

RHETORIC OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

CMS 390R 06995 · Spring 2009

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Meets Mondays 3:00-6:00 p.m · CMA 3.130

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past eight years, the assumptions of neoliberalism—that corporate globalization would forestall economic crisis, that there is no better social system than capitalism, that preemptive war is justified and necessary, that society offers every person who works hard and keeps the faith has the same life chances, regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality—have fallen like a house of cards. Whereas during the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher could announce that “there is no alternative to capitalism” and Francis Fukuyama could declare the end of history (i.e., the end of major social transformation), the present economic crisis and upsurge of hope for change have prompted a rebirth of Keynesian liberalism; one can only expect that existing social movements will pick up momentum and that new social movements will arise from the gap between what the Obama administration promises and what it can deliver.

As Kenneth Burke observed, rhetoric is the study of the role of language in both the establishment of permanence and the making of social change. But rhetorical studies traditionally conceived tended to render the process of change as a matter of the rhetorical intervention of autonomous individuals, while structuralist and poststructuralist challenges to individualist humanism tended to overestimate ideological barriers to agentive change. The study of social movements and their discourses offers an alternative to either of these extremes, raising questions of how collective consciousness faithful to one’s experience and interests comes into being, and how groups are motivated to act in concert.

The study of social movements raises the question of instrumentality, but in a way removed from the “great man speaking well” (Quintilian) ideal, and removed from any easy faith that talk alone can remedy injustice. Perhaps these twin challenges—to both simple humanism and anti-humanism—are the source of rhetorical studies’ (pre- and post-structuralist) uneasiness with the rhetoric of social movements. This uneasiness is expressed in the three main grooves of social movement research: psychological studies of charismatic leadership and group identification; preoccupation with the subject of confrontation and anxiety about violence; and, under the influence of structuralism, the assertion that social movements should be conceived in terms of their symbolic meaning over and above their material outcomes.

The sociological study of movements poses its own questions about organization, identity formation, and mobilization within structures affording both opportunity and constraint. It is more ends oriented than rhetorical studies. In addition, sociological work more readily acknowledges the existence and force of institutional and material structures, especially that of the nation-state and its armed defense organizations. Sociology admits the possibility—even necessity—of instrumental violence in processes of social permanence and change.

Even so, both sociology and rhetoric made the discursive turn in the 1980s (along with cultural studies and the rest of the humanities), emphasizing constitution of identity over and above organized collective action in the public sphere. Truly, the turn began in the late 1960s, when the weight of Stalin's betrayals broke down the instrumentalist, working-class based political models of the Old Left. The post-WWII era had generated a new class of activists among students whose movements were more concerned with shifts in ideals and identities than working class revolution.

This broad sketch, however, is complicated by the movement against the war in Vietnam, to which resistance in Vietnam and rebellion among the working class troops were essential. In addition, the 1960s witnessed a revival in liberalism's faith in the capacity of individuals working within the liberal imaginary and capitalist system to make steady progress for civil rights on various fronts. Sociologists labeled these developments "new social movements" in contrast with the class-based and allegedly stubbornly outcome-oriented "old social movements" formerly guided in and by labor and various socialist traditions. "New" is not exactly a temporal category, however; debates are ongoing about the relationship of persuasion, organization and identity with economics and the state, and many social movements today would count as "old" social movements in their evolution and instrumentality.

Hence, entering the 1970s and 1980s, scholarly concern with civil engagement and participation in public politics boomed; combined with the structuralist critique of corporate mass media and political hegemony, this concern gave rise to new theoretical and critical work about the quality and nature of the liberal public sphere. Enter Jurgen Habermas, whose 1989 (in English) critique of the bourgeois public sphere's decline from its Enlightenment ideal had an extraordinary impact on the study of social movements. Out of a critique of the limits of a model of a singular, disinterested, bourgeois public sphere, feminist theorists and other groups concerned with the conditions of possibility for social change observed what came to be called "counterpublics," or

vernacular public spheres in which counter-hegemonic groups came to a sense of and organized themselves for engagement with existing power structures.

Communication studies—especially the study of rhetoric and argumentation—latched onto the idea of publics and counterpublics as a productive vocabulary for describing projects for social change in contemporary times. It is fair to say that counterpublics studies is the present intellectual home for social movement concerns in rhetoric. This area recognizes the reality of hegemony but also the capacity for challenging it; it is committed to the observation of how publics actually emerge and operate; it investigates unconventional sites and modes of critique and symbolic action; it has attempted to understand the relationship of discourses to institutions in a commitment to actual, institutional and material change; it is concerned with the capacity of individuals to confront and make demands of the state and its agencies.

In spite of this innovation, the distinction between identitarian, symbolic, and constitutive movements in discourse and instrumentalist, outcome-oriented, system-focused movements has persisted as a defining rubric for movement studies. Stalin's ghost still hovers over what social theorists call "the democratic project."

This course will survey these disciplinary shifts in historical context. Our main theoretical frame will be that of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, whose theory of hegemony, culture, ideology, and oppositional consciousness unifies the concerns of most social movement theory and history through the present day. The course is also committed to providing a comprehensive survey of U.S. social movements—from the War for Independence to the contemporary movement for gay civil rights—because it is difficult to find a coherent account of this history anywhere at the graduate level. The lessons of the past are key to understanding the conditions of possibility for change today.

TEXTS: REQUIRED

John Waite Bowers, Donovan Ochs, and Richard Jensen, *Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* (Waveland, 1993).

Stephen Browne and Charles Morris, Eds., *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* (Strata 2006).

Jeff Goodwin, *The Social Movements Reader* (Blackwell, 2003).

Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, Eds., *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001).

Howard Zinn, *People's History of the United States* (Harper-Perennial, 1999).

TEXTS: STRONGLY RECOMMENDED (will cover and assign long excerpts and facilitate the production of photocopied course packets):

- Joe Allen, *Vietnam: The Last War the U.S. Lost* (Haymarket Books, 2008).
Jack Bloom, *Race, Class and the Civil Rights Movement* (Indiana University Press, 1987).
John D'Emilio, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Duke University Press, 2002).
Luis Alberto Fernandez, *Policing Dissent* (Rutgers University Press, 2008).
Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*. (Belknap Press; 3rd Revised edition, 1996).
Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990).
Jose Correa Leite, *The World Social Forum: Strategies of Resistance* (Haymarket Books, 2005).
John Muckelbauer, *The Future of Invention: Rhetoric, Postmodernism, and the Problem of Change* (SUNY Press, 2008).
Rosalind Petchesky, *Abortion and Women's Choice* (Northeastern, 1990).
William Saletan, *How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (University of California Press, 2004).
Lance Selfa, *The Democrats: A Critical History* (Haymarket Books, 2008).
Sharon Smith, *Subterranean Fire* (Haymarket Press, 2007).
Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove, *Voices of a People's History of the United States* (Seven Stories, 2004).

REQUIREMENTS:

- Regular reading and informed participation in class discussion/weekly reading questions (1 information 2 argument 3 controversy) 15%
- One in-class debate (against a classmate) on assigned propositions 15%
- Two short papers responding to assigned questions on readings 15% ea.
- Seminar paper focusing on case study of the rhetoric of a social movement or movements 40%

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. *Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor.* By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

DAY	TOPICS	READINGS (*= packet)
Jan 26	Course framework	Gramsci, Prison Notebooks excerpt "The Shape of Things to Come," ISR
Feb 2	Rhetoric of Agitation and Control	Bowers, Ochs, Jensen 1,2,3,7,8
Feb 9	Basic Features of Social Movements	Goodwin, intros to all sections; McAdam et al., parts 1-2
	discuss: We can explain social movements in terms of cause and effect.	
Feb 23	Rhetoric Movements 1	Morris & Browne 1
	discuss: Social movements are distinct phenomena and should be studied by rhetoricians with a focus on instrumental outcomes.	
March 2	Rhetoric on Movements 2	Morris & Browne 2
	discuss: Confrontation is compatible with rhetorical perspectives.	
March 9	"Old" Social Movements labor & race	Kelley, Smith Bowers 6, Cloud in M&B
	debate: It is impossible to understand racism separately from capitalism; theories of white privilege as autonomous from economic power are fundamentally mistaken. OR: Labor struggles do enact useful theories of rhetorical identification conjoined with coercive agency.	
March 23	"Old" Social Movements gender & sex	Flexner, Petchesky, Saletan Bowers 7
	debate: The Right has won the battle over women's rights, especially with regard to abortion, because of the weakness of liberal philosophy against conservative values talk.	
March 30	The Language of Civil Rights civil rights movement	Bloom, *other *Haines
	debate: Militant, nationalist approaches to civil rights hurt the cause by advocating violence over persuasion. OR: The liberal ideographs of the civil rights movement constituted its members in terms of the prevailing ideology and conservatized the mainstream movement.	

April 6	Persuasion and Power in Antiwar Movement	D'Amato	debate: The rhetoric of the anti-war movement was insignificant among the factors leading to U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. The anti-war movement is an example of the limits of persuasion in social movements.
April 13	Hegemony of the Democratic Party	Selfa	debate: The Democratic party is the graveyard of social movements; its language co-opts them.
April 20 paper 2 due	New Social Movements gltq rights Counterpublics theory	D'Emilio, *Butler *Habermas *Fraser	debate: Same-sex marriage is an outdated and conservative demand in the context of new modes of doing social change.
April 27	Globalization and Resistance global justice movement Policing Protest	Leite Della Porta	debate: The state and its rhetoric are vulnerable to change from below. OR: The global justice movement demonstrated the ongoing viability of "old" social movements class-based models of social change.
May 4	Postmodernism and Social Movements	Muckelbauer, *Fraser *Cloud	debate: Revolutionary movements are irrelevant to rhetoric and destined to fail in (post)modern society. OR: Postmodernism offers no viable theory of social change. OR: Modernist rhetorical theory wrongly discounts new forms of discursive struggle.

**Seminar papers are due May 11; submit via email.
I am not inclined to give incompletes.**