U.S. race relations have gone through many stages, some of them very tense. They sometimes have even exploded into violence, as with the many lynchings in the South in the early 1900s. This photo was taken in Rayston, Georgia, on April 28, 1936. Earlier in the day, the 40-year-old victim, Lint Shaw, accused of sexually assaulting a white girl, had been rescued from a mob by the National Guard. After the National Guard left, the mob forced their way into the jail.

COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

Why did the people in this little town "go mad"? These men—and the women who watched in agreement—were ordinary, law-abiding citizens. Even some of the "pillars of the community" joined in the vicious killing of Sam Pettie, who may have been innocent.

Lynching is a form of **collective behavior**, actions by a group of people who bypass the usual norms governing their behavior and do something unusual (Turner and Killian 1987; Harper and Leicht 2002). Collective behavior is a broad term. It includes not only such violent acts as lynchings and riots, but also panics, rumors, fads, and fashions. Before examining its specific forms, let's look at theories that seek to explain collective behavior.

Early Explanations: The Transformation of the Individual

When people can't figure something out, they often resort to using "madness" as an explanation. People may say, "She went 'off her rocker'—that's why she drove her car off the bridge." "He must have 'gone nuts,' or he wouldn't have shot into the crowd." Early explanations of collective behavior were tied in to such assumptions. Let's look at how these ideas developed.

How the Crowd Transforms the Individual

The field of collective behavior began when Charles Mackay (1814–1889), a British journalist, noticed that "country folks," who ordinarily are reasonable sorts of people, sometimes "went mad" and did "disgraceful and violent things" when they formed a crowd. The best explanation Mackay (1852) could come up with was that people had a "herd mentality"—they were like a herd of cows that suddenly stampede.

About fifty years later, Gustave LeBon (1841–1931), a French psychologist, built on this initial idea. In an 1895 book, LeBon stressed how people feel anonymous in crowds, less accountable for what they do. Some even develop feelings of invincibility and come to think that they can do virtually anything. A **collective mind** develops, he said, and people are swept up by almost any suggestion. Then contagion, something like mass hypnosis, takes over, releasing the destructive instincts that society had so carefully repressed.

Robert Park (1864–1944), a U.S. sociologist who studied in Germany and wrote a 1904 dissertation on the crowd, was influenced by LeBon (McPhail 1991). After Park

collective behavior extraordinary activities carried out by groups of people; includes lynchings, rumors, panics, urban legends, and fads and fashions

collective mind Gustave LeBon's term for the tendency of people in a crowd to feel, think, and act in extraordinary ways

joined the faculty at the University of Chicago, he added the ideas of social unrest and circular reaction. He said,

> Social unrest . . . is transmitted from one individual to another . . . so that the manifestations of discontent in A [are] communicated to B, and from B reflected back to A. (Park and Burgess 1921)

Park used the term **circular reaction** to refer to this back-and-forth communication. Circular reaction, he said, creates a "collective impulse" that comes to "dominate all members of the crowd." If "collective impulse" sounds just like LeBon's "collective mind," that's because it really is. As noted, Park was influenced by LeBon, and his slightly different term did not change the basic idea at all.

circular reaction Robert Park's term for a back-and-forth communication between the members of a crowd whereby a "collective impulse" is transmitted

The Acting Crowd

Herbert Blumer (1900–1987), who studied under Park, synthesized LeBon's and Park's ideas. As you can see from Figure 21.1, Blumer (1939) identified five stages that precede what he called an **acting crowd**, an excited group that moves toward a goal. This model still dominates today's police manuals on crowd behavior (McPhail 1989). Let's apply it to the killing of Sam Pettie.

1. *Tension or unrest.* At the root of collective behavior is a background condition of tension or unrest. Disturbed about some condition of society, people become apprehensive. This makes them vulnerable to rumors and suggestions. Sam Pettie was lynched during the early 1900s. At this time, traditional southern life was in upheaval. Due to industrialization, millions of Americans were moving from farm to city in search of jobs, and from South to North. Left behind were many poor, rural southerners, white and black, who faced a bleak future. In addition, African Americans were questioning the legitimacy of their low status and deprivation.

2. *Exciting event.* An exciting event occurs, one so startling that people become preoccupied with it. In this instance, that event was the killing of a police officer.

Figure 21.1 Blumer's Model of How an Acting Crowd Develops
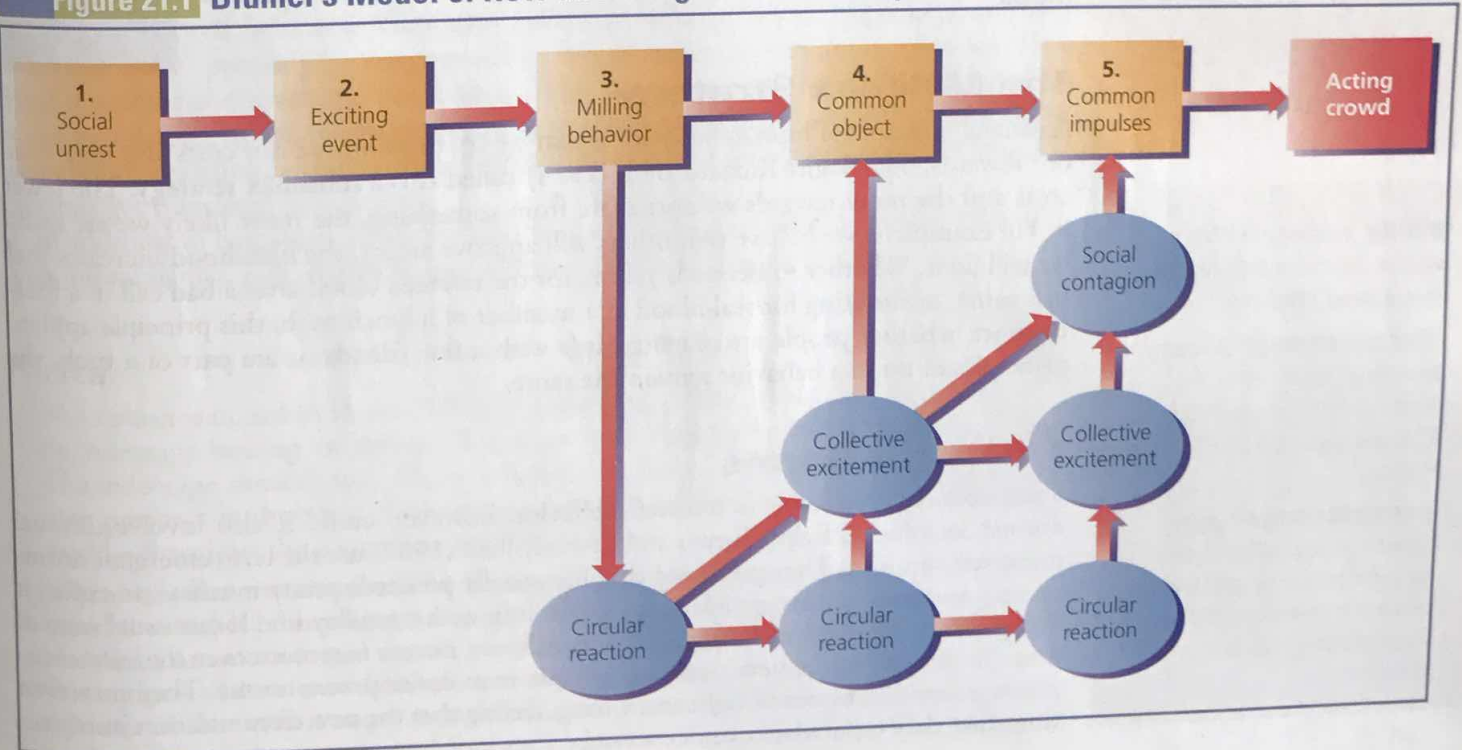
Source: Based on McPhail 1991:11.

3. *Milling.* Next comes **milling,** people standing or walking around, talking about the exciting event. A circular reaction then sets in. As people pick up cues as to the "right" way of thinking and feeling, they reinforce them in one another. During the short period in which Sam Pettie's lynch mob milled, the white residents of this small town became increasingly agitated as they discussed the officer's death.

4. *A common object of attention.* In this stage, people's attention becomes riveted on some aspect of the event. They get caught up in the collective excitement. In this case, people's attention turned to Sam Pettie. Someone may have said that he had been talking to the officer or that they had been arguing.

5. *Common impulses.* People get the feeling that they are in agreement about what should be done. These common impulses are stimulated by *social contagion,* a sense of excitement that is passed from one person to another. In this instance, people concluded that only the killer's immediate, public death would be adequate vengeance—and would serve as a warning for other African Americans who might even think about getting "out of line."

Acting crowds aren't always negative or destructive, as this one was. Some involve spontaneous demonstrations directed against oppression. Nor are they all serious, for students engaging in food fights are also acting crowds.

The Contemporary View: The Rationality of the Crowd

f we were to see a lynching—or a screaming mob or a prison riot—most of us might agree with LeBon that some sort of "madness" had swept over the crowd. Sociologists today, however, point out that beneath this chaotic surface, crowds are actually quite rational (Yamaguchi 2000; Horowitz 2001). They point out that crowds take deliberate steps to reach some goal. As sociologist Clark McPhail (1991) says, even a lynch mob is cooperative—someone gets the rope while others hold the victim, some tie the knot, and others hoist the body. This is exactly what you saw in Pettie's execution—the men working together: the rope, the boxes, the straw, and the oil.

The Minimax Strategy

A general principle of human behavior is that we try to minimize our costs and maximize our rewards. Sociologist Richard Berk (1974) called this a **minimax strategy.** The fewer costs and the more rewards we anticipate from something, the more likely we are to do it. For example, if we believe that others will approve an act, the likelihood increases that we will do it. Whether someone is yelling for the referee's blood after a bad call in a football game, or shouting for real blood as a member of a lynch mob, this principle applies. In short, whether people are playing cards with a few friends or are part of a mob, the principles of human behavior remain the same.

Emergent Norms

Since collective behavior is unusual behavior, however, could it also involve unusual norms? Sociologists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1987) use the term **emergent norms** to express this idea. They point out that life usually proceeds pretty much as we expect it to, and our usual norms are adequate for dealing with everyday life. If our usual ways of doing things are disrupted, however, our ordinary norms may not cover the new situation. To deal with this new situation, people may develop *new* norms. They may even produce new definitions of right and wrong, feeling that the new circumstances justify actions that they otherwise consider wrong.

milling a crowd standing or walking around as they talk excitedly about some event

minimax strategy Richard Berk's term for the efforts people make to minimize their costs and maximize their rewards

emergent norms Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian's term for the idea that people develop new norms to cope with a new situation; used to explain crowd behavior

To understand how new norms emerge, we need to keep in mind that not everyone in a crowd shares the same point of view (Snow et al. 1993b; Rodríguez 1994). As Turner and Killian (1987) point out, crowds have at least five kinds of participants:

1. The *ego-involved* feel a personal stake in the unusual event.

2. The *concerned* also have a personal interest in the event, but less so than the ego-involved.

3. The *insecure* care little about the matter, but they join the crowd because it gives them a sense of power, security, or feeling of belonging.

4. The *curious spectators* also care little about the issue, but they are inquisitive about what is going on.

5. The *exploiters* don't care about the event, but they use it for their own purposes, such as hawking food or T-shirts. For them, a rock concert would serve just as well.

To set the crowd on a particular course of action, the most important role goes to the "ego-involved." Some of them make suggestions about what should be done; others simply take action. As the "concerned" join in, they, too, influence the crowd. If things get heated up, the "insecure" and the "curious spectators" may also join in. Although the "exploiters" are unlikely to participate, they do lend the crowd passive support. A common mood completes the stage for new norms to emerge: Activities that are "not OK" in everyday life now may seem "OK"—whether they involve throwing bottles at the cops or shouting obscenities at the college president.

This analysis of emergent norms helps us see that collective behavior is *rational*. The crowd, for example, does not consider all suggestions made by the ego-involved to be equal: To be acceptable, suggestions must match predispositions that the crowd already has. This analysis, then, is a far cry from earlier interpretations that people were so transformed by a crowd that they went out of their minds.

Forms of Collective Behavior

Sociologists analyze collective behavior the same way they do other forms of behavior. They view collective behavior as the actions of ordinary people who are responding to extraordinary situations. They ask their usual questions about interaction, such as, How do people influence one another? What is the significance of the participants' age, gender, race-ethnicity, and social class? What were their preexisting attitudes? How did they perceive the situation? How did their perceptions get translated into action?

In addition to lynchings, collective behavior includes riots, rumors, panics, mass hysteria, moral panics, fads, fashions, and urban legends. Let's look at each.

Riots

The nation watched in horror. White Los Angeles police officers had been caught on videotape beating an African American traffic violator with their nightsticks. The videotape showed the officers savagely bringing their nightsticks down on a man prostrate at their feet. Television stations around the United States—and the world—broadcast the pictures to stunned audiences.

When the officers went on trial for beating the man identified as Rodney King, how could the verdict be anything but guilty? Yet a jury consisting of eleven whites and one Asian American found the officers innocent of using excessive force. The result was a **riot**—violent crowd behavior aimed against people and property. Within minutes of the verdict, angry crowds began to gather in Los Angeles. That night, mobs set fire to businesses, and looting and arson began in earnest. The rioting

riot violent crowd behavior directed at people and property

As the text explains, people have different reasons for taking part in a riot. In the 1992 L.A. riots, precipitated by the Rodney King verdict, some people rioted because they were incensed at the verdict, others because they were angry at what they themselves had experienced at the hands of the police. For still others, however, the riot simply provided an opportunity to loot stores.

spread to other cities, including Atlanta, Tampa, Las Vegas, and even Madison, Wisconsin. Whites and Koreans were favorite targets of violence.

Americans sat transfixed before their television sets as they saw parts of Los Angeles go up in flames and looters carrying television sets and lugging sofas in full view of the Los Angeles Police Department, which took no steps to stop them. Seared into the public's collective consciousness was the sight of Reginald Denny, a 36-year-old white truck driver who had been yanked from his truck. As he sat dazed in the street, Damian Williams, laughing, broke Denny's skull with a piece of concrete.

On the third night, after 4,000 fires had been set and more than 30 people killed, President George Bush announced on national television that the U.S. Justice Department had appointed prosecutors to pursue federal charges against the police officers. The president stated that he had ordered the Seventh Infantry, SWAT teams, and the FBI into Los Angeles. He also federalized the California National Guard and placed it under the command of Gen. Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Rodney King went on television and tearfully pleaded for peace.

The Los Angeles riot was the bloodiest since the Civil War. Before it was over, 54 people lost their lives, 2,328 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms, thousands of businesses were burned, and about $1 billion of property was destroyed. Two of the police officers were later sentenced to 2 years in prison on federal charges, and King was awarded several million dollars in damages. (Rose 1992; Stevens and Lubman 1992; Holden and Rose 1993; Cannon 1998)

The *background conditions* of urban riots are frustration and anger brought on by feelings of deprivation. Frustration and anger simmer in people who are kept out of mainstream society—limited to a meager education and denied jobs and justice. Then a *precipitating event* brings those pent-up feelings to a boiling point, and they erupt in collective violence. All these conditions existed in the Los Angeles riot, with the jury's verdict being the precipitating event.

Sociologists have found that it is not only the deprived that participate in riots. The first outbursts over the Rodney King verdict didn't come from the poorest neighborhoods but from the most stable neighborhoods. Similarly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, when many U.S. cities erupted in riots, even people with good

jobs participated (McPhail 1991). Why would middle-class people participate in riots? The answer, says sociologist Victor Rodríguez (1994), is the same: frustration and anger. Even though they are employed and living stable lives, middle-class minorities resent being treated as second-class citizens.

The event that precipitates a riot is less important than the riot's general context. The precipitating event is only the match that lights the fuel. The fuel is the background of tension and unrest—feelings that there is no justice, or that officials condone or encourage unfairness. Beneath what may seem a placid surface lies seething rage. To erupt, it takes but a match, such as the Rodney King verdict. Tension and resentment are felt not only by the poor but also by those who are materially better off. The precipitating event brings these feelings to the surface, and both groups become involved. Also participating in the riots are opportunists—people who feel neither rage at their general condition nor outrage at the precipitating event. For them, the riot simply provides an opportunity for looting—or even for sharing a sense of excitement.

Rumors

In *Aladdin,* the handsome young title character murmurs, "All good children, take off your clothes." In *The Lion King,* Simba, the cuddly lion star, stirs up a cloud of dust that, floating off the screen, spells S-E-X. Then there is the bishop in *The Little Mermaid,* who, presiding over a wedding, becomes noticeably aroused.

Ann Runge, a mother of eight who owned stacks of animated Disney films, said she felt betrayed when she heard that the Magic Kingdom was sending obscene, subliminal messages. "I felt as though I had entrusted my kids to pedophiles," she said. (Bannon 1995)

A **rumor** is unverified information about some topic of interest that is passed from one person to another. Thriving on conditions of ambiguity, rumors fill in missing information (Turner 1964; Shibutani 1966; Fine and Turner 2001). In response to this particular rumor, Disney reported that Aladdin really says "Scat, good tiger, take off and go." The line is hard to understand, however, leaving enough ambiguity for others to hear what they want to hear, and even to insist that the line is an invitation to a teenage orgy. Similar ambiguity remains with Simba's dust and the aroused bishop.

Most rumors are short-lived. They arise in a situation of ambiguity, only to dissipate when they are replaced by factual information—or by another rumor. Occasionally, however, a rumor has a long life.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for no known reason, healthy people would grow weak and slowly waste away. No one understood the cause and people said they had *consumption* (now called tuberculosis). People were terrified as they saw their loved ones wither into shells of their former selves. With no one knowing when the disease would strike, or who its next victim would be, the rumor began that some of the dead had turned into vampire-like beings. At night, they were coming back from the grave and draining the life out of the living. The evidence was irrefutable—loved ones who wasted away before people's very eyes.

To kill these ghoulish "undead," people began to sneak into graveyards. They would dig up a grave, remove the leg bones and place them on the skeleton's chest, then lay the skull at the feet, forming a skull and crossbones. Having thus killed the "undead," they would rebury the remains. These rumors and the resulting mutilations of the dead continued off and on in New England until the 1890s. (Associated Press, November 30, 1993)

rumor unfounded information spread among people

Rumors *have swirled around the Magic Kingdom's supposed plots to undermine the morality of youth. Could Mickey Mouse be a dark force, and these children his victims? As humorous as this may be, some have taken these rumors seriously.*
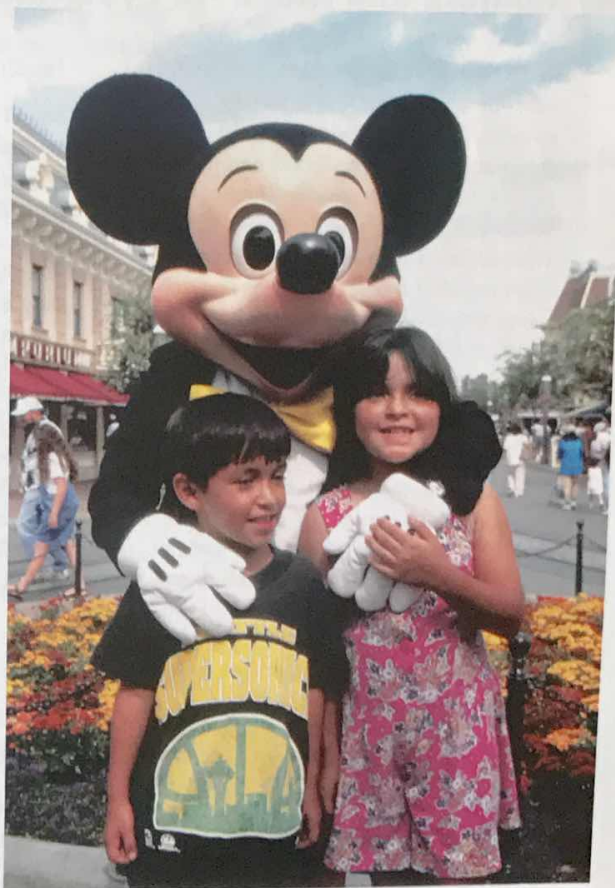
Most rumors are not only short-lived but also of little consequence. Occasionally, however, as discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box below, rumors severely affect people's lives and even entire communities.

Why do people believe rumors? Three main factors have been identified. Rumors deal with a subject that is important to an individual, and they replace ambiguity with some form of certainty. They also are attributed to a credible source. An office rumor may be preceded by "Jane has it on good authority that . . . " or "Bill overheard the boss say that . . . "

Rumors thrive on ambiguity or uncertainty, for where people know the facts about a situation a rumor can have no life. Surrounded by unexplained illnesses and deaths, however, the New Englanders speculated about why people wasted away. Their rather bizarre conclusions gave them certainty in the face of bewildering events. The uncertainty that sparked the Disney rumor may have been feelings among some that the moral fabric of modern society is decaying.

Rumors usually pass directly from one person to another, although, as we saw with the Tulsa riot, they can originate from the mass media. As the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page illustrates, the Internet, too, has become a source of rumors.

Panics and Mass Hysteria

In 1938, on the night before Halloween, a radio program of dance music was interrupted by a report that explosions had been observed on the surface of Mars. The announcer added that a cylinder of unknown origin had been discovered embedded

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

Rumors and Riots: An Eyewitness Account to the Tulsa Riot

IN 1921, TULSA, OKLAHOMA, WAS RIPPED apart by a race riot. And it all began with a rumor. Up to this time, Tulsa's black community had been vibrant and prosperous. Many blacks owned their own businesses, and competed successfully with whites. Then on May 31, everything changed after a black man was accused of assaulting a white girl.

Buck Colbert Franklin (Franklin and Franklin 1997), a black attorney in Tulsa at the time, was there. Here is what he says:

Hundreds of men with drawn guns were approaching from every direction, as far I could see as I stood at the steps of my office, and I was immediately arrested and taken to one of the many detention camps. Even then, airplanes were circling overhead dropping explosives upon the buildings that had been looted, and big trucks were hauling all sorts of furniture and household goods away.

Unlike later riots, these were white looters who were breaking in and burning the homes and businesses of blacks.

Franklin continues:

Soon I was back upon the streets, but the building where I had my office was a smoldering ruin, and all my lawbooks and office fixtures had been consumed by flames. I went to where my roominghouse had stood a few short hours before, but it was in ashes, with all my clothes and the money to be used in moving my family. As far as one could see, not a Negro dwellinghouse or place of business stood. . . . Negroes who yesterday were wealthy, living in beautiful homes in ease and comfort, were now beggars, public charges, living off alms.

The rioters had burned all black churches, including the imposing Zion Baptist church, which had just been completed. The homes, businesses, and churches had been destroyed by arson and bombs. Block after block lay in ruins, as through a tornado had swept through the area.

And the young man who had been accused of assault, the event that precipitated the riot? Franklin says that the

police investigated, and found that there had been no assault. All the man had done was accidentally step on a lady's foot in a crowded elevator, and, as Franklin says, "She became angry and slapped him, and a fresh, cub newspaper reporter, without any experience and no doubt anxious for a byline, gave out an erroneous report through his paper that a Negro had assaulted a white girl."

For Your CONSIDERATION

It is difficult to place ourselves in such an historical mindset to imagine that stepping on someone's foot could lead to such destruction, but it did. Can you apply the sociological findings on both rumors and riots to explain the riot at Tulsa? Why do you think that so many whites believed this rumor and that some of them were so intent on destroying this thriving black community? What was the "seething rage" that sociologists say underlie these types of riots?

■ ■ ■

Danger Lurks Everywhere: The Internet and the Uncertainty of Life

LIFE IN OUR MASS SOCIETY IS FILLED with uncertainty. That new neighbor who just moved in across the street could be a child molester, the guy next door a rapist. Evil lurks everywhere, and, who knows, maybe you'll be the next victim.

Or so it seems. And within this sea of uncertainty comes the Net to feed on our gnawing suspicions. Here is an e-mail that I received:

Please, read this very carefully.... then send it out to all the people online that you know. Something like this is noth-

ing to take casually; this is something that you do want to pay attention to.

If a guy with a screen-name of Slave-Master contacts you, do not answer. DO NOT TALK TO THIS PERSON. DO NOT ANSWER ANY OF HIS/HER IN-STANT MESSAGES/E-MAIL.

He has killed 56 women (so far) that he has talked to on the Internet.

PLEASE SEND OUT TO ALL THE WOMEN ON YOUR BUDDY LIST. ALSO ASK THEM TO PASS THIS ON.

He has been on Yahoo and AOL and Excite so far. This is no joke!!!

PLEASE SEND THIS TO MEN TOO ... JUST IN CASE!!!

For Your CONSIDERATION

How do the three main factors associated with rumors—importance, ambiguity, and source—apply to this note? In what ways do they not apply?

■ ■ ■

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in the ground on a farm in New Jersey. The radio station then switched to the farm, where a breathless reporter gave details of horrible-looking Martians coming out of the cylinder. Their death-ray weapons had destructive powers unknown to humans. An astronomer then confirmed that Martians had invaded the Earth.

Perhaps six million Americans heard this broadcast. About one million were frightened by it. Thousands panicked, grabbed their weapons, and hid in their basements or ran into the streets. Hundreds bundled up their families and jumped into their cars, jamming the roads as they headed to who knows where.

Of course, there was no invasion. This was simply a dramatization of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds,* starring Orson Welles. There had been an announcement at the beginning of the program and somewhere in the middle that the account was fictional, but apparently many people missed it. Although the panic reactions to this radio program may appear humorous to us, the situation is far from humorous to anyone who is in a panic. **Panic** occurs when people become so fearful that they cannot function normally, and may even flee the situation.

Why did people panic in this instance? Psychologist Hadley Cantril (1941) attributed the reaction to widespread anxiety about world conditions. The Nazis were marching in Europe, and millions of Americans (correctly, as it turned out) were afraid that the United States would get involved. War jitters, he said, created fertile ground for the broadcast to touch off a panic.

Contemporary analysts, however, question whether there even was a panic. Sociologist William Bainbridge (1989) acknowledges that some people did become frightened, and that a few actually did get in their cars and drive like maniacs. But he says that most of this famous panic was an invention of the news media. Reporters found a good story, and they milked it, exaggerating as they went along.

Bainbridge points to a 1973 event in Sweden. To dramatize the dangers of atomic power, Swedish Radio broadcast a play about an accident at a nuclear power plant. Knowing about the 1938 broadcast in the United States, Swedish sociologists were waiting to see what would happen. Might some people fail to realize that it was a dramatization and panic at the threat of ruptured reactors spewing out radioactive gasses? The sociologists found no panic. A few people did become frightened. Some telephoned family members and the police; others shut windows to keep out the radioactivity—reasonable responses, considering what they thought had occurred.

panic the condition of being so fearful that one cannot function normally, and may even flee

The Swedish media, however, reported a panic! Apparently, a reporter had telephoned two police departments and learned that each had received calls from concerned citizens. With a deadline hanging over his head, the reporter decided to gamble. He reported that police and fire stations were jammed with citizens, people were flocking to the shelters, and others were fleeing south (Bainbridge 1989).

Panics do occur, of course.

On December 31, 1999, a rumor spread through Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau, that the "black death" was going to hit at midnight, when the world entered the new millennium. Bissau's 250,000 residents fled the city ("Fears of . . ." 2000).

Nobody has the right to shout "Fire!" in a public building when no such danger exists. If people fear immediate death, they will lunge toward the nearest exit in a frantic effort to escape. Such a panic occurred on Memorial Day weekend in 1977 at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky.

About half of the Club's 2,500 patrons were crowded into the Cabaret Room. A fire, which began in a small banquet room near the front of the building, burned undetected until it was beyond control. When employees discovered the fire, they warned patrons. People began to exit in orderly fashion, but when flames rushed in, they trampled one another in a furious attempt to reach the exits. The exits were blocked by masses of screaming people trying to push their way through all at once. The writhing bodies at the exits created further panic among the remainder, who pushed even harder to force their way through the bottlenecks. One hundred sixty-five people died. All but two were within thirty feet of two exits in the Cabaret Room.

Sociologists who studied this panic found what other researchers have discovered in analyzing other disasters. *Not everyone panics.* In disturbances, many people continue to act responsibly (Clarke 2002). Especially important are primary group bonds. Parents help their children, for example (Morrow 1995). Gender roles also persist, and more men help women than women help men (Johnson 1993). Even work roles continue to guide some behavior. Sociologists Drue Johnston and Norris Johnson (1989) found that only 29 percent of the employees of the Beverly Hills Supper Club left when they learned of the fire. As noted in Table 21.1, most of the workers helped customers, fought the fire, or searched for friends and relatives.

Table 21.1 Employees' First Action After Learning of the Fire

Action	Percentage
Left	29%
Helped others to leave	41%
Fought or reported the fire	17%
Continued routine activities	7%
Other (e.g., looked for a friend or relative)	5%

Note: These figures are based on interviews with 95 of the 160 employees present at the time of the fire: 48 males and 47 females, ranging in age from 15 to 59.

Source: Based on Johnston and Johnson 1989.

When the fireworks used by the band Great White set a fire on February 21, 2003, the patrons of The Station in West Warwick, Rhode Island, panicked. Of the 412 people inside the night club, 100 were killed and over 200 were injured.

Sociologists use the term **role extension** to describe the actions of most of these employees. By this, they mean that the workers incorporated other activities into their occupational roles. For example, servers extended their role to include helping people to safety. How do we know that giving help was an extension of the occupational role, and not simply a general act of helping? Johnston and Johnson found that servers who were away from their assigned stations returned to them in order to help *their* customers. For a fascinating and related type of collective behavior, see the Down-to-Earth Sociology box below.

In some life-threatening situations in which we might expect panic, we find, instead, that a sense of order prevails. This seems to be the case during the attack on the World Trade Center when, at peril to their own lives, people helped injured friends and even strangers escape down many floors. These people, it would seem, were highly socialized into the collective good, and had a highly developed sense of empathy.

role extension the incorporation of additional activities into a role

mass hysteria an imagined threat that causes physical symptoms among a large number of people

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

Mass Hysteria

LET'S LOOK AT FIVE EVENTS.

Several hundred years ago, a strange thing happened near Naples, Italy. When people were bitten by tarantulas, not only did they feel breathless and have fast-beating hearts, but also they felt unusual sexual urges. As though that weren't enough, they also felt an irresistible urge to dance—and to keep dancing to the point of exhaustion.

The disease was contagious. Even people who hadn't been bitten came down with the same symptoms. The situation got so bad that whole villages would dance in a frenzy instead of gathering the summer harvest.

A lot of remedies were tried, but nothing seemed to work except music. Bands of musicians traveled from village to village, providing relief to the victims of *tarantism by* playing special "tarantula" music (Bynum 2001).

• • •

In the year 2001, in New Delhi, the capital of India, a "monkey-man" stalked people who were sleeping on rooftops during the blistering summer heat. He clawed and bit a hundred victims. Fear struck the capital. People would wake up screaming that the monkey-man was after them. To escape this phantom, some people jumped off two-story buildings. One man was killed when he jumped off the roof of his house during one of the monkey-man's many attacks ("'Monkey' . . ." 2001).

There was no ape-like killer.

• • •

At the United Arab Emirates University in Al-Ain, twenty-three female students rushed to the hospital emergency room after escaping from a fire in their dormitory. As you might expect, they were screaming, weeping, shaking, and fainting (Amin et al. 1997).

But here was no fire. A student had been burning incense in her room. The fumes of the burning incense had been mistaken for the smell of a fire.

• • •

People across France and Belgium became sick after drinking Coca-Cola. A quick investigation was held, and the experts diagnosed the problem as "bad carbon dioxide and a fungicide." Coke recalled 15 *million* cases of its soft drink ("Coke . . ." 1999).

Later investigations revealed that there was nothing wrong with the drink.

• • •

In McMinville, Tennessee, a teacher smelled a "funny odor." Students and teachers began complaining of headaches, nausea, and a shortness of breath. The school was evacuated, and doctors treated more than 100 people at the local hospital. Authorities found nothing.

A few days later, a second wave of illness struck. This time, the Tennessee Department of Health shut the high school down for two weeks. They dug holes in the foundation and walls and ran snake cameras through the ventilation and heating ducts. They even tested the victims' blood (Adams 2000).

Nothing unusual was found.

• • •

"It's all in their heads," we might say. In one sense, we would be right. There was no external, objective cause of the illnesses from tarantism or Coca-Cola. There was no "monkey-man," no fire, nor any chemical contaminant at the school.

In another sense, however, we would be wrong to say that it is "all in their heads." The symptoms these people experienced were real. They had real headaches and stomach aches. They did vomit and faint. And they did experience unusual sexual urges and the desire to dance until they could no longer stand.

There is no explanation for **mass hysteria**—an imagined threat that causes physical symptoms among a large group of people—except suggestibility. Experts might use fancy words to try to explain mass hysteria, but once you cut through their terms, you find that they are really simply saying, "It happens."

Perhaps one day we will know more about the causes of mass hysteria, but for now we have to be content with not knowing the specifics. We do know that such events occur in many cultures. This would indicate that mass hysteria follows basic principles of human behavior. Someday, we will understand these principles.

■ ■ ■

These principles can be applied to an urban legend that made the rounds in the late 1980s. I heard several versions of this one; each narrator swore that it had just happened to a friend of a friend.

Jerry (or whoever) went to a nightclub last weekend. He met a good-looking woman, and they hit it off. They spent the night in a motel. When he got up the next morning, the woman was gone. When he went into the bathroom, he saw a message scrawled on the mirror in lipstick: "Welcome to the wonderful world of AIDS."

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

When the Nazis, a small group of malcontents in Bavaria, first appeared on the scene in the 1920s, the world found their ideas laughable. This small group believed that the Germans were a race of supermen (*Übermenschen*) and that they would launch a Third Reich (reign or nation) that would control the world for a thousand years. Their race destined them for greatness; lesser races were meant for their service and exploitation.

The Nazis started as a little band of comic characters who looked as though they had stepped out of a grade B movie (see the photo on page 325). From this inauspicious start, the Nazis gained such power that they threatened the existence of Western civilization. How could a little man with a grotesque moustache, surrounded by a few sycophants in brown shirts, ever come to threaten the world? Such things don't happen in real life—only in novels or movies. They are the deranged nightmare of some imaginative author. Only this was real life. The Nazis' appearance on the human scene caused the deaths of millions of people and changed the course of world history.

Social movements, the second major topic of this chapter, hold the answer to Hitler's rise to power. **Social movements** consist of large numbers of people who organize to promote or resist social change. Members of social movements hold strong ideas about what is wrong with the world—or some part of it—and how to make things right. Examples include the abolitionist (anti-slavery) crusade, the civil rights movement, the white supremacist movement, the women's movement, the animal rights movement, and the environmental movement.

At the heart of social movements lies a sense of injustice (Klandermans 1997). Some find a particular condition of society intolerable, and their goal is to promote social change. Theirs is called a **proactive social movement.** Others, in contrast, feel threatened because some condition of society is changing, and they *react* to resist that change. Theirs is a **reactive social movement.**

To further their goals, people develop **social movement organizations.** Those whose goal is to promote social change develop such organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In contrast, those who are trying to resist these particular changes form the Ku Klux Klan. To recruit followers and publicize their grievances, leaders of social movements use attention-getting devices, from marches and protest rallies to sit-ins and boycotts.

Social movements are like a rolling sea, observes sociologist Mayer Zald (1992). During one period, few social movements may appear, but shortly afterward, a wave of them rolls in, each competing for the public's attention. Zald suggests that a *cultural crisis* can give birth to a wave of social movements. By this, he means that there are times when a society's institutions fail to keep up with social change. Then many people's needs go unfulfilled, massive unrest follows, and social movements spring into action to bridge this gap.

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social movement a large group of people who are organized to promote or resist some social change

proactive social movement a social movement that promotes some social change

reactive social movement a social movement that resists some social change

social movement organization an organization people develop to further the goals of a social movement

alterative social movement a social movement that seeks to alter only some specific aspects of people

redemptive social movement a social movement that seeks to change people totally

reformative social movement a social movement that seeks to change only some specific aspects of society

transformative social movement a social movement that seeks to change society totally

millenarian social movement a social movement based on the prophecy of coming social upheaval

cargo cult a social movement in which South Pacific islanders destroyed their possessions in the anticipation that their ancestors would ship them new goods

Types and Tactics of Social Movements

Let's see what types of social movements there are and then examine their tactics.
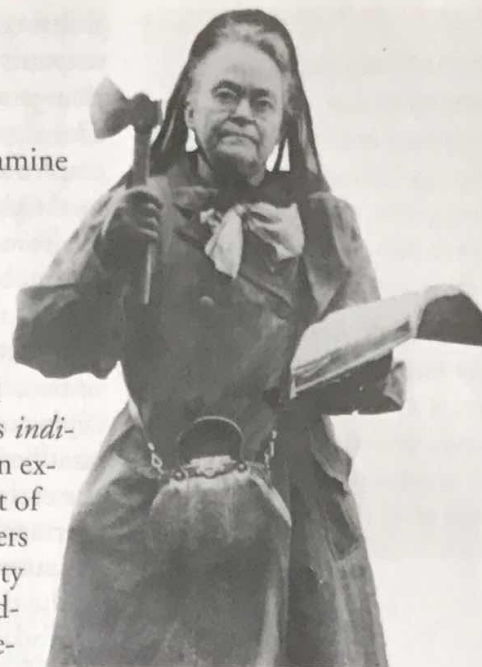
Types of Social Movements

Since social change is their goal, we can classify social movements according to their *target* and the *amount of change* they seek. Look at Figure 21.2. If you read across, you will see that the target of the first two types of social movements is *individuals*. **Alterative social movements** seek only to *alter* some specific behavior. An example is the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a powerful social movement of the early 1900s. Its goal was to get people to stop drinking alcohol. Its members were convinced that if they could shut down the saloons such problems as poverty and wife abuse would go away. **Redemptive social movements** also target individuals, but here the aim is for *total* change. An example is a religious social movement that stresses conversion. In fundamentalist Christianity, for example, when someone converts to Christ, the entire person is supposed to change, not just some specific behavior. Self-centered acts are to be replaced by loving behaviors toward others as the convert becomes, in their terms, a "new creation."

The target of the next two types of social movements is *society*. **Reformative social movements** seek to *reform* some specific aspect of society. The civil rights movement, for example, seeks to reform the ways society treats the minorities, from their place in education and politics to their opportunities in the job market. **Transformative social movements**, in contrast, seek to *transform* the social order itself. Its members want to replace the current social order with their version of the good society. Revolutions, such as those in the American colonies, France, Russia, and Cuba, are examples.

One of the more interesting examples of transformative social movements is **millenarian social movements**, which are based on prophecies of coming calamity. Of particular interest is a type of millenarian movement called a **cargo cult** (Worsley 1957). About one hundred years ago, Europeans colonized the Melanesian Islands of the South Pacific. Ships from the home countries of the colonizers arrived one after another, each loaded with items the Melanesians had never seen. As the Melanesians watched the cargo being unloaded, they expected some of it to go to them. Instead, it all went to the Europeans. Melanesian prophets then revealed the secret of this exotic merchandise. Their own ancestors were manufacturing and sending the cargo to them, but the colonists were intercepting the merchandise. Since the colonists were too strong to fight and too selfish to share the cargo, there was little the Melanesians could do.
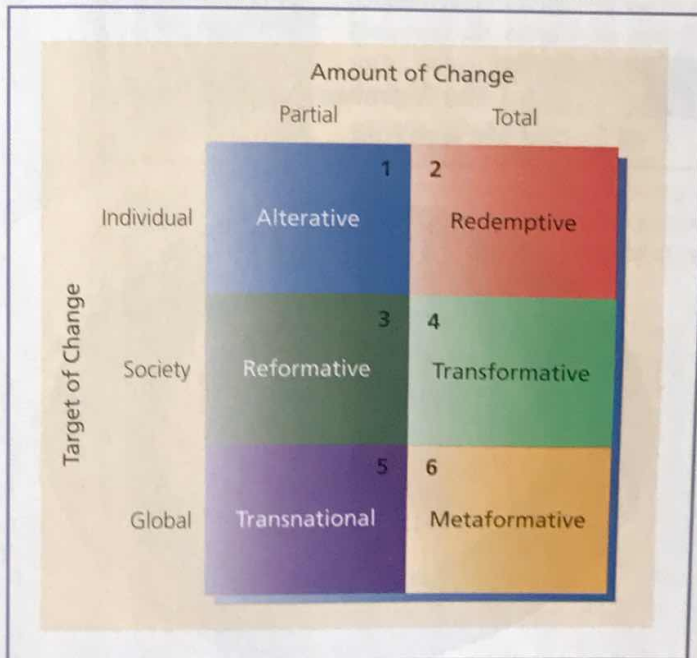
Then came a remarkable self-fulfilling prophecy. Melanesian prophets revealed that if the people would destroy their crops and food and build harbors, their ancestors would see their sincerity and send the cargo directly to them. The Melanesians did so. When the colonial administrators of the island saw that the natives had destroyed their crops and were just sitting in the hills waiting for the cargo ships to arrive, they informed the home government. The prospect of thousands of islanders patiently starving to death was too horrifying to allow. The British government fulfilled the prophecy by sending ships to the islands with cargo earmarked for the Melanesians.

As Figure 21.2 indicates, some social movements have a global orientation. As with many aspects of life in our new

Social movements *involve large numbers of people who, upset about some condition in society, organize to do something about it. Shown here is Carrie Nation, a temperance leader who in 1900 began to break up saloons with a hatchet. Her social movement eventually became so popular that it resulted in Prohibition.*

Figure 21.2 Types of Social Movements

	Amount of Change	
Target of Change	**Partial**	**Total**
Individual	1 Alterative	2 Redemptive
Society	3 Reformative	4 Transformative
Global	5 Transnational	6 Metaformative

Sources: The first four types are from Aberle 1966; the last two are from the author.

global economy, numerous issues that bother people transcend national boundaries. Participants of **transnational social movements** (also called *new social movements*) want to change some condition that exists not just in their society, but also throughout the world. These social movements often center on improving the quality of life (Melucci 1989). Examples are the women's movement, labor movement, environmental movement, and animal rights movement (McAdam et al. 1988; Smith et al. 1997; Walter 2001). As you can see from these examples, transnational social movements still focus on some specific condition, but that condition is global.

Cell number 6 in Figure 21.2 represents a rare type of social movement. The goal of **metaformative social movements** is to change the social order itself—not just of a society or two, but of the entire world. Metaformative social movements strive to reformulate concepts and practices of race-ethnicity, class, gender, religion, government, and the global stratification of nations. Examples include the communist and fascist social movements of the early to middle parts of the twentieth century. (The fascists consisted of the Nazis in Germany, the Black Shirts of Italy, and groups throughout Europe and the United States.) Because these metaformative social movements posed a threat to the existing social order of the time, nations with even opposing ideologies banded together to fight them.

Today, we are witnessing another metaformative social movement, that of international terrorism. Like other social movements before it, this movement is not united, but consists of many separate groups with differing goals. The version of which al-Qaeda is a part wants to cleanse Islamic societies of Western influences, which they contend are demonic and degrading to men, women, and morality. To bring about their goals, they want to transform civilization itself. They want to replace Western civilization with their version of the good society, which consists of an extremist brand of Islam. This frightens both non-Muslims and Muslims, who hold sharply differing views of what constitutes quality of life. If the Islamic international terrorists—or the communists or fascists before them—have their way, they will usher in a new world order.

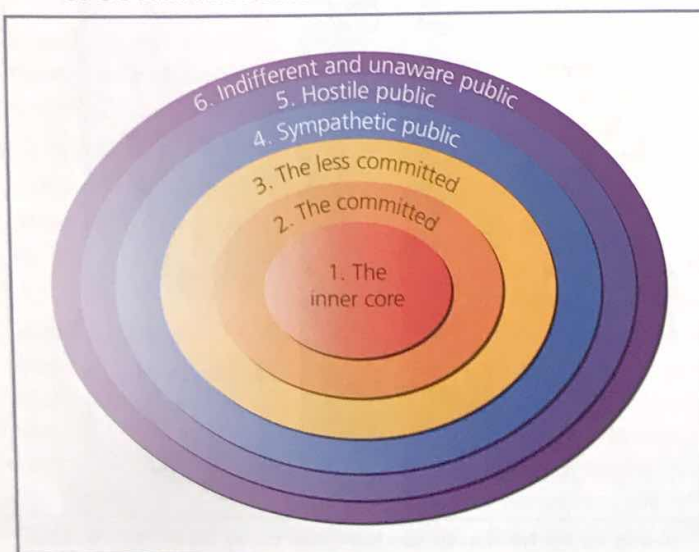## Tactics of Social Movements

The leaders of a social movement can choose from a variety of tactics. Should they peacefully boycott, stage a march, or hold an all-night candlelight vigil? Or should they bomb a building, burn down a research lab, or assassinate a key figure? To understand why the leaders of social movements choose their tactics, we need to examine a group's levels of membership, the publics it addresses, and its relationship to authorities.

Levels of Membership   Figure 21.3 shows the composition of social movements. Beginning at the center and moving outward are three levels of membership. At the center is the inner core, those most committed to the movement. The inner core sets the group's goals, timetables, and strategies. People at the second level are also committed to the movement, but somewhat less so than the inner core. They can be counted on to show up for demonstrations and to do the grunt work—help with mailings, pass out petitions and leaflets, make telephone calls. The third level consists of a wider circle of people who are less committed and less dependable. Their participation depends on convenience—if an activity doesn't interfere with something else they want to do, they participate.

The tactics chosen largely depend on the predispositions and backgrounds of the inner core. Because of their differing backgrounds, some members of the inner core may be predisposed to use peaceful, quiet demonstrations, or even placing ads in newspapers. Others may prefer heated, verbal confrontations. Still others may tend toward violence. Tactics also depend on the number of committed members. Different tactics are called for depending on whether the inner core can count on seven hundred—or only seven—committed members to show up.

Figure 21.3 **The Membership and Publics
of Social Movements**

6. Indifferent and unaware public
5. Hostile public
4. Sympathetic public
3. The less committed
2. The committed
1. The inner core

The Publics   Outside the group's membership is the **public**, a dispersed group of people who may have an interest in the issue. As you can see from Figure 21.3, there are three types of publics. Just outside the third circle of members, and blending into it, is the sympathetic public. Although their sympathies lie with the movement, these people have no commitment to it. Their sympathies with the movement's goals, however, make them fertile ground for recruitment. The second public is hostile. The movement's values go against its own, and it wants to stop the social movement. The third public consists of disinterested people. They are either unaware of the social movement or, if aware, indifferent to it.

In selecting tactics, the leadership pays attention to these publics. The sympathetic public is especially significant, because it is the source of new members and support at the ballot box. Leaders avoid tactics that they think might alienate the sympathetic public. They look for tactics that will create even more sympathy from this group. To make themselves appear to be victims—people whose rights are being trampled on—leaders may even force a confrontation with the hostile public. Tactics directed toward the indifferent or unaware public are designed to neutralize their indifference and increase their awareness.

Relationship to Authorities   In determining tactics, the movement's relationship to authorities is also significant. This is especially so when it comes to choosing between peaceful and violent tactics. If a social movement is *institutionalized*—accepted by authorities—violence will not be directed against the authorities, for they are on the movement's side. This, however, does not rule out violence directed against the opposition. In contrast, if authorities are hostile to a social movement, aggressive or even violent tactics may be directed against them. For example, because the goal of a transformative (revolutionary) social movement is to replace the government, the movement and the government are clearly on a collision course.

Other Factors   Sociologist Ellen Scott (1993), who studied the movement to stop rape, discovered that friendship, race-ethnicity, and even size of town are important in determining tactics. Women in Santa Cruz, California, chose to directly confront accused rapists—to publicly humiliate them. In a town of 41,000, the tactic worked. In Washington, D.C., women rejected confrontation as ineffective because of the anonymity

public in this context, a dispersed group of people relevant to a social movement; the sympathetic and hostile publics have an interest in the issues on which a social movement focuses; there is also an unaware or indifferent public

The social movement to stop violence against women has had a major impact on our thinking about gender relations, laws, and law enforcement. Discussed in the text are social factors that underlie the choice of tactics used by women's centers. Shown here are the Purple Berets in Santa Rosa, California, who are protesting against county officials for wanting to treat spouse abuse with counseling instead of in the courts.

that comes with a city of 640,000. Another factor was race–ethnicity. Both groups of women were white, but in Santa Cruz, it was white women confronting white men, while in Washington, D.C., it would have been white women confronting black men. Friendships were also important. Public confrontations require a closely working team of people who will back each other up. In Santa Cruz, the women had lived together for years, while the group in Washington, D.C., was a more formal organization.

No matter how carefully the leaders choose their tactics, they may backfire. All around Santa Cruz, women from the center hung pictures of a man accused of rape. He sued the center. The long litigation that followed sapped the women's energy, and the Santa Cruz center folded.

Propaganda and the Mass Media

The leaders of social movements try to manipulate the mass media in order to influence **public opinion**, how people think about some issue. The right kind of publicity enables the leaders to arouse the sympathetic public and to lay the groundwork for recruiting more members. Pictures of bloodied, dead baby seals, for example, go a long way toward getting a group's message across. The photo essay on pages 632–633 reports on the demonstrations that accompanied the execution of Timothy McVeigh. When I interviewed demonstrators who wanted McVeigh killed and those who wanted his life spared, I was stuck by their use of propaganda. I think this will strike you, too, as you look at these photos.

A key to understanding social movements, then, is **propaganda**. Although this word often evokes negative images, it actually is a neutral term. Propaganda is simply the presentation of information in the attempt to influence people. Its original meaning was positive. *Propaganda* referred to a committee of cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church whose assignment was the care of foreign missions. (They were to *propagate*—multiply or spread—the faith.) The term has traveled a long way since then, however, and today it usually refers to a presentation of information so one-sided that it distorts reality.

Propaganda, in the sense of organized attempts to influence public opinion, is a regular part of everyday life. Our news is filled with propaganda, as various interest groups—from retailers to the government—try to manipulate our perceptions of the world. Our movies, too, although seemingly intended as simply entertainment devices, are actually propaganda vehicles, but even more blatantly so during times of war. Underlying effective propaganda are seven basic techniques, discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page. Perhaps by understanding these techniques, you will be able to re-

The use of propaganda is popular among those committed to the goals of a social movement. They can see only one side to the social issue about which they are so upset. What attention-getting devices have these activists in the animal rights social movement chosen? Are they effective?

"Tricks of the Trade"—The Fine Art of Propaganda

SOCIOLOGISTS ALFRED AND ELIZABETH Lee (1939) found that propaganda relies on seven basic techniques, which they termed "tricks of the trade." To be effective, the techniques should be subtle, with the audience unaware that their minds and emotions are being manipulated. If propaganda is effective, people will not know why they support something, but they'll fervently defend it.

■ *Name calling.* This technique aims to arouse opposition to the competing product, candidate, or policy by associating it with a negative image. By comparison, one's own product, candidate, or policy is attractive. Political candidates who call an opponent "soft on crime" or "insensitive to the poor" are using this technique.

■ *Glittering generality.* Essentially the opposite of the first technique, this one surrounds the product, candidate, or policy with images that arouse positive feelings. "She's a real Democrat" has little meaning, but it makes the audience feel that something substantive has been said. "He stands for individualism" is so general that it is meaningless, yet the audience thinks that it has heard a specific message about the candidate.

■ *Transfer.* In its positive form, this technique associates the product, candidate, or policy with

something the public respects or approves. You might not be able to get by with saying "Coors is patriotic," but surround a beer with images of the country's flag, and beer drinkers will get the idea that it is more patriotic to drink this brand of beer than to drink some other kind. In its negative form, this technique associates the product, candidate, or policy with something the public disapproves of.

■ *Testimonials.* Famous individuals endorse a product, candidate, or policy. Michael Jordan lends his name to cologne, Nike products, and even underwear, while Britney Spears touts the merits of Pepsi, and Tiger Woods tells you that Buicks make fine SUVs. Candidates for political office solicit the endorsement of movie stars who may know next to nothing about the candidate or even about politics. In the negative form of this technique, a despised person is associated with the competing product. If propagandists (called "spin doctors" in politics) could get by with it, they would show Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden announcing support for an opposing candidate.

■ *Plain folks.* Sometimes it pays to associate the product, candidate, or policy with "just plain folks." "If Mary or John Q. Public likes it, you will, too." A political candidate who

kisses babies, puts on a hard hat, and has lunch at McDonald's while photographers "catch him (or her) in the act" is using the "plain folks" strategy. "I'm just a regular person" is the message of the presidential candidate who poses for photographers in jeans and work shirt—while making certain that the chauffeur-driven Mercedes does not show up in the background.

■ *Card stacking.* The aim of this technique is to present only positive information about what you support, and only negative information about what you oppose. The intent is to make it sound as though there is only one conclusion a rational person can draw. Falsehoods, distortions, and illogical statements are often used.

■ *Bandwagon.* "Everyone is doing it" is the idea behind this technique. Emphasizing how many others buy the product or support the candidate or policy conveys the message that anyone who doesn't join in is on the wrong track.

The Lees (1939) added, "Once we know that a speaker or writer is using one of these propaganda devices in an attempt to convince us of an idea, we can separate the device from the idea and see what the idea amounts to on its own merits."

■ ■ ■

sist one-sided appeals—whether they come from social movements or from hawkers of jeans, running shoes, or perfumes.

The mass media play such a crucial role that we can say they are the gatekeepers to social movements. If those who control and work in the mass media—from owners to reporters—are sympathetic to some particular "cause," you can be sure that it will receive sympathetic treatment. If the social movement goes against their views, however, it likely will be ignored or receive unfavorable treatment. If you ever get the impression that the media are trying to manipulate your opinions and attitudes—even your feelings—on some particular issue or social movement, you probably are right. Far from doing unbiased reporting, the media are under the control and influence of people who have an agenda to get across. To the materials in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on propaganda, then, we need to add the biases of the media establishment—the issues it chooses to give publicity to, those it chooses to ignore, and its favorable and unfavorable treatment of issues and movements.

Sociology can be a liberating discipline (Berger 1963/2003). Sociology sensitizes us to *multiple realities;* that is, for any single point of view on some topic, there are competing points of view. Each represents reality as people see it, their distinct experiences having led them to different perceptions. Consequently, different people find each point of view equally compelling. Although the committed members of a social movement are sincere—and perhaps even make sacrifices for "the cause"—theirs is but one view of the world. If other sides were presented, the issue would look quite different.

Why People Join Social Movements

As we have seen, social movements are fed by a sense of injustice. They stem from widespread, deeply felt discontent—the conviction that some condition of society is no longer tolerable. However, not everyone who feels dissatisfied with an issue joins a social movement. Why some, and not others? Sociologists have found that recruitment generally follows channels of social networks. That is, people most commonly join a social movement because they have friends and acquaintances already in it (McCarthy and Wolfson 1992; Snow et al. 1993a).

Let's look at three explanations for why people join social movements.

Mass Society Theory

To explain why people are attracted to social movements, sociologist William Kornhauser (1959) proposed **mass society theory**. Kornhauser argued that many people feel isolated because they live in a **mass society**—an impersonal, industrialized, highly bureaucratized society. Social movements fill this void by offering a sense of belonging. In areas where social ties are supposedly weaker, such as the western United States, one would expect to find more social movements than in areas where ties are supposedly stronger, such as in the Midwest and South.

This theory seems to match commonsense observations. Certainly, social movements proliferate on the West Coast. But when sociologist Doug McAdam and his colleagues (McAdam et al. 1988) interviewed people who had risked their lives in the civil rights movement, they found that these people were firmly rooted in families and communities. Their strong desire to right wrongs and to overcome injustices, not their isolation, had motivated their participation. Even the Nazis attracted many people who were firmly rooted in their communities (Oberschall 1973). Finally, the most isolated of all, the homeless, generally do not join anything—except food lines.

Deprivation Theory

A second explanation to account for why people join social movements is *deprivation theory.* According to this theory, people who feel deprived—whether it be of money, justice, status, or privilege—join social movements with the hope of redressing their grievances. This theory may seem so obvious as to need no evidence. Don't the thousands of African Americans who participated in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and the World War I soldiers who marched on Washington after Congress refused to pay their promised bonuses provide ample evidence that the theory is true?

Deprivation theory does provide a starting point. But there is more to the matter than this. Almost 150 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville (1856/1955) made a telling observation. Both the peasants of Germany and the peasants of France were living under deprived conditions. According to deprivation theory, if revolution were to occur we would expect it to take place in both countries. Only the French peasants rebelled and overthrew their king, however. The reason, said de Tocqueville, is *relative* deprivation. The living conditions of the French peasants had been improving, and they could foresee even better circumstances

mass society theory an explanation for why people participate in a social movement based on the assumption that the movement offers them a sense of belonging

mass society industrialized, highly bureaucratized, impersonal society

ahead. German peasants, in contrast, had never experienced anything but depressed conditions, and they had no comparative basis for feeling deprived.

According to **relative deprivation theory**, then, it is not people's actual deprivation that matters. Rather, the key to participation in social movements is *relative* deprivation—what people *think* they should have relative to what others have, or relative to their own past or even their perceived future. Relative deprivation theory, which has provided insight into revolutions, holds a surprise. Because improving conditions fuel human desire for even better conditions, *improving* conditions can spark revolutions. As Figure 21.4 shows, this occurs when people's expectations outstrip the actual change they experience. It is likely that we can also apply this to riots.
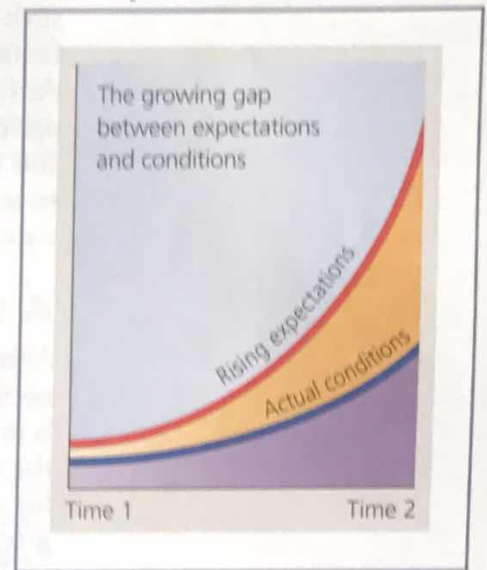
Relative deprivation also explains an interesting aspect of the civil rights movement. Relatively well-off African Americans—college students and church leaders—were at the center of the sit-ins, marches, and boycotts in the South during the 1950s and 1960s. They went to restaurants and lunch counters that were reserved for whites. When refused service, they sat peacefully while curses and food were heaped on them (Morris 1993). Why did they subject themselves to such treatment? Remember that according to relative deprivation theory, what is significant is not what we have or don't have, but with whom we compare ourselves. The African American demonstrators compared themselves with whites of similar status, and they perceived themselves as deprived.

How about the white, middle-class college students and church leaders from the North? They, too, risked their lives when they joined the Southern protesters. They weren't comparing themselves with people whose situation was better than their own. Nor was their own personal welfare at stake. Relative deprivation theory doesn't help us here. We need to look at the *moral* reasons for their involvement (McAdam 1988; Fendrich and Lovoy 1993). Let's consider that motivation in social movements.

Moral Issues and Ideological Commitment

As sociologists James Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin (1993) point out, we will miss the *basic* reason for many people's involvement in social movements if we overlook the moral issue—people sensing injustice and wanting to do something about it. Some people join because of *moral shock*—a sense of outrage at finding out what is "really" going on (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). For people who view a social movement in moral terms, great issues hang

Figure 21.4 Relative Deprivation and Revolution

The growing gap between expectations and conditions

Rising expectations

Actual conditions

Time 1   Time 2

relative deprivation theory in this context, the belief that people join social movements based on their evaluations of what they think they should have compared with what others have

Militias—citizens who arm themselves and form paramilitary organizations—have sprung up across the United States. Although all the theories discussed in the text may apply to members of these militias, those that deal with moral issues and ideological commitment are especially relevant. These two are members of the Michigan Militia, the country's largest militia.

in the balance. They feel they must choose sides and do what they can to help right wrongs. As sociologists put it, they join because of *ideological commitment* to the movement.

Many members on *both* sides of the abortion issue, for example, see their involvement in such terms. Similarly, activists in the animal rights movement are convinced that there can be no justification for making animals suffer in order to make safer products for humans. Activists in the peace movement, the environmental movement, and those who protest against global capitalism see nuclear weapons, pollution, and power in similar moral terms. It is for moral reasons that they risk arrest and ridicule for their demonstrations. For them, to *not* act would be an inexcusable betrayal of future generations. The *moral* component of a social movement, then, is a primary reason for many people's involvement.

A Special Case: The Agent Provocateur

Agent provocateurs are a unique type of participant in social movements. These are agents of the government or even of the opposing sides of a social movement whose job is to spy on the leadership and perhaps to sabotage its activities. Some are recruited from the membership itself, people who are willing to betray their friends in the organization for a few Judas dollars. Others are police or members of a rival group who go underground and join the movement.

The radical social change advocated by some social movements poses a threat to the power elite. In such cases, the use of agent provocateurs is not surprising. What may be surprising, however, is that some agents convert to the social movement on which they are spying. Sociologist Gary Marx (1993) explains that to be credible, agents must share at least some of the class, age, gender, racial-ethnic, or religious characteristics of the group. This background makes the agents more likely to sympathize with the movement's goals, making them disenchanted with trying to harm the group. To be effective, agents must also work their way into the center of the group. This requires that they spend time with the group's committed members. A basic sociological principle is that the more we interact with people, the more we tend to like them. In addition, as these agents build trust, they often are cut off from their own group. The point of view they represent can start to recede in their minds, and be replaced with concerns about betraying and deceiving people who now trust them as friends.

What also may be surprising is how far some agents go. During the 1960s, when a wave of militant social movements rolled across the United States, the FBI recruited agent provocateurs to sabotage groups. These agents provoked illegal activities that otherwise would not have occurred: They set the leadership up for arrest and, in some instances, set them up for death. Two examples will let us see how agent provocateurs operate (Marx 1993). In a plot by a group called the Black Liberation Front to blow up the Statue of Liberty, one of the four men involved was an undercover agent. It was he who drew up the plans and even provided funds to pay for the dynamite and rent the car. In another instance, the FBI paid $36,500 to two members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan to arrange for the Klan to bomb a Jewish businessman's home. A trap was set in which one Klansman was killed and another was arrested in the unsuccessful attempt.

IN SUM

People most commonly join a social movement because they have friends and acquaintances already in it. Motivations are mixed. Some join because of moral convictions, others to further their own careers. Still others join because they find a valued identity, or even because it is fun. Some participate even though they *don't want to.* The Cuban government, for example, compels people to turn out for mass demonstrations to show support of the Communist regime (Aguirre 1993). As we just saw, police agents may join social movements in order to spy on them and sabotage their activities. In no social movement, then, is there a single cause for people joining. As in all other activities in life, people remain a complex bundle of motivations—and this provides a challenge for sociologists to unravel.

agent provocateur someone who joins a group in order to spy on it and to sabotage it by provoking its members to commit extreme acts

On the Success and Failure of Social Movements

Social movements have brought about extensive change. The women's movement, for example, has led not only to new legislation but also to a different way of thinking about relations between women and men. Most social movements, however, are not successful. Let's look at the reasons for their success or failure.

The Stages of Social Movements

Sociologists have identified five stages in the growth and maturity of social movements (Lang and Lang 1961; Mauss 1975; Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Tilly 1978; Jaspar 1991). They are

1. *Initial unrest and agitation.* During this first stage, people are upset about some condition in society and want to change it. Leaders emerge who verbalize people's feelings and crystallize issues. Most social movements fail at this stage. Unable to gain enough support, after a brief flurry of activity, they quietly die.

2. *Resource mobilization.* A crucial factor that enables social movements to make it past the first stage is **resource mobilization.** By this term, sociologists mean the mobilization of resources—time, money, people's skills, and the ability to get the attention of the mass media. Those resources may also include access to churches to organize protests (Mirola 2003). Technology and mailing lists are also key resources: direct mailing, faxing, and e-mailing.

   In some cases, an indigenous leadership arises to mobilize resources. Other groups, lacking capable leadership, turn to "guns for hire," outside specialists who sell their services. As sociologists John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977; Zald and McCarthy 1987) point out, even though large numbers of people may be upset over some condition of society, without resource mobilization they are only upset people, perhaps even agitators, but they do not constitute a social movement.

3. *Organization.* A division of labor is set up. The leadership makes policy decisions, and the rank and file carry out the daily tasks necessary to keep the movement going. There is still much collective excitement about the issue, the movement's focal point of concern.

4. *Institutionalization.* At this stage, the movement has developed a bureaucracy, the type of formal hierarchy described in Chapter 7. Control lies in the hands of career officers, who may care more about their own position in the organization than the movement for which the organization's initial leaders made sacrifices. The collective excitement diminishes.

5. *Organizational decline and possible resurgence.* During this phase, managing the day-to-day affairs of the organization dominates the leadership. A change in public sentiment may even have occurred, and there may no longer be a group of committed people who share a common cause. The movement is likely to wither away. Decline is not inevitable, however, as we shall see.

The Rocky Road to Success

These stages, especially resource mobilization and institutionalization, help us understand why social movements seldom solve social problems. To mobilize resources, a movement must appeal to a broad constituency. This means that the group must focus on things that a lot of people are concerned about. For example, if workers at one particular plant are upset about their working conditions, their discontent is not adequate for recruiting the broad support necessary for a social movement. At best, it will result in local agitation.

resource mobilization a theory that social movements succeed or fail based on their ability to mobilize resources such as time, money, and people's skills

Unsafe working conditions of millions of workers, however, have a chance of becoming the focal point of a social movement.

Broad problems, however, are deeply embedded in society. This, of course, means that minor tinkering will not be adequate. Just as the problem touches many interrelated components of society, so the solutions must be broad. With no quick fix available, the social movement must stay around. But longevity brings its own danger of failure. When social movements become institutionalized, they tend to turn inward and focus their energies on running the organization (see stage 4 on page 637).

Many social movements do vitally affect society, however. Some, such as the civil rights and the women's movement, become powerful forces for social change. They draw the public's attention to problems and turn the society on a path that leads toward solutions. Others become powerful forces for resisting the social change that their members consider undesirable. In either case, social movements are highly significant for contemporary society, and we can anticipate that new ones will be a regular feature of our social landscape.

As we saw, the fifth and final stage of social movement is decline. However, decline is not inevitable. More idealistic and committed leaders may emerge and reinvigorate the movement. Or, as in the case of abortion, conflict between groups on opposite sides of the issue may invigorate each side and prevent the movement's decline. Let's close this chapter by focusing on abortion activists.

THINKING
Critically

Which Side of the Barricades? Prochoice and Prolife as a Social Movement

No issue so divides Americans as abortion. Although most Americans take a more moderate view, on one side are some who feel that abortion should be permitted under any circumstance, even during the last month of pregnancy. They are matched by some on the other side who are convinced that abortion should never be allowed for any circumstances, not even during the first month of pregnancy. This polarization constantly breathes new life into the movement.

When the U.S. Supreme Court made its 1973 decision, *Roe* v. *Wade*, that states could not restrict abortion, the prochoice side relaxed. Victory was theirs, and they thought their opponents would quietly disappear. Instead, large numbers of Americans were disturbed by what they saw as the legal right to murder unborn children.

The views of the two sides could not be more incompatible. Those who favor choice view the 1.3 million abortions performed annually in the United States as examples of women exercising their basic reproductive rights. Those who gather under the prolife banner see these acts as legalized murder. To

the prochoice side, those who oppose abortion are blocking women's rights—they would force women to continue pregnancies they want to terminate. To the prolife side, those who advocate choice are seen as condoning murder—they would sacrifice their unborn children for the sake of school, career, or convenience.

There is no way to reconcile these contrary views. Each sees the other as unreasonable and extremist. And each uses propaganda by focusing on worst-case scenarios: prochoice images of young women raped at gunpoint, forced to bear the children of rapists; prolife images of women who are eight months pregnant killing their babies instead of nurturing them.

With no middle ground, these views remain in perpetual conflict. As each side fights for what it considers basic rights, it reinvigorates the other. When in 1989 the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Webster* v. *Reproductive Services* that states could restrict abortion, one side mourned it as a defeat and the other hailed it as a victory. Seeing the political battle going against them, the prochoice side regrouped for a determined struggle. The prolife side, sensing judicial victory within its grasp, gathered forces for a push to complete the overthrow of *Roe* v. *Wade*.

This goal of the prolife side almost became reality in *Casey* v. *Planned Parenthood*. On June 30, 1992, in a 6-to-3 decision the Supreme Court upheld the right

Activists in social movements become committed to "the cause." The social movement around abortion, currently one of the most dynamic in the United States, has split Americans, is highly visible, and has articulate spokespeople on both sides.

of states to require women to wait 24 hours between the confirmation of pregnancy and getting an abortion; to require girls under 18 to obtain the consent of one parent; and to require that women be given materials that describe the fetus and be informed about alternatives to abortion. In the same case, by a 5-to-4 decision, the Court ruled that a wife does not have to inform her husband if she intends to have an abortion.

Because the two sides do not see the same reality, this social movement cannot end unless the vast majority of Americans commit to one side or the other. Otherwise, every legislative and judicial outcome—including the extremes of a constitutional amendment that declares abortion to be either murder or a woman's right—is a victory to one and a defeat to the other. To committed activists, then, no battle is ever complete. Rather, each action

is only one small part of a hard-fought, bitter, moral struggle.

For Your CONSIDERATION...

Typically, the last stage of a social movement is decline. Why hasn't this social movement declined? Under what conditions will it decline?

The longer a woman is pregnant, the fewer the people who approve abortion. How do you feel about abortion during the second month versus the eighth month? Or partial-birth abortion? What do you think about abortion in cases of rape and incest? Can you identify some of the social reasons that underlie your opinions?

Sources: Neikirk and Elsasser 1992; McKenna 1995; Williams 1995; *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 88; Henslin 2003d.