Adding Time to Social Movement Diffusion

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ABSTRACT: There is now a substantial literature on the diffusion of protest events, tactics, identities, and frames between locations and among movements. This paper asks how the patterns identified in this literature may change as the time scale of diffusion extends across single cycles of protest and beyond the life spans of individual activists. I focus especially on two types of differences: the changing weight of relational and non-relational channels of diffusion; and ways in which, over longer stretches of time, the mediation of diffusion by formal organizations, institutions, and public history works to filter the influence of past activism.

KEYWORDS: social movements; diffusion; time; comparative-historical sociology
Adding Time to Social Movement Diffusion

On 1 February 1960, four black students from North Carolina A&T took seats and requested service at the Greensboro Woolworth's whites-only lunch counter. Other students, hearing of the sit-in by word of mouth or through the media, quickly followed their example. Within two months, sit-ins reached lunch counters and cafeterias in 71 U.S. cities (McAdam, 1982). Fifty years earlier, London members of the Congo Reform Association organized public meetings and parliamentary petitions to protest atrocities committed by Belgian colonial authorities. These tactics, too, followed precedents set by other humanitarian activists, including Quakers and evangelical Christians who had been involved in different causes but were part of a common religious network (Stamatov, 2013). Social movement scholars will recognize these two cases as examples of 'diffusion,' with demands and tactics spreading through various channels -- social networks, media, organizational ties -- from source to adopter. In one respect, however, diffusion in these two cases looks quite different. In the first, the move from source to adopter occurred within days; in the second, it took place over eight decades. Does that difference make a difference?

This paper answers 'yes.' It urges students of social movements to pay more attention to time as an important mediating factor in diffusion, one that makes generalizations from diffusion within single cycles of protest hazardous. I argue that, as time stretches out, the *channels* for diffusion change in character and relative importance, with potential implications for the *content* of diffusion. Illustrations come from a variety of existing case studies rather than from original research on any one case. I begin with a selective survey of scholars' work on social movement diffusion and then explore how time can alter the patterns these authors have identified.
Social movement diffusion within cycles of protest

One way in which social movements matter is for one another. (Surveys include Strang & Soule, 1998; Whittier, 2004; Soule, 2004; Givan, Roberts, & Soule, 2010; della Porta & Mattoni, 2014.) Without losing sight of other influences on the incidence and character of protest -- threats, resources, moral outrage, political and cultural opportunities -- scholars add that activists are also inspired and guided by other activists. That mutual influence is something that needs to be shown. Similarities across cases of collective action might result from independent responses to similar conditions rather than from the influence of one case on another. Only when there is evidence for the latter do we say that diffusion is at work.

Almost every element in the standard analytical package of social movements may travel through diffusion. Protest events, such as riots, sit-ins, and strikes, are more likely to occur in proximity to other such events (Myers, 2000; Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Isaac & Christiansen, 2002). Tactics diffuse both within and across movement families: anti-apartheid students learned from those on other campuses to build shantytowns (Soule, 1997), for example; and consumers angered by high food prices learned from unions how to picket butchers (Mood, 2009). The basic frame of 'civil rights' spread from black Americans to movements on behalf of women, ethnic minorities, the disabled, and animals. Collective identities constructed in the feminist movement carried over to motivate and shape peace activism (Meyer & Whittier, 1994). Forms of organization, too, proved contagious within and across movements, as with the participatory democracy championed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and widely adopted in the New Left and many subsequent movements (Polletta, 2002).

The channels through which movements influence one another are as varied as the element that diffuse. One such channel involves activists themselves. Individuals often travel from one movement organization or field of protest to another in the course of their activist careers, applying lessons learned in old battles (such as the civil rights or global justice movements) to new ones (such as anti-war or anti-austerity protests) (McAdam, 1988; Zamponi & Daphi, 2014).
to other activists are also important channels of diffusion, channels that can cross national boundaries and movement fields (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Oliver & Myers, 2003). And because protest events are often run by ad hoc committees representing multiple social movement organizations, there are regular opportunities for activists to meet, trade war stories, and learn from one another (della Porta & Mosca, 2007). That mutual learning might get a boost when organizers actively promote their causes and their methods to others or compete with one another for resources and public support (Strang & Soule, 1998).

All of these mechanisms of diffusion involve social ties that link activists across different organizations or movements. They are examples of 'relational' diffusion (McAdam & Rucht, 1993). Other mechanisms involving individual activists dispense with direct social ties. When protesters see themselves as like protesters elsewhere, facing comparable problems, perhaps sharing a common identity, they may emulate movement practices seen from afar. Here, the 'attribution of similarity' (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Strang & Meyer, 1993) replaces direct ties. A related cognitive move, dubbed 'theorization' (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Strang & Meyer, 1993), eases diffusion by commensurating local practices at a higher level of abstraction. Recognizing the general ideal of 'non-violent civil disobedience,' for example, makes it easier for activists to see the relevance of other tactics even when defying very different laws. Persuading carpenters and auto workers that they both are 'wage labor,' similarly, enables members of each occupation to learn from the other despite differences in status and work experience. Both the attribution of similarity and theorization may be aided by brokers between source and adopter, including brokers safely outside the field of protest (Haveman, Rao, & Paruchuri, 2007). Examples are government bureaucrats working out the applicability of employment rights to different groups, media pundits making analogies across protests, and food corporations advancing their own interests by advertising the virtues of 'voting with your fork.'

Other channels of diffusion, finally, are largely independent of individual activists. These non-relational channels include, not surprisingly, social movement organizations themselves. With some of these, 'diffusion' is an internal matter, as protests travel across local branches,
perhaps becoming in the process more standardized by national policies. Andrews and Biggs (2006) offer the example of the sit-ins mentioned at the start of this paper, spreading in part through representatives of major civil rights organizations. Relations among organizations can also foster diffusion, whether these relations involve more or less temporary coalitions (Wang & Soule, 2012) or more distant competition and emulation (Minkoff, 1997). Close analyses of riots and sit-ins have identified the media as another institutional carrier for diffusion (Myers, 2000; Andrews & Biggs, 2006). Lastly, scholars have explored how cultural institutions and categories can serve as vehicles for diffusion, requiring no individual brokers to do the work of commensuration. The idea of a social actor known as 'the consumer' -- an early-twentieth-century innovation -- paved the way for a variety of consumer organizations and tactics (labeling, selective purchasing) across a wide range of problems, from labor exploitation to unsafe or unsustainable products (Glickman, 2009). And to the extent that certain feminist ideals came to be institutionalized in women's bookstores, health clinics, and college majors, these institutions, too, helped diffuse activism across sites, campaigns, and activist generations (Whittier, 1995).

**What about time?**

Time is certainly a factor in studies of diffusion. Rogers' (1995) classic analysis identifies the speed with which innovations spread as a central research topic, and studies by both Haveman and Rao (2007) and Oliver and Myers (2003) ask how that speed is affected by the character of senders and receivers or of the network for diffusion. Time also appears in the form of timing: the pace of diffusion varies with the stage of a protest cycle. It is more rapid early on but slows as niches fill and organizational competition for limited resources heats up (Minkoff, 1997). Some scholars also note that diffusion fades with time -- that a protest event is more likely to inspire imitation when fresh and widely reported (Strang & Tuma, 1993; Myers, 2000). But studies of diffusion over longer periods of time are rare, and examples come more from research on organizational innovation (such as Haveman and Rao on the bureaucratization of thrift institutions in the Progressive Era) than on social movements proper. When students of social movements do
call for greater attention to time or offer case studies of diffusion beyond a single cycle of protest, their temporal ambitions are modest. Zamponi and Daphi (2014) focus on legacies from the global justice movement that influenced anti-austerity protests ten years later; della Porta (2014) examines the diffusion of organizational styles over the decade from global social forums to the indignados and Occupy. Both studies join Tarrow (1998) in highlighting mechanisms that are largely confined to the short term, including 'reactivated activists' (Mattoni & della Porta, 2014, p. 281), individual memories, and social ties among activists.

Why would movements scholars narrow the time scale for diffusion? One reason is that, with exceptions as noted, the concept has typically been applied to the influence of movements on one another within cycles of protest rather than across them. This makes good sense. It is during periods of widespread mobilization that activism is most infectious. Another reason is that a common focus in case studies has been on the spread of discrete protest events. Protest events arguably have a shorter half-life than do collective identities, tactical repertoires, or organizational styles. A final reason may be that it is difficult to reconstruct long-term protest trajectories on the basis of interviews and observation. These are rich sources of information about personal memories and networks, as in Whittier's (1995) fine study of feminist generations in Columbus. They are less suited to tracking long-term diffusion through enduring organizations, institutions, and cultural artifacts.

We know from other case studies, however, that social movement diffusion does take place over the long term. No precise number of years qualifies as 'long term,' and we should not expect the character of diffusion to abruptly change when some specific number is reached. But in thinking about the long term, two considerations are important. First, is it longer than a single cycle of protest? Second, is it longer than the protest careers of all but the hardiest of activists? By those criteria, case studies of diffusion between early- and late-twentieth century creationism (Stobaugh & Snow, 2010) or between the suffragists and second-wave feminists (Taylor, 1989) clearly qualify. The balance of this paper explores questions that even Taylor or Stobaugh and Snow do not. How might diffusion begin to look different as the time scale lengthens, either in the
role played by different channels or in the social movement content that gets diffused? How, accordingly, might we be led astray by generalizing from studies of shorter-term diffusion? Not all the empirical examples discussed below will come from long-term diffusion, but they all suggest how time can make a difference.

**Time and channels of diffusion**

A good place to begin is with channels of diffusion that come to assume more or less prominent roles as time goes by. Following McAdam and Rucht's (1993) distinction between relational and non-relational diffusion, one would expect the former to recede and the latter gain in importance. The movement of any given individual from one cause to another is limited by mortality, and for most participants, time spent actively engaged in contentious politics is a good deal shorter than the full length of their lives. Individual turnover and periodic doldrums in social movement activity are also likely to mute long-term diffusion through social networks, at least as compared with the vibrant exchange of information and inspiration in a rising cycle of contention. Eventually, such ties between activists in different times will become indirect -- illustrated not by Marshall Ganz learning community organizing from Bob Moses in Mississippi during Freedom Summer but by Florence Kelley (leader of the National Consumers League in the early twentieth century) recalling great-aunt Sarah Pugh and reading about her use of boycott strategies in the abolitionist struggle forty years earlier (Goldmark, 1953). Media coverage, similarly, is sure to be a less typical link between protest events separated by many years than those occurring in rapid fire over days and weeks. In principle, an account of contention in the distant past -- in an inflammatory printed pamphlet, in a TV documentary, in a Twitter feed -- could inspire action in the present. But we can at least predict that the frequency and causal weight of that diffusion will diminish with time. The same applies to diffusion as social movement organizations compete with rivals or as entrepreneurial organizers promote far and wide their visions and methods for change. Neither channel is likely to loom as large over the long haul. And it is hard to imagine coalitions or common campaigns between contemporary activists and others long dead. The general point is
this: personal ties, social networks, the media, competition, joint action in a common cause, all 
may operate to convey movement ideals and tactics over time, but that conveyance will be muted 
and increasingly mediated. And the intermediaries, I will argue, are apt to complicate the process 
of diffusion in significant ways.

What channels do that mediating and pick up the slack left by the grim demographics of 
activism? They will be 'non-relational' mechanisms, ones involving the (selective) 
institutionalizing of past movements' influence. That institutionalizing may be through long-lived 
social movement organizations themselves; through political and economic institutions influenced 
by past movements; and through cultural residues from earlier activism.

Case studies that explore a specific genre of protest over time commonly point to formal 
or organzations as one of the means by which tactics, identities, and frames are conveyed. The 
temporal diffusion of tactics occurs in part when organizations act as the 'congealed experience' 
process over a relatively short time span, with the organizing styles and tactical priorities of 
student and religious civil rights workers coming to be embodied and perpetuated in SNCC and 
SCLC. Isaac Martin (2013) provides another example more extended in detail and in time. His 
book traces nearly a century of 'grass-roots' activism on behalf of tax relief for the rich, with 
repeated mobilization against income, property, and estate taxes. Key leadership figures often link 
one or two adjacent periods of struggle, bringing along lessons learned -- sometimes in other 
movements -- about the value of setting up local committees and about how to design anti-tax 
initiatives. But as we step back to consider continuities over longer periods, the more important 
vehicles for diffusion are organizations like the American Taxpayers' Association and the National 
Taxpayers' Union. They kept the flame alive between policy threats; they provided the networks 
that brought new activists to the front; and they offered the settings within which ambitious young 
conservatives learned the trade of fighting taxes on the rich through grass-roots strategies.

Formal organizations may also diffuse tactics over time by linking particular strategic 
repertoires to organizational identities. Stamatov (2013) offers the example of collective
humanitarian activism over several hundred years. Certain tensions between religious ethics and imperial expansion, he argues, made religious orders -- Dominicans and Franciscans in the Spanish Empire, Quakers in the British -- leading critics of colonial exploitation and human slavery. These groups also pioneered new techniques of protest, including the royal and (later) parliamentary petition, the formation of local support committees, and the mounting of public demonstrations of moral outrage. These techniques became enduring scripts associated with Quaker identities and with religious networks based in cities like London and Philadelphia. In successive mobilizations to protest the suffering of distant strangers, these would be the spark plugs and tactical guides.

Stamatov's and Martin's cases involve the diffusion of tactics through organizations within particular fields of activism (global humanitarianism, anti-tax protest). But we can also find formal organizations serving as vehicles for tactical diffusion across fields. To the venerable tradition of food riots, for example, came new tactics in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, including more orderly picketing of offending bakers and butchers. This innovation came as trade unions, with long experience setting up picket lines, added their weight to struggles over the standard of living -- an organizational story reinforced by the more 'relational' one that picketing women were often the wives or mothers of trade unionists (Mood, 2009).

Social movement identities, too, can be perpetuated through formal organization. A classic example comes from Voss's (1993) study of the fall and rise (respectively) of the Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor. Each union institutionalized class and racial boundaries along particular lines. The Knights bridged distinctions of trade, recruited common labor, and (more tentatively) admitted black workers; the AFL organized employees strictly by craft and excluded most unskilled and minority workers. The defeat of the Knights in the late 1880s and the American Federation of Labor's subsequent dominance within the labor movement reproduced those class and racial alignments until the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations forty years later. Isaac and Christiansen (2002) pick up the story, showing how diffusion can also be blocked by changing organizational fortunes. Solidarities and tactical cooperation between CIO unions and
black activists fighting racial inequality in the 1940s largely ended, once anti-communist
countermobilization purged left-leaning CIO locals. When black activism resumed later in the
1950s, it did so as a civil rights movement for blacks, and interracial organizing and protest were
not part of the agenda.

Organizations, finally, can help diffuse social movement frames over longer stretches of
time. In some cases, this is a matter of an organization picking up ideologies in one period and
influencing activists in a later one. During the 1830s, for example, reformers associated with
Sylvester Graham championed 'natural' foods, notably whole grains, as antidotes to the physical
and moral harm thought to be caused by the products of a commercializing food system
(Nissenbaum, 1980). The campaign largely died out by the mid-1840s. But Graham's way of
framing the perils of commercial foods (poisoning bodies and corrupting morals) and valorizing
natural food (suited to men and women as a matter of both scientific fact and divine intention) was
adopted wholesale by Adventist prophetess Ellen White. It became official church doctrine in the
early 1860s. When a new movement for natural food took off later in the century, one center would
be the Adventists' Battle Creek Sanitarium, and one popularizer would be Sanitarium

Organizations, however, do not merely channel frames through their embrace of some
formal ideology. As Elisabeth Clemens (1996) argues, they often are frames. The very
membership requirements, jurisdictional boundaries, and rules for action in labor unions, for
example, are public demonstrations of a collective action frame that defines the central grievances,
identifies the good and bad guys, and specifies the appropriate methods of redress. To the extent
that these organizations survive over extended periods, such frames diffuse through time along
with them (Isaac and Christiansen 2002).

Anti-tax associations, religious advocacy groups, and labor unions are channels of
diffusion operating within the field of social movements. But institutions outside that field can also
act as impersonal brokers, conveying tactics, identities, and frames over time. Stobaugh and Snow
(2010) make this case for legal institutions and the strategic framing of creationism in public
schools. Advocates and opponents of creationist curricula have fought one another in the courts periodically since the Scopes trial, and in each battle (in the 1920s, the 1960s, the 1980s, the 2000s) their tactical choices were guided by previous legal decisions. Proponents of creationism could no longer defend it, after the William Jennings Bryan debacle, as standing with God against secularism. Later, after a 1968 court decision requiring that science classes teach science, divine creation had to be rebranded as creation science. Movement outcomes in this case diffused across time through the workings of legal institutions. Goldberg's (2007) history of welfare rights describes a similar dynamic of diffusion through public policy, a mechanism less direct and constraining than legal precedent. Taking the story from reconstruction in the 1870s to welfare reforms in the 1990s, he shows how the terms of controversy recurrently distinguished between respectable citizens and workers, on one side, and, on the other, welfare recipients enjoying neither the dignity of independent workers nor the constitutional rights of full citizens. That binary was carried from one period to another in part because it was embedded in the institutions of poverty relief, including the contrasts between war pension for soldiers and (failed) land reform for freed slaves; between social security and welfare; and between entitlements and means-tested benefits. This was the terrain on which champions of the poor had to fight. It guided the tactics they used (trying to ally with unions and thus acquire the status of respectable labor during the 1930s, for example), the identities they embraced (as citizens, not paupers), and the frames they advanced (such as equal treatment for New York City's workfare recipients and public employees).

As compared with relational mechanisms, we would also expect diffusion over time to rely on cultural vocabularies, collective memories, and narratives that selectively keynote the past. As with organizations and political or economic institutions, diffusion on any time scale is mediated by culture. That attribution of similarity, after all, is a cultural process of classifying and commensurating. But examining case studies suggests that when the focus is on diffusion over time, it is worth paying closer attention to the institutional carriers of those vocabularies, memories, and narratives -- carriers such as school curricula, professional cultures, museums and monuments, public commemorations, and the like. One reason for that closer attention is
methodological: if we are to rule out independent invention in two different time periods, we need to document the transmission between them. The other reason is more substantive: as we will see, the character of these institutional carriers looms large in selecting which aspects or interpretations of past protest diffuse to the present.

As with formal organizations and political institutions, we can illustrate the importance of cultural intermediaries for diffusing social movement tactics, identities, and frames. Consider, first, two examples involving modest time spans. From an initial round of protest in the early 1970s to a revival in the mid-1990s, the U.S. movement against genetically modified organisms relied primarily on insider strategies. Activists developed their own expertise and deployed it in court cases, legislative hearings, and critical reports. Munro and Schurman (2008) attribute that tactical reliance on counterexpertise rather than popular mobilization to the human capital and professional culture of early activists, trained in science or law but also imbued with the anti-technocratic ethos of the New Left. Insider strategies reflected and were perpetuated by these activists’ sense of who they were and what forms of protest were appropriate. Arguably, tactical diffusion over time in this case delayed the adoption of more effective movement strategies. Payne (2007) tells a more upbeat story of diffusion between labor insurgency in the 1930s and the early civil rights movement. Here, an approach to organizing that emphasized collective empowerment and non-violent civil disobedience was handed down from one time and movement to another through the staff and curriculum of the Highlander School. Traugott's (2010) chronicle of barricades as an instrument of urban protest extends the time scale to nearly three centuries. The intermediary in this case is Parisian popular culture, with an assist from widely distributed novels and graphics. These representations helped identify the construction of barricades with urban insurrection: an important part of what it meant to rise up against the authorities was to build barricades.¹

Activist identities, too, can be embedded in and reproduced through cultural institutions and over multiple generations. However successful sociologists may be in explaining aggregate patterns of mobilization, accounting for the biographical roots of activism remains difficult. Even
McAdam's (1988) close study can do so only by comparing groups (why Freedom Summer applicants of certain types but not others ended up joining the project) rather than by comparing individuals. Payne (2007) finds that the specific men and women who took the earliest (and thus most extreme) risks by registering to vote or organizing others were often heirs to familial traditions of resistance, in some cases dating back to slavery. Family stories socialized the young by commemorating ancestors who refused to step off the sidewalk, to accept domestic service jobs with white families, or to back down when threatened. Guenther Roth's classic study (1963) of German workers between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries also calls out narratives and rituals embedded in cultural institutions as keys to the diffusion of movement identities. In his subjects' case, the identity was one of class solidarity and radical politics, and the institutions included a wide array of socialist clubs, choirs, theaters, libraries, and friendly societies that at once educated workers in class consciousness and insulated them from competing influences. Once established, this identity could then be appealed to in later political and industrial mobilization against the imperial upper classes.

Cultural institutions, finally, may convey distinct social movement frames over surprisingly long time spans. This is a role often assigned to intellectuals, nurturing criticisms of the status quo from the comfort of their studies but also, occasionally, providing some ideological ammunition for popular protest. Collective action frames, however, can be sustained by popular culture as well. Searching for the origins of Tea Party sentiment among lower-middle-class southern whites, Hochschild (2016) takes us back to reconstruction-era hostility to the moralistic intrusion of northern (in the guise of federal) authority. That experience laid down 'emotional grooves' that would be etched once more by the imposition of civil rights laws and court decisions in the 1960s. This resonant framing of 'big government,' especially in the area of race relations, was ready at hand after Obama's 2008 election. Hochschild does not explore how these emotional grooves were reproduced between crises. John Walton's (1992) study of Owens Valley residents' resistance to land and water grabs by Los Angeles developers and politicians over seventy years fills that gap. Already during the earliest protests, in the 1900s, resistance drew on an older
discourse of frontier independence and prosperity pitted against corrupt outsiders. By the 1920s, and then again in the 1970s, protesters also invoked 'the rape of the valley' to condemn the LA cabal and justify protest, including rough justice when legal strategies failed. It is possible, of course, that organizers in the two periods came up with this language independently. Walton, however, is careful to show how the frame was carried across fifty years through Hollywood movies, popular novels, and journalistic exposes. Those intermediaries ensured that when conditions favored a new cycle of protest in the 1970s, 'resonant' collective action frames from the past would be available.

**Time and the content of diffusion**

I have argued that, as time lengthens, relational mechanisms of diffusion are likely to play a smaller role and non-relational ones are likely to come to the fore. Are there similar shifts in the content of diffusion? The only components of protest we might reasonably expect to become less contagious over time, although not in any linear fashion, are protest events themselves. Empirical studies suggest that even over relatively short periods protest events quickly lose their capacity to inspire mobilization elsewhere (Strang & Tuma, 1993; Myers, 2000). We would expect their inspirational power to further diminish as emotions cool, memories fade, and witnesses pass away, unless those events become the subjects of institutionalized collective memory, as with the Stonewall riot taken up by gay rights organizations and pride parades (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). If only as a matter of relative proportion, other aspects of social movements will be correspondingly more prominent in long-term diffusion. There are, for example, the enduring tactical repertoires studied by Tilly (1995), collective identities like nationalism embedded in school textbooks and murals, and invidious framing devices like the contrast between 'natural' and 'artificial' reproduced in cookbooks and advertising.²

There may be no generalizable patterns in what specific tactics, identities, or frames are most likely to stand the test of time. The more useful line of inquiry is to explore particular kinds of filtering. If, over time, diffusion is increasingly mediated by non-relational mechanisms of the
kind illustrated here, we should explore how those mechanisms operate to select some aspects of past movements for posterity but not others. Such filtering may operate through the greater weight of formal organization, through historical 'lock-in,' or through the advantages enjoyed by some actors over others in appropriating the past to suit their present. These are the subjects of distinct literatures -- on historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory -- from which students of diffusion could usefully draw.

One of the ways in which long-term diffusion may be different from that within a protest cycle, I have argued, is that the organizational carriers of tactics, identities, and frames outlive individual activists and their relational ties. Scholars also have contended, on theoretical (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and empirical (Staggenborg, 1988) grounds, that more professionalized organizations are more likely to endure than informal organizations and ad hoc networks. To the extent that these professionalized organizations favor different tactics, identities, or frames, then those preferences would also carry greater weight over time. Whittier and Payne note the shift even over the span of a decade. In Whittier's (1995) interviews, older activists lamented the decline of grass-roots mobilization and radical feminism as the organizational center of gravity moved towards national, professionally run women's organizations. Payne (2007) chronicles the decline of the 'organizing tradition' of collective empowerment as initiative passed from the first generation of activists to formal civil rights organizations. Arguably that trajectory continued well beyond the mid-1960s as insurgent Freedom Schools, designed to cultivate racial pride and political fortitude, evolved into the better funded, bureaucratically entrenched, but politically neutered Head Start program. The best-known and longest-running example, however, comes from the labor movement. Scholars disagree about the causal weight of national unions (and formal collective bargaining procedures) in labor deradicalization after World War I and again after the 1930s. But it is at least clear that periods of heightened labor militancy and radicalism were associated with alternative, local, relatively informal worker organizations, such as shop committees and shop steward schemes (Brecher, 1972). These were the first to fall -- to employer counteroffensives, to unemployment, to exhaustion -- after the crises of WWI and the Great
Depression, leaving national unions as the main carriers of labor traditions. Those unions, in turn, whatever their formal politics, tended to discountenance such labor tactics as wildcat strikes and 'spontaneous' sit-ins. Their institutional preference was instead for acts of protest vetted by union officials and authorized under existing industrial relations rules.

Whether channeled by formal organizations or other institutions, diffusion over time may also be subject to historical lock-in and thus to filtering of another sort. Voss's (1993) story of the late-nineteenth-century decline of the Knights of Labor and rise of the AFL illustrates how types of organization can carry with them social boundaries and collective identities of particular kinds. But her story is also one of path dependency. After the collapse of the Knights and consolidation of the AFL, it became increasingly difficult for any labor organization built on rival principles to challenge the AFL, thanks to that federation's growing resources and exclusive jurisdictions, as well as employers' preference (if they had to choose) for a more moderate bargaining partner. It would take the Great Depression to loosen the AFL's hold. Ganz (2009) adds that by the 1960s, mainstream unions like the Teamsters had come to tightly link a form of organization (the bureaucratic union), a social identity ('labor'), and a tactical repertoire (strikes, collective bargaining). That made it hard for the Teamsters to grasp opportunities to organize and represent farm workers. Indeed, Teamster officials failed even to understand how the 'union' known as the United Farm Workers could have characteristics of a decentralized civil rights organization, appeal to farm laborers as Mexicans as well as workers, and use such tactics as peasant theater and public marches. This lack of strategic imagination illustrates how the attribution of similarity, too, is subject to historical lock-in.

That attribution of similarity is also highly contested, and therein lies a third sort of filtering. I have argued that over time diffusion will be mediated more by cultural institutions and public history, mechanisms for defining what are the lessons of the past. These definitions may be contentious, and some actors will have advantages in making their definitions prevail. In explaining the persistence of radicalism among west coast dock workers, Kimeldorf (1988) notes the continuing salience of the 1934 general strike. Here was an event that did diffuse over time, but
less by directly inspiring other strikes than by serving as an enduring testimonial to the virtues of
rank and file militancy for longshoremen who never experienced it themselves. Drawing attention
to that particular lesson and keeping it alive were the work of veterans of the strike, men who
enjoyed higher status for having participated and who often held higher positions in the union
hierarchy. It would have been hard for any dissidents to win wide support for an alternative
interpretation (such as that the violence and personal sacrifice involved in the 1934 struggle did not
'pay'), much less keep the celebration of the strike off the agenda of union communications,
informal gatherings, and anniversary observances. John Walton (2001) makes the point more
explicit and general in his study of Monterey. The public histories found in memorials,
monuments, holidays, tourist brochures, and countless other institutionalized narratives of the past
are the products of contentious, if usually behind-the-scenes, politics. In Monterey, local business
interests typically had the advantage. In their hands, diffusion selectively included such adopted
local heroes as John Steinbeck and excluded unseemly stories of cannery worker exploitation and
strikes. Or to take another example from Walton, whether Father Serra is remembered as like a
father to his early California flock or as like a colonial exploiter of Native Americans has been the
subject of lively debate among representatives of the park service, church champions of Serra's
sainthood, and activist tribal leaders. In 'attributing similarity' along different lines, each group has
retrospectively steered diffusion in particular directions.

Conclusion

The question this paper addressed is how the character of diffusion may change as that
process extends in time. The first answer I provided is that diffusion increasingly became mediated
by non-relational mechanisms like formal organizations, political, economic, and cultural
institutions, and cultural practices that construct public histories. These mechanisms matter, I
argued, as increasingly important channels of diffusion. But that shift in the significance of
different channels also may matter for the content of diffusion. The greater longevity of formal
organizations, for example, has implications for what tactics diffuse over time; diffusion through
social institutions and cultural scripts can lock in movement identities or frames; and the importance of constructed public histories makes lessons from the past dependent on the unequal influence of current interests. That final point suggests another way in which diffusion over time may look different. Given the prospect that collective memories will change as actors reinvent the past to suit their current needs, diffusion's 'push' may come more from the adopter than the source. As Tea Party activists, for example, 'attribute similarity' between themselves and revolutionary-era patriots, they activate the diffusion of strategic language and symbolic performances from the past.

That new identities can, long after the fact, create new causal influences from the past may send shivers down the realist's spine. Students of collective memory offer the consolation that the past is not infinitely malleable in later commemoration (Schwartz, 1991). I have also argued that social movement identities (as well as tactics and frame) are themselves subject to lock-in. The balance between constructed and constraining historical influences will vary, and path dependency is itself contingent. In political matters, for example, Pierson (2004) shows how the character of political institutions and interest groups makes it more or less likely that policy outcomes will get locked in. Spillman (1998) finds that more 'multivalent' events gain more enduring commemoration. And Tilly (1995) and Tarrow (2013) agree that more 'modular' tactics are most likely to spread. My discussion of the role of social movement organizations, social institutions, and collective memory in diffusion over time suggests another influence on what elements of social movements have staying power. To the extent that these vehicles of diffusion align, diffusion from the past is apt to be especially constraining for later activists. Labor offers the best example. In this case, a particular identity and tactical repertoire are embedded in social movement organizations (unions), institutionalized in industrial relations practices and law, and commemorated in public monuments and holidays. That convergence ensures that earlier models and precedents, including for what it means to be 'labor,' for how to frame employers, and for how to pursue goals, diffuse from past to present with considerable force.

This source of continuity in social movement identities, frames, and tactics suggests a final lesson, about the way in which social movement scholars, rather than activists, make use of
history. As compared with most other fields within sociology, much research on social movements is richly historical. It regularly includes case studies of past protest, and a common theme has been the role of large-scale, long-term social changes in shaping repertoires or fomenting major episodes (such as revolutions). But even historically minded scholars like Tilly also aspire to generalize beyond time and place. They might abstract protest events from their contexts in order to generalize about shifts in tactical repertoires, for example, or abstract properties of protest from their settings in order to generalize about mechanisms of contention. Exploring how time matters in diffusion suggests certain limits to that approach. Generalizing about the relative importance of different channels of diffusion can be misleading if it ignores the temporal scale of protest. In considering how long-term diffusion might, in turn, affect the content of diffusion, I have suggested that we learn from literatures on historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory. These are centrally concerned with how patterns of social interaction are embedded and reproduced through institutions; how those patterns become fixed and resist alternatives; and how they are publicly reconstructed and memorialized by later generations. Those processes apply as well to diffusion as it stretches through time, transmitting, locking in, and filtering the past. Scholars of historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory, however, caution us that these are not processes to be generalized, like 'mechanisms,' across historical contexts; they are instead reminders of different ways in which history matters. That caution applies as well to diffusion over time. It can best be understood by preserving the contexts of time as well as place within which activists make use of the past.

Notes

1. Traugott's treatment of what we might now call urban riots is an instructive contrast to Myers' (2000) account. For the time scale of Myers' study, it makes sense to consider mechanisms of diffusion that involve direct knowledge of riots elsewhere. For the several centuries covered by Traugott, it becomes necessary to ask how the meaning of a riotous activity comes to congeal in political and literary cultures and, in that way, can persist even through long periods of quiescence.
2. As Gillan (2017) points out, these components of social movements may change (or diffuse) at quite different rhythms.
References


Adding Time to Social Movement Diffusion

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Abstract: There is now a substantial literature on the diffusion of protest events, tactics, identities, and frames between locations and among movements. This paper asks how the patterns identified in this literature may change as the time scale of diffusion extends across single cycles of protest and beyond the life spans of individual activists. I focus especially on two types of differences: the changing weight of relational and non-relational channels of diffusion; and ways in which, over longer stretches of time, the mediation of diffusion by formal organizations, institutions, and public history works to filter the influence of past activism.

Keywords: social movements; diffusion; time; comparative-historical sociology

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On 1 February 1960, four black students from North Carolina A&T took seats and requested service at the Greensboro Woolworth's whites-only lunch counter. Other students, hearing of the sit-in by word of mouth or through the media, quickly followed their example. Within two months, sit-ins reached lunch counters and cafeterias in 71 U.S. cities (McAdam, 1982). Fifty years earlier, London members of the Congo Reform Association organized public meetings and parliamentary petitions to protest atrocities committed by Belgian colonial authorities. These tactics, too, followed precedents set by other humanitarian activists, including Quakers and evangelical Christians who had been involved in different causes but were part of a common religious network (Stamatov, 2013). Social movement scholars will recognize these two cases as examples of 'diffusion,' with demands and tactics spreading through various channels -- social networks, media, organizational ties -- from source to adopter. In one respect, however, diffusion in these two cases looks quite different. In the first, the move from source to adopter occurred within days; in the second, it took place over eight decades. Does that difference make a difference?

This paper answers 'yes.' It urges students of social movements to pay more attention to time as an important mediating factor in diffusion, one that makes generalizations from diffusion within single cycles of protest hazardous. I argue that, as time stretches out, the channels for diffusion change in character and relative importance, with potential implications for the content of diffusion. Illustrations come from a variety of existing case studies rather than from original research on any one case. I begin with a selective survey of scholars' work on social movement diffusion and then explore how time can alter the patterns these authors have identified.
Social movement diffusion within cycles of protest

One way in which social movements matter is for one another. (Surveys include Strang & Soule, 1998; Whittier, 2004; Soule, 2004; Givan, Roberts, & Soule, 2010; della Porta & Mattoni, 2014.) Without losing sight of other influences on the incidence and character of protest -- threats, resources, moral outrage, political and cultural opportunities -- scholars add that activists are also inspired and guided by other activists. That mutual influence is something that needs to be shown. Similarities across cases of collective action might result from independent responses to similar conditions rather than from the influence of one case on another. Only when there is evidence for the latter do we say that diffusion is at work.

Almost every element in the standard analytical package of social movements may travel through diffusion. Protest events, such as riots, sit-ins, and strikes, are more likely to occur in proximity to other such events (Myers, 2000; Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Isaac & Christiansen, 2002). Tactics diffuse both within and across movement families: anti-apartheid students learned from those on other campuses to build shantytowns (Soule, 1997), for example; and consumers angered by high food prices learned from unions how to picket butchers (Mood, 2009). The basic frame of 'civil rights' spread from black Americans to movements on behalf of women, ethnic minorities, the disabled, and animals. Collective identities constructed in the feminist movement carried over to motivate and shape peace activism (Meyer & Whittier, 1994). Forms of organization, too, proved contagious within and across movements, as with the participatory democracy championed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and widely adopted in the New Left and many subsequent movements (Polletta, 2002).

The channels through which movements influence one another are as varied as the element that diffuse. One such channel involves activists themselves. Individuals often travel from one movement organization or field of protest to another in the course of their activist careers, applying lessons learned in old battles (such as the civil rights or global justice movements) to new ones (such as anti-war or anti-austerity protests) (McAdam, 1988; Zamponi & Daphi, 2014). Their ties
to other activists are also important channels of diffusion, channels that can cross national boundaries and movement fields (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Oliver & Myers, 2003). And because protest events are often run by ad hoc committees representing multiple social movement organizations, there are regular opportunities for activists to meet, trade war stories, and learn from one another (della Porta & Mosca, 2007). That mutual learning might get a boost when organizers actively promote their causes and their methods to others or compete with one another for resources and public support (Strang & Soule, 1998).

All of these mechanisms of diffusion involve social ties that link activists across different organizations or movements. They are examples of 'relational' diffusion (McAdam & Rucht, 1993). Other mechanisms involving individual activists dispense with direct social ties. When protesters see themselves as like protesters elsewhere, facing comparable problems, perhaps sharing a common identity, they may emulate movement practices seen from afar. Here, the 'attribution of similarity' (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Strang & Meyer, 1993) replaces direct ties. A related cognitive move, dubbed 'theorization' (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Strang & Meyer, 1993), eases diffusion by commensurating local practices at a higher level of abstraction. Recognizing the general ideal of 'non-violent civil disobedience,' for example, makes it easier for activists to see the relevance of other tactics even when defying very different laws. Persuading carpenters and auto workers that they both are 'wage labor,' similarly, enables members of each occupation to learn from the other despite differences in status and work experience. Both the attribution of similarity and theorization may be aided by brokers between source and adopter, including brokers safely outside the field of protest (Haveman, Rao, & Paruchuri, 2007). Examples are government bureaucrats working out the applicability of employment rights to different groups, media pundits making analogies across protests, and food corporations advancing their own interests by advertising the virtues of 'voting with your fork.'

Other channels of diffusion, finally, are largely independent of individual activists. These non-relational channels include, not surprisingly, social movement organizations themselves. With some of these, 'diffusion' is an internal matter, as protests travel across local branches,
perhaps becoming in the process more standardized by national policies. Andrews and Biggs (2006) offer the example of the sit-ins mentioned at the start of this paper, spreading in part through representatives of major civil rights organizations. Relations among organizations can also foster diffusion, whether these relations involve more or less temporary coalitions (Wang & Soule, 2012) or more distant competition and emulation (Minkoff, 1997). Close analyses of riots and sit-ins have identified the media as another institutional carrier for diffusion (Myers, 2000; Andrews & Biggs, 2006). Lastly, scholars have explored how cultural institutions and categories can serve as vehicles for diffusion, requiring no individual brokers to do the work of commensuration. The idea of a social actor known as 'the consumer' -- an early-twentieth-century innovation -- paved the way for a variety of consumer organizations and tactics (labeling, selective purchasing) across a wide range of problems, from labor exploitation to unsafe or unsustainable products (Glickman, 2009). And to the extent that certain feminist ideals came to be institutionalized in women's bookstores, health clinics, and college majors, these institutions, too, helped diffuse activism across sites, campaigns, and activist generations (Whittier, 1995).

What about time?

Time is certainly a factor in studies of diffusion. Rogers' (1995) classic analysis identifies the speed with which innovations spread as a central research topic, and studies by both Haveman and Rao (2007) and Oliver and Myers (2003) ask how that speed is affected by the character of senders and receivers or of the network for diffusion. Time also appears in the form of timing: the pace of diffusion varies with the stage of a protest cycle. It is more rapid early on but slows as niches fill and organizational competition for limited resources heats up (Minkoff, 1997). Some scholars also note that diffusion fades with time -- that a protest event is more likely to inspire imitation when fresh and widely reported (Strang & Tuma, 1993; Myers, 2000). But studies of diffusion over longer periods of time are rare, and examples come more from research on organizational innovation (such as Haveman and Rao on the bureaucratization of thrift institutions in the Progressive Era) than on social movements proper. When students of social movements do
call for greater attention to time or offer case studies of diffusion beyond a single cycle of protest, their temporal ambitions are modest. Zamponi and Daphi (2014) focus on legacies from the global justice movement that influenced anti-austerity protests ten years later; della Porta (2014) examines the diffusion of organizational styles over the decade from global social forums to the indignados and Occupy. Both studies join Tarrow (1998) in highlighting mechanisms that are largely confined to the short term, including 'reactivated activists' (Mattoni & della Porta, 2014, p. 281), individual memories, and social ties among activists.

Why would movements scholars narrow the time scale for diffusion? One reason is that, with exceptions as noted, the concept has typically been applied to the influence of movements on one another within cycles of protest rather than across them. This makes good sense. It is during periods of widespread mobilization that activism is most infectious. Another reason is that a common focus in case studies has been on the spread of discrete protest events. Protest events arguably have a shorter half-life than do collective identities, tactical repertoires, or organizational styles. A growing body of research exploring the impact of digital technologies on social movements may also encourage a focus on the short-term: social media use appears to shorten the time line of diffusion (Poell, 2014). A final reason may be that it is difficult to reconstruct long-term protest trajectories on the basis of interviews and observation. These are rich sources of information about personal memories and networks, as in Whittier's (1995) fine study of feminist generations in Columbus. They are less suited to tracking long-term diffusion through enduring organizations, institutions, and cultural artifacts.

We know from other case studies, however, that social movement diffusion does take place over the long term. No precise number of years qualifies as 'long term,' and we should not expect the character of diffusion to abruptly change when some specific number is reached. But in thinking about the long term, two considerations are important. First, is it longer than a single cycle of protest? Second, is it longer than the protest careers of all but the hardiest of activists? By those criteria, case studies of diffusion between early- and late-twentieth century creationism (Stobaugh & Snow, 2010) or between the suffragists and second-wave feminists (Taylor, 1989)
clearly qualify. The balance of this paper explores questions that even Taylor or Stobaugh and Snow do not. How might diffusion begin to look different as the time scale lengthens, either in the role played by different channels or in the social movement content that gets diffused? How, accordingly, might we be led astray by generalizing from studies of shorter-term diffusion? Not all the empirical examples discussed below will come from long-term diffusion, but they all suggest how time can make a difference.

Time and channels of diffusion

A good place to begin is with channels of diffusion that come to assume more or less prominent roles as time goes by. Following McAdam and Rucht's (1993) distinction between relational and non-relational diffusion, one would expect the former to recede and the latter gain in importance. The movement of any given individual from one cause to another is limited by mortality, and for most participants, time spent actively engaged in contentious politics is a good deal shorter than the full length of their lives. Individual turnover and periodic doldrums in social movement activity are also likely to mute long-term diffusion through social networks, at least as compared with the vibrant exchange of information and inspiration in a rising cycle of contention. Eventually, such ties between activists in different times will become indirect -- illustrated not by Marshall Ganz learning community organizing from Bob Moses in Mississippi during Freedom Summer but by Florence Kelley (leader of the National Consumers League in the early twentieth century) recalling great-aunt Sarah Pugh and reading about her use of boycott strategies in the abolitionist struggle forty years earlier (Goldmark, 1953). Media coverage, similarly, is sure to be a less typical link between protest events separated by many years than those occurring in rapid fire over days and weeks. In principle, an account of contention in the distant past -- in an inflammatory printed pamphlet, in a TV documentary, in a Twitter feed -- could inspire action in the present. But we can at least predict that the frequency and causal weight of that diffusion will diminish with time. The same applies to diffusion as social movement organizations compete with rivals or as entrepreneurial organizers promote far and wide their visions and methods for change.
Neither channel is likely to loom as large over the long haul. And it is hard to imagine coalitions or common campaigns between contemporary activists and others long dead. The general point is this: personal ties, social networks, the media, competition, joint action in a common cause, all may operate to convey movement ideals and tactics over time, but that conveyance will be muted and increasingly mediated. And the intermediaries, I will argue, are apt to complicate the process of diffusion in significant ways.

What channels do that mediating and pick up the slack left by the grim demographics of activism? They will be 'non-relational' mechanisms, ones involving the (selective) institutionalizing of past movements' influence. That institutionalizing may be through long-lived social movement organizations themselves; through political and economic institutions influenced by past movements; and through cultural residues from earlier activism.

Case studies that explore a specific genre of protest over time commonly point to formal organizations as one of the means by which tactics, identities, and frames are conveyed. The temporal diffusion of tactics occurs in part when organizations act as the 'congealed experience' (Payne, 2007, p. 101) of activists. Payne (2007) and Tarrow and McAdam (2005) document this process over a relatively short time span, with the organizing styles and tactical priorities of student and religious civil rights workers coming to be embodied and perpetuated in SNCC and SCLC. Isaac Martin (2013) provides another example more extended in detail and in time. His book traces nearly a century of 'grass-roots' activism on behalf of tax relief for the rich, with repeated mobilization against income, property, and estate taxes. Key leadership figures often link one or two adjacent periods of struggle, bringing along lessons learned -- sometimes in other movements -- about the value of setting up local committees and about how to design anti-tax initiatives. But as we step back to consider continuities over longer periods, the more important vehicles for diffusion are organizations like the American Taxpayers' Association and the National Taxpayers' Union. They kept the flame alive between policy threats; they provided the networks that brought new activists to the front; and they offered the settings within which ambitious young conservatives learned the trade of fighting taxes on the rich through grass-roots strategies.
Formal organizations may also diffuse tactics over time by linking particular strategic repertoires to organizational identities. Stamatov (2013) offers the example of collective humanitarian activism over several hundred years. Certain tensions between religious ethics and imperial expansion, he argues, made religious orders -- Dominicans and Franciscans in the Spanish Empire, Quakers in the British -- leading critics of colonial exploitation and human slavery. These groups also pioneered new techniques of protest, including the royal and (later) parliamentary petition, the formation of local support committees, and the mounting of public demonstrations of moral outrage. These techniques became enduring scripts associated with Quaker identities and with religious networks based in cities like London and Philadelphia. In successive mobilizations to protest the suffering of distant strangers, these would be the spark plugs and tactical guides.

Stamatov's and Martin's cases involve the diffusion of tactics through organizations within particular fields of activism (global humanitarianism, anti-tax protest). But we can also find formal organizations serving as vehicles for tactical diffusion across fields. To the venerable tradition of food riots, for example, came new tactics in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, including more orderly picketing of offending bakers and butchers. This innovation came as trade unions, with long experience setting up picket lines, added their weight to struggles over the standard of living -- an organizational story reinforced by the more 'relational' one that picketing women were often the wives or mothers of trade unionists (Mood, 2009).

Social movement identities, too, can be perpetuated through formal organization. A classic example comes from Voss's (1993) study of the fall and rise (respectively) of the Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor. Each union institutionalized class and racial boundaries along particular lines. The Knights bridged distinctions of trade, recruited common labor, and (more tentatively) admitted black workers; the AFL organized employees strictly by craft and excluded most unskilled and minority workers. The defeat of the Knights in the late 1880s and the American Federation of Labor's subsequent dominance within the labor movement reproduced those class and racial alignments until the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations forty years later.
Isaac and Christiansen (2002) pick up the story, showing how diffusion can also be blocked by changing organizational fortunes. Solidarities and tactical cooperation between CIO unions and black activists fighting racial inequality in the 1940s largely ended, once anti-communist countermobilization purged left-leaning CIO locals. When black activism resumed later in the 1950s, it did so as a civil rights movement for blacks, and interracial organizing and protest were not part of the agenda.

Organizations, finally, can help diffuse social movement frames over longer stretches of time. In some cases, this is a matter of an organization picking up ideologies in one period and influencing activists in a later one. During the 1830s, for example, reformers associated with Sylvester Graham championed 'natural' foods, notably whole grains, as antidotes to the physical and moral harm thought to be caused by the products of a commercializing food system (Nissenbaum, 1980). The campaign largely died out by the mid-1840s. But Graham's way of framing the perils of commercial foods (poisoning bodies and corrupting morals) and valorizing natural food (suited to men and women as a matter of both scientific fact and divine intention) was adopted wholesale by Adventist prophetess Ellen White. It became official church doctrine in the early 1860s. When a new movement for natural food took off later in the century, one center would be the Adventists' Battle Creek Sanitarium, and one popularizer would be Sanitarium superintendent (and Adventist) John Harvey Kellogg (Numbers, 1992).

Organizations, however, do not merely channel frames through their embrace of some formal ideology. As Elisabeth Clemens (1996) argues, they often are frames. The very membership requirements, jurisdictional boundaries, and rules for action in labor unions, for example, are public demonstrations of a collective action frame that defines the central grievances, identifies the good and bad guys, and specifies the appropriate methods of redress. To the extent that these organizations survive over extended periods, such frames diffuse through time along with them (Isaac and Christiansen 2002).

Anti-tax associations, religious advocacy groups, and labor unions are channels of diffusion operating within the field of social movements. But institutions outside that field can also
act as impersonal brokers, conveying tactics, identities, and frames over time. Stobaugh and Snow (2010) make this case for legal institutions and the strategic framing of creationism in public schools. Advocates and opponents of creationist curricula have fought one another in the courts periodically since the Scopes trial, and in each battle (in the 1920s, the 1960s, the 1980s, the 2000s) their tactical choices were guided by previous legal decisions. Proponents of creationism could no longer defend it, after the William Jennings Bryan debacle, as standing with God against secularism. Later, after a 1968 court decision requiring that science classes teach science, divine creation had to be rebranded as creation science. Movement outcomes in this case diffused across time through the workings of legal institutions. Goldberg's (2007) history of welfare rights describes a similar dynamic of diffusion through public policy, a mechanism less direct and constraining than legal precedent. Taking the story from reconstruction in the 1870s to welfare reforms in the 1990s, he shows how the terms of controversy recurrently distinguished between respectable citizens and workers, on one side, and, on the other, welfare recipients enjoying neither the dignity of independent workers nor the constitutional rights of full citizens. That binary was carried from one period to another in part because it was embedded in the institutions of poverty relief, including the contrasts between war pension for soldiers and (failed) land reform for freed slaves; between social security and welfare; and between entitlements and means-tested benefits. This was the terrain on which champions of the poor had to fight. It guided the tactics they used (trying to ally with unions and thus acquire the status of respectable labor during the 1930s, for example), the identities they embraced (as citizens, not paupers), and the frames they advanced (such as equal treatment for New York City's workfare recipients and public employees).

As compared with relational mechanisms, we would also expect diffusion over time to rely on cultural vocabularies, collective memories, and narratives that selectively keynote the past. As with organizations and political or economic institutions, diffusion on any time scale is mediated by culture. That attribution of similarity, after all, is a cultural process of classifying and commensurating. But examining case studies suggests that when the focus is on diffusion over time, it is worth paying closer attention to the institutional carriers of those vocabularies,
memories, and narratives -- carriers such as school curricula, professional cultures, museums and monuments, public commemorations, and the like. One reason for that closer attention is methodological: if we are to rule out independent invention in two different time periods, we need to document the transmission between them. The other reason is more substantive: as we will see, the character of these institutional carriers looms large in selecting which aspects or interpretations of past protest diffuse to the present.

As with formal organizations and political institutions, we can illustrate the importance of cultural intermediaries for diffusing social movement tactics, identities, and frames. Consider, first, two examples involving modest time spans. From an initial round of protest in the early 1970s to a revival in the mid-1990s, the U.S. movement against genetically modified organisms relied primarily on insider strategies. Activists developed their own expertise and deployed it in court cases, legislative hearings, and critical reports. Munro and Schurman (2008) attribute that tactical reliance on counterexpertise rather than popular mobilization to the human capital and professional culture of early activists, trained in science or law but also imbued with the anti-technocratic ethos of the New Left. Insider strategies reflected and were perpetuated by these activists' sense of who they were and what forms of protest were appropriate. Arguably, tactical diffusion over time in this case delayed the adoption of more effective movement strategies. Payne (2007) tells a more upbeat story of diffusion between labor insurgency in the 1930s and the early civil rights movement. Here, an approach to organizing that emphasized collective empowerment and non-violent civil disobedience was handed down from one time and movement to another through the staff and curriculum of the Highlander School. Traugott's (2010) chronicle of barricades as an instrument of urban protest extends the time scale to nearly three centuries. The intermediary in this case is Parisian popular culture, with an assist from widely distributed novels and graphics. These representations helped identify the construction of barricades with urban insurrection: an important part of what it meant to rise up against the authorities was to build barricades.¹
Activist identities, too, can be embedded in and reproduced through cultural institutions and over multiple generations. However successful sociologists may be in explaining aggregate patterns of mobilization, accounting for the biographical roots of activism remains difficult. Even McAdam's (1988) close study can do so only by comparing groups (why Freedom Summer applicants of certain types but not others ended up joining the project) rather than by comparing individuals. Payne (2007) finds that the specific men and women who took the earliest (and thus most extreme) risks by registering to vote or organizing others were often heirs to familial traditions of resistance, in some cases dating back to slavery. Family stories socialized the young by commemorating ancestors who refused to step off the sidewalk, to accept domestic service jobs with white families, or to back down when threatened. Guenther Roth's classic study (1963) of German workers between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries also calls out narratives and rituals embedded in cultural institutions as keys to the diffusion of movement identities. In his subjects' case, the identity was one of class solidarity and radical politics, and the institutions included a wide array of socialist clubs, choirs, theaters, libraries, and friendly societies that at once educated workers in class consciousness and insulated them from competing influences. Once established, this identity could then be appealed to in later political and industrial mobilization against the imperial upper classes.

Cultural institutions, finally, may convey distinct social movement frames over surprisingly long time spans. This is a role often assigned to intellectuals, nurturing criticisms of the status quo from the comfort of their studies but also, occasionally, providing some ideological ammunition for popular protest. Collective action frames, however, can be sustained by popular culture as well. Searching for the origins of Tea Party sentiment among lower-middle-class southern whites, Hochschild (2016) takes us back to reconstruction-era hostility to the moralistic intrusion of northern (in the guise of federal) authority. That experience laid down 'emotional grooves' that would be etched once more by the imposition of civil rights laws and court decisions in the 1960s. This resonant framing of 'big government,' especially in the area of race relations, was ready at hand after Obama's 2008 election. Hochschild does not explore how these emotional
grooves were reproduced between crises. John Walton's (1992) study of Owens Valley residents' resistance to land and water grabs by Los Angeles developers and politicians over seventy years fills that gap. Already during the earliest protests, in the 1900s, resistance drew on an older discourse of frontier independence and prosperity pitted against corrupt outsiders. By the 1920s, and then again in the 1970s, protesters also invoked 'the rape of the valley' to condemn the LA cabal and justify protest, including rough justice when legal strategies failed. It is possible, of course, that organizers in the two periods came up with this language independently. Walton, however, is careful to show how the frame was carried across fifty years through Hollywood movies, popular novels, and journalistic exposes. Those intermediaries ensured that when conditions favored a new cycle of protest in the 1970s, 'resonant' collective action frames from the past would be available.

**Time and the content of diffusion**

I have argued that, as time lengthens, relational mechanisms of diffusion are likely to play a smaller role and non-relational ones are likely to come to the fore. Are there similar shifts in the content of diffusion? The only components of protest we might reasonably expect to become less contagious over time, although not in any linear fashion, are protest events themselves. Empirical studies suggest that even over relatively short periods protest events quickly lose their capacity to inspire mobilization elsewhere (Strang & Tuma, 1993; Myers, 2000). We would expect their inspirational power to further diminish as emotions cool, memories fade, and witnesses pass away, unless those events become the subjects of institutionalized collective memory, as with the Stonewall riot taken up by gay rights organizations and pride parades (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). If only as a matter of relative proportion, other aspects of social movements will be correspondingly more prominent in long-term diffusion. There are, for example, the enduring tactical repertoires studied by Tilly (1995), collective identities like nationalism embedded in school textbooks and murals, and invidious framing devices like the contrast between 'natural' and 'artificial' reproduced in cookbooks and advertising.²
There may be no generalizable patterns in what specific tactics, identities, or frames are most likely to stand the test of time. The more useful line of inquiry is to explore particular kinds of filtering. If, over time, diffusion is increasingly mediated by non-relational mechanisms of the kind illustrated here, we should explore how those mechanisms operate to select some aspects of past movements for posterity but not others. Such filtering may operate through the greater weight of formal organization, through historical 'lock-in,' or through the advantages enjoyed by some actors over others in appropriating the past to suit their present. These are the subjects of distinct literatures -- on historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory -- from which students of diffusion could usefully draw.

One of the ways in which long-term diffusion may be different from that within a protest cycle, I have argued, is that the organizational carriers of tactics, identities, and frames outlive individual activists and their relational ties. Scholars also have contended, on theoretical (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and empirical (Staggenborg, 1988) grounds, that more professionalized organizations are more likely to endure than informal organizations and ad hoc networks. To the extent that these professionalized organizations favor different tactics, identities, or frames, then those preferences would also carry greater weight over time. Whittier and Payne note the shift even over the span of a decade. In Whittier's (1995) interviews, older activists lamented the decline of grass-roots mobilization and radical feminism as the organizational center of gravity moved towards national, professionally run women's organizations. Payne (2007) chronicles the decline of the 'organizing tradition' of collective empowerment as initiative passed from the first generation of activists to formal civil rights organizations. Arguably that trajectory continued well beyond the mid-1960s as insurgent Freedom Schools, designed to cultivate racial pride and political fortitude, evolved into the better funded, bureaucratically entrenched, but politically neutered Head Start program. The best-known and longest-running example, however, comes from the labor movement. Scholars disagree about the causal weight of national unions (and formal collective bargaining procedures) in labor deradicalization after World War I and again after the 1930s. But it is at least clear that periods of heightened labor militancy and radicalism
were associated with alternative, local, relatively informal worker organizations, such as shop committees and shop steward schemes (Brecher, 1972). These were the first to fall -- to employer counteroffensives, to unemployment, to exhaustion -- after the crises of WWI and the Great Depression, leaving national unions as the main carriers of labor traditions. Those unions, in turn, whatever their formal politics, tended to discountenance such labor tactics as wildcat strikes and 'spontaneous' sit-ins. Their institutional preference was instead for acts of protest vetted by union officials and authorized under existing industrial relations rules.

Whether channeled by formal organizations or other institutions, diffusion over time may also be subject to historical lock-in and thus to filtering of another sort. Voss's (1993) story of the late-nineteenth-century decline of the Knights of Labor and rise of the AFL illustrates how types of organization can carry with them social boundaries and collective identities of particular kinds. But her story is also one of path dependency. After the collapse of the Knights and consolidation of the AFL, it became increasingly difficult for any labor organization built on rival principles to challenge the AFL, thanks to that federation's growing resources and exclusive jurisdictions, as well as employers' preference (if they had to choose) for a more moderate bargaining partner. It would take the Great Depression to loosen the AFL's hold. Ganz (2009) adds that by the 1960s, mainstream unions like the Teamsters had come to tightly link a form of organization (the bureaucratic union), a social identity ('labor'), and a tactical repertoire (strikes, collective bargaining). That made it hard for the Teamsters to grasp opportunities to organize and represent farm workers. Indeed, Teamster officials failed even to understand how the 'union' known as the United Farm Workers could have characteristics of a decentralized civil rights organization, appeal to farm laborers as Mexicans as well as workers, and use such tactics as peasant theater and public marches. This lack of strategic imagination illustrates how the attribution of similarity, too, is subject to historical lock-in.

That attribution of similarity is also highly contested, and therein lies a third sort of filtering. I have argued that over time diffusion will be mediated more by cultural institutions and public history, mechanisms for defining what are the lessons of the past. These definitions may be
contentious, and some actors will have advantages in making their definitions prevail. In explaining the persistence of radicalism among west coast dock workers, Kimeldorf (1988) notes the continuing salience of the 1934 general strike. Here was an event that did diffuse over time, but less by directly inspiring other strikes than by serving as an enduring testimonial to the virtues of rank and file militancy for longshoremen who never experienced it themselves. Drawing attention to that particular lesson and keeping it alive were the work of veterans of the strike, men who enjoyed higher status for having participated and who often held higher positions in the union hierarchy. It would have been hard for any dissidents to win wide support for an alternative interpretation (such as that the violence and personal sacrifice involved in the 1934 struggle did not 'pay'), much less keep the celebration of the strike off the agenda of union communications, informal gatherings, and anniversary observances. John Walton (2001) makes the point more explicit and general in his study of Monterey. The public histories found in memorials, monuments, holidays, tourist brochures, and countless other institutionalized narratives of the past are the products of contentious, if usually behind-the-scenes, politics. In Monterey, local business interests typically had the advantage. In their hands, diffusion selectively included such adopted local heroes as John Steinbeck and excluded unseemly stories of cannery worker exploitation and strikes. Or to take another example from Walton, whether Father Serra is remembered as like a father to his early California flock or as like a colonial exploiter of Native Americans has been the subject of lively debate among representatives of the park service, church champions of Serra's sainthood, and activist tribal leaders. In 'attributing similarity' along different lines, each group has retrospectively steered diffusion in particular directions.

Conclusion

The question this paper addressed is how the character of diffusion may change as that process extends in time. The first answer I provided is that diffusion increasingly became mediated by non-relational mechanisms like formal organizations, political, economic, and cultural institutions, and cultural practices that construct public histories. These mechanisms matter, I
argued, as increasingly important channels of diffusion. But that shift in the significance of
different channels also may matter for the content of diffusion. The greater longevity of formal
organizations, for example, has implications for what tactics diffuse over time; diffusion through
social institutions and cultural scripts can lock in movement identities or frames; and the
importance of constructed public histories makes lessons from the past dependent on the unequal
influence of current interests. That final point suggests another way in which diffusion over time
may look different. Given the prospect that collective memories will change as actors reinvent the
past to suit their current needs, diffusion's 'push' may come more from the adopter than the source.
As Tea Party activists, for example, 'attribute similarity' between themselves and revolutionary-era
patriots, they activate the diffusion of strategic language and symbolic performances from the past.

That new identities can, long after the fact, create new causal influences from the past may
send shivers down the realist's spine. Students of collective memory offer the consolation that the
past is not infinitely malleable in later commemoration (Schwartz, 1991). I have also argued that
social movement identities (as well as tactics and frame) are themselves subject to lock-in. The
balance between constructed and constraining historical influences will vary, and path dependency
is itself contingent. In political matters, for example, Pierson (2004) shows how the character of
political institutions and interest groups makes it more or less likely that policy outcomes will get
locked in. Spillman (1998) finds that more 'multivalent' events gain more enduring
commemoration. And Tilly (1995) and Tarrow (2013) agree that more 'modular' tactics are most
likely to spread. My discussion of the role of social movement organizations, social institutions,
and collective memory in diffusion over time suggests another influence on what elements of
social movements have staying power. To the extent that these vehicles of diffusion align,
diffusion from the past is apt to be especially constraining for later activists. Labor offers the best
example. In this case, a particular identity and tactical repertoire are embedded in social movement
organizations (unions), institutionalized in industrial relations practices and law, and
commemorated in public monuments and holidays. That convergence ensures that earlier models
and precedents, including for what it means to be 'labor,' for how to frame employers, and for how to pursue goals, diffuse from past to present with considerable force.

This source of continuity in social movement identities, frames, and tactics suggests a final lesson, about the way in which social movement scholars, rather than activists, make use of history. As compared with most other fields within sociology, much research on social movements is richly historical. It regularly includes case studies of past protest, and a common theme has been the role of large-scale, long-term social changes in shaping repertoires or fomenting major episodes (such as revolutions). But even historically minded scholars like Tilly also aspire to generalize beyond time and place. They might abstract protest events from their contexts in order to generalize about shifts in tactical repertoires, for example, or abstract properties of protest from their settings in order to generalize about mechanisms of contention. Exploring how time matters in diffusion suggests certain limits to that approach. Generalizing about the relative importance of different channels of diffusion can be misleading if it ignores the temporal scale of protest. In considering how long-term diffusion might, in turn, affect the content of diffusion, I have suggested that we learn from literatures on historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory. These are centrally concerned with how patterns of social interaction are embedded and reproduced through institutions; how those patterns become fixed and resist alternatives; and how they are publicly reconstructed and memorialized by later generations. Those processes apply as well to diffusion as it stretches through time, transmitting, locking in, and filtering the past. Scholars of historical institutionalism, path dependency, and collective memory, however, caution us that these are not processes to be generalized, like 'mechanisms,' across historical contexts; they are instead reminders of different ways in which history matters. That caution applies as well to diffusion over time. It can best be understood by preserving the contexts of time as well as place within which activists make use of the past.
Notes

1. Traugott's treatment of what we might now call urban riots is an instructive contrast to Myers' (2000) account. For the time scale of Myers' study, it makes sense to consider mechanisms of diffusion that involve direct knowledge of riots elsewhere. For the several centuries covered by Traugott, it becomes necessary to ask how the meaning of a riotous activity comes to congeal in political and literary cultures and, in that way, can persist even through long periods of quiescence.

2. As Gillan (2017) points out, these components of social movements may change (or diffuse) at quite different rhythms.
References


