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UNLOCKING THE DYNAMICS OF SUCCESS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: INSIGHTS FROM HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES BASED ON JOHN LOCKE'S LIBERAL PHILOSOPHY

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter".
Martin Luther King Jr.

Abstract. This paper delves into the defining characteristics of successful social movements, employing six case studies for detailed examination. Adopting John Locke′s liberal philosophy as a framework, success is gauged based on principles such as public support, peaceful governance, and the safeguarding of individual rights and freedoms. Two pairs of movements – the Civil Rights Movement and Occupy Wall Street; the Women′s Suffrage Movement and The Paris Commune – are examined to highlight the importance of leadership, organization, and strategic nonviolent resistance. Another pair – the Environmental Movement and the Arab Spring – underscores the critical role of coalition-building and grassroots support. Through this comparative analysis, the paper elucidates that while every movement operates within its unique context, common characteristics often differentiate successful movements from their less triumphant counterparts. Furthermore, the concept of "success" in social movements is revealed to be multi-dimensional, influenced by numerous factors including societal norms, political climate, and public sentiment. The insights from these case studies not only offer a historical perspective but also equip citizens with the tools to advocate for meaningful change in the future, underscoring the power of committed individuals in shaping society.

Kewords: Social movements, Leadership, Revolution, Organization, Nonviolent resistance, Coalition-building, Grassroots support, John Locke, Liberal philosophy

Introduction:

This essay will explore six different case studies of social movements, arguing that successful movements can be distinguished by their strong leadership and organization, strategic employment of nonviolent resistance, effective coalition-building, and grassroots support. This paper′s objective is threefold: 1) to establish a definition of a successful movement, 2) to identify specific characteristics of past representative social movements that qualify them as successful or unsuccessful in accordance with the definition established in Part 1, and 3) to explore several key insights from this analysis.

1. Defining Successful Movements

For the purposes of this essay, we will adopt the perspective of John Locke, a key figure in liberal philosophy.

Locke posited that all governments should form a social contract with their citizenry. In this pact, people surrender a portion of their power to the government, with the government reciprocating by pledging to protect their natural rights. Based on Locke′s philosophy, we can then assume that a successful movement shares key features with a successful government, including: consent from the governed, peaceful and rational governance, public support, minimal intrusion in people′s lives, and safeguarding individual rights and freedoms (Locke, 1999). Thus, in Locke′s view, a successful movement effectuates a successful and lasting shift towards the liberal democracy he advocated.

John Locke′s liberal philosophy closely aligns with the goals of many social movements, which often aim to promote rights and democratize power

(*John Locke > the Influence of John Locke & Rsquo; S Works (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, n.d.). By utilizing Locke's philosophy to define a successful social campaign, we ensure that the criteria for success involve not only the accomplishment of immediate objectives but also the progression toward broader democratic ideals, such as liberty, equality, and justice. This approach offers a comprehensive, ethical, and democratic framework for evaluating movements while acknowledging their crucial role in nurturing and advancing societal values.

2. Case Studies

Case Study 1. The Civil Rights Movement and Occupy Wall Street

To address the question, we start with a comparative analysis of two notable examples: the Civil Rights Movement and Occupy Wall Street.

The Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968) was a fourteen-year struggle against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Through the strategic use of nonviolent tactics like protests, sit-ins, and boycotts, activists not only caught public attention but also attained their final goals against racial inequality/discrimination countrywide (Mc Neese, 2008). The Civil Rights Movement is a classic example of a successful social movement. The movement's transformation of societal values, peaceful and rational approach, broad popular support, and ability to secure the consent of the governed were critical factors in its well-deserved success (Morris, 1999).

Occupy Wall Street, a progressive populist movement active from September to November 2011, sought to address economic inequality and political corruption (Massey & Snyder, 2012). However, despite its initial momentum and significant media attention, the movement encountered substantial barriers that impeded its effectiveness.

While the aspirations of Occupy Wall Street did echo John Locke's liberal principles – such as advocating for individual rights and liberty and a more restrained role of government – it's essential to acknowledge that the movement fell short in fulfilling these ambitions. Therefore, we would define Occupy Wall Street as unsuccessful (Calhoun, 2013).

In the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. galvanized public sentiment and mobilized action through inspirational rhetoric and strategic nonviolent protests. His centralized leadership was vital to coordinating action; creating clear, understandable messages; and setting tangible goals (Carson, 1987).

In contrast, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement intentionally lacked centralized leadership. The slogan "We are the 99%" reflected OWS's central ideal of creating a leaderless grassroots organization; however, this turned out to be ineffective. Without a singular leadership or defined structure, OWS struggled to articulate a concise message or set of demands. This feature made it difficult for both outsiders to understand the movement's objectives and insiders to strategize effectively or negotiate with power holders (Rowe & Carroll, 2015).

Organizationally, the Civil Rights Movement was remarkably well-structured, enjoying support from established institutions such as churches and universities. The existence of critical groups, such as The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), made it possible to organize protests, boycotts, and voter registration drives while also providing resources, connections, and institutional memory that sustained the movement (Killian, 1984).

On the other hand, Occupy Wall Street was organized primarily via social media. This allowed for rapid mobilization and extensive reach but also created numerous vulnerabilities. Without the institutional infrastructure, the movement lacked resilience, especially in the face of legal challenges and police repression (Caren & Gaby, 2011).

Finally, both movements' approaches to fulfilling their objectives determined their successful outcome. For example, the Civil Rights Movement

aimed to dismantle legal segregation and secure voting rights for African Americans using strategic non-violent protests and legal challenges. Along with its clear goal, the strategies employed by Civil Rights leaders allowed the movement to make substantial gains, despite significant opposition.

In contrast, Occupy Wall Street voiced broad critiques against income inequality and corporate influence in politics but struggled to transform these grievances into concrete policy proposals (Rowe & Carroll, 2015). While the movement successfully brought issues of economic inequality to the forefront of public discourse, its lack of specific, achievable goals and strategic action did not achieve substantial policy change.

Studying the Civil Rights Movement and Occupy Wall Street provides clear evidence of leadership and organizations' critical role in successful social movements. The centralized leadership and structured organization of the Civil Rights Movement were instrumental in its ability to effect substantial legislative changes. Likewise, the lack of formal leadership and decentralized structure within Occupy Wall Street contributed to its difficulties in achieving clear-cut, systemic changes.

Case Study 2. The Women´s Suffrage Movement and The Paris Commune

The Women´s Suffrage Movement and the Paris Commune are two social movements that arose from a natural desire for rights and representation. Despite their shared objective of social justice, the two movements employed distinct strategies to achieve their objectives. In contrast to the Women´s Suffrage Movement, which viewed nonviolence as a central strategy, The Paris Commune employed violent methods, diminishing its overall effectiveness and long-term results.

The Women´s Suffrage Movement (1878–1920) was a peaceful social and political campaign that extended voting rights for women, while The Paris Commune was a radical socialist revolutionary government that ruled Paris from March to May 1871.

The Women´s Suffrage Movement is deemed successful because it pushed society to expand individual rights and freedom, pursue peaceful and popular support, and support the consent of the governed. Through non-violent protest and strategic political advocacy, the movement eventually resulted in the 19th Amendment, a landmark achievement that granted women´s right to vote (*19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution: Women´s Right to Vote (1920)*, 2021). Nonetheless, the Paris Commune is considered to have failed because it shifted society away from these liberal goals.

Despite both movements aiming for greater representation, the Paris Commune engaged in violent confrontations with the French government, evident in various instances such as the violent repression of the Versailles army, the execution of hostages, and the final, horrific week known as "La Semaine Sanglante", during which the French government massacred thousands of Communards (*Paris Commune of 1871: Causes, Bloody Week & Legacy*, n.d.).

If the Paris Commune had embraced nonviolent means instead of force, it could have achieved more positive results and avoided catastrophic repercussions (Roberts, 2001). Instead, leaders' unwillingness to exercise restraint ultimately played perfectly into the hands of French government forces, who deployed ruthless suppression measures, resulting in unnecessarily high loss-of-life costs. Furthermore, the use of violent force was used as justification by adversaries aiming to undermine the credibility associated with the Paris Commune movement among foreign partners and potential supporters.

Indeed, even as we acknowledge that many violent social movements have led to significant societal changes, it´s essential to recognize that the violence they use to achieve their goals can often tarnish the legacy they leave behind. A classic example of this is the French Revolution. Although it successfully toppled an absolute monarchy and paved the way for Republicanism, its violent means, particularly during the Reign of Terror, left a legacy of brutality that un-

dermined its ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity (*Legacies of the Revolution &Middot; Explore &Middot; LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY: EXPLORING THE FRENCH REVOUTION*, n.d.). Therefore, while some violent movements may achieve short-term objectives, the long-term societal costs can be substantial. Nonviolent resistance not only minimizes unnecessary suffering and destruction, but it also promotes dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation – the foundations for a more durable peace.

Case Study 3. The Environmental Movement and The Arab Spring

Although the Environmental Movement and the Arab Spring share the fundamental goal of pursuing transformative objectives, their operational techniques differ significantly, notably in terms of coalition-building and grassroots support.

As worldwide concerns about pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss developed, the Environmental Movement gained momentum. It successfully transcended national boundaries by bringing together diverse interest groups to advocate for sustainable ecological practices (*I. Origins of the Environmental Movement &Middot; Exhibit &Middot; Give Earth A Chance: Environmental Activism in Michigan*, n.d.). Halfway around the world, the Arab Spring began to take shape in Tunisia in 2010, as people demanded urgent political reform and a more democratic government across North Africa (*Arab Spring*, n.d.).

The Environmental Movement is a classic illustration of how coalition-building and grassroots support can translate into substantial change. The core strength of the movement has been its ability to establish a broad coalition of interest groups, including scientists, policy-makers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and ordinary citizens (Harvey, 2020). This combination of strategic coalition-building and grassroots support has ensured not only the Environmental Movement´s immediate successes but also its lasting impact.

Despite a significant initial participation base, the Arab Spring encompassed a diverse mix of individu-als – from liberal teens to Islamic fundamentalists – which complicated coalition-building over time. The lack of clear guidance and leadership hindered the efforts to organize around shared aims, thus posing a challenge in building continued grassroots support beyond the initial protests.

Poor coalition-building and insufficient grass-roots engagement ultimately hindered the progress of the Arab Spring beyond the initial protests. Despite its enthusiastic start, the movement saw its gains wane over time due to these inherent weaknesses (Amour, 2018). This lack of a long-term outcome underscores the limitations of a movement that, while passionate, needed more organizational structure and coherent objectives to achieve enduring success.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, while these case studies represent a limited selection of social movements, they undoubtedly illuminate the key characteristics that distinguish successful movements from less successful ones: effective leadership and meticulous organization, strategic use of nonviolent resistance, and coalition-building and grassroots support.

In practice, however, these elements are not simply boxes to tick for a movement to be deemed successful. Rather, they are intertwined with, and often shaped by, myriad other factors, including cultural context, prevailing political climate, and public sentiment. For instance, effective leadership within a democratic society could look significantly different from that within an autocratic regime. Similarly, the impact and feasibility of nonviolent resistance could be heavily influenced by societal norms and public perceptions of dissent.

Further to this point, the idea of "success" itself can be multi-dimensional and context-dependent. A movement may not achieve its specific, stated goals yet still initiate meaningful social and political change. Conversely, a movement that achieves its immediate objectives may inadvertently lead to unintended negative consequences in the longer term. Understanding this intricate landscape is more than

just an academic exercise. Instead, it provides us with practical tools for comprehending and engaging with the socio-political world around us. As we continue to witness the emergence of new social movements, the lessons from these case studies provide critical insights that can guide future initiatives.

In essence, the knowledge gleaned from these case studies is about more than just historical analysis; It is about harnessing this knowledge to foster a more informed, engaged citizenry capable of effectively advocating for change and, in doing so, shaping a more equitable, democratic society. As Margaret Mead once wisely observed, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Mead, 2023).

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