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# Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements

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*Study of stories and storytelling in social movements can contribute to our understanding of recruitment that takes place outside formal movement organizations; social movement organizations' ability to withstand strategic setbacks; and movements' impacts on mainstream politics. This paper draws on several cases to illuminate the yields of such study and to provide alternatives to the overbroad, uncritical, and astructural understandings of narrative evident in some recent writings. It also urges attention to the role of literary devices in sociological analyses of collective action.*

**KEY WORDS:** narrative; social movements; collective identity.

Insurgents have always known that stories of exodus and redemption, of chosen people and returning prophets, are powerfully motivating of collective action. Recently sociologists, following trends in history, psychology, women's studies, and legal theory, have come to the same conclusion. The stories told in and about movements in speeches, manifestos, field reports, and legal affidavits, in activists' deliberative discussions, in post-movement political debates, textbooks, and holiday commemorations have rich potential for illuminating features of the emergence, trajectories, and consequences of movements that are not yet well understood.[1] Drawing on my own research and that of other sociologists, I argue that studying movement narratives can help us to understand 1) recruitment occurring before the consolidation of formal movement organizations; 2) the conditions under which movement organizations are able to rebound from strategic setbacks; and 3) the impact of movements on institutional policymaking.

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Of course, activists do more than tell stories. They storm barricades, negotiate with allies, plan demonstrations, sit-in. Movement talk likewise consists of discourses other than narrative, including referential, expressive, and persuasive modes (Polkinghorne 1988:31). In what circumstances, then, do movement activists tell stories rather than, say, make causal arguments, expressive pleas, or lists of costs and benefits? Are stories *always* motivating of collective action? And are people more likely to tell stories in movements than they are during periods of political stability, or than when they're in school or at home? I raise these questions to caution against the overbroad, uncritical, and astructural conceptions of narrative that have appeared in some recent writings. Instead, I argue for close attention to what distinguishes narratives from other discursive forms; for attention to the features of narrative that make it prone to reproducing dominant understandings even when used by insurgents; and for attention to the social rules governing storytelling.

I intend this essay to introduce lines of ongoing research and propose new directions rather than chart a full-fledged methodological program. My review of theory and research on the topic is accordingly selective. The scholarship on narrative in literature alone is vast, and I pick and choose among competing theories, noting debates among authors only where they are relevant to a sociology of social movements. I begin by outlining features of narrative that account for its likely prominence in movement talk and talk about movements, namely its reliance on emplotment, point of view, narrativity, and a canon of familiar plots.[2] Then I show how an analysis of movement narratives can shed light on three movement processes not yet well understood. How are people persuaded to participate before the establishment of formal organizations and instrumental framing efforts? Why are some movement groups able to withstand defeats? How do past movements shape current institutional policymaking? I conclude very briefly by assessing narrative as a *mode* of sociological analysis. A note on terminology: although some writers distinguish "narrative" from "story" by restricting the latter to compositions of fictional events (Polkinghorne 1988), I use the terms interchangeably, along with tale, myth, and anecdote. I also use "account," in spite of its somewhat different sociological genealogy (Orbuch 1997).

## NARRATIVE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Renewed interest in the cultural dimensions of protest has generated new analytic concepts and revived older ones: ideology, tradition, collective identity, rhetoric. How is narrative a valuable addition to these? In particular, how does narrative improve on collective action "frames" and

"framing," concepts which have proven fertile in generating empirical research? (See *inter alia*: Babb 1996; Benford 1993a; b; Hunt and Benford 1994; Evans 1997; Gamson 1992; Tarrow 1994; Voss 1996a; b; Williams and Williams 1995). Frames are persuasive devices used by movement leaders to recruit participants, maintain solidarity, drum up support and, in some instances, demobilize opposition (Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1988; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). When successful, frames foster a sense of injustice, identity, and collective efficacy—cognitions that a situation is wrong, that it is not immutable and that "we" can battle "them" in order to change it (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997). What makes for success? Clarity, empirical credibility, and congruence with potential adherents' beliefs and broad cultural understandings (Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1988; Klandermans 1997). Potent frames foster "a sense of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety" (Benford 1993a: 209), supply a "clearly interpretable" rationale for participation, and discourage "fatalism" (Snow and Benford 1988: 203).

Recently, framing theorists have included narratives (stories, tales, anecdotes, allegories) in their discussions of framing (Benford 1993a, Hunt and Benford 1994; Fine 1995). Frames are "expressed and made concrete" (Fine 1995:134), and "exemplified" through narratives (Benford 1993a:196). However, subsuming "narrative," under the broader category of "frame" obscures differences between the two in how they organize and represent reality, their relation to collective identities, how they engage audiences, and their criteria of intelligibility. These differences are a function of narrative's dependence on emplotment, point of view, narrativity, and a limited fund of plot lines, and I treat each in turn.

Plot is the logic that makes meaningful the events that precede the story's conclusion. Without plot, events would be mere occurrences, discontinuous and separate moments, rather than episodes in an unfolding story (Polkinghorne 1988). As a logic linking events, plot is both heuristic and normative, since the end of the story is also its "end" in the sense of purpose or telos. All stories have a moral (White 1980). The temporally configurational and evaluative functions of plot account for narrative's role not only in representing reality but in apprehending and, indeed, constituting it. Unlike the "paradigmatic" mode of cognition characteristic of logic and science, which adjudicates between truth claims on the basis of empirical evidence and formal logic, a narrative mode seeks time and place-specific connections between events (Bruner 1986). We understand narratively by tacking from the raw datum—the occurrence or behavior—to the developing whole of which it is a part (Mandler 1984). This goes for actions we are contemplating as well. We act not on the basis of categorizing knowl-

edge (in Polkinghorne's [1988] example, "I am 40 years old; I should buy life insurance"), but by locating events within an unfolding life-story ("I felt out of breath last week, I really should start thinking about life insurance").

Whether or not we always or naturally apprehend reality narratively is the subject of dispute among narrative theorists (see Hinchman and Hinchman [1997] for a review of the debate). However, they do agree that we are especially likely to turn to narrative when we encounter phenomena that are unfamiliar or anomalous. Psychologist A.E. Michotte found that when presented with small colored rectangles moving on a screen, viewers constructed elaborate narrative plots:

> "It is as if A's approach frightened B and B ran away." "It is as if A, in touching B induced an electric current which set B going." "The arrival of A by the side of B acts as a sort of signal to B..." "It is as if A touched off a mechanism inside B and thus set it going" (1963, quoted in Sarbin 1986:13).

The experiment demonstrates our tendency to tell stories to make intelligible what is strange and potentially disturbing. Social movements, by definition, are just that: moments when agency explodes structure, the taken for granted becomes precarious, when old "words lose their meaning" (White 1984). Lives are interrupted, physical space is rearranged (think of street demonstrations), the relations of deference and authority and civility that structure everyday life disintegrate, and the old calculi of interest and risk suddenly lose their force. In that context, narratives may serve to contain the disruptive within a familiar form, to turn the anomalous into the "new." Note that although the instability I'm describing may be a *consequence* of protest, it may also reflect the political reversals and cleavages that create political opportunities *for* protest.

Emplotment distinguishes narratives from frames in another sense. Whereas framing theorists see collective identities as developed through discursive processes of analogy and difference (Benford and Hunt 1992; Hunt and Benford 1994; Klandermans 1992; 1997),[3] narrative theories emphasize identities' temporal dimension (Gergen and Gergen 1997; Polkinghorne 1991). In telling the story of our becoming, as an individual, a nation, a people, we establish who we are. Narratives may be employed strategically to strengthen a collective identity but they also may precede and make possible the development of a coherent community, nation, or collective actor (Sewell 1992; Hart 1992; Somers 1992; 1994; Carr 1997; Ginsburg 1989). In periods of actual or potential upheaval, stories maintain the stability of the self and group (Denzin 1987; Ginsburg 1989; Williams 1997), connect through a trope of reversal the group under conditions of oppression and the group under conditions of liberation.

Narrative's reliance on at least three points of view, those of narrator, protagonist, and audience, further contributes to the formation and sustenance of collective identities. If we as the audience cannot know for certain how events will turn out in the story, we can assume that the narrator knows (Scholes and Kellogg 1966). Even when the narrator and protagonist are one and the same, our expectation of narratorial authority warrants the account. Storytelling thus objectifies its subjects, confers a kind of fixity and stability on them. An activist may be trying more to make sense of what is happening around her than to mobilize participation, but when she tells a story of the collective "we," she is helping to bring that identity into being.

In addition to plot and point of view, a third feature of narrative suggests its prominence in fledgling movements. Even as stories help to make sense of discontinuity by integrating self and collective, action and character, and past and future, their *failure* to fully contain the new may endow them with mobilizing power. What makes a frame successful, say Gamson (1988; 1992), Snow and Benford (1988; 1992), and Klandermans (1997), is clear specification not only of the injustice against which protest must be mounted but the agents and likely efficacy of that protest. People must be shown that deliberate action will have its intended effect. But individual intent is just one among the principles that may link events in a story. The question often is just what the linkage is: are things happening because of chance or divine intervention, conscious intention or subliminal drive? "Narrativity" is what grips us, what keeps us listening or reading. A story whose end was immediately apparent would be no story at all; it would be the moral without the story. Wolfgang Iser writes that, "It is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism" (1972: 285; see also Bruner 1986). Narrative necessitates our interpretive participation, requires that we struggle to fill the gaps, to resolve the ambiguities. We struggle because the story's end is consequential; it is not only outcome but moral of the events which precede it.

Literary critic J. Hillis Miller (1990) argues that even the story's conclusion may not resolve the ambiguity. All narratives are characterized by repetition of a "complex word," Miller argues, a word with multiple, indeed incongruous, meanings, as "right" may mean to have the right, to be right, or to be straight (as in "right angle"). Each of those meanings may or may not be simultaneously operative in the same story and this indeterminacy is both what compels our attention and calls for more stories. "[W]e always need more stories because in some way they do not satisfy," Miller suggests (p. 72). I will expand on the argument later. For now, my point is that the difficulty of logically explaining some events (because they are unfamiliar, or defy conventional rationales for action) may compel a narrative expla-

nation, which in turn preserves the ambiguity that calls for more stories. Together, then, narrative's temporally configurative and projective dimensions, its capacity to constitute subjects, and its indeterminacy of meaning suggest its prominence during the earliest stages of social protest. Before the consolidation of formal organizations or before they monopolize micromobilization tasks, narratives that are told by numerous actors more to explain than to recruit may nevertheless endow events with the moral purpose and engaging ambiguity that compels participation.

Stories' reliance on a stock of familiar plot lines, on a canon, distinguishes them from frames in a fourth way. To be effective, say framing theorists, frames must resonate with extant "ideology, values, belief systems" (Gamson 1988:220). But since "every coin has two sides; every argument has its opposite arguments" (Klandermans 1992:84), there is still plenty of room for ideological maneuver. Framing theorists thus emphasize the multiplicity of coexisting, often contradictory value positions that can be instrumentally mobilized by activists. By contrast, narrative's dependence on a limited stock of possible story lines foregrounds the constraints levied by extant cultural understandings. Narrative theorists differ on just how many plots there are, and just how universal they are. But there is agreement that stories not conforming to a cultural stock of plots typically are either not stories or are unintelligible. Narratives' canonicity points to one way in which conventional understandings of protest and politics may enter into and constrain activists' strategic decisionmaking. Activists' very understandings of "strategy," "interest," "opportunity," and "obstacle," may be structured by the oppositions and hierarchies that come from familiar stories. Thus if part of the power of mobilizing narratives lies in their polyvalence of meaning, oppositional meanings must always contend with more conventional ones.

## THE NARRATIVE CONCEPT: METHODOLOGICAL CAUTIONS

My purpose in distinguishing narratives from frames has been both to avoid an overbroad definition of narrative and to argue for its relevance to understanding neglected dynamics of collective action. Before turning to empirical research on these dynamics, I want to raise two more cautions about how we study social movement stories. Recent treatments in cultural studies, anthropology, history, and legal theory as well as sociology have emphasized narrative's counterhegemonic, subversive, and liberatory possibilities (see, *inter alia*: Ashe 1989; Delgado 1989; Richardson 1990). There is good reason for this emphasis. Since anyone can tell his or her own

story, even if he or she lacks the institutional resources and credentials typically required of technical-scientific discourse, personal narratives are a way to discover and communicate that which is shared in individual experiences. They can also expose the boundaries, exclusions, and hierarchies built into "objective" social science and law, that is, the particularity of the experiences that are masked by the authorial voice. However, privileging narrative's subversive capacity or counterposing oppositional stories to hegemonic ones ("counter-stories" to "stories," as Delgado [1989] puts it) leaves out an important question. Are there features of narrative not shared by other discursive forms that make it prone to reproducing hegemonic understandings even when used by oppositional groups? I noted earlier that narrative's dependence on a canon may generate one set of constraints. Modern Western movement stories may tend to attribute insurgency to individual, independent actors rather than to the relationships that motivate and sustain participation. (Later, I will take issue with the assumption underpinning the foregoing statement that social movement analysts are *not* dependent on canonical narratives). As I'll suggest below, it may be easier to tell a story of short-term triumph than one of long-term endurance. Stories resonate through a combination of familiarity, pleasurable surprise, and emotional identification; this makes them difficult to challenge. If leaders seek to stifle internal dissent, storytelling is probably an effective tool, but it is not if they seek to prefigure a fully democratic society. Finally, narratives often work by "effac[ing] the connections between the particular and the general" (Ewick and Silbey 1995:218). A compelling story seems to speak to the shared experience of a larger group or in its collective voice, but without demonstrating its representativeness. The danger for movements is that my particular story is too easily seen as that of "women" or "Latinos" in a way that erases difference within the group (Abrams 1993).

Another caution: stories are differently intelligible, salient, available, and authoritative depending on who tells them, when, for what purpose, and in what institutional context. Sociologists' adoption of the narrative concept from literary studies risks privileging narrative form over narrative context, stories over storytelling. We need a better understanding of the settings in which storytelling is expected, required, or disallowed, the conventions adjudging what kinds of stories are considered intelligible or successful, and the rules governing how stories may be told, and when they may be interrupted or interrogated or ignored (Ewick and Silbey [1995] make a similar argument). We are likely to tell a different story of our car accident to a group of friends than to a judge in traffic court. But the possibility I want to broach here is that the rules governing storytelling may help to define and sustain the very interests, boundaries, and mandates

that *constitute* the institutions within which they are told. Storytelling's content and context mutually sustain each other: what stories can be told on particular occasions endow those occasions with institutional meaning.

With these theoretical cautions and questions in mind, I turn to the operation of stories in three dynamics of collective action.

## Stories of Origin: Narratives in Fledgling Movements

In a recent article, Daniel Horowitz punctured the myth of Betty Friedan in the 1950s as an apolitical suburban housewife, captive of the forces of domesticity that she would later challenge, and not "even conscious of the woman problem," as she put it (1996:2). He showed that the author whose *Feminine Mystique* would play a critical role in launching second wave feminism was a longtime labor writer and activist. Her journalism in the 1940s and 1950s was marked by a strong and explicit commitment to women's economic and political equality and sharp insight into the economics of feminine domesticity.

One of the striking features of social movements is that they so often deny their pasts. In popular accounts, long-time activist and Alabama state NAACP secretary Rosa Parks was a middle-aged seamstress who was just "too tired" to stand up on a segregated Montgomery bus, thus prompting her arrest and the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott. Martin Luther King, Jr., was propelled into leadership of the movement by his sheer charisma or the historical "zeitgeist" rather than by the magisterial persuasive efforts of local NAACP head E.D. Nixon (Kohl 1995). Protest "wells up," "explodes," "bursts," words suggesting that it is unplanned, non-instrumental, and apolitical. These "myths of immaculate conception," in Taylor's (1989) felicitous phrase, are in part a function of the media and cultural practices that frame protest as deviance, fad, or threat. Yet social movement activists themselves often trade on an image of protest as unplanned. This is partly strategic. Lewis Killian reveals that student sit-inners in Tallahassee, Florida in 1960 were provided critical assistance by adult civil rights activists who then went on to deny their own involvement in the protest. Their intent was to deflect charges of "outside"—read, communist—influence (1984:782). Rosa Parks's past activism included a stint at the Highlander Center, a group already tarred with the brush of communist sympathies at a time when such sympathies were widely viewed as a threat to national security. Betty Friedan had also spent time at the Highlander Center and Horowitz plausibly hypothesizes that her legitimate fear of being red-baited led her to downplay her radical past. In addition, she probably wanted to appeal to women who had not been exposed to the radical ideas and set-

tings that she had. Movement stories of origin are, on this view, strategic bids for public sympathy and identification. But activists may also deny their forerunners in order to establish their own collective identity, their own distinctiveness from what has come before. Rather than strategic "spin" efforts on the part of an already constituted collective actor, storytelling may serve to make sense of confusing events while recognizing that things—and oneself—are no longer as they were. Thus people's references to "being born" during moments of rebellion (Weschler 1982), or having been "blind" and coming to "see" (Hunt and Benford 1994), formulations that both assimilate novelty within familiar narratives of birth and healing and recognize a generative breach.

I found this dynamic at work in students' representations of the 1960 sit-ins (Polletta 1998a). On February 1, 1960, four black students sat down at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and did not leave until they were arrested. Their action touched off a wave of similar demonstrations around the South: by the end of February, they had spread to thirty cities in seven states and by mid-April, fifty thousand people had taken part in sit-ins (Carson 1981; Chafe 1980). Thanks to Aldon Morris's (1984) pathbreaking research, we know that a good deal of planning preceded the sit-ins, with a network of ministers, NAACP officials, and other activists contacting colleagues to spread the news, training students in sit-in techniques, and persuading adults to support the protests. Other chroniclers have similarly detailed the extensive adult networks that preceded the sit-ins (Chafe 1980; Powledge 1991).

Why then did students describe them as unplanned, impulsive, "like a fever" (Walzer 1960:114) and, over and over again, as "spontaneous"? In articles and letters to the editor of campus newspapers, flyers, and correspondence with each other, students told remarkably similar stories of the demonstrations. They described themselves acting powerfully, transgressively, with immediate, real consequence. And yet they were simply the carriers of a force beyond them. The sit-ins came from nowhere— "boom" —and were the culmination of "centuries of accumulated anger." Narrators were as likely to deny conscious intent as to assert it (when one group of students launched a demonstration, "[t]his was a surprise (and shock) not only to the whole town but to themselves as well"), to declare themselves followers rather than leaders ("Some great leaders are present today," a student wrote in the Morris Brown College *Wolverine*. "Let us follow them wherever they go"), to predict rather than claim their own activism ("As soon as the movement broke, I knew I would get into it"). "*No one* started it..." a sit-inner insisted.[5] Students attributed the sit-ins not to conscious, collective intent, but to forces over which they had no control. Certainly, an image of spontaneity was likelier to garner public support for a home-

grown protest. But students also referred to the spontaneity of the sit-ins in unpublished communications with each other, where one would imagine that the aim was to interpret unfolding events and inspire and mobilize fellow students. Would not representing the sit-ins as spontaneous undermine the sense of collective *efficacy* that framing theorists have viewed as essential to successful mobilization (Benford 1993a; Klandermans 1997; Gamson 1992; McAdam 1982)?

Consider one group's account. Their sit-in was "the result of spontaneous combustion," they wrote, and then went on to chronicle the planning that preceded it. They emphasized, however, and this seems to be the point of using the term "spontaneous combustion," that "there was no organizational tie-in of any kind, either local or national." But they also acknowledged "in order to make the story complete" that members of the sit-organizing group had previously received a "Letter to Christian Students" from the National Student Christian Federation urging them to seek ways to participate.[6] This insistence on spontaneity in spite of evidence to the contrary suggests that spontaneous meant something other than unplanned. And indeed, my review of students' talk about the sit-ins as they were occurring shows that spontaneity referred to independence from adult control (spontaneity denoted a moral imperative to act), a break with the gradualism of prior black protest forms (spontaneity denoted urgency), and a break with the centralized bureaucracy of existing organizations (spontaneity denoted local initiative). Students narrativized the sit-ins to make sense of them. But since narratives simultaneously explain and evaluate, account for the past and project a future, and objectify their subjects through their telling, they were constituting a collective identity as they described it. "The sit-ins," wrote one participant, "have inspired us to build a new image of ourselves in our own mind" (McDew 1967).

Sit-in narratives' emphasis on spontaneity may have also motivated action by their very ambiguity. Recall Miller's (1990) argument that the complex word at the heart of all narratives is not only polyvalent but finally indeterminate, its core meaning unfixable. The impossibility of a conclusive meaning calls for more stories, which recapitulate the dilemma but differently. All stories both explain and fail to explain, Miller argues, but the dynamic is clearest in stories of humankind's origins. The point at which humans separated themselves from beasts is unknowable, since "whatever is chosen as the moment of origination always presupposes some earlier moment when man first appeared" (p. 72). The question cannot be answered logically, and the alternative is a mythical narrative whose illogical premises will nevertheless require that it be retold. "What cannot be expressed logically, one is tempted to say, we then tell stories about," Miller concludes (p. 74). The question of origins is just as unanswerable in the

case of social movements. When does protest begin? In this case, did it begin when the first students were arrested? Did it begin with the Montgomery bus boycott? With Brown v. Board of Education? Did it begin with the first slave rebellion? With the first song sung, or African tradition preserved, or Christian ritual reinterpreted in what James Scott (1990) calls an "infrapolitics of dissent" stretching back to Africans' enslavement in this country? The question of origins is historical but also personal. When can I call myself an activist? The sit-in narrative posed those questions and resolved them in a way that called for their re-asking. The students acted, and yet it was a *force* that made students act, an impetus that acted *through* them. The word "spontaneity" means both voluntary and instinctual (involuntary), contradictory meanings contained in the same (complex) word. In the sit-in narratives, spontaneity functioned as a kind of narrative ellipsis in which the movement's "beginning" occurred and the non-narratable shift from observer to participant took place. The story could not fix the motivation for participation and so required its own retelling. And since the story was a true one, retelling required reenactment of the events already described.

Contrary to framing theories, it was not the sit-in narratives' clarity about antagonists, protagonists, stakes, and mechanics of struggle that made them so compelling, but rather their containment of ambiguity, risk, and mystery within a familiar discursive form. We still know little about the discursive processes that precede the establishment of formal movement organizations (Klandermans 1988; Oberschall 1989; but see Hirsch 1990; Steinberg 1996; Taylor and Whittier 1992). How does the talk occurring in oppositional subcultures and indigenous institutions, and occurring during initial episodes of protest (strikes, marches, occupations, etc.) yield movement identities on behalf of which people are willing to take high-risk action? This case suggests that in conditions of "loose structure" (Oberschall 1989), where there are neither established organizations nor coherent ideologies in place, narratives may be a prominent mode of talk on account of their capacity to turn confusing events into a suspenseful story of overcoming, and to turn a threatened sense of self and group into a powerfully mobilizing identity.

Is narrative then always an effective framing device? Should representatives of formal movement organizations tell stories in order to recruit members and supporters? Surely they do. But there are several reasons why people may *not* respond to narrative pitches made by organizational representatives. Insofar as activists are perceived as "experts," storytelling probably conflicts with what is expected of experts, namely well-evidenced and clearly specified arguments. As organizational spokespeople, their personal stories may be discredited as towing an organizational line rather

than as authentic self-expression. This doesn't mean, of course, that narrative discourse isn't effective in other respects in ongoing social movements. Activists probably continue to tell stories in order to sustain and strengthen members' commitment. Movements in which the goal is self-transformation as much as political reform may see personal story-telling *as* activism. Veteran activists may stake claims to authority by demonstrating their superior knowledge of the movement's history, and may justify transformations in agenda or strategy by telling stories that configure past decisions in a narrative of enlightenment. Stories are not only legitimating, however; they are evaluative, they are lenses through which leaders as well as rank and file assess opportunities and obstacles, costs and benefits, and success and failure (see, for example, King 1986; Voss 1996a; b). I will discuss the latter dynamic in the next section. All of them demand further empirical investigation.

A macrohistorical comparative investigation of the stories people tell in movements would help to answer another question. Is the critical discursive ellipsis I have described, the point in the story where the non-narratable movement beginning takes place, a characteristic feature of movement founding stories?[7] An alternative and quite plausible argument is that the narratives explaining and justifying movement participation change over time. In earlier eras and other places, the certainty of fate or divine plan may have made for narrativity of a different sort. The counterpart of modern narratives' suspenseful "who or what is responsible for what is happening to me?" may have been something quite different: "how does one come to know God's will?" or "is our fate to be one of victory or defeat?" Viewed in a broad historical sweep, the sit-in stories' emphasis on spontaneity may have reflected an age in which the relations between agency and fate had become especially unclear. Study of movement founding stories thus promises to link the "vocabularies of motive" (Mills 1940; Benford 1993a) that justify participation to their social, political, and cultural contexts.

## Stories of Defeat: Narratives in Ongoing Movements

One of the points at which we should be able to identify the practical power of narrative is when movement organizations suffer defeats. How do activists account for a setback? Are they able to recast it as trivial, temporary, or a victory in disguise? To what extent do the narrative traditions available to activists delimit the kinds of stories that they can tell about reversals or missteps? Kim Voss (1996a) argues that the late nineteenth century Knights of Labor were debilitated by their failure to develop a

"fortifying myth" that could sustain them through an organizational crisis. At its peak in 1886, the Knights of Labor enrolled 750,000 workers; it was active in nearly every industry and in every city and mid-sized town in the country. Knights called for an inclusive labor movement within a regulated cooperative economy, retaining elements of a "producerist" ideology in their belief in small employers' commonality of interest with workers. However, the Knights' hopes for a "working man's democracy" began to fade after the 1886 Haymarket riot. Membership plummeted to 120,000 by 1890 and to 80,000 three years later amid factional battles and increasingly effective countermobilization on the part of employers.

It was just such a countermobilization that was responsible for the decimation of the Knights in the New Jersey leather industry after 1887. Only a few years earlier, leather workers had gained impressive victories in a series of strikes, their success due in part to the willingness of small firms to break ranks with other employers and settle with the workers. Accordingly, when leather industry employers organized to regain control of the shops, the Knights again sought to appeal to small employers. This time their pitch failed, largely as a result of the employer association's willingness to assist firms suffering the effects of the lockout—and to penalize those who refused to participate. The workers' defeat was critical, with more than half of those reapplying for old jobs turned away, and shop stewards blacklisted. At the beginning of 1887, there were forty-eight local assemblies of manufacturing workers in Newark; two years later only twelve were still active.

In the wake of the failed strike, the Knights' framing efforts were critical. And Voss finds that there was little discussion of the strike. The silence in New Jersey was reproduced elsewhere. "Aside from the inevitable blaming war that went on between a few national leaders of the Knights as the Order declined across the nation, there are virtually no articles or published speeches assessing the reasons for the Knights' collapse that appeared anywhere in the country. Neither are there martyrs, nor brave projections of how, next time, the working class would triumph over its enemies" (1996a:253). What was lacking, Voss argues, was the kind of sustaining narrative that could have made of the Knights' setbacks an episode in a longer story of overcoming. Working class republicanism assumed that workers would secure the support of the middle class by the force of their argument; while thus granting workers enormous capacity, it also made them responsible for their own fate. Lacking socialism's comforting belief in the inevitable overcoming of the working class, the Knights of Labor were unable to tell a story that would blame anyone

but themselves when things went awry. And that narrative failure played an important role in the movement's demise.

The kind of fortifying myth that Voss has in mind was available to leaders of Poland's Solidarity movement in the Catholic trope of the successive stations of the "via dolorosa." The analogy to protest was clear: "while early uprisings resulted in Crucifixion, eventually insurgency would bring Resurrection and Life" (Voss 1996a:8). James Weschler describes a Solidarity poster which traded on the same theme through different imagery:

> A bright-red pulse line moves horizontally across a white background—a seismograph, or perhaps the record of a heartbeat—erupting periodically in steep, jagged verticals, above which are the dates '44, '56, '68, '70, '76, '80. Approaching the present, the tremors increase in strength and frequency, and on the other side of 1980 the red line opens out into a single powerful word: "SOLIDARNOSC" (1982: 24).

The power of specifically religious traditions to supply sustaining narratives is suggested by Voss's (1996b) comparison of the Knights of Labor with British "new unionists" who were active at the same time. She found that activists in 12 of the 42 strikes that she sampled during the years of employers' strongest counterattack against the unions (1890-93) *did* attempt to make sense of their defeats in speeches and editorials. Their accounts "were usually fairly elaborate," she writes, "and developed a variety of themes: the idea that the defeat was actually a moral victory, the notion that the setback was only temporary or partial, and the belief that the strike was part of a larger struggle, which the labor movement would eventually win" (pp. 13-14). Interestingly, however, she did not find that stories about the inevitable triumph of the workers privileged the working class as historical agent, as the socialist commitments of unionists would lead one to believe. Writers were as likely to assert variously that a principle of "independence," the moral rightness of the cause, or the public's support for the workers would guarantee victory. Voss concludes that the narratives of *religious* dissent familiar to British unionists may have been more important than their socialist commitments in accounting for their ability to rebound from setbacks, unlike their American counterparts.

These examples suggest that canonical narratives may set the terms for justifying participation and explaining defeat in social movements. Familiar narratives structure what Steinberg (forthcoming) calls the "discursive repertoire" of protest. But the foregoing examples also show that coexisting and competing narrative traditions allow people to think beyond canonical narratives. Under what circumstances are such traditions available and effective? Probably when they are sustained in organizations enjoying some independence from dominant political institutions. This

insight underpins concepts like "abeyance structures" (Taylor 1989), "half-way houses" (Morris 1984), "havens" (Hirsch 1990b), and "free spaces" (Evans and Boyte 1986). During periods of political quiescence, institutions that are somewhat insulated from the direct surveillance of authorities preserve not only activists' tactical know-how and personnel networks but stories of past victories, defeats, and continuing struggle. What has not been adequately explained, or even explicitly treated, is why some institutions enjoy that autonomy. Mary Ann Tetreault (1993) shows that the mosque played a crucial role in Kuwaiti opposition to Iraqi occupation not just because it was one of the few associations that was not repressed, but because of its long-standing and "morally unassailable" authority to challenge the state. In authoritarian states, counternarratives have been preserved in cultural institutions in part because they are viewed by authorities as non-political and therefore as not threatening (Johnston 1996). Whether political systems extending broad civil liberties make it easier to disseminate dissenting traditions, or whether they encourage such a proliferation of dissenting traditions that the power of each one is diminished, remain open questions.

At the same time, we should be careful not to attribute counterhegemonic challenge to the mere existence of an organization free of direct control by authorities. For example, Eric Hirsch argues that nineteenth century German workers in Chicago launched a revolutionary movement while Irish and Anglo-American workers did not in part because Germans possessed "havens" or "free social spaces." The "structural isolation from ruling groups [of these settings]...allowed subordinate groups to develop innovative ideas about the nature of the system, to identify those responsible for the subordinate groups' plight, and to discover what action was needed to resolve their common problems" (Hirsch 1990b:208). But *Irish workers had havens too*, most importantly the Catholic Church. Irish workers did not join their German counterparts in revolutionary mobilization because the Church's animosity to radical thought, along with Irish nationalist organizations' focus on the Irish/British conflict overseas, led workers to blame their troubles on their lack of skills, and to attribute their lack of skills to Britain's underdevelopment of Ireland. Hirsch's historical analysis, contrary to his theoretical brief, suggests that the mobilizing power of havens lay not just in their structural isolation but in the character of the narratives that were told and retold there. Similarly, British workers' ability to draw on religious traditions of dissent cannot be attributed solely to the existence of churches, but to the dissenting narratives that were preserved in them and indeed, outside them. The relationship between counterhegemonic stories and their institutional "car-

riers" is more complex than that term allows; it certainly deserves further study.

**Stories of Victory: Movement Narratives in Institutional Politics**

The impact of social movements on mainstream politics is a third understudied process. The achievement of political representation for members of an aggrieved group, whether women, African Americans, lesbians, or people with disabilities, is widely viewed as an indicator of movement success. And yet, challengers are inevitably disappointed by the yields of institutional participation. Representatives often find themselves fighting off criticism by activists who allege their co-optation. At the same time, they must persuade, cajole, and challenge their political colleagues to implement policies that benefit a constituency with little clout. The movement stories they tell are likely to be strategic, intended to warrant their institutional position. But they are also constrained, not so much by "what really happened" in some pristine, unreconstructed sense, as by the institutional rules governing storytelling.

This is what I found in studying Congressional representatives' stories of Martin Luther King, Jr. Through a content analysis of the *Congressional Record* (the official transcript of House and Senate floor activity) between January 1, 1993 and May 31, 1997, I parsed the structure of representatives' references to Dr. King. Who referred to Dr. King, in what context, with what purpose, and how? (Polletta 1998b). I found, unsurprisingly, that African American legislators were more likely to invoke King than were whites, that Democrats were more likely to do so than Republicans, and that all speakers were more comfortable with the King of the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech than the post-1965 King who opposed U.S. militarism and called for a massive federal financial commitment to the poor. I was especially interested in African American representatives' talk about King. In a majority white Congress, their ability to deliver to constituents depends on persuading conservative and/or centrist forces to approve substantial government intervention (Swain 1993).[8] At the same time, they have come under repeated challenge for their alleged moderation by extra-institutional activists like Jesse Jackson, and successive heads of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP (Reed 1986; Smith 1996; Swain 1993; Clay 1992). How black Congressmen represent their relationship to the movement—how they define King's "legacy" and their role in furthering it—is crucial to their credibility with constituents.

I found that African American representatives told stories of their own connection to King and the civil rights movement, both direct ("I feel privi-

leged to have known King personally" [Payne, House, March 15, 1994];[9] "I met a man who was a preacher from Montgomery" [Hilliard, House, March 15, 1994]); "I remember Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mary McCloud Bethune" [Meek, House, February 28, 1996]; "I was privileged to be with [King] on that march from Selma to Montgomery" [Rangel, House, September 15, 1993]), and indirect ("My own story is a testament to King's dream" [Moseley-Braun, Senate, April 3, 1993]). The latter formulation is interesting because it not only vouches for the speaker's commitment to the same goals as King but casts her as fruit of the movement. This claim is often explicit: "I along with many of my colleagues am here today as a direct result of the struggles of the sixties" (Thompson, House, June 21, 1994). Congressional representatives are both witness to and evidence of racial advancement: "I have seen progress...I have seen a poor black man, denied the right to vote, become a Member of Congress" (Lewis, House, February 11, 1997); "Had Dr. King and many others not made that historic and dangerous walk from Selma to Montgomery, perhaps I would not be standing before this body today" (Collins, House, May 14, 1996). Speakers are clear that their own careers were made possible by the travails of an earlier generation of movement activists. But they also style themselves *qua* institutional actors as legitimate heirs to that earlier activism. Their own careers become the next stage in a saga of African American struggle. "I was born, as a matter of African American history," Jesse Jackson Jr. related, "on March 11, 1965. On March 7, 1965, in our history, it is known as bloody Sunday. It is the Sunday that the gentleman from Georgia [John Lewis], Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson and many others in our history walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge for the right to vote. Because of the struggle that they engaged in in 1965, I now stand here as the 91st African American to ever have the privilege of serving in the U.S. Congress" (Jackson, House, February 11, 1997).

Representatives do not claim exclusive guardianship of the movement's legacy. They share it, they say, with people who are working in "the tradition of Reverend King," who are "shining examples of his legacy," the "unsung heroes" of the movement. Who are these co-legatees? Rarely activists, if the term is used to describe organized actors using extra-institutional means to bid for a redistribution of power (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982). Rather they are teachers, ministers, founder of a homeless shelter, two leaders of a boys' club, president of a city growth association, director of a family care center, a local high school coach. King's legacy, as Congressional speakers tell the story, is electoral representation and service rather than insurgency. Black Congressional representatives never denigrate extra-institutional activism and activists; they are, as they acknowledge

repeatedly, the beneficiaries of past insurgency. However, by narrating King's activism as part of an earlier phase of struggle, as *past*, they represent their own careers as its proper successor.

Yet black Congressmen aim to do more than justify their own existence, and for that reason, they have a real stake in *not* representing the past as past. As representatives of a constituency whose aspirations were voiced but not realized by the 1960s civil rights movement, they must convince their Congressional colleagues that there is much more to be done. They must convey not the accomplished, the steps taken, the threat averted, but the promises not made good on, the incomplete. Memory must not become nostalgia, they insist; it must inspire government action, not substitute for it. And black Congressional representatives forcefully describe a society marked by racial inequality and injustice. But the solution to such conditions is story-telling. Thus one speaker asked, "if we stop and reflect on where we have gone since the marches and the sit-ins and boycotts of the 1960s, have we really gone far?" then called for "daily efforts to correct the history that is taught to our children" (Jackson-Lee, House, February 11, 1997). A speaker who pointed out that although "times have changed, we have not reached the promised land," urged that "[we] constantly remind ourselves and others of the great contributions blacks have made and continue to make to this nation" (Clay, House, February 23, 1994). It is "forgetfulness" about "the lessons [King's] life taught us" that has "contributed to the widening gap that remains between the salaries of white and African American workers, the increasing gap between the incomes of middle and lower income African Americans, the continuing segregation of our cities' schools and communities, and the violence among our youth which has reached heights unimaginable even a few years ago" Senator Carol Moseley-Braun argued (Senate, April 3, 1993). If forgetting has had such debilitating consequences, then remembering should have equally transformative effect. Legislation to commemorate the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, one speaker promised, "will mark a turning point in the history of this country's struggle for civil rights" (Jackson-Lee, House, May 14, 1996). Another described movement commemorative activities in a project aimed at reducing teen-age pregnancy as essential to building "self-esteem" and thence, responsible behavior (Waters, House, March 12, 1996).

Speakers tell Dr. King's story to call for more storytelling. This is hardly surprising since all of the addresses from which I have quoted were either "one minute speeches" delivered in honor of a constituent or national notables, "special orders" celebrating Black History Month or the anniversary of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, or were delivered in discussions of provisions for official commemoration. It makes sense that

on commemorative occasions, people would attest to the benefits of commemorative activity. *But the vast majority of references to King occur on such occasions.* When combined, tributes to individuals, speeches marking the anniversary of notable events, and speeches advocating government sponsorship of commemorative activities accounted for 275 or 65% of the 420 speeches in which Dr. King was mentioned. Is this simply because these kinds of speeches dominate Congressional discourse? In analyzing all *Congressional Record* speeches in a typical two-day period (267 entries for March 15 and 16, 1994), I found that only 25% of them were either commemorative or calls for commemoration (see Polletta 1998b for details). The *Record* reveals, then, an interesting bifurcation: even as African American Congressional representatives assert the importance of narrating the past in order to bring about tangible change, they do not often invoke the past in substantive legislative discussions.

What prevents them from doing so? Whether anything gets done on the floor of Congress has always been the topic of dispute, but has sharpened in the context of two developments: one, representatives' increased attentiveness to constituents and to the symbolic legislation that they appreciate;[10] and the other, a widespread perception of the ever-expanding role of Congressional committees and subcommittees (Bacon et al. 1995: 612; Denton and Woodward 1990:301; Weatherford 1981). In fact, committees' autonomy has been formally circumscribed in the last two decades, and floor amending activity has increased (Bacon et al. 1995:420), but legislation is still widely perceived to be made through the vote trading, dealmaking, and interest group lobbying that takes place behind closed doors. An important consequence of these developments may be pressure among Congressional representatives to demarcate legislative floor debate both from back-room maneuvering and constituent-driven pomp. Establishing spatial, temporal, and rhetorical boundaries prevents the "pollution" of legislative functions by activities deemed "merely" symbolic. Of course, legislative discourse has always invoked historical precedent, hallowed tradition, and heroic figures. However, the vulnerability of Congressional floor discourse to charges that it involves scarce deliberation at all, that it is ritual drama rather than substantive debate, may make representatives anxious to distinguish making history from memorializing it. Accordingly, the context of their speeches—that it is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day rather than a debate about the budget, say—encourages speakers to call for more commemoration, more storytelling, rather than calling for new legislation, more appropriations, better enforcement of existing laws, or an otherwise interventionist federal stance. And in those discussions of health care, welfare, toxic waste cleanup, campaign and governmental reform, military defense, crime, education, foreign policy, and telecommunications that took place

in 1993-1997, stories of the movement, King, and his lessons were not told. Paradoxically, then, the conventions surrounding narratives of past insurgency strengthen institutional politics in two ways. Memorializing dissent enables politicians to legitimate themselves as heirs of an activist past. And if the ideological work of commemoration is restricted to special occasions—occasions on which anyone can be honored, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to the constituent whose claim to fame is his stamp collection—then what goes on the rest of the time must be driven by national interests rather than partisan ones, and have tangible rather than symbolic consequence. Stories about King and the movement end up reproducing the legislative institution by their very marginality.

The irony that memorializing dissent strengthens the political establishment begs for further analysis. Students of collective memory have not devoted much attention to states' efforts to commemorate, or ignore, past insurgency (see Olick and Robbins 1997 for a review of the literature on collective memory). Yet such efforts are richly revealing of the processes by which past movements influence current policymaking. Can any policymaker tell the story of a particular movement's past? Are battles over the authority to speak in the movement's name more or less likely in political systems that lack a tradition of movement parties? Do national commemorative traditions (Kammen 1991) shape what one can say about past activism?

Such investigation should be wary of attributing uniform interests in the past to "officials" (Bodnar 1992; Scott 1996:388) or, for that matter, to "subordinates" (Merelman 1992:248), or "African Americans" (Zerubavel 1996). Precisely what we need to get at are how such interests are forged in complex and changing relations with groups defined as allies, antagonists, competitors, and constituents. Moreover, even a sophisticated instrumentalist approach can be strengthened by investigating the cultural processes through which policymaking institutions are reproduced. In this case, Black legislators *use* King remembrances instrumentally, but they do so in forms and at times that are acceptable to the legislative body. The result, and this is surely not their intention, is that the commemoration of dissent reproduces a view of Congress's policy deliberations as substantive rather than symbolic, since the symbolic work of commemoration takes place, and only takes place, on occasions reserved for it. Storytelling helps to sustain the institution.

## CONCLUSION

So far, I have discussed narratives as objects of analysis. What about narrative as a mode of analysis? Should sociologists of social movements

be *telling* stories as well as studying them? These questions reflect issues of epistemology and indeed, ontology, that have divided theorists of narrative. At its simplest, the question is whether stories are lived before they are told, that is, whether we impose narratives on an inchoate flux of reality (White 1980; Mink 1974), or on social processes that are structured but not narratively so (Tilly 1998), or whether social life is always already storied, whether selves, temporality, and social relations are fundamentally narrative in structure (Bruner 1986; MacIntyre 1981; Somers 1994; Richardson 1990; Ricoeur 1984). If the former is the case, then narrative may not be an effective mode of analysis because it mistakenly assumes that social processes are the intended consequences of deliberate actions (Tilly 1998), or because its credibility depends on its conformity to familiar genres and canonical plots (White 1980). If the latter is true, then narrative can capture the determinants and consequences of social action better than non-narrative and static sociological concepts like "society" or "structure."

The debate is not likely to be resolved anytime soon. However, it has already had a salutary effect in focusing attention on the unacknowledgedly narrative character of much social scientific writing. In spite of sociology's determination to be scientific rather than literary (Somers 1994; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Richardson 1990), it has persistently relied on narrative tropes. Laurel Richardson describes several: the "grammatical metaphor" through which the split between subject and object becomes a separation between "real" subjects and "real" objects fixed in time and space; the "management metaphor" where "data is 'managed,' variables are 'manipulated,' research is 'designed, time is 'flow-charted,' 'tables' are 'produced,' and 'models' (like toothpaste and cars) are 'tested'"; and the "tool metaphor" which makes language a neutral instrument for rendering the world and empirical inquiry a kind of "master carpentry" (1990:122-123; summarizing Shapiro 1985-6). Metaphors like these are unavoidable, Richardson maintains, and indeed, "narrative cannot be suppressed within sociology because it is ineluctably tied to the human experience; trying to suppress it undermines the very foundations of the sociological enterprise" (p. 124). But it is not clear why a self-consciously narrative account would do any better in widening the variety of tropes in terms of which data can be constructed. And presumably Richardson believes that we would have better accounts if sociologists were not as dependent on the orienting metaphors she describes.

My point is not that the use of literary devices like metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche invalidates a properly sociological account. Rather, it is that we should ask what lines of analysis, perspectives, questions, and kinds of data might be left out when we depend, whether explicitly or not, on narrative modes of presentation. Let me list a few. Since we are used to accepting the beginning of the story as the beginning of the story (we

take "once upon a time" as warrant for what is an arbitrary opening), we may fail to question the chronological starting point of a narrative and ignore prior causes. The protagonists of stories stand in for larger groups or identities, as I noted earlier, yet stories often do not specify criteria for their representativeness. The danger is that the story presents a unitary picture and obscures difference within a group or experience (see Abrams 1993). In social movement analyses, we may talk about "challengers"—the story's protagonists—without fully exploring their internally differentiated, tenuously unified, and emergent character.

Finally, what I have referred to as the "narrativity" of stories, whereby gaps, omissions, and ambiguities sustain the reader's engagement with the text, may influence what is included in, and omitted from, the analysis. Recall Miller's (1990) argument that at the heart of all narratives is a fundamental indeterminacy, a key question that cannot be answered or even formulated, a "complex word" or concept whose meaning remains ambiguous. That ambiguity is what sustains our attention, and the fact that it remains at the story's end is what calls for more stories, which recapitulate the dilemma but differently. For Miller, the indeterminacy is not a deliberate strategy on the part of the storyteller but a function of the general impossibility of fixing meaning, and more specifically, of accounting for beginnings. Miller's argument suggests that we ask if social movement analyses too are characterized by indeterminacy at critical points. To what extent do they both explain and fail to explain? In a recent review of the field, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald wrote that "understanding the mix of factors that give rise to a movement is the oldest, and arguably the most important, question in the field. Moreover, virtually all 'theories' in the field are, first and foremost, theories of movement emergence" (1996:7). It is somewhat surprising, then, that nowhere in the literature is there a clear answer to what would seem the logically prior question of *what counts as movement emergence*. When has a movement become a movement? When it reaches a certain scale, achieves a level of visibility, endures for a specified period? Indeed when movement theorists attempt to account for movement emergence, they sometimes shift without acknowledgment to explaining movement success, or movement endurance. Thus, for example, McAdam cites the repression of the 1989 Chinese student movement as evidence that a state's repressive capacity must be considered a key factor in whether a movement emerges or not. "Communist Party hard-liners were still able to mobilize the social control capacity and political will necessary to thoroughly repress the movement...[This] suggests the merit of considering state repression as a...dimension of the structure of political opportunity" (1996: 28). But clearly the movement had "emerged" before it was repressed. Likewise Jenkins and Perrow (1977), in a seminal article on the 1960s farm

workers' movement, alternate between accounting for the "rise" of the United Farm Workers' mobilization, and accounting for its "success."

Perhaps the question cannot be posed explicitly precisely because it cannot be answered. Specifying the point at which a movement "begins" is like accounting for the moment when humans separated themselves from beasts, as Miller puts it. And so while popular accounts of protest describe their beginnings as "spontaneous," social movement theorists avoid the question altogether. Of what consequence? It may lead us to concentrate on protest that is directed to national level political targets, orchestrated by formal organizations, highly visible and mass in scale. We may obscure forms and episodes of protest that do not fit that model, and that in fact may be more prominent early on in the game. We may also miss the processes by which national level political shifts come to be experienced as "opportunities" by people who are isolated from national centers of power, and who may face a *contraction* of local opportunities as the national government makes concessions to the challenging group.

The answer to elisions and omissions like the foregoing is not to abandon the goal of veracity. The purpose of identifying the narratives operating without acknowledgment in conventional social science should be neither to embrace narrative as the only honest way to apprehend reality nor to root out from science any narrative inclinations. But it should make us consider the possibility that we may turn to narrative precisely when we *cannot* explain, when our non-narrative explanations fall short, and yet that narrative may recapitulate more than resolve the puzzles we pose it.

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## ENDNOTES

1. For an extensive bibliography of work on narrative in the social sciences see Hinchman and Hinchman (1997). For treatments of narrative in social movements, see Apter 1985; Somers 1992; 1994; Hart 1992; Hunt and Benford 1994; Franzosi 1997; Fine 1995. For analysis of activists' personal narratives, see Rogers 1993, Ginsburg 1989; and Johnston 1991. Merelman 1992; 1995; Mendel-Reyes 1995; Scott 1996; Kohl 1995; and Greenblatt 1983 discuss popular representations of past movements.
2. I make a complementary but somewhat different argument in Polletta 1998a.

3. Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, Hunt and Benford (1994; see also Benford and Hunt 1992) argue that frames configure identities in dramatic form. Listeners/readers are encouraged to see themselves in the role of hero, to see movement antagonists as villains. This would seem to suggest the narrative configuration that I'm describing. However, as Polkinghorne points out, "To play a social role is not the same as configuring one's life into a plot that is one's personal identity" (1988:153). Distinguishing a narrative perspective from a Goffmanian dramaturgical one, Polkinghorne argues that roles rather "take on meaning from the perspective of the single adventure that is one person, as defined by the life plot" (153).
4. A piece published in the Shaw College campus newspaper in May 1960 is typical: "It was night time Tuesday, Feb. 9. Radio and television commentators had announced that 'it' was not expected to happen in Raleigh. Wednesday morning, Feb. 10, 10:30—BOOM!—'it' hit with an unawareness that rocked the capital city from its usual sedateness to a state of glaring frenzy" ("Drama of the Sitdown," *Shaw Journal,* March-April 1960). Interestingly, the very first campus newspaper accounts of the Greensboro sit-ins, which appeared in the Agricultural and Technical College *Register,* used much more conventionally journalistic and editorial formats. The difference between these and subsequent accounts suggest that the narrative representation of the sit-ins took some time to develop. See Polletta 1998a for details.
5. "Drama of the Sitdown," *Shaw Journal,* March-April 1960; "A Report on the Student Direct Action Movement at Penn State as of March 31, 1960," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers (SNCC) microfilm reel 44 #22; "The Price for Freedom," *Wolverine Observer,* October-November 1960; Jane to Dave, August 14, 1960, SNCC microfilm reel 4 #810; "Call for Unity in Struggle for Freedom," Howard University *Hilltop,* March 7, 1960.
6. "A Report on the Student Direct Action Movement at Penn State as of March 31, 1960," SNCC papers microfilm reel 44 #22.
7. Two more examples of how such ellipses figure in founding stories: The "Hundredth Monkey Story" was a much cited and powerfully persuasive tool for the American antinuclear movement (Benford 1993a). The story opens with one monkey in a tribe observed by scientists learning how to wash potatoes of unpleasant sand and then teaching the trick to her mother and playmates. The story goes on, "This cultural innovation was gradually picked up by various monkeys before the eyes of the scientists. Between 1952 and 1958, all the young monkeys learned to wash the sandy sweet potatoes to make them more palatable...[sic] Then something startling took place," and the potato-washing was suddenly picked up not only by nearby tribes, but by tribes at some distance. Benford argues that the story promotes efficacy by demonstrating "the power of the new awareness and your role in the unfolding drama" (196). Yet the story's demonstration of the power of conscious individual action is not at all clear. Rather the sudden, inexplicable spread of the potato-washing occurs in the three dot ellipsis. A second example: in his manifesto for community organizing, Saul Alinsky (1971) rehearses a conversation between an organizer and a resident. "Organizer: Do you live over in that slummy building? Answer: Yeah. What about it?" The organizer suggests that the residents should demand building repairs and the resident protests the ineffectuality of action. "Organizer: Hmmm. What if nobody in that building paid their rent? Answer: Well, they'd start to throw...Hey, you know, they'd have trouble throwing everybody out, wouldn't they?" Again, the action takes place in the three dot ellipsis, where the resident realizes the potential of collective action. His next line is "Hey, you know, maybe you got something—say, I'd like you to meet some of my friends. How about a drink?" (1971:103-4). He has become an activist.
8. Insofar as black legislators in the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses saw themselves as advancing self-identified "black interests," they represented a constituency 70% of whom

favored "more laws to reduce discrimination" (barely a third of whites polled agreed), and 51% of whom believed that "the USA is moving toward two separate and unequal societies—one black, one white" (one third of whites agreed) (Marable 1995:146).

9. This and following quotes refer to the THOMAS computerized database of Congressional materials.
10. Until 1979, commemorative legislation (naming public buildings, for example, or designating special days) accounted for between one and ten percent of all legislation. In the 96th Congress, commemorative legislation increased by more than 70 percent and continued to rise thereafter, accounting for more than one-third of all bills signed into law by 1985. Attacked for its diversion of money and attention from substantive to purely symbolic concerns, this increase has been attributed to representatives' orientation to constituents (Bacon et al. 1995: 400).

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