

Critical Mass *Bulletin*

Newsletter of the Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements, American Sociological Association

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Message From the Chair

Rory McVeigh

Nancy Reeves Dreux Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Notre Dame

Okay, so I turned in all of my grades and it is 78 degrees in South Bend, Indiana—small pleasures, but I’ll take them. It has been another tough year as we have had to figure out how to manage work, family responsibilities, and caring for our students, while the global pandemic refuses to go away and as the news becomes more maddening and heartbreaking each day. I am grateful that my time serving as CBSM chair has brought some rays

of hope and light into my life on a regular basis. I have enjoyed our “Ask Social Movement Scholar Anything” events immensely and getting to know more of you in a variety of other ways. I admire the ways in which social movement scholars, perhaps especially those in the younger generation, have shown dogged determination to take on the world’s problems through their scholarship as well as through activism.

The summer months ahead offer opportunities to recharge our batteries and, hopefully, to turn our attention to those projects that we have been meaning to get to if only we could find the time. (Continued on Page 2)

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Perhaps most importantly, the summer will also bring us back together (not on Zoom but in person!!!!). I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the *Mobilization Workshop* in San Diego in June. I hope to see all of you at the ASA meetings in Los Angeles. We have some great sessions lined up (thanks to our organizers). We will firm up the time for our reception very soon (keep an eye out for updates in the online program, and I will send out an announcement on the listserv). We will be holding a joint reception with the culture section because that is a fun group (many are also members of our section) and because we can have a nicer event if we pool our resources. Prices at the LA hotel are sky high!

Okay...that is it for me. Please enjoy the newsletter that Julia (Goldman-Hasbun) and Mario (Venegas) have put together for you. Have a great summer!

Op-Ed Pieces

Ready, Fire, Aim: Are We Making the Economy Greener by Adding More Green jobs?

Meihui Chen
Smith College

Biden's [Clean Energy Revolution](#) and the [Green Procurement Plan](#) pushed the discussion of net-zero and clean energy to a new peak. Politicians are selling the green economy and green jobs as the ultimate solutions to combat the climate crisis. But while environmental-focused jobs might benefit nature, they can also endanger the physical well-being of workers.

The term "green jobs" is a vague and politicized phrase that first appeared in the mainstream media in the U.S. [during the 2008 election](#). "Green jobs" are typically associated with positive connotations of progress and social betterment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has defined "[green](#)" jobs, but it still has a broad definition that includes all the businesses that protect or establish more eco-friendly production lines. Without clear guidelines for green jobs, they become susceptible to manipulation and exploitation in the future.

So how are green jobs dangerous?

Many harmful and dangerous jobs are coated under the word "green." For instance, occupations in solar panel manufacturing are considered green jobs, but they are not safe, as platinum is the key material used for semiconductors. South Africa is the largest exporter of platinum, where miners often work underground for prolonged periods with [little protection from high concentrations of harmful dust particles](#). Workers in the [photovoltaic \(PV\)](#) manufacturing process face contaminated chemicals, but the benefits of solar panels [obscure](#) their workplace injustice. The solar energy industry jobs in the U.S. have [doubled](#) from 2010 to 2016. However, we know little about the breakdown of this growing industry. There is limited information and government attention across the production line that affects workers' well-being.

Many of us may not think of trash collectors as green workers, but their work is crucial for waste management and recycling. Frontline trash collectors face the [6th highest mortality rate](#) among all jobs in the U.S. Those people provide valuable service daily that keeps our communities clean, but few of us have advocated for their safety. We often overlook workplace safety when the ultimate goal is to have a green economy. There needs to be more focus on green job safety and design.

Occupational safety policies did not keep pace with the development of the green job. Factories feel little legal obligation to adjust

their protection standard for workers in emerging green industries. For example, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) [research](#) states that only 17% of the randomly selected e-waste facilities responded to the working safety survey.

There are deeply rooted tensions between labor unions and environmentalists, especially industrial labor unions. While there was blue-green solidarity in the early 1970s, [tension sparked](#) after the economic recession in the mid-1970s, leading to the “jobs-versus-environment” dilemma. Labor unions fear that environmental regulations would threaten employment in industrial sectors. The blue-green relationship evolved when unions realized the inevitable trend toward a sustainable economy in recent years. The world economy is projected to transition to green under countries’ [commitment](#) to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26). According to a research study at Ohio State University, environmental policies are [strongly](#) linked to increasing green job opportunities. Large unions like United Mine Workers of America [have supported](#) clean energy in the past few years with conditions to provide green jobs for laid-off miners. The industrial unions are focusing on employment transition for their members, but they might reverse their support for green jobs if the safety standards for the transitioned workers are not guaranteed.

There have been discussions on [worker safety](#) and [green job design](#), but none attract policy attention. People [still commented](#) on a 2014 article on the occupational safety of the electronic waste industry, expressing their concern about government oversight. Workers continue to be an afterthought -- the main goal comes first, and the workers are seen as dispensable. The ‘how’ to a net-zero society is overlooked in the media coverage.

For three years, I volunteered at a homeless shelter in Northampton County, MA. While the city government built a community resilience hub last year, the homeless issue did not get alleviated. The city government taxed

marijuana and built the hub using the 1.6 million marijuana impact fees. Yet most homeless people have an addiction or substance abuse history, and they tend to be more seriously impacted by [this municipal impact tax](#). Likewise, having more green jobs won’t necessarily lead to a green economy. Societies with higher standards for green jobs will. Therefore, we need to make safety standards a policy priority for the green economy.

The Strike is Dead...or Not?

Chris Rhomberg, Ph.D.
Fordham University

It may seem strange to remember it now, in light of the recent upsurge in strike activity in the United States, but in the early 2010s, the scholarly consensus seemed rather to be that the strike was dead (Rosenfeld 2014; McCartin 2008). And not just strikes -- Chun (2009: 9-11) argued that unions and collective bargaining were also “gone,” and it was time to move “beyond the strike and trade union frameworks.” At the time, the data seemed to support the view. During the 1970s, an average of 269 major work stoppages involving 1000 or more workers occurred annually in the U.S. By the 2000s, that number had fallen to 17, and in 2009 there were no more than five. Private sector union density has continued its relentless decline, and the recent uptick in labor action is far from its historic peaks. And yet, not only have strikes reemerged, but workers like those at Amazon and Starbucks are demanding their rights to unionize and bargain collectively. How can we make sense of these events?

First, the decline of both unions and strikes was hardly due to the end of conflicts over work. For decades, wages have lagged behind productivity growth, income inequality has increased, and millions of workers face precarious employment conditions.

Second, the corporate counterattack against unions since the 1980s relied on government suppression of workers' rights, through generations of pro-employer case law decisions by the National Labor Relations Board and the federal courts. The 2010s saw the expansion of anti-union "right-to-work" laws in the industrial Midwest and attacks on public workers' rights by conservative state governments and the Supreme Court.

Such barriers, however, should not blind us to important innovations in strike activity that have appeared in the last decade. Thus, the fast food workers' movement organized its first symbolic, 1-day walkout in New York City in November 2012. The tactic quickly spread to include coordinated actions in multiple cities nationwide. The actions rarely shut down the restaurants and imposed almost no direct economic costs on the brand corporations, yet they galvanized public awareness and support (beyond the traditional corporate campaign strategy), helped revive the idea of the strike, and sparked the Fight for \$15 campaigns to raise local and state minimum wages. The results have been extraordinary: by 2022, eleven states and the District of Columbia had passed laws to phase in a \$15 wage, more than twice the level (\$7.25) of the federal minimum.

Similarly, the "Red for Ed" teachers' strikes that burst forth in 2018 emerged from conservative southern and mountain states where public school teachers have few or no rights to bargain collectively or strike (Blanc 2019). Those strikes often did not target the immediate employer (the school districts) but mobilized political protests against state legislatures that for years had starved budgets for public education.

Finally, traditional economic strikes had already begun to increase before the pandemic, with large work stoppages in 2018 and 2019 of manufacturing, healthcare, grocery and hotel workers that led to significant contract gains. Since then, hazardous working

conditions, tightened labor markets, and booming corporate profits under the economic recovery have emboldened workers to pursue collective action to unionize and to strike.

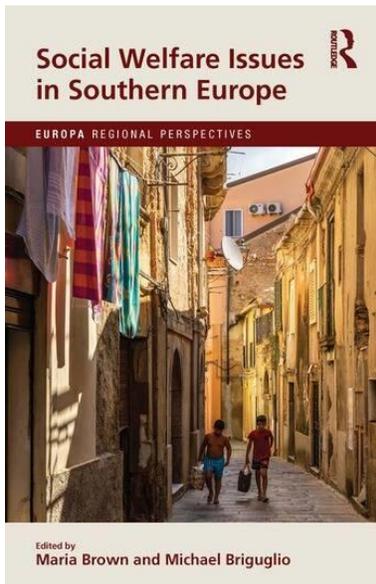
These changes show the resiliency of the American labor movement and call our attention to the increasing diversity of labor collective action, across the arenas of the economy, the state, and civil society (Rhombert and Lopez 2021). More than a statistical bump, the new militancy questions our understanding of recent norms in American labor relations. Workers and unions may no longer fear striking now as much as they did before. Under the New Deal order, strikes were recognized as a necessary part of the bargaining process; their decline only showed how far the balance of power had shifted to employers. The proposed Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) act, the most radical labor law reform in decades, would strengthen the right to strike, promote sectoral collective bargaining, and repeal right-to-work laws; it remains bottled up in the U.S. Senate.

Other challenges remain: the Fight for \$15's victories have come mainly in politically progressive "blue" states, and the movement has not yet succeeded in unionizing the fast food franchises. Teachers in red states have difficult tasks building the long-term power to secure gains for public education, and Amazon and Starbucks show no signs of lowering their resistance to unions. These struggles are likely to continue, and in many ways the future may be a test of American democracy.

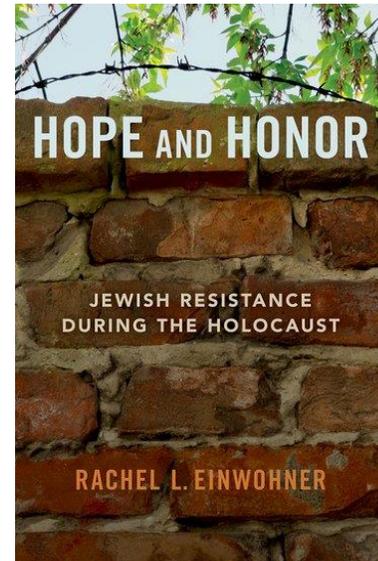
Recent Publications

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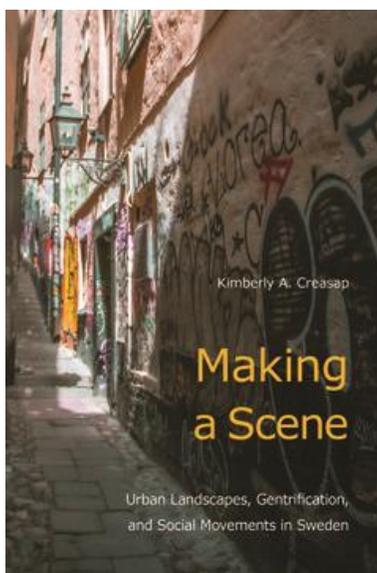
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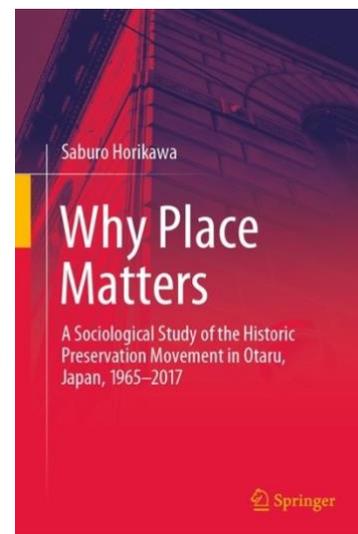
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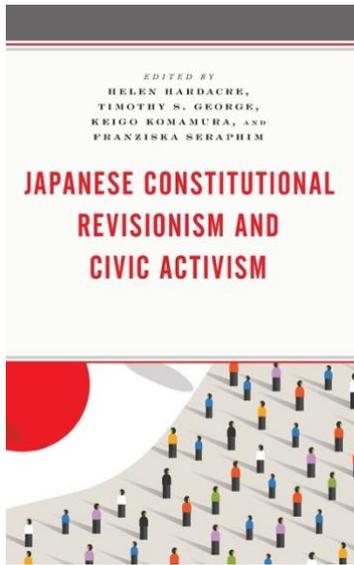
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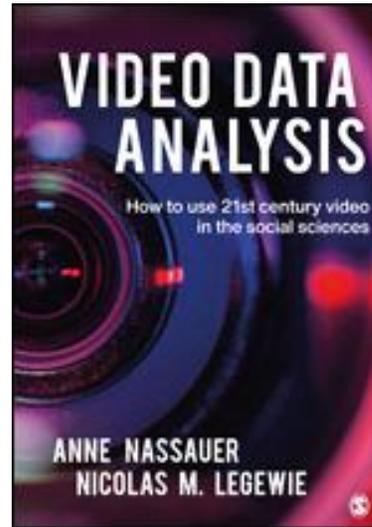
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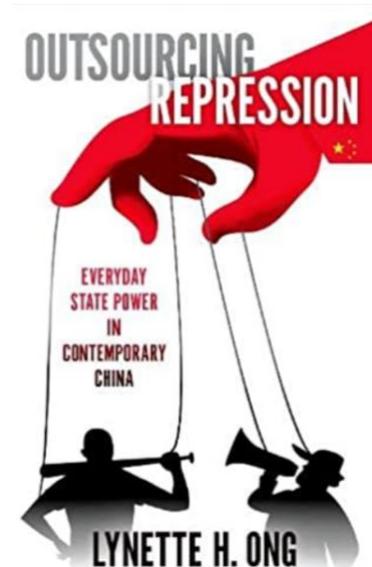


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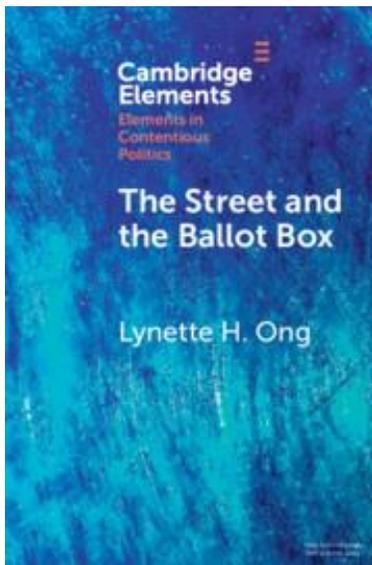


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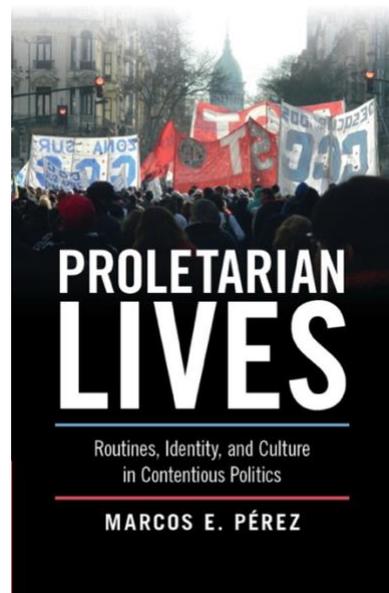
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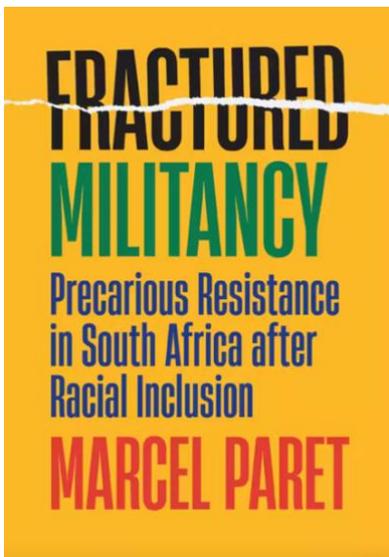
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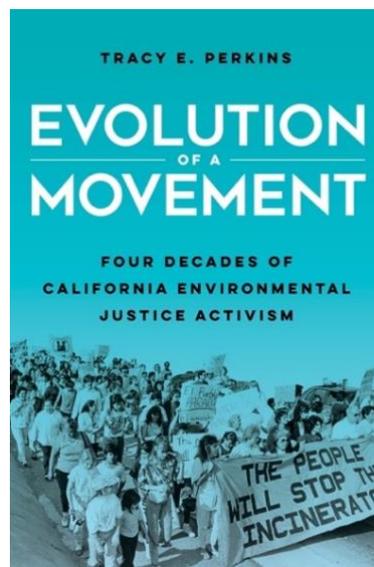
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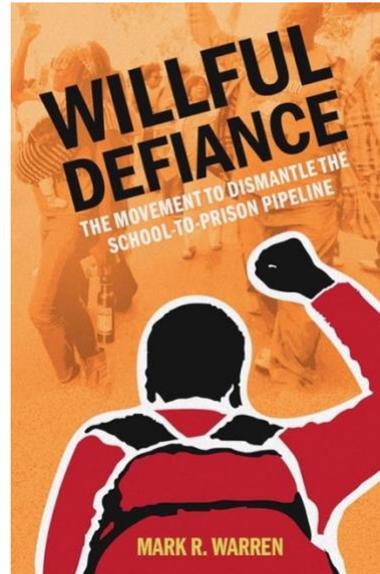
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CBSM at ASA 2022

Below is a list of ASA sessions and events that may be of interest to CBSM members. These include events from other ASA sections that speak to social movements. If you are participating in a session not included in the list below and would like us to feature it in the next issue of Critical Mass (released right before the conference), please email us with the session title and date.

Please consult the [ASA 2022 Online Program](#) for more information on paper titles and updated session times. Please note that all times are in Pacific Standard Time (PST).

¹ Read more about Spires' research in the [South China Morning Post](#) and in [China File](#).

Saturday, August 6th

Widening the Lens of Social Movements and the Civic

8:00 to 9:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 1, 150B

Culture and Social Movement Participation: Movement Articulation, Framing, Practices, and Repertoires

8:00 to 9:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 304A

Immigrant Rights Activism in Los Angeles

4:00 to 5:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 1, 150B

Religion and Racial Justice

4:00 to 5:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 301A

Sunday August 7th

Ideology, Ideas, and Information in Social Movements

8:00 to 9:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 301B

Youth and Activism

8:00 to 9:30 am

JW Marriott, Floor: Level 3, Olympic 3

Social Movement Activism, the Pandemic, and Public Health Crises

10:00 to 11:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 301B

Collective Behavior and Social Movements Roundtable

10:00 to 11:00 am

JW Marriott, Gold Level, Gold Salon 1

Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements Business Meeting

11:00 am to 11:30 am

JW Marriott, Floor: Gold Level, Gold Salon 1

The New Youth-Led Social Movements

12:00 to 1:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 301B

Media, Political Discourse, and Movements

2:00 to 3:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 404A

Activism and Intersectionality

2:00 to 3:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 1, 153B

Monday August 8th

Political Culture, Collective Action, and Polarization

8:00 to 9:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 410

Contention and Collective Identity in Social Movements

10:00 to 11:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 410

How and Why Does Context Matter for Mobilization and Institutional Change? Analyzing Activist-Authority Relations Across Time, Space, and Place

10:00 to 11:30 am

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 304A

Impacts of Social Movements

2:00 to 3:30 pm

LACC, Floor: Level 2, 410

Highlight your Accomplishments for the job market!

Are you going on the sociology job market this year? Do you have students who are going on the market? Critical Mass Newsletter is publishing a summer issue highlighting the accomplishments of junior social movements scholars. The issue will be published in early August, just in time to help generate buzz at the ASA conference.

To publish your profile, please provide the following:

- Name
- Photograph (optional)
- Current affiliation
- List of up to 10 representative publications (including forthcoming publications and works in progress) in ASA or APA format
- 200-word candidate statement in 1st person
- Website and email address

Please send all materials to Critical Mass Co-editors Julia Goldman-Hasbun, and Mario Venegas at cbsmnews@gmail.com by July 8th, 2022.

NEXT ISSUE

The Summer issue of the Critical Mass Newsletter will highlight junior scholars entering the job market this fall and spotlight additional ASA conference sessions.