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## Social movement rhetoric and the digital shift

Matt DuPuis

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## ABSTRACT

### SOCIAL MOVEMENT RHETORIC AND THE DIGITAL SHIFT

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This analysis explores how modern information and communication technologies and social networking sites have influenced and shaped modern social movements. By using Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton's model for the stages of social movements as a theoretical framework, this study conducts two case studies of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protest to better understand how modern social movements are adopting new technologies. Ultimately, this study reveals several shifts in the stylistic, substantive, and organizational patterns of modern social movement rhetoric.

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SOCIAL MOVEMENT RHETORIC AND THE DIGITAL SHIFT

BY

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem: Social Movement Rhetoric in the Modern Era

“It’s okay, I’m here with you” are the words of comfort offered up by the four-year-old daughter of Diamond Reynolds as they sat in the back of a police squad car in Falcon Heights, a suburb of Saint Paul, Minnesota, on July 6, 2016. The child's words were broadcast to millions over Facebook. Moments earlier, Reynolds’ 32-year-old boyfriend, Philando Castile had been pulled over for a broken tail light. During the traffic stop, after learning that Castile was armed, Officer Jeronimo Yanez shot Castile seven times at point-blank range, fatally wounding him (Berman, 2017). Immediately after Officer Yanez discharged his firearm, Reynolds began filming the interaction with police using Facebook’s live video function.<sup>1</sup> By noon the following day, Castile’s shooting death and Reynold's video, by then viewed 3.2 million times, were headline news (Stelter, 2016). The images of Castile’s bloodied body and the sounds of Reynolds’ sobbing permeated every corner of the Internet. The graphic event fueled the ongoing debate about police brutality against African Americans with social media sites ablaze with the words of activists and angry citizens. Twitter users expressed disgust with the act of violence

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<sup>1</sup> Live video allows for the simultaneously capturing, uploading, and sharing of digital data from a cell-phone or other internet-connected device.

they had witnessed. For example, U.S. Representative Barbara Lee of California tweeted to her 180,000+ followers: “#PhilandoCastile was shot in cold blood. The world watched it LIVE. What will it take for the justice system to value Black lives?” (@RepBarbaraLee, 2016). Other Twitter users shared messages of solidarity and condolences to the family, but they also extensively discussed the greater social implications of police-perpetrated acts of violence. Not insignificantly, social media and new technologies have changed where and how these crucial social dialogues are occurring and the speed with which they take place.

The ability to express dissent with or distrust in government institutions or private corporations is a cornerstone of American public life (Cameron, 1967). Protest and public expression are central features of the American civil process. Over the last half century, America has seen a rich history of protest and the subsequent development of different methods and forms of social movement rhetoric. From the 1963 “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” where 250,000 people gathered in solidarity to bring attention to race inequality and economic injustices (March on Washington, 1963), to the 2017 Women’s March, where an estimated 4.2 million people came out to support gender equality (Frostenson, 2017), social movements have changed in everything from their size and scope to the way they are organized and actualized.

Emergent technologies have had an immense impact on the way social movement rhetoric is created and disseminated. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are making it easier than ever for people to share messages with more people than ever before (Kaun, 2016). Not only has social media changed how messages are shared, but they have inevitably changed the way messages are received. Marshall McLuhan’s adage that the “medium is the message” rings ever true in this instance (McLuhan, 2005). Social media sites are often less about the articulation of political positions and more about the sharing of visceral emotional reactions.

Social movement rhetoric shifting to digital platforms is changing the stylistic and substantive characteristics of social movement rhetoric in ways that we as researchers are only starting to explore.

This study will focus on contemporary American social movement rhetoric and the influence of social media and emerging technologies on select protest and agitation efforts, namely the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. Although this study will develop two U.S.-based case studies, it is still important to note that all around the world there has been a steady rise in protest rhetoric over the last half decade. An international project, known as the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDEL-T), tracks social movement protests all over the globe dating back to 1979 (Youngs, 2017).<sup>2</sup> GDEL-T shows a steep rise in protests starting in 2011-2012, followed by a short dip, with resurgence in activity in 2015 which continues to rise.

This global phenomenon has been reflected in the American social consciousness as the United States has seen a steep rise in protest in recent years. Some of the largest scale protests ever occurring on U.S. soil have happened within the last five to six years (Chenowith, Peroski, Pressman, & Thurber, 2017). As this study highlights, the most prominent examples include the Black Lives Matter Protests<sup>3</sup> and the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests<sup>4</sup> (Chenowith et al., 2017). These movements and others like them will provide a useful foundation for discovering how these changes have manifested themselves. Social movement rhetoric is changing and the

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<sup>2</sup> GDEL-T is an online data archive that continuously canvasses print, broadcast, and web news to track global events and social responses to them.

<sup>3</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement has formed as a response to the increasing visibility of police brutality perpetuated on black citizens in America (Clayton, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> During 2016 and early 2017, protestors gathered in North Dakota to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline which posed an environmental threat to tribal land (Worland, 2016).



catalyst for the shift is the transition of this rhetoric from a physical platform to a digital platform. This thesis will explore several trends in terms of the stylistic, substantive, and organizational changes that can be observed in social movement rhetoric. More specifically, social movements have seen changes in their motivations, how they are catalyzed, and how they are led.

First, and perhaps one of the most recognizable trends, is the diversification and segmentation of social movement rhetoric. While protests differ in goals and methods as mobilized individuals respond to different rhetorical exigencies,<sup>5</sup> it seems that individual protestors or activist groups are focusing on an increasingly wider range of issues. Some of the protests that GDEL-T has covered, such as those seen in Venezuela, are about total government restructuring, total revolution (Taylor, 2017). Others, meanwhile, are commenting on overarching structures like capitalism or neoliberalism, such as the Occupy movement which has had different iterations all over the world (Gautney, 2012). There are also protests that focus on very specific issues. Protests can concern things as small as bus fares to the policy decisions concerning the Federal Communication Commission's stance on net neutrality.<sup>6</sup> Digital media has allowed people to connect with others who are affected by specific or small-scale issues in a way that was not possible previously.

Diversification and segmentation has not stopped smaller groups of people from coming together. Most protests are conglomerations of people who might share similar views on one or

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<sup>5</sup> As defined by Bitzer (1968), an exigence is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (p. 6). Bitzer further argues: "An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> Net neutrality "is the principle that individuals should be free to access all content and applications equally, regardless of the source, without Internet Service Providers discriminating against specific online services or websites" (Kamal & Getachew, 2017).

two points of protest but whose end-goals and methods might vastly differ (Chapman, 2010). Consequently, we may find people arguing for a total system overhaul at the same protest as those arguing for a five-cent reduction in public transportation costs. Yet, it seems that most protestors have a very singular view of the protests they are taking part in. As Youngs maintains:

For those working on or exercised by corruption, the current protest surge represents a global struggle against corruption. For democracy campaigners and experts, it is a new uprising in favour of democracy. For critics of capitalism and neo-liberalism, it is part of a growing anti-capitalist revolt. For environmentalists, it tends to be interpreted as an outgrowth of campaigning on natural resource exploitation and mining rights. (2017)

More and more people may be showing up to express discontent, but they are not necessarily communicating with each other about the problems they are trying to address.

Second, the changes are evident in more than just the subjects of protests. When looking at the organizational patterns of social movement rhetoric, it appears there is a growing trend of reactionary politics as opposed to proactive coordination. Smaller scale protests are being organized and conducted following specific heinous incidents. For example, the protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States were initially small-scale protests that sprang up in response to specific instances of police brutality but then eventually began to encompass a wider set of social inequalities in American social strata (Shin, 2017). Some of the most powerful protests come from long systemic issues being brought to a head by a catalytic event.<sup>7</sup> Social media and digital technologies have made it easier than ever to share these catalytic events. For example, on July 17, 2014, a video shot on a cellphone surfaced. The video depicted a man, Eric Garner, being placed in a chokehold by a police officer while he can be heard yelling "I can't breathe" eleven times before losing consciousness. Within twenty-four

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<sup>7</sup> Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2012) characterize "catalytic events" as events that "exacerbate the social situation or exigence" to which agitators respond (p. 96). As Darsey (2009) notes, these triggering events come about "outside the bounds of movement strategy" but nevertheless shape "subsequent discourses of the movement" (p. 58-59).

hours, the video had been viewed two-and-a-half million times (Associated Press, 2015). Garner lost his life and his death catalyzed a series of rallies involving thousands of individuals in cities across the country during the following two days (Bankoff, 2014). New digital technologies not only allowed for the recording of this event but for its dissemination on an unprecedented scale.

Third and lastly, the observable organizational changes extend beyond movement's motivations. New social movement rhetoric has seen the emergence of the "leaderless" movement (Gautney, 2012). The term was first and most liberally applied to the Occupy Wall Street Movement. As social movement rhetoric is relying more on social media to facilitate, organize, and accomplish all the goals of a movement, there are fewer central leaders and organizers that can be identified. Although there is still space for traditional organizers and formal organizations, such as non-governments organizations (NGOs) or minor political parties, it seems that there is some level of mistrust between demonstrators and organizers (Naím, 2014). For example, in February of 2018, one of the principal organizers and co-presidents of the Women's March, Tamika Mallory, attended a speech delivered by Minister Louis Farrakhan directed towards the Nation of Islam (Lockhart, 2018). During the presentation, Farrakhan made several anti-Semitic, homophobic, and transphobic comments which many found highly offensive (Lockhart, 2018). Participants of the Women's March pointed to Mallory's involvement as a sign that she was not prepared as an organizer to protect and fight for the rights of all members of the march (Lockhart, 2018). Whether or not she held the same beliefs as Farrakhan, activists no longer trusted Mallory to speak on their behalf.

This shift has raised questions of legitimacy from detractors, change agents, and government agents alike. While questions of legitimacy have always been raised regarding social movement rhetoric, the shifting of this rhetoric from the streets to digital platforms has only

made those questions more pervasive and frequent (Davies, 2016). Social movement rhetoric is about addressing systemic inequalities, and there will always be individuals and institutions invested in maintaining the status quo. Social media may have simply provided new fodder for an old argument. Nonetheless, it is important to explore how new technologies have legitimized or delegitimized the rhetoric surrounding social movements.

A study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute found that incoming college students are more likely than ever before to take part in some form of political protest (Eagan, Stolzenberg, Bates, Aragon, Suchard, & Rios-Aguilar, 2015). Social movements have been an integral part of American society for centuries. Understanding how these dialogues are happening and how they are changing is critical to furthering effective discourse in an increasingly volatile political quagmire. To best understand these developing changes, the research question must be posed: "How has social media and new technology altered the way social movements organize and communicate both internally and externally?"

### Overview of Critical Framework: Rhetorical Study of Social Movements

Rhetorical criticism is something humans do daily. At its most basic, it is the interpretation of meaning stemming from the symbolic communication that takes place between people. We often see interesting art, hear a moving speech, or watch an emotionally impactful advertisement and ask ourselves what it means, what purpose it serves, and whether (or how well) the artifact accomplishes its goal. These are just some of the questions that arise when consuming media with a critical eye. Rhetorical criticism as a method of inquiry allows the

researcher to systematically conduct distinctive and in-depth analyses on a range of diverse rhetorical acts and artifacts (Foss, 2009).

Rhetorical criticism as a tool of discovery often eludes definition. This might be because many rhetoricians often approach their research from highly individualized perspectives.

Initially, at the core of rhetorical criticism is, of course, *rhetoric*. When the word rhetoric is used, people often conjure up thoughts of obtuse language or perhaps large-scale speeches meant for the masses, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s infamous "I Have a Dream" speech. When it comes to the study of rhetoric, however, the subjects of interest are considerably broader. For the purposes of this study, Foss's (2009) definition of rhetoric will be used as a foundation:

"Rhetoric is defined as the human use of symbols to communicate. This definition includes three primary dimensions: (1) humans as the creators of rhetoric; (2) symbols as the medium for rhetoric; and (3) communication as the purpose for rhetoric" (p. 3). Importantly, most human interaction can be construed to have some sort of meaning. A rhetorician's job is to analyze communicative artifacts to shed light on the rhetorical processes that we engage in as humans.

Rhetorical criticism aims to make sense of the symbolic communication produced by humans through systematic analysis. Foss (2009) defines rhetorical criticism as

a qualitative research method that is designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes. Thus, definition includes three primary dimensions: (1) systematic analysis as the act of criticism; (2) acts and artifacts as the objects of analysis in criticism; and (3) understanding rhetorical processes as the purpose of criticism. (p. 6)

The systematic analysis of rhetorical acts and artifacts allows the researcher to limit value judgments, moving beyond how a message makes an audience respond, to explore the characteristics of the message or act itself.

A critical difference between what the lay public does when evaluating a media message and what a rhetorician does when analyzing a rhetorical artifact is that the “rhetorician engages in rhetorical criticism to make a contribution to rhetorical theory” (Foss, 2009, p. 7).<sup>8</sup> Theory is a researcher’s attempt at sense-making of the world around them. In rhetorical criticism, this process constitutes answering questions about how rhetoric is developed, disseminated, and received.

### Social Movement Criticism

Social movement criticism is the systematic analysis of rhetoric created by participants of social movements. While there are numerous approaches, they share some commonalities. Our contemporary understanding of social movement rhetoric is heavily influenced by Leland M. Griffin’s 1952 article, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements” (Burghardt & Jones, 2017). Here Griffin argues for a paradigmatic shift in scholarship, noting that traditional methods of rhetorical criticism analyzing the works of a single orator were unduly limiting the field of study (Griffin, 1952). Griffin observed that historical movements had definable beginnings, progressions, and terminations (Burghardt & Jones, 2017). This insight gave fruitful categorizations for further study. Social movement criticism concerns itself with questions of how people organize, how messages are created and shared, how movements fall apart, and so on.

A rudimentary observation but still an important one to this discussion is that the term social movement itself indicates some form of action by the term *movement*. Social movement

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<sup>8</sup> For a dissenting view on the necessity of theory-building in rhetorical criticism, see Darsey (1994).

criticism places as much value in how a message is crafted and shared as it does on the message itself. Analyzing an act of public protest can be just as illustrative as analyzing the signs and other physical artifacts produced through protest.

Griffin outlines specific questions a researcher should ask when conducting a rhetorical study of a historical movement. First, “what should be the point of focus in the movement study?” (Griffin, 1952). An inherent part of social movements is the actual *movement*. That is, they all have a trajectory or path. When selecting an artifact or object of analysis, the scholar must isolate the chronological point that will best help answer the specific research question. A second question a researcher must answer when conducting this kind of study is: “what kind of movement should the student select for study, and how much of the movement should he [sic] study? (Griffin, 1952). Griffin argues that any movement, regardless of its size or success is worthy of analysis. Sometimes knowing why a movement failed is more interesting than knowing why another succeeded. The third question forces the researcher to question the rhetorical purpose of messages. Do they seek to protect the status quo or change it? The fourth question concerns criteria for appraisal of social movement rhetoric. When looking at a movement, the researcher should pay attention to the effect of the messages. The researcher must also pay heed to the context in which the rhetorical action takes place. For example, when evaluating an artifact from the early American women’s rights movement, it may be interesting to analyze it through the lens of the Woman's March of 2017. However, it is imperative to at least start within the immediate context in which the rhetoric is situated. For the last question, which deals with how to apply research once completed, Griffin posits that the role of a social movement rhetorician is akin to that of a rhetorical historian. That is, the researcher’s role is to

describe past situations to help shed light on current situations and to possibly provide prospective solutions or useful insights.

### Literature Review: The Role of Digital Media in Social Movements

This study aims to provide new observations about social movement rhetoric in America in the digital age. To accomplish this, it is necessary to first conduct a survey of previous research concerning this relatively new but rapidly developing interest area in the field of communication. As new media develops and digital media expression expands, research has attempted to catalogue and analyze these trends. Although some scholars who rigidly adhere to traditional modes of inquiry, there is a growing consensus that digital media have vastly increased the ability of the average citizen to participate in social movements and made it easier than ever for movements to mobilize (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013).

The phrase “digital activism” is broadly used to “describe different forms of activism that utilise digital technology” (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 478). Its usage dates to the mid-1990s and the conception of the Internet and the web. At its core, digital activism forces researchers to consider more fully the relationship between technology and politics. Compared to some other forms of activism, digital activism is very much in its fledgling stage. Even still, Gerbaudo (2017) posits that there are two discernable waves in the development of this style of social movement rhetoric.

The first wave of digital activism, beginning in the mid-1990s, is marked by “a number of projects and initiatives waged by tech and alternative media activists of the anti-globalisation movement, including the alternative news site Indymedia, as well as a number of alternative



mailing lists and early hacker (or hacktivist) groups and labs” (Gerbaudo, 2017, pp. 478-479). The first wave is populated by individuals who can be labeled as “cyber-autonomists”. With a focus on individual liberty and the right to be free from interference of the institution, pirate radio stations and other like-minded organizations were emblematic of this first wave and consequently the larger counter-culture movements that began to develop in the 1970s and 80s (Gerbaudo, 2017). Cyber-autonomists viewed the Internet as a space of autonomy. A space that is meant to be free from both the regulation and surveillance of governing bodies.

The second wave is where the social movement case studies developed in this study are squarely placed. The second wave “coincides with the rise of the so-called web 2.0 Internet of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, which has been accompanied by the rise of world-famous hacker collectives” (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 479).<sup>9</sup> Social media sites have drastically changed the landscape when it comes to digital activism. Social media sites gave birth to the inception of “cyber-populists,” who reflect the ideals and principles of the second wave. The cyber-populist “sees the Internet as a space of mass mobilization in which atomized individuals can be fused together in an inclusive and syncretic subjectivity” (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 480). The second wave truly recognizes the connective power that new digital media offers.

The current body of literature concerning digital activism is influenced heavily by a techno-deterministic perspective that believes “the adoption of a certain kind of platform, say Facebook or Twitter, automatically defines the form of activism channelled through it. This approach stems from a simplistic view of technology’s effects.” (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 479) While this assertion is not without merit, and does provide a useful framework in which to view the

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<sup>9</sup> Hacker collectives are organized groups of individuals who utilize computer programming skills to promote ideals of free speech, open access, government transparency, etc., such as Anonymous, Lulzsec, and 15-M. Members are sometimes referred to as “hacktivists.”

ability of technology to shape activism, it often over simplifies a complex issue. This techno-deterministic approach often ignores some of the critical components of social movements such as the contributing socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. This analysis seeks to create a more complete and complex picture of social movement rhetoric. A description that is more reflective of the cyclical relationship between technology and activism. Their relationship is not linear, both in turn shape the other.

Digital media has come to play a critical role in civic engagement and political activism over the last couple years (Morador, 2016). Modern protests exist within a hybrid place, where the lines between the streets and the websites that social movement have a presence on are increasingly blurred (Castells, 2015). There is debate concerning the role of digital networks in protest, with one side arguing they are critical to removing barriers for participation and make movements more inclusive, and the other raising questions of the true capability of the Internet and new technologies to create genuine participation in a movement (Fuchs, 2012). This tension is especially

evident in relation to social media platforms (such as Facebook or Twitter), which either raise apologetic discourse, underlining their importance in creating alternative channels of participation, or derogatory discourses, emphasizing the temporary and inconsistent nature of these social media, and equally warn about the risk of monitoring and electronic surveillance by companies and authorities. (Simoes & Campos, 2016, p. 135)

Research is far from reaching a consensus on the role that social media plays in activism. Some researchers have attempted to identify more specific dimensions in which these new tools are used. Simoes and Campos developed eight fundamental dimensions for the use of social media: debate and reflection, organization and logistics, mobilization, communication, recruitment, advertising, social networking, and event planning (2016). These dimensions are not mutually exclusive and are also not exhaustive but illuminate the fact the social movements are finding a

variety of ways to utilize digital media. By looking at contemporary examples, this analysis hopes to contribute to the understanding of the role these new tools play in social movements.

Most contemporary research situates digital activism as a supplemental medium for social movement rhetoric. There is some research that has sought to understand how digital activism has altered a citizen's ability to participate in public discourse. This research views digital activism as a non-traditional or alternative form of political involvement. It also tries to answer where it fits into existing rhetorical theory (Simoes & Campos, 2016; Dahlgren, 2011). The speed at which technology develops make this approach difficult because as soon as a researcher might establish a relevant use of digital media in modern activism, a new technology will appear that alters the relationship between. Research tends to develop at a slower rate than the technology they seek to study. This presents a gap in the research, where scholarship is more focused on the after-effects of emergent technologies rather than about how these advancements are shaping rhetoric.

One gap in contemporary research that this analysis hopes to fill is that much of the existing literature is focused on movements outside of the United States. From studies concerning vegan activists in Turkey (Erben & Balaban-Sali, 2016) to an explosion of research covering the Arab Spring that was centered in Egypt (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012) there has been considerably more research outside of the United States on the role of digital media in social movements (Lim, 2012; Lee & Ting, 2015; Petray, 2013; Trere, Jeppesen, & Mattoni, 2017).

It is nearly impossible to think about modern social movements without giving consideration to the role that digital media now plays. As research supports, "the internet is not only increasingly presenting itself as a complementary space for exchanging information,

communicating and creating networks, but it has also been affirmed as a proper space for public participation” (Simoes & Campos, 2016, p. 142). Understanding the role digital media plays will be critical in understanding social movements in the future and this analysis seeks to answer some of the questions that are being raised through recent scholarship.

### Scope of Analysis: Social Movement Rhetoric from the Roots Up

This analysis aims to create a descriptive summarization of major social movements since the introduction of the Internet and the subsequent creation of social media sites such as Facebook. To do this, the study will analyze two major movements, tracing their genesis through termination (if that has occurred). Specifically, it will be analyzing movements that have captured headlines and space in the collective conscious of the American public over the last five years, with both physical and digital expressions of protest. Though each of the included major movements can have their lineages traced farther back, this study will go as far back as 2013 and the modern inception of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Craven, 2015). It will also look at the inner workings of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. The analysis will rely heavily on primary documentation of the testimony of activists and organizers disseminated through social media platforms and public speeches.

Considering this analysis is primarily concerned with the impact of social media and new technologies it is important to note that this study will be utilizing non-traditional sources. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, independent blogs, and other traditionally less reputable sources will be used to encapsulate the true scope of this issue to best answer the question posed about these developing digital platforms. These sites often function as not just a means for

sharing rhetorical artifacts (pictures of your protest signs) but as an organizing tool for activists. Exploring their uses without utilizing primary documentation of it would create an incomplete picture.

### Preview of Chapters

To best analyze and explore these shifting trends, this study will first establish a relevant foundation within the existing literature (Chapter two). The third chapter will explore what technological and social factors led to these trends. Understanding how the Internet functions and in what ways social media has changed the landscape will help create a more complete picture of the issue at hand. Next, it is necessary to look at two case studies to evidence these trends and more fully explore how these changes have manifested themselves.

The first case study, chapter four, will closely analyze the inception and workings of the Black Lives Matter movement. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was first used in 2013. The sentiments that the movement embodies are not new; it shares strong parallels with the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s (Clayton, 2018). The 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was the catalyst that gave this movement new life (Craven, 2015).<sup>10</sup> Understanding how this hashtag turned into a campaign and then into a movement will illuminate the role digital media played in its creation.

The second case study, chapter five, will examine the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, a social movement concerning both environmental rights and the rights of America's Indigenous

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<sup>10</sup> A hashtag is a word or phrase that follows a pound sign (#) and is used to categorize messages on a specific topic.

people. In December of 2016, thousands of protestors stood fast in the face of security guards armed with water cannons and bullets in an initially successful attempt to block the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline (Visser, 2017). The pipeline was intended to transport crude oil from northern domestic wells to distribution centers in Illinois. One of the most interesting parts of this story is that, in conjunction with the thousands of protestors that stood on the protest line in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, over one-and-a-half million individuals used Facebook's check-in feature to distort police perceptions of crowd size and location (Kennedy, 2016).<sup>11</sup> This is a clear example of how social media has opened new avenues for rhetorical protest.

The final chapter, chapter six, will explore the implications of digital trends in social movement rhetoric for researchers and activists. This chapter will also expound upon limitations of the study and discuss directions for future research.

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<sup>11</sup>Facebook's 'check in' feature allows individuals to geo-tag themselves at businesses or landmarks. Geo-tagging reveals an individual's geographical position using the Global Position System (GPS).

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### A Model of Agitation and Control

Social movements at their core seek to address imbalances of power perceived to be unjust. The balance of power rests in the hands of both activists and the institutions to which they are opposed. To understand how these opposing forces push back on each other, and in turn lead to a cycle of reactionary politics, their components can be unpacked and more fully explored. Neither social movements nor institutional organizations are exempt from external influences and understanding how these two sides of the same coin interact will be crucial to understanding institutional responses in the modern era. This study will employ Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz's (2010) model of agitation and control developed in their text *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*. This model explores the interactions between social movements and the establishment which will provide insight into the tactics and strategies of both the oppressed and the oppressor. This section will create a framework in which to understand social movement rhetoric by defining the related concepts.

Initially, the authors begin by defining *agitation*: “Agitation exists when (1) people outside the normal decision-making establishment (2) advocate significant social change and (3) encounter a degree of resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal

discursive means of persuasion” (Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, & Schulz, 2010, pp. 3-4). They continue, *control* is defined simply in opposition to agitation as “the response of the decision-making establishment to agitation” (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 4). Although, as the authors point out, this definition of agitation is flawed by vague language such as “significant social change” and “a degree of resistance,” it nevertheless provides a necessary foundation for understanding the activities of change-seeking collectives and the context in which these activities take place.

In terms of control, in most situations the institution or establishment holds a monopoly on legitimate power (Bowers et al., 2010). Legitimate power is comprised of two components. First, legislation, or the power of creating policy. Second, enforcement, is the power of the carrot and the stick. The ability of the institution to reward positive behavior and provide punitive measures for undesired behaviors (Bowers et al., 2010). While the term “control” is not narrowly defined by the authors, they do provide a more practical primer on what control looks like:

Establishments have a distinct advantage over agitators because of their superior power and their ability to adjust to activists’ tactics...members of the establishment have greater control over language, the mass communication media, and other channels of influence, information, expertise, agendas, and settings because of their wealth power, and status. (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 9)

There is a clear separation between the agitators and those in power<sup>1</sup> and everything from policy decisions to infrastructure design can reinforce that hierarchy. The establishment typically has considerably more resources at its disposal than the side of the agitator. They establish the language that frames the policy debates that citizens engage in. The establishment decides the rules by which everyone must abide.

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<sup>1</sup> Bowers et al. made a note to highlight the fact that a member of the institution cannot be considered an agitator so long as they are a member of the establishment



Agitation can be further broken down into two categories, agitation based on vertical deviance and agitation based on lateral deviance.

Agitation based on vertical deviance is much more direct and typically clearly ideologically situated and articulated. It “occurs when the agitators accept the value of the system of the establishment but dispute the distribution of benefits or power within that value system” (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 7). The issues that this style of agitation is geared towards are more simplistic because they are first and foremost concerned with the distribution of resources within an environment, not with changing that environment. This type of agitation typically seeks a concession or compromise from the establishment as its end goal. The prime example of this being early American labor movements where the workers had no problem with the dominant economic system (capitalism) but had grievances with how money was split between wages and other company expenditures.

In juxtaposition, agitation based on lateral deviance “occurs when the agitators dispute the value system itself and seek to change it or replace it with a competing value system” (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 7). These social movements are typically less direct and usually much more complex because they are dealing with larger-scale issues. While most agitators are comfortable working outside of the system, in instances of lateral deviance the goal might sometimes be the complete removal of the system. Compromise is made difficult by the fact that agitation based on lateral deviance calls for either the abolishment or the complete reimagining of an institution. This style of agitation also encompasses some of the more iconic (and in some cases frankly wacky) rhetorical strategies. This is because “the agitators’ ideology and demands may be difficult for the establishment and the general public to understand because the agitators will often display symbols, organize events, and behave in unusual ways to symbolize their

rejection of society” (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 8). The rejection of society's norms and standards is often seen manifested in the subversion of pop culture used in graffiti and performance art.

As was previously mentioned, the establishment has the means of legitimate power, but that is not the only source of social power. Bowers et al. utilize French and Raven’s five bases of social power as scaffolding for discussing the distribution of power<sup>2</sup> between agitators and the establishment. The five bases include legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, referent power, and expert power (Raven, 1993).

Since legitimate power was previously discussed, this section will begin with reward power. Reward power is the ability to give benefits like monetary compensation or improved social status. For example, a recruiter could offer someone a free t-shirt for a signature on a petition.

Coercive power is derived from the threat of punishment (Bowers et al., 2010). This can be easily exemplified by the American penal system. If you as a citizen participate in an un-sanctioned protest, the government can deter you by threat of imprisonment or a fine.

Referent power comes from the formation of strong interpersonal bonds (Bowers et al., 2010). An individual holds referent power if those around them hold them in high esteem. Someone might be convinced to join a cause because a friend whose values they put weight in is already a part of that movement.

Lastly, there is expert power, which stems from the belief that power in a specific situation should be relegated to the person with most knowledge in that topic area (Bowers et al.,

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<sup>2</sup> Bowers et al. recognized three general characteristics of power “(1) the need for social power in some form is almost a universal attribute of Western Culture. (2) An individual or a group seldom gives up power voluntarily to another individual or group. (3) The exercise of social power is satisfying in itself to most individuals in Western Culture” (2010, p. 14).

2010). Institutions often rely on expert power as a means of silencing discourse. For example, in the gun control debate, antagonists to gun reform often refocus the debate on specific gun knowledge (like how many bullets can an AR-15 fire in one minute) and place stock in people who are most familiar with guns. They privilege information sourced from military veterans and gun lobbyists above all else.

These forms of power, simplistic as they are, are the foundation from which social movements exert control using persuasive rhetorical strategies. Bowers et al. outline several key descriptors for the distribution of power between groups:

Power is likely to be distributed in this manner: (1) By definition, the establishment always controls legitimate power. However, legitimate power alone is insufficient to maintain an establishment in its position of control. (2) The establishment normally is capable of exerting coercive power. Only rarely does an agitational group have coercive power... (3) Both the establishment and the agitators have some reward power... (4) The agitators must depend almost completely on referent power and expert power. (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 16)

Understanding this distribution of power sheds lights on the potential tactics and strategies that an agitator or member of the establishment is most likely to use.

One of the primary tactics that both agitators and the institution employ is the rumor. It is one of the most prevalent strategies and can be an incredibly powerful tool. A rumor “occurs when information is passed from one individual to another in the absence of any trustworthy official source” (Bowers et al., 2010, p. 18). This misinformation, intentional or not, spreads fast and can cause people to act in ways they would not if they had the full story. Bowers et al. identify four conditions that must be present for a rumor to develop. First, ambiguity must be present. There must be more than one plausible explanation. Second, the subject of the rumor must be relevant to the person spreading it, or else they will not spread it. Third, trustworthy official explanations must not be present. If it is easy to verify a rumor’s falsity, then it most

likely will not be the most effective rumor. Fourth and finally, the conflict in question must be dramatic. Without tangible consequences or stakes, the rumor has no reason to exist. While at the time of Bower et al.'s (2010) publication the authors recognized how easy the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the Internet had made it to share and spread rumors, it is doubtful they could have predicted the sheer amount of curated fake content the Internet is now producing. With the rise of social media, it has become easier to spread rumors and misinformation and to do so on an unprecedented scale. Understanding how the distribution of power is being affected by modern technology is a crucial component of this discussion.

The model of agitation and control explores the complex interplay between members of the establishment and members of a movement. Social movements are ever-changing entities characterized by constant change and unpredictability. This model allows for a deeper understanding of what motivates those on the inside of a social movement and on the outside to act in the way they do.

### Life Cycle of a Social Movement

As previously mentioned, historical movements have clearly definable beginnings, progressions, and termination stages. Some rhetoricians have taken this a step further and outlined more specific stages in the life-cycle of a social movement. Considering this analysis is highly concerned with the organizing principles of social movements, providing a framework to understand how a movement begins, proceeds, and ends is imperative. In *Persuasion and Social Movements* (2012), Stewart, Smith, and Denton outline five stages that a social movement might go through: genesis, social unrest, enthusiastic mobilization, maintenance, and termination. By

breaking this communicative process down into identifiable phases, the components of a complex system are more easily understood. Once applied to the case-studies at hand, this theoretical framework will provide a means for the systematic evaluation of more modern social movements and will be crucial to answering questions about how new social movements organize and communicate with internal and external audiences.

Stage one is *genesis*. Though there can be any number of contributing factors to the creation of a social movement, there are a couple characteristics that exemplify the beginnings of a social movement according to Stewart, Smith, and Denton. “Social movements typically begin during relatively quiet times with respect to the issue that protestors are addressing. The people, media, and institutions may be unaware of a problem or see it as insignificant or of low priority.” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 90) Before there can be a collective, individuals must start to recognize that there is a problem. During the genesis stage

individuals scattered geographically and unknown to one another perceive an ‘imperfection’ in the existing order. This imperfection may be institutional or individual corruption, abuse of power, inequality, a threat to one’s status, an identity crisis, an unfilled ‘legitimate’ expectation, or an environmental crisis. (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 90)

This boiling unrest is sometimes considered part of a “pre-genesis” stage, it is often incredibly difficult to track. Take for example the period of economic turmoil in the United States in the early 2000s that led to an economic collapse and bred that concerns that gave birth to the Occupy Wall Street movement (Stekelenburg, 2012).

This stage of the movement is often led by intellectuals or “prophets,” individuals who “lead through their words, strive for perfection, and work for the good of society” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 91). These early figures in a movement are often more concerned with expressing philosophical commitments than they are with actual agitation toward the establishment. The

leaders of the movement at this stage, “the thinkers”, use their available means of persuasion in things like “scholarly essays, editorials, songs, poems, pamphlets, books, sermons, lectures, and websites designed to transform perceptions of reality...and self” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 91). There is typically very little clash during the genesis stage because the movement has failed to gain legitimacy or visibility at this point.

As is true of the subsequent movement stages, there is no definite time-frame in which the genesis stage occurs: “the length of the genesis stage varies from movement to movement and depends not only on the skills and adaptability of protesters but also on social conditions and events” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 91). There is no way to predict when or what will push a social movement from genesis stage to next phase of social unrest. In some instances, a particularly horrendous act or what some researchers refer to as a “moral shock”<sup>3</sup> can act as a catalyst for a fledgling movement and push it forward to the next stage (Jasper, 1997). Take for example, the public response following a mass shooting on school property. After the graphic deaths of twenty-six children at Sandy Hook Elementary school, there was a visceral and immediate reaction by the public to come together and do something about the gun-violence epidemic that manifested itself in candle-light vigils and demonstrations among other things (Taylor, 2012). Other movements may stall for years before moving on to the second phase, and others still might never move past the first stage.

The genesis stage is a setting of the scene. The “most important contributions of persuasion during the genesis stage are the apprehension of an exigence and the cultivation of commitment among aroused people to address this exigence” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 92). The

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<sup>3</sup> A moral shock is defined as an event that causes such a visceral emotional reaction as to force the audience to both articulate their moral standing and pursue solutions to the problem presented. Moral shock often leads to higher levels of civil engagement from non-traditional demographics (Jasper, 1997; Snow & Soule, 2010).

critical realization that comes during the genesis phase is the recognition that there is indeed a problem. Further, the activities of the genesis stage indicate whether people can and will mobilize.

The second stage is *social unrest*. There is no clear line that separates the genesis stage from the phase of social unrest. However, there are some indicators that a movement might have progressed to the second stage: more participants, media recognition (even going so far as to call it a movement), the “thinkers” and other early members of the movement become agitators (moving beyond the word and into the realm of action), and/or the development of organizations dedicated to the recognition of the problem begin to appear (Stewart et al., 2012).

This stage capitalizes on the misgivings and concerns that were developing in the genesis stage to create a more coherent group identity for protestors. One way in which the collective conscious of a social movement can be strengthened is through the statement of the organizations principles. This can take many forms, such as a manifesto or some form of proclamation. This declaration of ideals serves

four essential functions: to describe an exigence; identify devils and/or scapegoats; reveal faulty principals that have caused and sustained an exigence; list principles, beliefs, and stands on critical issues; and prescribe a solution with the gods, principles, and procedures that will bring it about. (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 94)

The coalescing of the ideas that began in the genesis stage is critical to making sure a movement progresses rather than stagnates, getting bogged down by uncertainty and inaction.

The social unrest stage is often characterized by the formation of an in-group and out-group dichotomy. As previously mentioned, this stage often sees the creation of groups or organizations dedicated to solving the problem. These organizations are very helpful in the creation of an in-group identity.

The act of joining or forming an organization sets members apart from nonmembers and institutions and fosters a we-they division that becomes more pronounced as a social movement continues to evolve. Members see themselves as elites with a mission, and they devise strategies for fulfilling their moral crusade. Activists attempt to instill feelings of self-identity, self-respect, and power within members that was absent when they were merely individuals. (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 95)

This division between activists and the institution starts to deepen at this stage of the social movement. At this point in the process, the Institution will begin to take notice. Institution being the dominant hegemonic political and social systems in place. “Institutions may openly deny the severity or existence of the problem and, for the first time, take official notice of the fledgling social movement. They may stigmatize the movement as naïve, ill-informed, laughable, unpatriotic, and a loud minority” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 96). This common institutional tactic of delegitimizing through feigned ignorance and indifference is usually employed in the hope that the movement will fail to garner the support it needs to warrant a serious institutional response or intervention.

Once again, there are several factors that can determine the length of the social unrest stage: “the number of people who are attracted to the movement, reactions of institutional agents, and new triggering or catalytic events that exacerbate the social situation or exigence” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 96). The second stage in the life cycle of the social movement is about the individual becoming the collective.

The third stage is *enthusiastic mobilization*. Catalytic events or those moral shock moments are often crucial in the progression between these stages, but nowhere is that more evident than between the stage of social unrest and enthusiastic mobilization. The otherization of the institution and the we-they divide starts to come to a critical point during this stage of the social movement. “Activists begin to see institutions as the problems or as active conspiracies to



sustain power and stifle all reasonable efforts to bring about urgently needed action” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 97). This is the point in the movement where the “thinkers” and philosophers that started the movement have been replaced by the “true believers” who are “agitators [that] see the movement as the only way to bring about urgently needed change and believe that the movement’s time has come” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 97).

This stage is characterized by an over-abundance of optimism. This optimism is often owing to the influx of “legitimizers such as entertainers, senators, clergy, physicians, labor leaders, scientists, and educators” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 97). Individuals that breathe new life into the campaign by increasing visibility using their social influence. This in turns leads to an increase in members to the movement, which also means a rise in the number of passive participants to the movement. These passive participants often wear rose-colored glasses concerning the issues and tend to think no further than *if-only* propositions. If only the government would pass sensible gun reform laws, then no more school children would die. Mixed in with the true believers, are individuals that do not and cannot recognize the complex nature of the issues that they are dealing with and view these issues in a bare bones matter. These members are not concerned with the how or the why as much as they pre-occupied with the simple fact that this exigence exists.

With increased visibility comes increased scrutiny. Although this is true at all other stages, it is during the enthusiastic mobilization stage that it matters most: “The public and institutions do not make fine distinctions: an act in the name of a social movement and its cause is an act by the movement” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 99). Meaning that the actions and words of a lone member can and will be associated with the movement. Stewart, Smith, and Denton elaborate on this by saying “a few violent acts such as the killing of a physician who performs

abortion, firebombing meat wholesaler trucks, and sabotaging logging equipment may doom years of protest, even if the acts are by fanatical, miniscule, splinter groups” (2012, p. 99). At this stage, it is crucial for members to balance their agitation efforts with maintaining some semblance of public decorum. If some rhetorical act ends up leading to public outcry the movement risks losing support.

The institution is not a passive participant in this process. During this stage, the institution is typically aware of the social movements “clear and present danger to their authority, power, and legitimacy” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 97). The indifference that institutions tend to exhibit during the second stage, social unrest, is replaced by a much more active institutional response. In fact, the institution may even encourage the creation of counter-movements:

The goal is to stifle the threat through actions of ‘the people’ or the ‘silent majority,’<sup>4</sup> including appeals to persons the movement claims to be victims of the status quo and to avoid the appearance of institutional involvement. If counter-persuasive efforts fail, institutions may attempt to suppress the threat through arrests and violence. (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 98)

The polarization between activists and the institution reaches a critical junction at this stage and can have tangible consequences. Members of the movement place less faith in the institution’s ability to rectify the problem and begin to turn to less traditional means of recourse and agitation. This is the stage of protest that often starts to see social movement rhetoric manifest itself as more physical protest: “Coercive persuasion replaces the rhetoric of speeches, leaflets, pamphlets, and newsletters. Protestors burn tractors in front of the Capitol to protest farm prices,

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<sup>4</sup> First used by Richard Nixon in his November 3, 1969, speech on Vietnamization, the “silent majority” refers to the anecdotal assertion that more people believe in something than are willing to speak up about it (Campbell, 2014).

bury school buses to protest forced busing to integrated schools” (Stewart et al., 2012, pp. 98-99).

The movement does not just face threats from the outside. At this stage, the movement must navigate complex internal politics. There is often more than one organization dedicated to the solving of a problem. These competing organizations end up working against each other instead of cooperatively. The organizations can be divided on appropriate solutions, identity politics, or any number of issues. It often seems these differences are irreconcilable. Splintering occurs, in part, due to the re-articulation of group ideologies that occurs at this stage where groups often start to radicalize and specify their agendas more explicitly (Stewart et al., 2012). At the tail end of this stage lies a major threat to the internal workings of the social movement, fatigue. At this point “advocates devote increasing attention to explaining and justifying setbacks, delays, lack of meaningful gains, and failures of old successes to fulfill exaggerated expectations. The extravagant hopes and unrealistic dreams that once energized the movement begin to fade” (Stewart et al., 2012, p.101).

Stage four, *maintenance*, is marked by a sense of ennui brought on by the persistent feelings of fatigue that are brought on by dealing with “harsh rhetoric and confrontation for long” periods of time (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 102). No movement can maintain stage three, enthusiastic mobilization, indefinitely. The beginning of this stage presents a critical junction for the movement because it either marks the final march to something that constitutes success or a spiral into obscurity and failure.

The maintenance stage is unsurprisingly characterized by a decline in both membership and levels of commitment. The function of this stage is to ensure the survival of the movement, whatever form that may take. Some maintenance tasks that an organization might engage in

would be “fund-raising, recruiting, mailings, publications, and websites” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 104). These kinds of tasks allow the movement to remain operational and still within the collective public conscious, though the visibility of the organization is also diminished at this stage.

At the maintenance stage, the institutional response has become relatively well-established through a series of interactions between agitators and the powers that be. The gap between *we* and *they* is still wide, but there is must less tension between the two parties. The main reason for this is that during the maintenance stage the social movement interacts less with the public and the institution. Further, “rhetoric at the maintenance stage is increasingly internal rather than external. Activists employ ceremonies, rituals, annual meetings, and anniversary celebrations during which martyrs, tragedies, events, and victories are recounted and memorialized” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 104). The movement becomes less focused on what is happening outside the organization.

The maintenance stage of course is not simply a purgatory where social movements stagnate. There may be some small victories and with the right conditions a movement can even be re-launched into the stage of enthusiastic mobilization. A moral shock may reinvigorate the movement, or that same moral shock might be the thing forces audiences to shut themselves off from the issue entirely because it is too emotionally exhaustive. The maintenance stage can be a precarious place for any movement to find itself in.

The fifth and final stage is *termination*. The termination stage is somewhat challenging to define, but it is often characterized by a disillusionment with the movement by activists. As a social movement reaches its final stage, activists will begin to focus their typically limited resources on very specific and targeted issues (Stewart et al., 2012). The termination stage marks

the end of the fight; the social movement will no longer exist but the “question is whether it will die, become another form of collectivity, blend into an institution, or become an institution” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 107). Few social movements are completely successful and “most social movements seem to fade away because they disappear from the public scene” (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 107). Some social movement simply dissolve while others are transformed into things like philanthropic associations (Literacy Funders Group), political parties (Green Party), lobbying groups, or something else entirely. There are any number of reasons and any number of ways for a social movement to meet its termination stage.

These stages can take years and even decades to run their course. There is no one path for a social movement. While this can present a challenge in the systematic analysis of social movement rhetoric, it has not stopped researchers like Stewart, Smith, and Denton from attempting to make sense of these complex and multi-faceted rhetorical acts.

For as long as social movements have been considered worthy artifacts of analysis there have been rhetoricians who believe breaking up these movements in this fashion is not reflective of how they occur. Considering there can be so much difference between the purposes, ideologies, leaders, structures, strategies, and durations of social movements, it seems counter-intuitive to break them up in this cookie-cutter fashion (Cameron, 1967). Still, this framework of life-stages will be critical in tracing and understanding how modern social movements operate as it will provide a standard in which to evaluate the observable changes in these movements. This categorization will also be helpful in determining how modern social movements depart from more traditional frameworks.

## Supplementing the Metaphor of the Public Sphere

One of the primary ways in which social movement rhetoric has changed is the platform in which these dialogues occur. Concern over how community organizing occurs has been around since the writings of Aristotle and the time of the Athenian Agora (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). A critical concept helpful to understanding how these conversations occur is the notion of the public sphere. Conceptually defined by Jürgen Habermas as a social space where citizens congregate to determine public opinion (1991), many researchers have built upon or challenged this concept. For instance, Deluca and Peeples (2002) identify limitations in Habermas's idealized public sphere, arguing that it “assumes open access, the bracketing of social inequalities, rational discussion, focus on common issues, face-to-face conversation as the privileged medium, and the ability to achieve consensus” (p. 128). Deluca and Peeples (2002) further identify some shortcomings with modern application of this theoretical concept, claiming that the “privileging of dialogue and fetishization of a procedural rationality” as integral parts to the public sphere create an “exclusionary and impoverished normative ideal that shuns much of the richness and turbulence of the sense-making process” (p. 128).

While Habermas's idealized public sphere still holds significance and merit, it is now necessary to update and amplify this concept. The public sphere requires a reimagining for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is where the supplementation of the metaphor of the “public screen” becomes integral. DeLuca and Peeples's (2002) notion of the public screen is a critical addition to the conceptual framework of the public sphere because the “public screen accounts for technological and cultural changes while enabling a charting of the new conditions for rhetoric, politics, and activism” (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002, p. 125). The public screen is less concerned with dialogue

and more pre-occupied with the process of dissemination. At the core of the public screen, is the critical role of technology in communication. The public screen recognizes

that most, and the most important, public discussion take place via “screens”—television, computer, and the front page of newspapers. Further, it suggests that we cannot simply adopt the term “public sphere” and all it entails, a term indebted to orality and print, for the current screen age. The new term takes seriously the work of media theorists suggesting that new technologies introduce new forms of social organization and new modes of perception. (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002, p. 131)

Understanding how the public sphere in tandem with the public screen can be conceptualized will be critical to understanding where and how social movement rhetoric is now taking place.

Research must actively work to reflect evolving modes of technology. The metaphor of the public screen enables exactly that. Technology has become an integral part of modern social movements. Technological advancements have had a profound impact on in the interactions between agitators and institutions. Understanding how these advancements have influenced the life cycle of social movements will be crucial to understanding the direction that social movements will head in the future. This theoretical framework will be crucial to understanding the following case studies but does not create a complete picture. The next chapter explores the technological advancements that have allowed for modern movements to develop and evolve into what they resemble today.

## CHAPTER 3

### EMERGENT TECHNOLOGY

#### The Relationship Between Technology and Social Movements

This chapter serves to create a basic understanding of the technologies that have enabled social movements to develop and transform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Throughout history, social movements have progressed in tandem with technology. Historical movements can often be characterized by the technological advancements that were also made during that era. It only makes sense that agitators and activists turn to whatever available means of persuasion exist, including new communication technology.

Revolutionary agitation against Great Britain made use of committees of correspondence, boycotts, liberty poles, and pamphlets. Abolitionists published newspapers, wrote books, evolved networks of religious congregations, and developed the Underground Railroad. The labor movement wielded the strike, the paid organizer, the boycott, the "free speech fight," and the mass rally, while the Civil Rights movement supplemented these tactics with civil disobedience and protest marches organized in large part through networks of African-American churches and chapters of the NAACP. (Kreimer, 2001, p. 118)

New communication technologies have historically allowed for social movements to organize and spread their rhetorical messages in radically new ways. Agitators' adaptation of new communication technologies can be the difference between a movement's survival and desolation. The national network of television stations that developed in the late 40s broadcasted



images of civil disobedience protests<sup>1</sup> carried out in the name of the civil rights movement directly into the homes of Americans all around the country (Kreimer, 2001). Television networks made civil disobedience protest a more viable option because it increased the potential visibility these peaceful acts could garner. Computers, high-speed Internet, and advancements like e-mail have more recently allowed for “the development of independent and bureaucratized single-issue advocacy organizations on both the Left and the Right” (Kreimer, 2001, p. 120). As the previously cited Gerbaudo posits, the Internet marked a revolutionary point in the history of social movement rhetoric (2017). To understand the following case studies and modern social movement rhetoric, it is critical to understand how this major technological advancement and the subsequent adaptations of it are being used.

### Information and Communication Technology

The field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) emphasizes the role that unified communication systems play in modern society (Cantoni & Danowski, 2015). It is a difficult field to define and scholarship often does so flexibly. It is hard to define because the technologies that it characterizes are rapidly developing, at a far faster pace than the scholarship can match. Scholarship typically discusses the integration of telecommunication technology (physical telephone wires to wirelessly transmitted signals) and computers (software, hardware, and other audio-visual components) (Cantoni & Danowski, 2015). ICTs cover an incredibly wide array of technologies. Any device that can store, retrieve, transfer, or manipulate data

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<sup>1</sup> Civil disobedience, also referred to as passive resistance, is a non-violent form of agitation. It was an integral part of the American Civil rights movement and manifested itself in the form of sit-ins, freedom rides, and other similar examples of protest (Haiman, 1967).

electronically or in a digital form fits under the umbrella of ICTs. As this field has grown, more social movement scholars have increasingly recognized the integral role that technology has come to play. The developing relationship between social movements and ICTs can be characterized by several fundamental assertions as explained by Morador in their article “New Social Movements, the Use of ICTs’ and Their Social Impact” (2016).

Initially, ICTs have allowed for an explosion in the number of social collective organizations. Technological advancements afforded by the Internet have “allowed for the proliferation of civic organizations and social collectives which offer mutual assistance through volunteer programs, finding positive aspects in the balance of costs and benefits” (Morador, 2016, p. 407). The Internet has reduced the strain that geographic constraints place on an organization's ability to accrue resources and organize their members at a much cheaper cost than previously possible. ICTs open new opportunities and have been crucial in expanding the scope and size of modern social movements.

The ease with which social movements can be created and grown has also increased the expressive function of modern social movements. Most major historical movements, such as the civil rights movement or the labor rights movement, were characterized by social grievances voiced in a monolithic nature by a large enough group of people to give them credence. ICTs and modern social movements value individual expression more than traditional movements: “The main purpose of new social movements is to establish new expressive forms of reality. They produce special ways of simultaneously communicating events and stirring emotions to facilitate social actions and changes” (Morador, 2016, p. 409). New technology allows just about anyone to express what they see as wrong with the world around them and potentially do something

about it. New digital media has created a new space for creative expression that revolves around the autonomy of its users.

Communication media provide the great stage of creative outpour and constitute one of the greatest symbolic capitals used by users. Re-signification, symbolic richness and expressive diversity will be inherent features of new social movements. A plethora of messages, audiences, users and audiences are observed, and each group manages to find its own voice within diverse forms of expression. (Morador, 2016, p. 409)

The diverse perspectives and personalities that have amalgamated with the assistance of ICTs have radically changed the landscape of modern social movements.

Modern networks have become flattened and much more flexible than their traditional counterparts. Modern organizations tend to rely less on hierarchical social structures. Power is distributed more horizontally among members of an organization. ICTs have ensured that modern social movements have more members and thus the division of responsibility and power is spread more than in traditional movements. This newer organizational model also “allows networks to adapt, expand and multiply through the decentralized and integrated nature of its structure. Networks can activate and deactivate at any time; they can support one cause today and another tomorrow” (Morador, 2016, p. 408). ICTs allows different groups to interact with each other in a quick and painless way that can facilitate coalition building. The decentralized and sometimes fragmented nature of these networks incentivize different groups to work together to achieve their desired goals.

Coalitions make it possible to join individuals and groups with common objectives. Thus, social movements tend to act more through coalition networks that have global scopes, share common interests and rely on the communication infrastructure provided by the internet. (Morador, 2016, p. 408)

Sites like Facebook allow for the creation of online communities that make connecting to groups all around the world easier than ever. Facebook and other social networking sites have created a communication infrastructure that has made the world seem like a much smaller place.

Formal organizations like Greenpeace, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and the National Rifle Association have historically been central to activism because they alleviated the high costs of communication and the coordination of protest (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005). ICTs have started to eliminate the need for these formal organizations: “[the] formal organization is moving out if its central explanatory role, and the emphasis is placed upon organizing and individual action.” (Ganesh & Stohl, 2010) More specifically “ICTs are seen as mechanism that allow activists instead of organizations to take on the role of brokerage” (Ganesh & Stohl, 2010). Brokerage is defined as “the linking of two or more unconnected social actors by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 190). Formal organizations used to be the only collective bodies capable of organizing movements on a large scale, ICTs have changed that. What traditionally took a national organization with chapters across several states to organize can now be done by an individual or potentially even a computer program.

Social movements have always been difficult to study because of their enigmatic nature. ICTs complicate this even further because of the speed at which they allow people to organize. Movements have become increasingly unpredictable as the number of actors involved has risen: “not even organizers of these groups can predict or know for certain the possible scope of their calls...the individuals who started the movements never suspected the effect they’d have”

(Morador, 2016, p. 408). A movement may be born, go viral,<sup>2</sup> and terminate in a single day all within the confines of the Internet.

ICTs have allowed for the self-regulation and moderation of social discourse by citizens. As access to the Internet and the digital media it has produced have increased, the Internet has clearly been situated as a space that is meant to be open for political dialogue of all kinds. While there are some federal standards that dictate how content is labeled or regulated, online spaces are predominantly “managed and regulated by the users” (Morador, 2016, p. 409). Users have generated an informal set of rules, norms, and regulations that guide social interaction on the Internet, and social movements are not exempt from this phenomenon.

Though it is hard to quantify, new ICTs have shown the capability to generate tangible outcomes. This is referred to as the phatic function of communication by scholars (Morador, 2016; Miller, 2017). New digital communication tools, such as social media, have been applauded for their ability to forward social change by increasing visibility of social wrongs. Though the digital nature of these interactions often make the tangible outcomes seem removed or understated, these new technologies allow for the easy allocation of resources such as a volunteer’s time or money.

Lastly, a thread that can be pulled through these ideals is the unifying potential that ICTs provide. These new communication technologies are about connectivity, about bringing citizens closer together. These new technologies “are capable of building dialogue between diverse groups, regardless of the time and distance that separates them; they unite people in spaces that transcend personal and ideological boundaries” (Morador, 2016, p. 409). The communication

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<sup>2</sup> “Go viral” is a colloquial phrase that refers to the explosive popularity of digital content marked by its sharing and dissemination on a wide scale within a short amount of time.

infrastructure created by new digital media has created new avenues for protest by bringing people together in ways that were impossible in the past.

### The Web 2.0: Social Networking Sites

Web 2.0<sup>3</sup> is a techno culture term that represents the modern era of online communication (Baym, 2013). Web 2.0 describes the “participatory, collaborative, and distributed practices which enable formal and informal spheres of daily activities [on the web]” (Kujur & Chhetri, 2015, p. 134). In terms of technological innovation, Web 2.0 describes a “platform with software above the level of a single device” which can be operationalized as blogs, wikis, digital podcasts, social networking sites (SNSs), or other similar iterations of the technology (Kujur & Chhetri, 2015, p. 135). Among the diverse array of digital platforms that have manifested themselves in the era of Web 2.0, SNSs have captured the most attention in the realm of academic scholarship (Baym, 2013). They fit under the umbrella of ICTs and have possibly had the most profound impact on social movement rhetoric and thus will be the focus of this section.

The idea of a social network is far from new. Finding its roots in sociological scholarship from the 1950s, a social network is the bridge between the individual and the community (Bott, 1957). As a digital platform SNSs are defined as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)

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<sup>3</sup> Some computer science scholarship has progressed past just the 2.0 moniker. It is the predominant nomenclature used in social science research though.

Even with these definitional parameters, there can be debate as to what constitutes a SNS. The most prevalent examples would be sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube. These digital social networks are much vaster than traditional social networks, but what truly separates them from traditional models of social systems is that they “enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Those traditional social networks, that consist of friends, neighbors, and family are often invisible to outside eyes and lack any organizing schema. SNSs are intentionally designed to display the relationships that are developed through the sites:

The public display of connections is a crucial component of SNSs. The Friends list contains links to each Friend’s profile, enabling viewers to traverse the network graph by clicking through the Friends lists. On most sites, the list of Friends is visible to anyone who is permitted to view the profile, although there are exceptions. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 213)

The ability to “add” friends and see other users’ friend lists contributes to the visibility of a social network in ways that traditional social networks simply cannot do. Further, SNSs allow the individual to publicly express their ideals in spaces specifically designed to bring people of a similar mindset together. Facebook groups are user-generated sites dedicated to specific issues where the members can see who else shares their beliefs without ever having to meet those people in a physical setting. The Hashtag serves a similar function on sites like Twitter and Instagram as a way of grouping content that expresses similar ideas.

The main reason that SNSs tend to defy definition is that the many platforms that fit into the framework of SNSs have a great variety of features: “Some have photo-sharing or video-sharing capabilities; others have built-in blogging and instant messaging technology. There are mobile specific SNSs, but some web-based SNSs also support limited mobile interactions” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 214). These different features are often intended to cater to certain

demographics of users that these sites are trying to entice. Typically, SNSs are developed and designed to be nearly universally accessible. Yet: “many attract homogeneous populations initially, so it is not uncommon to find groups using sites to segregate themselves by nationality, age, educational level, or other factors that typically segment society” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 214). With the vast variety of SNSs out there, everyone can find somewhere they feel they belong.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the privacy standards maintained by most SNSs, the sheer size of the Internet traffic they generate, and the rise of “bot users,”<sup>5</sup> there is very little reliable data on how many people are truly using SNSs. Still, the Pew Research Center<sup>6</sup> shares that 68% of U.S. adults report they use Facebook (nearly three-quarters of that number say their Facebook use is daily) (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media has become a normalized part of everyday life in America. Although data collection concerning social media usage is in its infantile stages, research has shown that social media use has only continued to rise in the United States (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

This evolving digital platform is becoming inextricably linked to social movement rhetoric and its use is only becoming more pervasive in American society. The way citizens have opted to use this platform in the realm of protest has already proven to be innovative and the future holds exciting potential. With a working theoretical framework and an understanding of the digital technologies that have allowed for the transformation of social movement rhetoric,

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<sup>4</sup> There are have even been social networking sites designed for non-traditional audiences such as dogs (e.g., Dogster).

<sup>5</sup> "Bot users" refers to online profiles curated by artificial intelligence technology and not by a human user.

<sup>6</sup> The Pew Research Center only began collecting data on Social Networking Sites in 2012.



this study can now begin to examine the artifacts at hand: The Black Lives Matter Movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY 1

#### #BlackLivesMatter

The Black Lives Matter Global Network describes themselves as “a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (About Black Lives Matter, 2018). The movement adopts a model of lateral deviance, in the sense that it seeks a complete reform of the law enforcement system they see as the progenitor of coordinated and systemic violence in Black communities. The organization and the movement stands as a reaffirmation of black identity and is dedicated to the defense of black bodies. In a statement published on the organization’s website they explicitly state:

We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise. We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression. The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation. (2018)

The movement has grown to recognize the intersections of race, gender, and identity that influence social dialogue. The leaders of the movement have pushed to facilitate an inclusive

environment that fights for the safety of all minority bodies. Agitators involved with the movement deal with many of the same grievances that the civil rights movement faced, such as police brutality and racist housing policies (Clayton, 2018). Over the last couple years, this movement has increased in size, scope, and visibility. Social networking sites and new information and communication technology played a crucial role in its formation and proliferation. This movement has predominantly occurred in the realm of the public screen, on digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook. In fact, the origins of this movement can be traced back to a hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

### Genesis

The social factors that laid the foundation for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement are deeply ingrained into American culture. Though BLM activists have made a conscious departure from some of the more traditional stances and agitation tactics of the civil rights movements, they both deal with deeply ingrained systems of racially motivated oppression (Clayton, 2018). The claims of a post-racial America have been undercut by a recurring theme, the de-valuing of black bodies. Government institutions have proven to place a lower value on the life of black people in America. This was made painfully evident during a natural disaster that has become a synonym for catastrophe: Hurricane Katrina.

When we look at the first 15 years of the 21st century, the most defining moment in black America's relationship to its country isn't Election Day 2008; it's Hurricane Katrina. The events of the storm and its aftermath sparked a profound shift among black Americans toward racial pessimism that persists to today, even with Barack Obama in the White House. Black collective memory of Hurricane Katrina, as much as anything else, informs the present movement against police violence, "Black Lives Matter." (Bouie, 2015)

As this journalist suggests, the government's handling of this crisis left many citizens feeling like their lives were a secondary concern to the institution. Informal polls conducted by ABC news and the *Washington Post* cemented this notion when they found that “71 percent of blacks said that New Orleans would have been better prepared if it were a “wealthier city with more whites,” and 76 percent said the federal government would have responded faster” (Bouie, 2015).

Hurricane Katrina revealed an underlying truth in American society: “Hurricane Katrina exposed that even in our hour of greatest need, black people are often not afforded the tragic gift of vulnerability. Instead, we are an ever-present threat” (Ross, 2015).

The natural disaster devastated the city, especially lower income sections of the city such as the Lower Ninth Ward. As the flood waters rose and images of people standing on roofs surrounded by water began to circulate, an adversarial relationship began to form between black citizens and law enforcement:

law enforcement quickly began to label the black residents as “looters.” They were not viewed as people trying to survive, but rather as criminals who needed to be reined in. New Orleans Police Department Captain James Scott instructed police officers that they had the “authority by martial law to shoot looters. (Ross, 2015)

Researchers have found that there is a negative criminal stereotype applied to young black men that views them “as bigger (taller, heavier, more muscular) and more physically threatening (stronger, more capable of harm) than young White men” (Wilson, Rule, & Hugenberg, 2017). During the relief efforts, eleven people were shot (Ross, 2015). The tension between law enforcement and citizens came to a tipping point on September 4, 2005 in what has come to be known as the Danziger Bridge incident. During a shootout on the Danziger Bridge in New Orleans, two people lost their lives, a 40-year-old man with an intellectual disability and a 17-year-old high school student, both black (Burnett, 2006).

The troubling part of this story comes with the filing of the police report following the incident. There were several inconsistencies with the depiction of events between what police reported and what witnesses at the scene of the shootout claimed to have seen. The most glaring inconsistency dealt with the manner of death for 40-year-old Ronald Madison. In the police report, officers to claim to have shot Madison only once. The autopsy revealed that he was shot seven times, including five times to the back (Burnett, 2006). The autopsy report contradicted the narrative that Madison was an aggressive gun-man that posed a serious threat to the officers' personal safety. The coercive and absolute power systems of the institution are reinforced by law enforcement. Four officers were tried and convicted for their involvement in the wrongful deaths of Ronald Madison and James Brissete. One other officer was given jail-time for his role in the cover-up and falsification of police documents (Daley & Lane, 2016). While their conviction came as welcome news to the families of the victims, most instances of police misconduct end on less satisfying terms.

The deaths of Madison and Brissete were two among a plethora of examples of a tactic of control employed institutional actors; police officers controlling the narrative to justify the murder of black individuals. Social media sites and digital technologies have allowed for private citizens to hold officers more accountable for their actions. Cellphone cameras have made it easier than ever for agitators and private citizens to record interactions with the police. Social networking sites have made it easier to share those interactions with growing social groups. The tension between law enforcement and black citizens coupled with a key catalytic event catapulted this movement from its first stage into the next.

## Social Unrest

On February 26, 2012 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, was gunned down on the street by George Zimmerman, a member of the local neighborhood watch (Pearson & Botelho, 2013). Martin left the house he was staying in to walk to a nearby 7-Eleven. On his walk back, Zimmerman spotted him and made a 911 call to report a suspicious figure in a hoodie (Blow, 2012). Officers were dispatched and the call operator instructed Zimmerman to stand down, he did not listen. While the details are still contentious even after court proceedings, the outcome is clear. After a physical altercation between Martin and Zimmerman ensued, officers arrived on the scene to find Martin dead with a gunshot wound to the chest (Botelho, 2012). After the investigation that followed, police described the events as “ultimately avoidable by Zimmerman” and that there was no evidence that Martin had been involved in any criminal activity (Bothelo, 2012). There was heavy speculation that Zimmerman was motivated by his personal racial bias. In accordance with the law, Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder.<sup>1</sup>

On July 13, 2013, a little over the year after the death of Martin, Zimmerman walked out of the courthouse to chants of “No Justice, No Peace!” after just having been acquitted of all charges (Luscombe, 2013). The nation grieved, civil rights activists expressed their disappointment in the justice system. This catalytic event pushed the issue of police brutality into the forefront of social discourse. The phrase “Black Lives Matter” has been commonly traced back to a Facebook post made by Alicia Garza in July of 2013 that was “intended as an affirmation for a community distraught over George Zimmerman’s acquittal” (Cobb, 2017). The post, which has since been made private and inaccessible, ended with “black people. I love you. I

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<sup>1</sup> Second-degree murder is “defined as an intentional killing that was not premeditated” (Justia, 2018).

love us. Our lives matter” (Cobb, 2017). A friend of Garza’s, Patrisse Cullors, adapted those last three words and created the hashtag: #BlackLivesMatter (Cobb, 2017). The adoption of this phrase was not immediate, but this was the moment in which BLM movement was given form and its philosophical underpinnings began to become apparent.

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi are the self-identified founders of the Black Lives Matter movement. As they explain on their organizational website, they are all activists in their own rights (2018). These three provided the expertise and infrastructure necessary for this movement to form a cohesive identity. They helped formulate the ideas and principle of the organization and the movement. They created an environment meant to “encourage a broader and deeper conversation about what justice for black people might look like in an era of mass incarceration and relentless police violence – and how they might organize to achieve it” (Garza & Kauffman, 2015). When the organization was founded, the public was not ready to fully engage in that dialogue, but it did not take long before external factors forced the movement to take on new life.

### Enthusiastic Mobilization

Use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was frequent but minimal until the moral shock of the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner pushed the movement forward into its next phase. Brown and Garner were added to the list of victims that lost their life due to police brutality (Lewis, 2014). One interesting thing about those two cases is how the stories ignored traditional media patterns of coverage:

The prominence of the Michael Brown case, relative to some other stories of police violence, is somewhat counterintuitive. The incident that led to Eric Garner's death was captured on video and took place in New York City, the nation's largest media market, while Michael Brown's death was in a tiny suburb in the Midwest. Yet, while #ericgarner was appended to about 4.3 million tweets in the study period, #Ferguson showed up in 21.6 million tweets, and #michaelbrown/mikebrown was used in about 9.4 million. (Demby, 2016)

Following their deaths there were short spikes in the hashtag's use on Twitter (Chokshi, 2018).

Daily mentions of #BLM on Twitter averaged about 1,500 times a day in months of July to November of 2014 according to a Pew Research Center study (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016).

Coupled with the Tweets of support and outrage, graphic images of the acts of police brutality were also circulated:



Caption: Eric Garner (@TheFinalCall, 2014)

On November 25, 2014 – only three days after 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot by an officer in a public park while he was playing with a toy gun, and just one day after a grand jury chose not to indict the officer responsible for the Brown's death – Twitter traffic surrounding the hashtag skyrocketed to new levels: 172,772 mentions in a single day (Chokshi, 2018; Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). The organization's visibility on the Internet and subsequently in the collective conscious of America continued to increase as:



The hashtag leaped from social media to the streets, mobilizing a new wave of civil rights protests in the U.S. with the killings of Martin, Oscar Grant, Michael Brown and Eric Garner. In marches, sit-ins and rallies across the country, protesters have shouted the slogan, plastered it on posters and printed it on T-shirts. It was even featured on an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*. (Guynn, 2015)

This was still not the peak of the movement. Each death and act of graphic violence perpetrated by actors representing the institution pushed the movement forward. Instances of police brutality and misconduct continued and with each one, the movement grew: “The label appears to have lasting power, simmering like a low-grade fever on social media and roaring to life with every police killing of a black citizen and every racial protest that makes the news, informing the long-running national debate” (Chokshi, 2018).

A series of catalytic events in July of 2015 pushed the movement to new heights. The movement violently reacted to the July 5 death of Alton Sterling, the July 6 death of Philando Castile, and the July 7 attack on Dallas police by Micah Johnson that led to the death of five officers (Chokshi, 2018). Johnson, who media outlets identified as a “Black Power Extremist”, open fired on police providing protection<sup>2</sup> to a BLM protest happening in downtown Dallas (Fernandez, Perez-Pena, & Bromwich, 2016). During the stalemate between Johnson and Dallas law enforcement, it is reported and corroborated by the police chief that Johnson “told police negotiators that “he was upset about Black Lives Matter,” Chief Brown said. “He said he was upset about the recent police shootings. The suspect said he was upset at white people. The suspect stated he wanted to kill white people, especially white officers” (Fernandez, Perez-Pena, & Bromwich, 2016). On July 8 alone, #BlackLivesMatter appeared 1.1 million times on Twitter (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). The deaths of Sterling and Castile fostered an incredibly supportive

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<sup>2</sup> This an excellent example of a tactic of control employed by institutional actors. By providing protection, the institution gets to determine how and where agitators are protesting. This creates the outward appearance of support without having to match it with policy solutions.

environment that shed a positive light on the movement. In fact, 87 percent of the Twitter posts using the hashtag did so in a positive manner between July 5 to July 7 (Anderson & Hitlin). Interestingly, however, and reflective of the fast-paced nature of modern social movements, that support all but vanished after the events of July 8. In the ten days following July 8, only 28 percent of the Tweets presented BLM in a positive manner (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). In an interview conducted with the researchers who carried out the Pew Research Center study, one of the authors highlighted the shift in tone: “We really saw that shift overnight,” Ms. Anderson said. “It really shows you where current events can drive the conversation on social media and also change the tenor of conversation there, as well” (Chokshi, 2018).

The public screen, specifically Twitter, allowed this dialogue concerning police brutality and the status of black bodies in America to occur at a historically unprecedented scope. Further, social networking sites allowed for the quick mobilization of activists as evidenced by the volatile reaction of the public to current events.

### Maintenance

As Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2012) highlight, no movement can sustain high levels of involvement and passion from its members forever. The intense emotional toll that witnessing acts of brutality perpetrated by police is not something easy to expose yourself to for extended periods of time. Arguably, Black Lives Matter has entered the maintenance stage due to compassion fatigue<sup>3</sup>. The movement has settled down and is attempting to figure out how it is

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<sup>3</sup> Adopted from the study of traumatology, and often applied in the field of journalism, compassion fatigue can be defined as the physical and mental exhaustion that leads to emotional withdrawal experienced by those who are exposed to traumatic events for extended periods of time (Moeller, 2016).

going to stay relevant. In an interview conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*, BLM founder

Patrisse Cullors commented on the direction that she hopes the organization will follow:

The first thing that Black Lives Matter had to do was remind people that racism existed in this country because when we had Obama people thought we were post-racial. That was the debate. Is racism over? And very quickly we understood that it was not over. And then the second one was to talk about anti-black racism. And then I think the next step for Black Lives Matter was to decide, “What was our target?” And I want to be frank. I think our target has been law enforcement, and that has been important because black folks not only are killed with impunity, but also black folks are some of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in this country. We believe if we can get real accountability in this country around mass criminalization, we could start to change the other apparatuses inside this country. (Cullors, Simmons, & Kaleem, 2017)

Like many other formal organizations that have developed during historical movements, BLM has realized that it must adapt and diversify to stay relevant.

Even with the organization’s waning digital presence, it is still perceived as a threat by the current administration. On December 12, 2017, an armed team of FBI agents raided the home of Christopher Daniels (Bourmont, 2018). The raid of Daniels’ home was the culmination of two years of surveillance by the FBI. Though the FBI has released no document officially labeling him as such, Daniels qualifies as what is referred to as a “black identity extremists”: “the terrorism classification is used to describe individuals who resort to violence or unlawful activities “in response to perceived racism and injustice in American society” (Bourmont, 2018). The phrase “black identity extremist” has been revealed to have originated from an internal document circulated by the FBI (Winter & Weinberger, 2017). The targeting and censorship of black activists is a tactic that was seen during the civil rights movement by the institution (Clayton, 2018). This raid was a prime example of what Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz (2010) would refer to as a tactic of control employed by the institution. It was a clear of exertion

of the legitimate and coercive power of the federal government. The institutional response has given credence to the impact of the BLM movement.

### Termination

As stated in the previous section, this study argues that the BLM movement is currently in the maintenance stage and has not yet reached its termination point. The movement has gone through some minor transformations already concerning its scope of activism. But, the systemic and institutional issues that this movement has concerned itself with are not ones that will dissipate overnight.

Past the traditional tactics of control utilized by the institution, namely the surveillance and censorship of activists (“Black Identity Extremists”), an interesting trend appeared of the digital de-legitimization of the BLM movement. BLM is a response to white-supremacy perpetuated by dominant hegemonic structures (Smith, 2018). As the movement has grown, so has the response to it. Opponents of the movement have utilized the hashtags #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter as a means of declaring the BLM movement superfluous: “All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter are two of the most prominent rhetorical manifestations of the backlash. Both played major roles in the media coverage of and political response to Black Lives Matter” (Smith, 2018). These hashtags represent the ideology of “color-blindness” that many Americans have adopted:

“All Lives Matter” erases a long past and present of systemic inequality in the US. It represents a refusal to acknowledge that the state does not value all lives in the same way. It reduces the problem of racism to individual prejudice and casts African-Americans as aggressors against a colourblind post-civil rights order in which White people no longer “see race”. (Smith, 2018)

Though this rhetoric is not unique to the BLM movement, it is the most recent articulation of the belief that racism is gone, when scholarship and modern social movements tell a much different story (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Though each of these hashtags have been used more sparsely than the original #BlackLivesMatter they have remained pervasive, #AllLivesMatter “has been used a total of 1.5 million times, about one-eighth as often as #BlackLivesMatter. Over time, the volume of #AllLivesMatter tweets has generally moved in parallel with that of #BlackLivesMatter” (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). These hashtags represent a new method for an old tactic of control.

Although it seems that the public has become desensitized to police violence, there is no predicting whether another catalytic event might re-invigorate the movement. Contrarily, another act of violence like Micah Johnson’s might mean the termination of the movement. This story has yet to be completely told.

## CHAPTER 5

### CASE STUDY 2

#### The Dakota Access Pipeline Protests

In December of 2014, a Dallas-based company called Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) put in a bid to the federal government<sup>1</sup> for the right to construct the Dakota Access Pipeline (Humes, 2018). The pipeline is designed to transport up to 570,000 barrels of crude oil every day from North Dakota to a distribution point in Illinois (Worland, 2016). The pipeline, which has at this point been completed, spans roughly 1,200 miles (Worland, 2016). On January 20, 2016, North Dakota's public service commission provided approval for construction to begin in the state. As construction began, so did pushback from activists. By April 1, "the first camp of 20 to 30 people was established...at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers. Camps in the area would later swell to thousands of people" (Humes, 2018). This protest exemplifies what Bowers et al. refer to as vertical deviance. The movement did not seek to replace or remove any of the institutional actors responsible for the pipeline's construction, but simply that the pipelines not be built. The protests generated by the pipeline's construction are a primary example of single issue activism that utilized new digital media in tandem with traditional methods of agitation.

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<sup>1</sup> The federal government in this case refers specifically to the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Even though the protests concerned a single issue, they united several different interest groups to halt construction. Native Americans agitators took a central role in the protests. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe was directly impacted because oil spills could have dire consequences to their water supply considering how close the pipeline lays to reservation land (Worland, 2016). The Standing Rock Sioux tribe “argue that the federal government did not adequately engage the Standing Rock Sioux during the permitting process – a requirement under federal law” (Worland, 2016). The movement also caught the attention of environmental activists who said the “pipeline would contribute to man-made climate change by building up the country’s oil infrastructure” (Worland, 2016). Regardless of their motives, people from across the country were brought together to fight for the sovereign rights of Native Americans, including access to clean water.

### Genesis

As Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2012) assert, the genesis stage can be hard to define and describe considering it is a time in which the movement and its concerns have not yet permeated main stream society. That holds true in this instance; the genesis of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protest saw quiet legal battles waged in courts and private meetings between Energy Transfer Partners, the federal government, and tribal elders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe (Hersher, 2017).

To understand the social conditions that facilitated the movement and the public’s response, it can be helpful to understand the historical relationship between America’s indigenous people and the U.S. Federal Government. After the revolutionary war, the newly

formed government followed the same imperialistic model that the British Empire had concerning tribal policy (Collins, 2006). Federal and state government departments developed treaties with tribes and in doing so acquired “Indian land for settlers and miners, from the founding [of the country] until the 1920s” (Collins, 2006, p. 3). In 1787, with the ratification of the Constitution, the Commerce Clause in effect gave Congress “paramount power over tribes” (Collins, 2006, p. 3) The passing of the Trade and Intercourse Act in 1790 made it illegal to acquire tribal land without Federal oversight, it also designated tribal land as separate from U.S. landholdings (Peters, 1846). This marked the beginning of a strained relationship, after the passing of the Trade and Intercourse Act: “Eastern state governments...continued to exercise authority over Indians within their borders, purchasing land in violation of the federal statute and regulating Indian affairs generally.” (Collins, 2006, p. 3) The disregard and abuse of Tribal sovereignty characterizes much of the historical relationship and lead to such historical atrocities as the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma in which Andrew Jackson forcefully removed Cherokees from their land by way of the Indian Removal Act in first half of the 1800s (Ehle, 1997).

By the 1920s, many tribal communities were subject to abject poverty and the sovereign tribal governments had been stripped of the means to provide for their people due to Federal oversight and mismanagement (Collins, 2006). Reservation land began to shrink and U.S. policy threatened the very existence of tribal life. In 1953, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 which called for the “termination of tribal governments and the federal restriction on sale of tribal land” (Collins, 2006, p. 4). This policy decision coupled with the prolonged subjugation of tribal people lead to an increasing number of tribes disappearing, most “notably those of the Menominees in Wisconsin and the Klamath and Modoc Tribes in Oregon” (Collins, 2006, p. 4).



Increasing pressure to assimilate and the threat of termination pushed Indigenous people to mobilize. During the 50s and 60s, at roughly the same time as the civil rights movement, Indigenous rights activists began to push back. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was formed in “1968 by Clyde Bellecourt, Eddie Benton Banai, Dennis Banks, and Mary Jane Wilson, all four Chippewa Indians from Minnesota. AIM arose out of concerns of Native Americans in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and focused on changing the lives of Indians in urban centers” (Johnson, 2007, p. 7). The movement garnered success and by 1970, Nixon declared tribal governments were no longer at threat of termination (Collins, 2006).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relationship between Indigenous people and the federal government is complicated and sometimes tenuous. Legally, tribal nations are considered distinct and separate:

Within tribal territory, their authority over tribal members is comparable to that of state governments, which it displaces. They lack jurisdiction over non-Indians in tribal territory, a source of dissatisfaction that tribes seek to change. Whether or not they succeed, they have survived numerous attempts to force them to disband. (Collins, 2006, p. 4)

Indigenous people have become a notable political force. The complex political system in which they reside has often taken advantage of the inherent power structure that historical and policy decisions has created over the last two-and-a-half centuries. Collective conscious has started to recognize the trend of predatory politics that characterizes the federal government’s handling of tribal life and has become readier to address to the systemic inequalities present. This was made evident in the response to the announcement of the DAPLs construction.

Secondary but not entirely separate from the concerns of Indigenous rights activists were the environmental concerns that were at play during the DAPL protests. In the eyes of many Indigenous rights activists, tribal sovereignty and environmental protection are two sides of the

same coin: “Indian nations and tribes and other indigenous communities throughout the world are afflicted by poverty, poor health and discrimination. When indigenous peoples are deprived of their ways of life and their ties to the earth, they suffer” (Indian Law Resource Center, 2018). Even still, many non-indigenous agitators who joined the movement were motivated by the threat to the environment the new pipeline created.

The United States has played a key role in global environmental justice scholarship and agitation. The rise of contemporary environmental activism coincided with the civil rights movement, and adapted many of the same tactics of agitation, such as acts of civil disobedience (i.e. activists chaining themselves to trees) (Perez, Grafton, Mohai, Hardin, Hintzen, & Orvis, 2015). Though movements concerning conservation stretch much farther back. Scholarship concerning conservation is commonly traced back to Samuel Hays’ *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Rome, 2003). Hays identified two models of agitation for these movements: movements led by agitators who sought to protect natural resources from corporate exploitation and movements championed by scientific experts committed to the responsible allocation of resources (Hays, 1980). Modern movements still see representation of both models (Rome, 2003).

It is difficult to separate the genesis stage of this movement neatly by agitator’s motivation for participation, because both aspects of agitation played crucial roles. Indigenous rights were assuredly the dominant reason for this movement’s genesis, but the environmental aspect of the protest is likely what pushed the movement to mobilize as rapidly and intensely as it did.

## Social Unrest

The January 2016 announcement that Dakota's public service commission had given ETP the permit to begin construction on the first 400 miles of construction marked the moment this movement began to take form (Humes, 2018). Early examples of agitation were carried out by Tribe members. On April 1, 2016 images began to circulate on social media sites like Twitter and Instagram of tribe members on Horseback gathering to protest the construction:



Caption: Tribal protesters (@UR\_Ninja, 2016)

About 200 individuals gathered together in the first tangible act of agitation (Woolf, 2016). The group was made up of activists from the Standing Rock Sioux, Cheyenne River Lakota, and Rosebud Sioux nations; they rode from the Tribal Administration building to Cannonball, North Dakota, which lies near the edge of the reservation's northern border (Woolf, 2016). One of the protesters present, Dakota Kidder, was interviewed by a correspondent at *The Guardian*, and gave voice to the concerns of the protestors who attended: "Although we do live on a reservation, the land that [the DAPL is] going to be crossing is on original land that was given to us by treaty, this where it gets people fired up when you talk about broken treaties." (Woolf, 2016)

Following this initial act of protest on Saturday April 2, a smaller group of the Tribes' members (between 20 and 30) established a permanent "spiritual camp" with the intention of staying on site to protest construction until it was no longer a threat (Woolf, 2016). The camp was placed where the pipeline and the Missouri river cross, and came to be known as the Oceti Sakowin camp (King & Munger, 2016). This camp would prove to be the staging ground for many of the acts of agitation that were to follow. At the time the camp was created the main goal of the movement was to force a compromise by ETP and the Federal government by halting construction long enough to conduct an environment impact study (Woolf, 2016). The creation of the camp sent a message to the outside world; indigenous sovereignty needed to be protected and these individuals were willing to defend it with their bodies.

### Enthusiastic Mobilization

Unlike the Black Lives Matter Movement, the transitions between the stages of this movement are not quite as clear cut. After the creation of the "spiritual" camp in April, it slowly began to grow. By August the movement had begun to capture headlines across the country stoking outrage and pushing activists to mobilize (Naylor, 2018). Institutional response<sup>2</sup> was swift, the first arrest made in conjunction with the protests happened on August 10, 2016. These initial arrests galvanized the movement. Between August 2016 and February 2017, the number of individuals physically protesting throughout the Dakotas reached near 10,000 at one point,

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<sup>2</sup> Arrests are a typical tactic of control utilized by the institution at this stage in a social movement. Institutional response was not limited to law enforcement, ETP hired a private security firm to monitor their properties as well.

and included high profile public figures like Jill Stein and Shailene Woodley<sup>3</sup> (Naylor, 2018; Woolf, 2016). The protestors increasingly employed more drastic tactics of agitation as the movement progressed. On October 27, 2016, 141 people were arrested during clashes with riot gear clad officers during which nine vehicles were set on fire in addition to construction equipment and materials, bringing the number of people arrested since August 10<sup>th</sup> to 411 (Parks, Sidner, & Shoichet, 2016).

The movement frequently saw the destruction of ETP's property as a tactic of agitation. Facebook's live stream played a crucial part in this stage of the protest because it allowed protestors to quickly share and disseminate video of the violent clashes between agitators and the institution (Dreyfuss, 2017). Graphic videos showing how the protestors were treated by both ETP's private security firm and law enforcement were shared countless times on multiple social networking sites.

Social media posts that discussed life at the camp and the status of the pipeline have been credited by organizers, such as former Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault, as the reason that the movement swelled so much and so quickly (Naylor, 2018). In a Facebook post by Red Warrior Society in September, activist Lynette Two Bulls' words were shared:

History if forgotten will repeat itself. This movement is bigger than any one person, one group or one nation. It is a time for Indigenous Peoples, as caretakers of Mother Earth to stand up; to let our voice be heard; to reconnect to our life-ways; to live a life worthy of our ancestor's sacrifice; to focus on our strengths and resilience; to come together in our commonalities with the people of the world. We all walk on Mother Earth, breathe the same air, and we all need water for life. Let us not just focus on our external voice and actions, but focus on internal reconnection and wellness. We can create a shift in consciousness, and create social change. We are doing it now! (2016)

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Stein, member of the Green party and former presidential nominee, was arrested for vandalism and criminal trespass. Shailene Woodley, actress, was arrested for criminal trespass (Woolf, 2016).

That message was shared 1,579 times. It and other messages like it brought this struggle into the forefront of social discourse in America.

The public screen and the social networking sites it is partially comprised of allowed this discourse to take place on a scale that was unprecedented. More interestingly, Facebook allowed for a new tactic of agitation to occur. Throughout the protests, there was extensive clash between protestors, law enforcement, and ETP's private security forces. In late October, a rumor began circulating on social media sites that the local police department was using Facebook to track the location of agitators (Kennedy, 2016). While the rumor's origins have not been traced, the response to it was immediate and wide-scale. On November 1, to confuse police and prevent them from tracking protesters movements over 1.5 million users utilized Facebook's check in feature to distort perceptions of protestor's locations and crowd size (Kennedy, 2016). People from around the world used Facebook to engage in the protest while transcending traditional geographic boundaries. In a post, that has since been deleted, the Morton County Sherriff department responded to this outpouring of support from around the world by saying it "does not follow Facebook check-ins for the protest camp or any location" (Kennedy, 2016). This showing of solidarity was catalyzed by a particularly violent clash between agitators and the institution that produced images of activists being peppered with rubber bullets and doused with pepper spray (Hersher, 2016). Emotions were running high and while the sheer size of the response is awe-inspiring, it must be noted that it came from an unfounded rumor (Kennedy, 2016). Within a day, the number of check-ins around the Standing rock protest camp had gone from 140,000 to 1.5 million, an incredibly quick mobilization effort that was most likely a visceral response to the events of the past couple days (Kennedy, 2016).

## Maintenance

The entirety of the movement can mostly be contained within the months of August 2016 to February 2017. With such a short life-span, it is unsurprising that the maintenance stage of this movement was relatively brief. On December 4, 2016, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers halted construction of the pipeline to conduct an environmental impact statement, fulfilling the original desires of the camp that was established in April (Beaumont, 2016). In a statement, that has since been archived, the Army Corps said it “made the decision because the Sioux tribe in that region of North Dakota – along with hundreds of allied protesters at the site over the past several months – had repeatedly expressed concerns that the pipeline posed a risk to its water and treaty rights’ (Beaumont, 2016). The stay of construction came with encouragement from the Obama administration. Agitators and tribal leaders heralded it as a victory. This victory came in the dead of winter, after months of protest and it became evident that people had become fatigued. In fact, organizers like the previously mentioned Archambault, explicitly told protestors they should go home because the extreme winter weather would most likely prevent construction anyways (Haffner, 2016).

The camp, which had grown and even developed new smaller overflow camps, dwindled in size and the core Tribal members who referred to themselves as “Water Protectors” dug in for the winter (Haffner, 2016). John Bigelow, head of Oceti Sakowin’s media committee declared: “As water protectors, we have a responsibility to be stewards of the water... We declare here today, we are not going anywhere” (Haffner, 2016). As winter set in and the threat of the construction seem far removed, the movement began to recede from the public’s field of view.

## Termination

On January 24, 2017, newly elected President Trump signed an executive order to advance approval of both the Keystone XL and DAPL (Jones, Diamond, & Krieg, 2017). The order forced the Army Corps of Engineers to approve the permits for construction without completing the environmental impact study they claimed they would conduct a month prior (Dreyfuss, 2017). Trump's executive order was met with outrage from activists. But, it was too little too late. On February 3, 2017, the US Army Corps of Engineers announced it would be taking steps to close the main camp and remove all protestors from the area; they announced a deadline of February 22<sup>nd</sup> for all water protectors and activists to vacate the land (Medina, 2017). This marked the end of the movement. The federal government's exercising of their legitimate power, specifically Trump's executive order, gave activists no viable means for recourse. Activists were still vocal about their disapproval, but the tactic of control employed by the institution meant that no matter what activists did, the pipeline was going to be built. The movement had exhausted its options for tactics of agitation both traditional and digital. Agitators had failed to accomplish what they set out to do. As the deadline approached, the remaining activists poured out of the camp until only a few remained. In the final hours, the remaining protestors who had not voluntarily left adopted a scorched earth policy and set fire to the remaining structures in the camps (Levin, 2017). After the deadline had passed, ten protestors were arrested and removed (Levin, 2017). The camps all now stood empty. Construction resumed and on June 1, 2017 the DAPL began pumping oil (Kirby, 2017).

One of the most interesting things that occurred because of the movement, was the institutional policy centered response. North and South Dakota are two out four states that have



recently passed anti-protest legislation in their respective state legislative bodies (ACLU, 2018). Take for example North Dakota HB 1293, it is considered emergency legislation and is a direct response to the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The bill not only increased the penalties and fines for trespass in the state, but it also redefined what qualifies as trespassing in the state of North Dakota. The language of the bill makes “an individual liable to trespass charges even when notice against trespass is not clearly communicated or posted, as long as a notice against trespass is clear from the circumstances” (Lux, 2017). Essentially this allows the state to persecute an individual for accidentally crossing into private property, whether the signage is obscured by foliage, or all that signifies the property line is a single post in the ground, the courts can hold them responsible for their trespass. Under this new law, a journalist or protestor could be charged with a class B misdemeanor which in the state of North Dakota can result in up to thirty days in jail and/or up to 1,500 dollars in fines (Lux, 2017). These new anti-protest laws deal with criminal trespass, making it illegal to conceal your face during protest, and other riot related offences (ACLU, 2018). The institution saw the impact and speed of the DAPL and promptly created laws to regulate similar situations in the future. This institutional response however did ignore the digital component that characterized the movement. These new laws were centered around the physical, and more traditional tactics of agitation that were observed during the DAPL protests. As much as social movements are still trying to determine how emergent technology can best be used, the institution has still not discovered an effective model of control for digital discourse.

Though this movement did not achieve its desired outcome, it created a template for future movements to follow. This movement truly occurred on two fronts, in the small town of Cannonball, North Dakota and on the screens of computers all around the world. Its failure

presents a learning opportunity for future agitators. Although it failed, it kept Americans engaged and showed the true potential of new digital technologies in modern social movements. Further, the institutional response illustrated that new social movements have the potential to circumvent traditional models of control by moving the dialogue to a digital platform.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### The New Social Movement

This chapter will outline the findings of the analysis. After completing the case studies, it is time to return to the research question: "How has social media and new technology altered the way social movements organize and communicate both internally and externally?" Contributions to the field of social movement rhetoric can be observed by shedding light on the stylistic, substantive, and organizational changes observed in the case studies. The shifting landscape means that both researchers and activists must adapt and learn to approach these movements in new ways. This chapter will also discuss the limitations that manifested themselves during the research process. Digital mediums have created an influx of data and digital archives can compress large amounts of this data into a simple and accessible format, but the belief that everything on the Internet lasts forever is not entirely true. Further, academia is still catching up with modern technology, while the theoretical framework was present to conduct this research, there were gaps. Lastly, this chapter will look towards potential options for future research. This field is rapidly developing and has exciting potential. The movements that were used in this

analysis were both very recent. This analysis could have benefited from a little more distance between its writing and the events discussed. This study is just a first step into exploring new tactics and models for social movement rhetoric.

### Changes in Social Movement Rhetoric

As the techno-deterministic approach to technology dictates, the adoption of a platform has the potential to influence the stylistic characteristics of rhetoric. In both case studies, the primary interactions between agitators, institutions members, and outsiders occurred via the public screen. While both examples had a physical aspect, they were dwarfed by their online activity. This can be evidenced by the conversations that centered around the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. In the case of the Black Lives Matter movement, the use of Twitter represents a compression of social movement rhetoric. The Twitter platform only allows for a user to share messages of 280 characters at one time<sup>1</sup>. This means that activists are forced to fit their messages into word-efficient formats. Twitter flattens dialogue and instead of a conversation, social movement discourse shifts into a series of quips that often fail to engage the issue fully. Rhetorical messages are crafted to be shorter and more direct in the era of social networking.

Although the use of images in the body of this analysis was limited as to not dominate page space, pictures and video are now a much larger part of the rhetorical artifacts that are produced through social movement rhetoric. While researching the movements, pictures like the ones provided in the case studies characterized much of the discourse occurring. Social

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<sup>1</sup> Users can “chain” their messages, meaning connect multiple tweets into one longer message.

networking sites privilege visual content over simple text. Facebook utilizes an algorithm that will place pictures and videos higher up in the news feed (Flynn, 2017). With Twitter's limited character space, users have learned to utilize images to say what they do not have room for. Social movement rhetoric is becoming increasingly visual due to the adoption of social networking sites.

Modern social movements are highly reactive. While catalytic events have previously been recognized as part of social movement scholarship, social networking sites have made it so the impact of these moments are swift and immediate. In the case of BLM, the violent deaths of victims of police brutality, like Trayvon Martin, pushed the movement between stages overnight. In the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the call went out for citizens to mobilize through Facebook, and they responded immediately with the million-person check-in. The ability to share the graphic images from both crime scenes and protest lines with the touch of a button have made it easier to capitalize on the visceral emotional reactions that they cause.

This reactionary style of rhetoric coupled with the incredibly fast paced nature of the public screen does present a potential problem. While it did no harm in the case of the DAPL, it is critical to note that it happened because of an unconfirmed rumor. Citizens were ready to mobilize before they fully understood the situation they were engaging in. Facebook and other social networking sites have been become plagued with "fake news" in recent years (Wendling, 2018). The false and typically unverifiable stories are spread at a prolific rate because they have engaging headlines and compelling narratives. The speed at which people tend to react to new information could potentially lead to violent reactions if the right conditions present themselves. Take for example, the story of "Pizzagate" in which a twenty-eight-year old man named Edgar Madison walked into a Washington Pizzeria, Comet Ping Pong Pizza, and fired a live round from

his assault rifle to force the establishment to reveal the truth concerning a conspiracy theory that had been circulating on Twitter (Griffin, 2016). The conspiracy alleged the pizzeria was the base of operations for a child-sex abuse ring that was frequented by high-profile politicians like Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief John Podesta (Griffin, 2016). The conspiracy, which had no evidence to support it, had begun circulating on Twitter, 4Chan, and Reddit in late October and had been shared millions of times in the days leading up to the Presidential election (Stelter, 2016). This brings forth a concerning revelation: “While conspiracy theories are nothing new, Internet echo chambers are making the deceptions more powerful and more pernicious. The world-wide web provides easy access to the truth -- but makes it equally easy to wall off the facts and soak up fictions instead” (Stelter, 2016). The truth has power, and modern digital media can warp perceptions of the truth in ways that should concern researchers and activists alike.

These quick knee-jerk reactions are also a result of the rise of the uninformed activist, or what has been colloquially dubbed the “weekend warrior”. Social networking sites have created an emphasis on the performative aspect of activism. Sites like Facebook are built around the people you choose to connect with, your “friends”. Facebook and Twitter posts are as much about showing other people that you care about a movement as they are about increasing visibility for the movement itself. For the most part, the millions of tweets concerning both the BLM movement and the DAPL protests were created by people using their computers and cellphones, not individuals who were physically engaging in protest. Social network sites blur the insider versus outsider dichotomy that usually develops during the social unrest stage in a social movement. The public nature of social networking sites allows anyone and everyone to engage in a movement.

While “weekend warrior” is typically used as a derogatory term, it more accurately represents an increase in the inclusivity of modern social movements. Researchers and activists alike must re-evaluate what constitutes participation in a movement. Modern information and communication and technologies have allowed for new movements to be more accessible than has historically been the case. Considering that as technology advances, it will make what this analysis will refer to as tele-protesting easier and subsequently more common. “Tele-protesting,” in the same vein as telecommuting, can be defined as the using the Internet (including social networking sites, phone applications, etc.) to engage in protest from home or a mobile location. While these uninformed activists may engage in social dialogue without all the facts, they increase the visibility and scope of modern movements. However, as has already been mentioned, this increase in visibility and size comes at the cost of rhetorical robustness. While more people are engaging in these social dialogues, they are doing it 280 characters at a time. The dialogues that occur on Twitter and Facebook do not involve as much engagement as more traditional models of social movement rhetoric. Even though these platforms allow for users to reply with comments, they rarely do. This has led to more one-sided rhetorical statements where clash is either centered around ad hominem attacks or simply non-existent.

The substantive and stylistic changes observed were not dramatic, but there were noticeable differences in organizational patterns. In more traditional social movement settings, a message that would have been spread through a rally or pamphlet can be Tweeted out with a flurry of fingers. The medium has removed hurdles like organizing rallies or the process of publication and distribution that more traditional models of agitation faced. Formal organizations are unnecessary in the creation of social movements. Black Lives Matter was born from a

conversation between friends and actualized through social media sites. A formal organization developed because of the hashtag but was not present at its creation.

The trend of leaderless movements that was first recognized in the Occupy movement was supported in the case studies presented in this analysis. While Garza, Cullors, and Tometi are recognized as founders of the Black Lives Matter Global Network and of the movement overall, their names rarely appear in posts or attached to organizational materials. Further, some members of the BLM movement have a problem with the labeling of them as founders. Johnetta Elzi was a prominent community organizer following the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and: “Elzie, in fact, takes issue with people referring to Garza, Cullors, and Tometi as founders. As she sees it, Ferguson is the cradle of the movement” (Cobb, 2017). There is not simply an absence of leaders, but a rejection of them. Social movements have become too large to be centered around one or two central figures. The case study concerning the DAPL protests exemplified the leaderless movement. During the research process, identifying key figures to the movement was nearly impossible. While some tribal elders and media specialists were interviewed, the ideals and principals of the movement were developed through social media posts. The power structures in a movement have become even more flattened, with the power horizontally distributed between members of the movement and not concentrated in the hands of one or two crucial organizers.

Changes in social movement rhetoric also extend to the metrics and tools that researchers must use to analyze their artifacts. Databases such as G-DELT and research being done by institutions like the Pew Research Center highlight an interesting trend: the quantification of social movement success. Traditional social movements are often evaluated by observable policy outcomes, or sometimes by head-counts at physical protests. Modern social movements are



measured through online traffic and content. In the case study concerning BLM, it was clear that tracking social media trends revealed a lot about the path of the movement, as spikes in traffic corresponded with spikes in protest activity. This might not be true of all movements though. While this metric is useful for determining how much a topic or movement is being discussed, Tweets and Facebook posts might not be the most effective measure of a movement's success. Researchers should be careful moving forward using simple social media metrics as placeholders for in-depth analysis of a movement.

### Limitations

Though this analysis contributes critical and important additions to the developing body of literature concerning modern social movement rhetoric, it does have several gaps that future research could fill. The major limitations include the scope presented by the chosen case studies and the use of non-traditional sources.

BLM and the DAPL protests are prime examples of modern social movement rhetoric. However, as the case study revealed, BLM has not reached the termination stage of the movement. This could be a shortcoming of the model provided by Stewart, Smith, and Denton. There might be other more appropriate models that would have better fit the current movement. A possible alternative could have been Herbert Blumer's model for collective behavior (1969). Blumer identified four stages in social a movement which were labeled as "social ferment," "popular excitement," "formalization," and "Institutionalization" (1969). Scholars in recent years have re-labeled respectively as "emergence," "coalescence," "Bureaucratization," and "decline" (De La Porta & Diani, 2006). This model combines the maintenance and termination phases that

Stewart, Smith, and Denton outline into more ambiguous terms that might be more reflective of the BLM social movement.

Another possible explanation for the imperfect fit of Stewart, Smith, and Denton's model could be a more drastic organizational change in social movement rhetoric; digital media allows for modern social movements to lay dormant for much longer than traditional movements. The Internet allows for social movements to stay relevant without staying in America's viewfinder. Further, as was evidenced in the case studies, modern movements can mobilize and re-mobilize with incredible ease and speed. Stewart, Smith, and Denton's model does account for this phenomenon, by saying a movement may shift back into the enthusiastic mobilization stage after entering the maintenance stage (Stewart et al., 2012). It may simply be the BLM movement has not had enough time to develop rather than an explicit issue with the model used.

While BLM and DAPL protests provide a diverse look at modern social movement rhetoric, encompassing examples of both vertical and lateral deviance, they are by no means a complete picture. To limit the scope of the analysis, these two movements were chosen as case studies for their unique melding of traditional and new tactics of agitation and organization. Social networking sites have made it easier to create new movements and there are more small scale, single issue examples of activism than ever before (Youngs, 2017). While this study could have benefited from casting a wider net, keeping the narrower focus allowed for a more complete exploration of the two chosen case studies.

While researching this project, it was incredibly difficult to locate primary documentation of institutional responses. While the Internet can archive massive amounts of data, government websites had already completely removed or limited access to some documents to which

activists, journalists, and other researchers often referred. As a result, this study relied on secondary documentation more than was desired.

The treatment of both the BLM movement and the DAPL protests relied predominantly on local news, independent online news sources, and primary data pulled from social networking sites. Academic sources are notably missing from chapter four and five and this is simply because they do not exist. A *Communication and Mass Media Complete* search for the term “Black Lives Matter” returns 18 results, most of which deal with topics adjacent to the movement. A search of “Dakota Access Pipeline” returns zero results. This is most likely due to these movements’ recency. The amount of research on these movements is likely to increase in the years to come as the recognition of their social significance grows.

#### Directions for Future Research

While this study establishes a necessary foundation for the analysis of modern social movement rhetoric, it is just that, a foundation. Future research would benefit from expanding the repertoire of case studies and exploring new methodological approaches. First as was discussed in the limitations of the study, this analysis could benefit from exploring other examples of modern social movements. Second, social movements are the codified grouping of human communication, the approach this study took could have utilized a more person-centric methodology such as qualitative in-depth interviews.

As has been stated multiple times, modern social movements are highly individualistic. Future scholarship would benefit from revisiting BLM and DAPL protests once more time has elapsed and their social impact can be more appropriately gaged. Moreover, it is critical for this

field to look at as many examples as possible. The larger the survey of protests is, the more accurately trends and patterns of modern social movements can be identified. Movements that might be worthy of consideration include the Women's Marches mentioned in the introduction of this study, The March for Science which argued for increased scientific literacy (Houterman, 2018), or the wave of activism that has been generated in response to mass shootings in American schools. While this is nowhere near an exhaustive list of potential subjects for further study, it provides a starting point.

The approach this study took was an effective way to understand the organizing principles and characteristics of modern social movements, but it would greatly benefit from an examination of the attitudes and motivation of protestors. Sonora Jha created an exploratory model for the longitudinal study of journalists' Internet use and their attitudes toward social movements (2008). Adapting this model to be more generally administered to activists could provide useful insights into how people truly feel about social media and digital technology's use in modern social movements. It is critical to approach this topic from diverse perspectives, this study was geared towards answering the *what* and *how* related questions of modern social movement rhetoric, but future research can and should focus on the motivational *why* questions as well.

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