalism as the irreformable cause of economic, gender, and racial inequalities. Furthermore, they hold that capitalism corrupts any attempt at establishing a democratic society due to the exploitative relationship between capitalists and workers inherent to the capitalist system. In contrast to the Soviet model of socialism, DSA members argued that democratic socialism's principal objective is to democratize all sectors of modern society. Only by overcoming capitalism and establishing a socialist system can democracy truly be realized. Through DSA activities, insurgent challengers associated with several different political tendencies believe they can build a mass movement for socialism. These shared grievances, along with a general belief in the movement's future success, is what McAdam calls cognitive liberation.

For these participants, it was important not only to show solidarity with activists who share a similar worldview but also to develop strong relationships with members that extend beyond formal organizational activities. The social and spatial infrastructure described by participants represents a gateway to more active and prolonged engagement in the social movement due to the consistent exposure to movement norms in a low-pressure context (Leach and Haunss 2009). Accordingly, participants often described a process of constructing an idea of democratic socialism in informal settings that eased their mobilization into the social movement organization. Although proponents of the resource mobilization paradigm were critical of classical theorists who saw movement emergence as the consequence of social strain, political process theorists claim that participation is dependent upon a transformation of consciousness within a significant segment of the aggrieved population. This cognitive transformation, these researchers add, typically develops under conditions of strong group integration (McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977). My findings revealed that feelings of political efficacy are related to DSA's collective identity.

The progenitors of the resource mobilization paradigm correctly understood grievances as omnipresent in modern society and instead concentrated on the availability of resources and the development of political opportunities to understand movement emergence (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1999; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). However, Snow indicates that these theorists "failed to appreciate the extent to which material conditions like economic deprivation or unemployment are themselves subject to differential interpretation and therefore do not automatically constitute or generate mobilizing grievances" (2004:382-83). Piven and Cloward, in describing the necessity of the formation of an insurgent consciousness, said that "the social arrangements that are ordinarily perceived as just and immutable must come to seem both unjust

and mutable" (1977:12). Therefore, movement scholars began recognizing that grievances do factor into social movement emergence. Furthermore, interpretive processes were key for me in understanding the relationship between contemporary social problems and the recent increase in DSA membership.

A Persisting False Dichotomy

While introducing his political process model, McAdam (1982; 1999) expresses his concerns regarding the artificial barrier that has been erected between institutionalized and insurgent politics. He discusses this barrier in the context of a disciplinary division between political scientists and sociologists working in the field of social movements. Sociologists, McAdam explains, typically assess social movements without analyzing their impact on the institutional political establishment. Conversely, he argues that political scientists had (up to the time of his writing) conceptualized political power in mostly institutional terms, which contributes to a lack of understanding regarding the impact social movements have on institutionalized political processes. Echoing much of Tilly's (1973) concluding remarks regarding social protest, Gamson states: "In pace of the old duality of extremist politics and pluralist politics, there is simply politics" (1975:138). He adds: "Rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means. It is not some kind of irrational expression but is as instrumental in its nature as a lobbyist trying to get special favors for his group or a major political party conducting a presidential campaign" (1975:139). I contend that my research helps to establish the links between social movements and the institutional political establishment.

McAdam is critical of supportive elite/movement linkages in the case of moderate reform movements, and he is especially concerned about elite constituents undermining radical movement organizations such as DSA. However, my findings reveal a case where a member of

the established polity, Senator Sanders, represents a resource to the democratic socialist movement that contributed to the dramatic growth in DSA membership. McAdam's political process model, rather than allowing space for elite constituents, cautions that established polity members would not support insurgent political activity, because social movement organizations like DSA pose a threat to existing institutional arrangements in U.S. society. McAdam theorizes that elite sponsorship of a movement only occurs as a response to the potential threat represented by the mobilization of a mass-based insurgent movement. McAdam describes elite involvement of elites as invariably reflecting an "abiding conservatism" (1982:38). Tilly explains that this conservatism encourages existing members to "resist changes which would threaten their current realization of their interests even more than they seek changes which would enhance their interests" (1978:135). However, my findings yielded little evidence that Sanders, and the new guard of insurgents his campaigns inspired, are working towards institutionalizing the democratic socialist movement. Sanders' call for his supporters to support Biden's presidential campaign, to be sure, has been cited by some on the radical Left as incompatible with their movement. Indeed, DSA made a public statement in April 2020 that it would not endorse Biden for the 2020 election. Nevertheless, the Sanders campaign embodies many of the key tenets of democratic socialism, which continues to mobilize participants into DSA. I would encourage future researchers to follow up on my exploratory case study of DSA with empirical studies designed to chart the development or decline, of DSA, identifying the causal factors related to these outcomes.

The Future of U.S. Socialism

The opening sentence of Aronson's book *After Marxism*, published after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, summarizes the uncertain status of

socialism heading into the twenty-first century: "Marxism is over, and we are on our own" (1995:1). Socialism has a longer and deeper socialist tradition than is generally known featuring powerful organizers such as Eugene V. Debs and Marry Harris "Mother" Jones, as well as well established organizations including the Socialist Party of America (SPA) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). However, most socialists in the United States faced fierce challenges, both internally and externally, throughout much of the twentieth century. Sectarian splits, two World Wars (corresponding to two Red Scares), the Khrushchev revelations, Cold War paranoia, and the fall of communist regimes around the world, had, by the 1990s, contributed to widescale socialist movement abeyance. Around 2017, however, a new social movement and an organization that bares its name would mobilize, boldly organizing under the socialist banner. DSA emerged as the largest U.S. socialist organization since Debs' SPA in the early twentieth-century, recasting socialism as a fight for democracy and social justice in the face of increasing inequality and social unrest. The findings and analysis presented herein illuminate some of the factors that contributed to the dramatic increase in DSA membership that began in 2017. It is my contention that if DSA is going to succeed where other socialist movements have failed, advocates in the academic community must disentangle the complex factors that contributed to the emergence and growth of DSA.

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VITA

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