



MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Course # 11.469
BU Metropolitan Studies Program Course # MET SO 502 Urban Sociology

Urban Sociology Study Guide for Week 13
Collective Action

1. In *The Logic of Collective Action*, **Mancur Olson** explores how collective action on behalf of collective goods is possible among individuals or firms who are guided by narrow self-interest. He argues that the larger the group of people, the more individuals are willing to free-ride. How would you relate the concept of collective efficacy to Olson's ideas about groups? Do you agree with Olson? Explain why or why not.
2. Barbara Ransby describes the civil rights leader, community organizer, and teacher, **Ella Baker**, who believed deeply in the power of grassroots collective action and worked tirelessly inspiring others in the struggle for economic and racial justice. What is Baker's view of how social and political change takes place? What, for Baker, is the relationship between education and social change? How do you think Baker would define leadership? How do Baker's views of collective action differ from those of Mancur Olson?
3. **Johanna Fernandez** provides a history of the Young Lord's Organization (YLO), a Puerto-Rican nationalist group that led militant community-based campaigns to challenge urban poverty and racial inequality. How would you characterize the strategy of the YLO? What enabled the YLO to gain influence and what limited their power? How does their approach differ from that of **Ella Baker's**?
4. **Roger Gould** analyzes social movement mobilization through an analysis of social ties – he focuses, however, not on individual level networks but on neighborhood based ties. Why does Gould think that neighborhoods mattered for mobilization? How do network analyses help us understand collective actions? According to **Gould**, what happens to social networks after mobilizations?
5. **McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly** state that collective action “refers to individuals sharing resources in pursuit of collective goals – goals that cannot be privatized to any of the members of the collectivity on behalf of which collective action has taken place. Such goals may be produced within movements, but also in many contexts that normally are not associated with movements” (19). What mechanisms and processes do **McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly** identify to explain mobilization? How would you use their models to explain Ella Baker's organizing work, the rise of the YLO, or the 1871 Paris Commune insurgencies?

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