#### Introduction to Social Movements

In January 2011, Egypt erupted in protests against the stifling rule of longtime President Hosni Mubarak. The protests were sparked in part by the revolution in Tunisia, and, in turn, they inspired demonstrations throughout the Middle East in Libya, Syria, and beyond. This wave of protest movements travelled across national borders and seemed to spread like wildfire. There have been countless causes and factors in play in these protests and revolutions, but many have noted the internetsavy youth of these countries. Some believe that the adoption of social technology—from Facebook pages to cell phone cameras—that helped to organize and document the movement contributed directly to the wave of protests called Arab Spring. The combination of deep unrest and disruptive technologies meant these social movements were ready to rise up and seek change.

What do Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, People for the <u>Ethical Treatment of Animals</u> (PETA), the anti-globalization movement, and the <u>Tea Party</u> have in common? Not much, you might think. But although they may be <u>left-wing</u> or right-wing, <u>radical</u> or conservative, highly organized or very <u>diffused</u>, they are all examples of social movements.

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common goal. These groups might be attempting to create change (Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring), to resist change (anti-globalization movement), or to provide a political voice to those otherwise <u>disenfranchised</u> (civil rights movements). Social movements create social change.

Consider the effect of the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This disaster exemplifies how a change in the environment, coupled with the use of technology to fix that change, combined with anti-oil sentiment in social movements and social institutions, led to changes in offshore oil drilling policies. Subsequently, in an effort to support the Gulf Coast's rebuilding efforts, changes occurred. From grassroots marketing campaigns that promote consumption of local seafood to municipal governments needing to coordinate with federal cleanups, organizations develop and shift to meet the changing needs of the society. Just as we saw with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, social movements have, throughout history, influenced societal shifts. Sociology looks at these moments through the lenses of three major perspectives.

The functionalist perspective looks at the big picture, focusing on the way that all aspects of society are integral to the continued health and <u>viability</u> of the whole. A functionalist might focus on why social movements develop, why they continue to exist, and what social purposes they serve. On one hand, social movements emerge when there is a <u>dysfunction</u> in the relationship between systems. The union movement developed in the 19th century when the economy no longer functioned

# **Social Movements An Introduction**

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