

# A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest

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## Abstract

Building on Karl Mannheim’s theory of generations, this address argues that U.S. Millennials comprise a new political generation with lived experiences and worldviews that set them apart from their elders. Not only are they the first generation of “digital natives,” but, although they are more educated than any previous U.S. generation, they face a labor market in which precarity is increasingly the norm. And despite proclamations to the contrary, they confront persistent racial and gender disparities, discrimination against sexual minorities, and widening class inequality—all of which they understand in the framework of “intersectionality.” This address analyzes the four largest social movements spearheaded by college-educated Millennials: the young undocumented immigrant “Dreamers,” the 2011 Occupy Wall Street uprising, the campus movement protesting sexual assault, and the Black Lives Matter movement. All four reflect the distinctive historical experience of the Millennial generation, but they vary along two cross-cutting dimensions: (1) the social characteristics of activists and leaders, and (2) the dominant modes of organization and strategic repertoires.

## Keywords

social movements, youth, Millennials, generations

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that young adults are overrepresented among progressive political activists. As a result, their generationally specific experiences and worldviews have disproportionately influenced social movement agendas. Although this generational aspect of social movements has received limited scholarly attention in recent years, it is a striking feature of the wave of protest that has emerged in the twenty-first-century United States. With few exceptions, college-educated “Millennials”<sup>1</sup>—usually defined as those born after 1980—comprise the key demographic group driving the left-wing movements in that wave.

Defying the popular stereotypes of their generation as selfish, narcissistic, and politically disengaged, Millennials have more progressive attitudes and beliefs than do older generations on a wide range of issues, from the rights of sexual minorities to capitalism itself. Moreover, many of them have acted on those beliefs through engagement in social movements. In what follows, I analyze the four largest Millennial-driven movements: the young undocumented immigrant “Dreamers,” the 2011 Occupy Wall Street (OWS) uprising, the campus movement protesting sexual assault, and Black Lives Matter (BLM).<sup>2</sup>

Building on Karl Mannheim’s classic 1927 essay, “The Problem of Generations,” I argue that U.S. Millennials constitute a new *political generation*, whose lived experiences and worldviews sharply distinguish them from previous generations of youthful activists.<sup>3</sup> First, as “digital natives,” profoundly shaped by the Internet and other new technologies from the start of their lives, Millennials’ use of network-based communication (i.e., social media) is unprecedented in scale and effectiveness. Second, although they are more educated than any previous generation, Millennials’ aspirations have been frustrated by the growth of precarious employment and by an increasingly polarized labor market (Kalleberg 2011). Although these trends have affected all generations, they have influenced the worldviews of youthful labor market entrants most profoundly. The emergence of precarious and polarized

employment preceded the Great Recession but was exacerbated by it, and this helped galvanize Millennial activism, especially among the college-educated.

U.S. Millennials are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they came of age in a supposedly post-racial society—yet they confront persistent racism. Similarly, despite claims that gender inequality has been largely eliminated, this generation routinely encounters disparities in the treatment of women and men, as well as systematic discrimination against sexual minorities. Millennials are also affected by the soaring level of class inequality, and the vast political influence of corporations and wealthy individuals. Viewing race, gender, sexuality, and class as inextricably intertwined, Millennial activists have adopted the term “intersectionality” (which originated in the academy; see Crenshaw 1991) to highlight their interconnections.

Although they share these common features—unprecedented use of social media, the combined effects of extensive postsecondary education and employment precarity, and the discourse of intersectionality—in other respects the Millennial-led social movements I examine here are far from homogeneous. They vary along two cross-cutting dimensions: (1) the social characteristics of their activists and leaders, and (2) their dominant modes of organization and strategic repertoires.

First, although all four movements are led by college-educated Millennials, the Dreamers and BLM activists are social *outsiders*: they are overwhelmingly people of color, and women and sexual minorities are highly overrepresented in their ranks. By contrast, activists in OWS and in the anti-sexual assault movement are social *insiders*: they are typically white and from economically privileged families, and in the case of OWS they are also disproportionately heterosexual and male. These movements also vary along a second dimension: the Dreamers and the anti-sexual assault movement rely on conventional organizational forms and primarily seek to win legislation and other reforms “inside the system.”

In contrast, OWS and BLM are disdainful of conventional forms of political organization and decision-making, rejecting hierarchy in favor of “horizontalism” and “leaderful,” participatory organizational structures. In addition, both emphasize direct action and disruptive strategies designed to challenge basic social structures, rather than efforts to win legislation or other short-term reforms.

Before analyzing these four cases and the variations among them in more detail, I discuss selected concepts from the social movements literature, and then go on to suggest the ways in which Mannheim’s theory of generations illuminates the distinctive historical forces shaping Millennials’ experiences.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL AVAILABILITY, WAVES OF PROTEST, AND POLITICAL GENERATIONS**

In his study of the 1960s Freedom Summer campaign, McAdam (1986) highlighted the “biographical availability” of its affluent youthful participants, most of whom were unencumbered by family obligations or demanding occupations. These “Baby Boomers” were more “available” than earlier generations had been, largely because their transition from childhood to adulthood had been prolonged by the expansion of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s (Flacks 1971:10; Klatch 1999:4). As I will discuss, that life-cycle transition has been lengthened further in the twenty-first century, rendering Millennials even more biographically available than boomers were.

The concept of biographical availability helps explain why students and other young people are more easily recruited into social movements than are their elders, all else being equal. Yet, although youth of every generation are potentially available in this sense, they become politically engaged in large numbers only under certain conditions. In most historical periods, no large-scale social movements have emerged among the young (or among older people, for that

matter). Although some level of contentious politics has become a constant feature of the United States and other advanced democracies, major upsurges of protest like that of the 1960s are historically rare.

Many commentators have observed that when large-scale social movements do develop, they often cluster in time and space, forming “waves” of protest. Within such clusters, movements learn from and emulate one another (Della Porta 2015; Tarrow 1998; Traugott 1995), a process variously understood as social movement “spillover” (Meyer and Whittier 1994), “diffusion” (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Wood 2012), or in some contexts “mimetic isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The movements I analyze here are part of such a wave of protest, or at least the embryo of one, and have reciprocally influenced one another in just the ways the literature suggests.

But this begs the critical question: under what conditions do such waves of protest emerge? As Walder (2009) points out, recent sociological literature on social movements has largely abandoned that line of inquiry, concentrating instead on *processes* of mobilization, especially the cultural and emotional aspects of movement participation, and the dynamics of framing. Walder (2009:398) also criticizes the recent literature for failing “to explain the political orientation of mobilized groups and the aims and content of movements.”

The issues whose recent neglect Walder laments are central to the “political process” model that dominated social movements research in the late twentieth century. A key axiom in that approach was that a necessary condition for movement emergence is the presence of “political opportunities” (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978) or “political opportunity structures” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). But as many critics have noted (e.g., Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Meyer 2004), in practice such opportunities tend to be identified retrospectively, so this component of the political process model often seems tautological rather than predictive.<sup>4</sup> These critics also reject the model’s structural determinism, arguing for a

more agency-centered, contingent approach. Although this line of critique and the micro-sociological perspective to which it led have been increasingly influential, the pendulum may be swinging back once again. Walder's (2009:407) complaint about the "lack of curiosity about the social structural roots of protest" was followed by a mini-revival of Marxist-inspired approaches to social movement research (Barker et al. 2013; Cox and Nilsen 2014), just as a new wave of protest began to emerge around the globe.

## BRINGING MANNHEIM BACK IN

Mannheim's (1927, 1944) theory of generations usefully bridges the micro-sociological and cultural focus of *fin-de-siècle* social movements literature and the structural questions to which Walder and others have given renewed attention. Deeply influenced by Simmel and Weber, and by the early work of his compatriot Georg Lukács, Mannheim was equally concerned with culture and social structure (Kettler and Meja 1995). To be sure, Mannheim seldom mentioned social movements per se in his writings on generations, nor did he tackle the formidable problem of specifying the conditions under which major waves of protest emerge. His focus was on generational worldviews and "generational style." Yet, he took pains to emphasize the impact of social transformations and historical forces on the distinctive outlook of particular generations:

Not every generation . . . creates new collective impulses and formative principles original to itself and adequate to its particular situation . . . the frequency of such realization is closely connected with the tempo of social change. When as a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation basic attitudes must change so quickly . . . then the various new phases of experience are consolidated somewhere. . . .

We speak in such cases of the formation of a new generation style, or of a new *generation entelechy*.<sup>5</sup> (Mannheim 1927:309)

Mannheim (1927:310–11) argued that generations are formed not by biological but by historical and sociological processes:

Whether a new *generation style* emerges every year, every thirty, every hundred years, or whether it emerges rhythmically at all, depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural process. . . . The biological fact of the existence of generations merely provided the *possibility* that generation entelechies may emerge.

Mannheim pointed out that in every era, young people are especially susceptible to the influence of such triggers, because (unlike their less impressionable elders) their worldviews are still in the process of formation. "Early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set," he argued (Mannheim 1927:298). "The 'up-to-dateness' of youth consists in their being closer to the 'present' problems . . . and in the fact that they are dramatically aware of a process of de-stabilization and take sides in it. All this while, the older generation cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of *their* youth" (Mannheim 1927:300–301; see also Jaeger 1985). This has specific implications for social movements:

Youth [are] especially apt to sympathize with dynamic social movements . . . which are dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs. Youth has no vested interests yet, either in an economic sense or in terms of habits and valuations, whereas most of the settled adults have. This is the explanation of the peculiar fact that in their adolescence and prolonged adolescence so many people are ardent revolutionaries or reformers. (Mannheim 1944:40)

For Mannheim, however, sociological generations are not necessarily politically engaged. He took pains to distance himself from the conventional wisdom that young people are always to the left of their elders. “Nothing is more false than the usual assumption,” he declared, “that the younger generation is ‘progressive’ and the older generation *eo ipso* conservative” (Mannheim 1927:297). This perspective is resolutely anti-determinist, yet at the same time it retains a structural dimension, emphasizing the ways in which “the tempo of social change” shapes each generation’s “style” and worldview.

With few exceptions (but see Hart-Brinson 2014; Henry 2004; Klatch 1999; Whittier 1995), recent literature on social movements makes only passing reference to Mannheim’s work. It was a more common reference point in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Flacks 1971; Inglehart 1977), although even then his influence was limited. Feuer’s (1969:25) famous study of student movements, for example, does not explicitly acknowledge Mannheim, although it echoes his thesis: “A generation in the sociological sense consists of persons in a common age group who in their formative years have known the same historical experiences. . . . Often a generation’s consciousness is shaped by the experience of what we might call the ‘generational event.’”<sup>6</sup>

Mannheim’s perspective offers a fundamental insight into the ways in which critical historical events can precipitate new waves of protest, galvanizing newly formed generations into social movement activity, which in turn is shaped by their historically specific worldviews. Here I aim to demonstrate the usefulness of this framework by applying it to the case of U.S. Millennials and the social movements they have launched since 2008. The “acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation” Mannheim posits affected Millennials in two respects that I have already mentioned: the rapid diffusion of digital communication technologies, and the growth of precarious and polarized employment. Both these developments deeply affected Millennials and helped shape their

“new collective impulses” and “new generational style.” The Internet revolution and the Great Recession were what Mannheim called “the trigger action of the social and cultural process”—just as the Great Depression was for the Old Left in the 1930s, and the civil rights revolution and the Vietnam War were for the New Left in the 1960s. That trigger action propelled a key group of Millennials—those with extensive postsecondary education—into social movement activism.

Mannheim’s observation about the plasticity of youth is distinct from McAdam’s concept of biographical availability, but these two ideas complement one another, and both contribute to an understanding of Millennial social movements. As the first generation of digital natives, their unparalleled expertise in deploying social media reflects Millennials’ youthful plasticity; similarly, the intensification of employment polarization and precarity during and after the Great Recession have disproportionately shaped their worldviews. The notion of biographical availability sheds light on the reasons why the “trigger action” of the 2008 financial crisis was so salient for *college-educated* Millennials. Mason (2013) notes the unprecedented level of education among the young protagonists of twenty-first-century social movements around the world, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, arguing that such movements were led by “the graduate with no future.”<sup>7</sup>

## MILLENNIALS: A NEW POLITICAL GENERATION

The protest movements that sprang up after the 2008 financial crisis are not limited to youth movements. But while older people have been disproportionately drawn to right-wing populist movements like the U.S. Tea Party and Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, Millennials comprise the bulk of those involved in the new movements that emerged on the Left in this period.<sup>8</sup> As a first step toward explaining this development, which took many observers by surprise, I will review the available data on U.S. Millennials’

attitudes and worldviews, which crystallized into what Mannheim called a new “generational style” and helped constitute them as a new political generation.

In the early twenty-first century, the dominant narrative defining the Millennial generation portrayed its young adult members as lazy, narcissistic, and with a sense of entitlement that greatly exceeded that of earlier generations. Until recently, such commentary also presumed that Millennials were politically disengaged. As late as 2013, a *Time* magazine cover story dubbed them the “Me Me Me Generation,” asserting that “they have less civic engagement and lower political participation than any previous group” (Stein 2013). A 2014 Pew Research Center study similarly concluded that Millennials are “relatively unattached to organized politics” (Taylor et al 2014:4).

The 2008 presidential election was an early indication of the limited accuracy of such claims. Barack Obama captured the imagination of millions of Millennials: 66 percent of voters under age 30 cast their ballots for him that year, compared to 50 percent of those age 30 or over—a generational disparity larger than in any previous U.S. presidential election since exit polling began in 1972 (Pew Research Center 2010). Millennials not only voted for Obama in vast numbers, but many also actively campaigned for him. Some 2,000 full-time organizers participated in the 2008 “Camp Obama” trainings, “mostly in their twenties,” along with over a million part-time volunteers (Ganz 2009). Not coincidentally, the Obama campaign made unprecedented use of social media (Talbot 2008).

Eight years later, these dynamics were recapitulated in Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign, which became legendary for the enormous support it attracted from Millennials. The generation gap was even wider than in 2008: an aggregation of exit polls found that 72 percent of voters under age 30 cast their ballots for Sanders in the 2016 Democratic primaries, whereas 71 percent of those 65 and over voted for Clinton (Ehrenfreund 2016; Norman 2016; Zitner, Chinni, and McGill 2016).

A wealth of survey data suggest that Millennials’ attitudes are to the left of those of older generations.<sup>9</sup> Millennials are the only generation in which self-identified “liberals” outnumber “conservatives”: in 2014, 31 percent of Millennials identified as liberal and 26 percent as conservative (the rest were “moderates”); the figures for Boomers (age 50 to 68 in 2014) were 21 and 41 percent, respectively. Only about half (49 percent) of Millennials described themselves as “patriotic,” compared to 75 percent of Boomers, and Millennials also were less religious than older generations.

Millennials’ views about specific issues are disproportionately left-leaning as well. In 2014, just over half (51 percent) described themselves as “supporters of gay rights,” and 68 percent supported same-sex marriage; the figures for Boomers are 33 and 48 percent, respectively. Over two-thirds (69 percent) of Millennials supported legalization of marijuana, compared to 52 percent of Boomers. A solid majority of Millennials (55 percent) said that “immigrants now living in the U.S. illegally should be allowed to stay and apply for citizenship,” a view held by 53 percent of white and 58 percent of non-white Millennials; only 39 percent of Boomers (and 38 percent of white Boomers) shared this view. Millennials are also more supportive of interracial marriage, with 50 percent saying it is “a good thing for American society,” compared to 19 percent of Boomers. And a 2016 survey found that 60 percent of white adults under age 30 supported the BLM movement, compared to 37 percent of those age 50 to 64 (Horowitz and Livingston 2016).

These attitudes are not limited to social issues or “identity politics.” Although their unionization rates are far lower than those of older cohorts, Millennials have unusually pro-union attitudes, with 61 percent expressing a favorable opinion of organized labor in 2013, compared to 49 percent of Boomers (Dimock et al. 2013). Moreover, a 2011 Pew poll found that 49 percent of Millennials had a positive view of “socialism,” nearly double the rate for Boomers (25 percent). The same poll found a substantial generation gap in

attitudes about capitalism: 47 percent of Millennials expressed a negative view of capitalism, compared to 39 percent of Boomers.<sup>10</sup>

Millennials are also deeply skeptical about established political parties and institutions. In a 2007 survey, 56 percent endorsed the view that their generation was more likely than older ones to “join an emerging third political party”; only 18 percent said they were less likely to do so. In the same survey, 49 percent of Millennials said they were more likely than earlier generations to “join an independent or issue-based political movement”; 23 percent said they were less likely to do so (Greenberg and Weber 2008).

Few data exist on attitudinal differences *within* the Millennial generation, but those available suggest that progressive views are especially prevalent among individuals with extensive formal education as well as among non-whites. In Pew’s 2014 survey of Millennials, 42 percent of college graduates, 38 percent of those with some college education, and 34 percent of those with a high school education or less described themselves as “liberal.” Only 20 percent of college graduates and 21 percent of those with some college described themselves as “conservative,” compared to 30 percent of those with a high school education or less. College-educated Millennials also were disproportionately likely to identify as Democrats and to support gay rights.<sup>11</sup> Another 2014 survey found that African American and Latino Millennials were more likely than their white counterparts to support minimum wage increases, health care reform, and immigration reform (although not gay rights). They also were more likely than white Millennials to identify as Democrats (Rogowski and Cohen 2015). Similarly, support for Sanders in 2016, although strong among all Millennials relative to older generations, was greatest among highly educated and black Millennials (Norman 2016).

But are Millennials’ left-leaning attitudes truly generational effects, or are they also characteristic of youth in other political generations? A full exploration of that question is

beyond the scope of this study, but the General Social Survey (GSS) data shown in Table 1 suggest a mixture of generational effects and youth effects.<sup>12</sup> Part A of the table compares Millennials and Boomers (as well as the rest of the population) on five issues, and confirms the Pew findings that Millennials were significantly to the left of Boomers in 2014 (on all five variables). However, as part B of Table 1 shows, in the 1970s, when Boomers were young, they were far more likely than the rest of the population to identify as liberal, to support marijuana legalization, and to be tolerant of homosexuality. In contrast, on race and income inequality, their attitudes were not significantly different from those of the rest of the population. Finally, part C of Table 1 shows the shifts in Boomers’ attitudes as they aged, comparing their views during the 1970s and in 2014. Their attitudes toward homosexuality and marijuana legalization shifted leftward (like those of the larger population), but they moved rightward in regard to race and income inequality (although on the latter, the over-time difference is not statistically significant). They were also significantly less likely to identify as liberal in 2014 than in the 1970s.

## MILLENNIAL MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

As the first generation of digital natives, Millennials are famously adept in using the Internet and social media. The new communications technologies have diffused rapidly among all age groups, but Millennials have maintained their edge. In 2015, 90 percent of Millennials reported using social networking sites, compared to 51 percent of Boomers (Perrin 2015). And although all generations use social media to contact friends and family, young people are far more likely than their elders to exploit the Internet for other purposes. For example, a 2016 Gallup study reported that 71 percent of Millennials rely primarily on the Internet for “news or information about national and international issues,” compared to 30 percent of Boomers, who rely mainly on television and other “old” media (Gallup 2016).

**Table 1.** Comparing Generational Effects and Youth Effects on Political Attitudes

| <i>A. Comparing Boomers and Millennials, 2014</i> | <i>Boomers</i> | <i>Millennials</i> | <i>All Others</i> |
|---|----------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Government should reduce income differences       | 42.6%          | 51.6%*             | 45.3%             |
| Homosexuality is “not at all wrong”               | 45.4           | 63.8**             | 42.8              |
| Marijuana should be legal                         | 57.4           | 65.6*              | 47.8              |
| Government has special obligation to help blacks  | 13.6           | 20.1*              | 17.3              |
| Liberal self-identification                       | 24.7           | 30.2*              | 24.0              |

  

| <i>B. Comparing Boomers in Their Youth to Boomers in 2014</i> | <i>1970s</i> | <i>2014</i> |
|---|--------------|-------------|
| Government should reduce income differences (1978)            | 49.3%        | 42.6%       |
| Homosexuality is “not at all wrong” (1973)                    | 19.8         | 45.4**      |
| Marijuana should be legal (1974)                              | 43.4         | 57.4**      |
| Government has special obligation to help blacks (1975)       | 27.6         | 13.6**      |
| Liberal self-identification (1974)                            | 43.2         | 24.7**      |

  

| <i>C. Comparing Boomers in Their Youth to All Others in the 1970s</i> | <i>Boomers</i> | <i>All Others</i> |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Government should reduce income differences (1978)                    | 49.3%          | 50.5%             |
| Homosexuality is “not at all wrong” (1973)                            | 19.8           | 8.6**             |
| Marijuana should be legal (1974)                                      | 43.4           | 12.5**            |
| Government has special obligation to help blacks (1975)               | 27.6           | 24.5              |
| Liberal self-identification (1974)                                    | 43.2           | 25.8**            |

Source: General Social Survey.

Note: Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, inclusive; Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, inclusive. In Part A, “others” are listed for reference purposes only and significance tests compare Boomers and Millennials.

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .001$  (chi-square tests).

By the late 1990s, the Internet had become an important tool for political activists, reducing the costs of organizing and mobilization and enabling new forms of social movement recruitment (Earl and Kimport 2011; Juris 2008). But Millennial social movements have deployed the new technologies to a qualitatively different degree. As Mason (2013:76–77) observes, social media enabled this generation of protesters “to outwit the police, to beam their message into the newsrooms of global media, and above all to assert a cool, cutting-edge identity.” Moreover, he adds, “a network can usually defeat a hierarchy.” The police and other state agents have increasingly developed expertise in deploying social media and high-tech forms of surveillance, yet as digital natives Millennials retain a strong advantage.

For all four of the movements I analyze here, social media were critically important. Castells (2012:168) goes so far as to declare

that Occupy Wall Street “was born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet” (see also Costanza-Chock 2012; Juris 2012). For the Dreamers, too, social media have been vital (Costanza-Chock 2011), especially because for many undocumented immigrants, physical mobility is limited by lack of access to drivers’ licenses. Activists in the anti-sexual assault movement intensively exploited Facebook and other social media platforms, creating private online spaces where survivors and activists could share experiences, as well as using the new communication technologies in organizing and mobilization (Karasek and Dirks forthcoming). Black Lives Matter also has made extensive use of social media for internal communication, recruitment, and mobilization (Taylor 2016).

Social media and traditional media are often counterposed as alternatives, but they are not mutually exclusive; in practice, they often feed on and amplify one another.

Although Millennial social movement activists have made far greater use of the Internet and other new technologies than did their counterparts in earlier generations, “old media” remain critically important. Traditional news coverage has magnified the influence of all these movements and contributed to their recruitment and networking efforts. For example, a front-page *New York Times* story alerted many student activists campaigning against sexual assault to organizing efforts on other campuses around the country of which they previously were unaware (author’s interviews).

Just as traditional media remain important for these movements along with social media, so too participants’ physical, face-to-face interactions continue to be crucial complements to virtual network building. Many OWS activists commented on the importance of Zuccotti Park and the other occupied spaces for their movement; indeed, after the police evicted them from those spaces, OWS as a recognizable entity rapidly dissipated. And although the Dreamers, BLM, and the anti-sexual violence movement all relied heavily on virtual network building, in-person meetings and other direct interactions were essential for all of them as well. As one Dreamer activist put it, “Even if I post an image on Facebook, that’s not enough. We still need to be in physical contact, we need to gather” (Seif 2014:307). In short, social media were vital for these movements, helping them scale up their organizing quickly and reducing the costs of recruitment, but this supplemented rather than replaced face-to-face interaction.

## **PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND “WAITHOOD”**

Millennials are the most highly educated generation in U.S. history. In 2015, 36 percent of the population age 25 to 29 had a four-year college degree or more, compared to 24 percent in 1976. Young women lead this trend, with even higher levels of educational attainment than their male counterparts (Ryan and Bauman 2016). More generally, the transition to adulthood has been prolonged for this

generation to an unprecedented degree (Waters et al. 2011). This is not unique to the United States, but part of a global trend extending “youth” as a phase of the life cycle, especially among the affluent. In the twenty-first century, young adults often shuttle back and forth between postsecondary education and precarious employment, a phenomenon that some commentators term “waithood.” Aspirations rise with increased education, but they are often frustrated by chronic unemployment or underemployment (Sukarieh and Tannock 2015). This may be one reason why, as survey data suggest, Millennials are less likely than older generations to be “engaged” in the workplace and they change jobs more frequently (Gallup 2016), contributing to their biographical availability.

Unlike Boomers, who came of age in a period of relatively abundant career opportunities, Millennials face a stagnant labor market with far more limited options (Duke 2016). Those without college education fare worst, but college graduates also find it difficult to access the stable workplace-based jobs that were commonly available to degree-holders in the second half of the twentieth century; instead, many settle for marginal employment as interns, temporary workers, independent contractors, freelancers, and the like (Kalleberg 2011; Katz and Krueger 2016; Standing 2011).

Moreover, as college tuition rates have skyrocketed, Millennials have paid a much higher price for their education than did earlier generations. Two-thirds of U.S. students who earned a four-year college degree in 2011 borrowed money to help finance their educations; student loan debt in 2011 averaged \$26,600 (Project on Student Debt 2012), a far higher proportion and amount than among previous graduates. Along with debt and precarious employment, soaring housing costs have made it difficult for many Millennials to live independently. In 2014, 32.1 percent of adults age 18 to 34 were living in their parents’ homes, a larger share than any time since the 1940s. Millennials also have lower marriage rates and marry later than did previous generations (Fry 2016).

The situation was especially bleak for Millennials who entered the labor market just after the 2008 crisis, and historical evidence suggests this will have enduring effects on their earnings and career trajectories (Kahn 2010). The impact on this generation's worldviews is also likely to be long-lasting. Older workers have been affected by the growth of employment precarity as much as their younger counterparts (Katz and Krueger 2016), but *pace* Mannheim, because that growth occurred during the period in which Millennials came of age, it has influenced their worldviews far more than those of older generations.

In September 2011, when OWS surfaced, the unemployment rate among 20- to 24-year-olds was 15 percent, although the college-educated youth who make up the bulk of Millennial social movement activists were more likely to be *under-* than *unemployed*.<sup>13</sup> In late 2011, a Pew survey of 18- to 34-year-olds found that 49 percent had taken a job they did not want "to pay the bills," and only 30 percent considered their current job a "career" (Taylor et al. 2012). In another survey of 2006 to 2011 U.S. college graduates, 60 percent of employed respondents reported that their jobs did not require a four-year degree, 40 percent said their jobs were unrelated to their college major, and 24 percent were earning "a lot less" than they had expected (Stone, Van Horn, and Zukin 2012). In this light, it is not surprising that in the 2014 General Social Survey, only 35 percent of Millennials described themselves as "middle class," down from 46 percent among similar-age respondents as recently as 2002 (Malik, Barr, and Holpuch 2016).

In short, underemployment, precarious employment, and "waithood" were widespread among Millennials in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. But "the economically inactive are not necessarily politically inactive," as one commentator noted. "They can form powerful constituencies that lobby for a reduction in inequality, or even a fundamental change in the system itself" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2014:11). This is precisely what occurred

among the Millennial political generation, led by underemployed college-educated young people. As anthropologist David Graeber (2011) observed in an early analysis of OWS, many participants were "forward looking people who have been stopped dead in their tracks . . . their one strongest common feature being a remarkably high level of education." Similarly, Mason (2013:63, 66, 67) notes that the "youthful, socially networked horizontalist movements" that have emerged across the globe since 2008, including the Arab Spring, the *indignados* in Southern Europe, and OWS, feature "a new sociological type: the graduate with no future." Mason added: "The financial crisis of 2008 created . . . a generation of twenty-somethings whose projected life-arc has switched, quite suddenly, from an upward curve to a downward one" (see also Della Porta 2015:51–52).

## THE POLITICS OF INTERSECTIONALITY

The worldviews of progressive U.S. Millennial activists are strikingly different from those of earlier political generations. Activists in the Old Left of the 1930s had a worldview centered on labor and class politics, or what Fraser (1995) terms the politics of redistribution; the worldview of New Leftists in the 1960s and 1970s centered on identity politics and other "new social movement" issues (Melucci 1980), or what Fraser calls the politics of recognition. Simultaneously building on and differentiating themselves from these traditions, Millennials active in what one commentator calls the "New New Left" (Beinart 2013) have a worldview that combines struggles for redistribution *and* recognition. They express a broad critique of neoliberal capitalism, yet at the same time embrace the discourse of intersectionality.

As the post-2008 wave of protest developed, the movements comprising it interacted with and learned from one another, deepening their understanding of the interconnections among class, race, gender, sexuality, and

other forms of oppression. Their commitment to the idea of intersectionality also reflects the historical context in which Millennials came of age. They are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation: in 2014, 43 percent were non-white; Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing group. In addition, a higher proportion of Millennials identify as bisexual, gay, or transgender than do individuals in older generations.<sup>14</sup>

Millennials grew up in a “post-racial” society, and one in which gender inequality was supposed to have been largely eliminated, even as same-sex marriage and other rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) people won new legitimacy. Yet Millennials’ lived experience often contradicted such egalitarian claims. Even after the election of the first African American president, pervasive racism continued, manifested in ongoing police violence against African Americans, racial disparities in incarceration rates and in income and wealth, and racially based micro-aggressions. Despite frequent proclamations about equal rights and opportunities for women, and even after women overtook men in average educational attainment, sexual assault is still pervasive on college campuses and elsewhere, pay equity remains elusive, and other gender inequities persist. Similarly, notwithstanding their legal gains, LGBTQ individuals continue to be stigmatized and disproportionately victimized by sexual violence. Millennial activists often express a sense of betrayal in regard to these unmet promises; indeed, this is one key source of their radicalization.

Millennial social movement participants and leaders not only embrace the idea of intersectionality as an integral component of their political worldview, but their ranks include a disproportionate number of women and LGBTQ-identified individuals. This is an especially prominent feature of BLM and the Dreamers, as many observers have noted. LGBTQ women are also overrepresented among leaders of the campus-based anti-sexual assault movement, although in this case their identities are rarely visible to the public. Sexual minorities were less prominent in

OWS, yet there, too, diverse gender expressions were explicitly recognized. For example, OWS working group meetings routinely began with participants stating their names and the pronouns they preferred.

## THE POST-2008 WAVE OF PROTEST

The twenty-first-century wave of protest only surfaced as a large-scale phenomenon after the 2008 financial crisis, but its foundation was laid in the late 1990s (Jaffe 2016). The roots of the Dreamers’ movement and of OWS can be traced to that decade’s immigrant rights and anti-globalization movements, respectively, although both were abruptly derailed by the events of September 11, 2001. Just before that date, the immigrant rights movement had begun to incubate the Dreamers’ movement, an effort that would regain momentum in the early 2000s. The anti-globalization movement—best remembered for the 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” when a broad coalition protested against the World Trade Organization—took longer to regroup. But in mid-2011, anti-globalization veterans (mostly older but also including some Millennials) were prominent among the planners of the Occupy protests that burst into public view that autumn, mentoring the Millennials who became OWS’s dominant demographic.

The anti-sexual assault movement and BLM had more arms-length relationships to older activists. They eventually embraced elements of previous feminist and anti-racist movements, but initially they were critical of those movements and less welcoming of mentorship. Indeed, BLM activists explicitly rejected the civil rights movement’s historical reliance on charismatic male leaders. For anti-sexual assault activists, the critique of earlier feminisms was more complex. Many did not initially see themselves as feminists at all, and for those who did, generational differences regarding forms of gender expression and sexuality were highly salient (Henry 2004).

I now turn to examine these four movements and the variations among them in more detail, focusing on the social characteristics

|  |  | <i>Modes of Organization and Strategic Repertoires</i>  |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | Non-hierarchical, “leaderful” organizations. Direct action and disruptive strategies, challenging basic social structures and highly critical of conventional politics. | Traditional organizational forms. Story-telling as a key strategy, also engage in conventional politics, working “inside the system” for reforms. |
| <i>Social Characteristics of Activists and Leaders</i> | Insiders — mostly white, U.S.-born, and affluent | OCCUPY WALL STREET  | MOVEMENT AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT   |
|  | Outsiders — of color and often LGBTQ             | BLACK LIVES MATTER  | “DREAMERS”  |

**Figure 1.** Millennial Social Movements in the United States

of activists and leaders, on the one hand, and their dominant modes of organization and strategic repertoires, on the other. As the vertical axis of Figure 1 indicates, activists in both OWS and the anti-sexual assault movement had disproportionately privileged backgrounds: typically white and U.S.-born, with affluent parents and extensive postsecondary education. Unlike these social insiders, the Dreamers and BLM activists—although in most cases also highly educated—were social outsiders, marginalized by their race or ethnicity, and, in the Dreamers’ case, their undocumented status. Reinforcing this outsider positioning, individuals with LGBTQ identities (most of them female) are overrepresented and highly visible among both Dreamers and BLM activists and leaders.<sup>15</sup>

Although all four movements rely heavily on social media and embrace an intersectionality-based critique of U.S. society, their dominant modes of organization and political strategies diverge sharply, as the horizontal axis of Figure 1 shows. For most OWS and BLM activists, conventional political demands and reforms are anathema; they aim instead to systematically challenge the basic structures of class and racial inequality, respectively. Both these movements rely primarily on direct action and other disruptive tactics and strategies, and they explicitly reject hierarchal organizational forms and traditional models of charismatic leadership, as

well as the “non-profit industrial complex” (INCITE 2007). By contrast, the Dreamers and activists in the movement against sexual assault focus their energies on campaigns for new legislation and other short-term reforms, and to that end engage in lobbying and work “inside the system.” Although they rely on conventional organizational and leadership approaches and traditional political strategies, both the Dreamers and the anti-sexual assault activists also make extensive use of “story-telling” as a political strategy, to a far greater extent than do OWS or BLM.

Internal divisions exist within all four movements, and their strategic and tactical repertoires have increasingly begun to converge. But these underlying differences in modes of organization and strategy remain salient, exposing important variations among Millennial social movements. I now turn to examine each of the four in more detail, proceeding in chronological order.

### *The Dreamers*

The Dreamers’ movement was the first of the four to take off. Its initial focus, and the origin of its name, was the proposed federal DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act, first introduced in Congress in August 2001—just before the 9/11 attacks put immigration reform on hold. This proposed legislation was designed to offer

legal residency and a path to U.S. citizenship to unauthorized immigrants who had arrived in the United States as children, provided they had completed two years of college or performed two years of military service (among other conditions).

The Dreamers not only came first chronologically, but it also has the most transparent genealogy of the four cases. It was conceived when the larger immigrant rights movement, which began in the early 1990s and was dominated by older activists, launched a campaign focused on undocumented immigrants who had been brought to the United States as children. The hope was that the plight of these young people would generate public sympathy and help win support for comprehensive immigration reform. The Dreamers would break away from the “parent” movement after 2008 and form their own autonomous organizations, but the effort began as a carefully cultivated offshoot of the established immigrant rights infrastructure of churches, community organizations, and other groups committed to that broader cause.

The Dreamers are by definition youthful, and most are highly educated. A survey of Dreamer activists conducted in 2011 and 2012 found that their average age was 21, and that 95 percent had attended a postsecondary educational institution (Terriquez 2015). Schools and colleges are relatively safe spaces for undocumented youth, but once they leave school and attempt to transition to adulthood, their lack of legal status becomes increasingly problematic (Gonzales 2011). As Abrego (2011) argues, this contradiction between the social inclusion undocumented youth experience during their student years and what they face as young adults has been a spur to activism. Their parents are more likely to remain “in the shadows,” whereas undocumented youth often are emboldened to challenge the stigma associated with lack of legal status and to demand expanded citizenship rights.

Indeed, as the Dreamers graduated from college, they emerged as an early and especially poignant manifestation of “the graduate

with no future.” As undocumented immigrants they could legally attend school indefinitely, but until 2012 they were prohibited from working in the formal economy, either during or after completing their educations.<sup>16</sup> The Dreamers thus became an extreme example of both “waithood” and biographical availability. “Historically, youth organizing has been very episodic,” DREAM Act co-author Josh Bernstein stated in 2011 (quoted in Altshuler 2011). “The DREAM Act is different because the Dreamers are stuck. It’s bad for them, but it’s actually good for organizing.” Similarly, Nicholls (2013:104) notes that “[b]locked upward mobility for undocumented graduates . . . provided the movement with a rich and deep reservoir of talented, mostly voluntary labor.”

The Dreamers are also a textbook case of a movement that made extensive use of storytelling (Polletta 2006). From the outset, DREAM activists were trained by the parent immigrant rights movement in “messaging” and story-telling (Fernandes 2017; Nicholls 2013). The narrative they were taught to recount focused on how they had been brought to the United States by their parents as children, so they were not really “illegal”—after all, they did not choose to cross the border (or overstay a visa). Growing up in the United States from an early age, the narrative continued, they were fully assimilated into U.S. society and spoke perfect English. Only when they needed a social security number to apply to college or for a job did they even learn of their lack of legal status. One representative example of such a narrative appeared in a publication compiled by a Dreamers’ organization at UCLA (Madera et al. 2008:42–43):

Growing up, I did not have any friends who were undocumented, and I was unaware of my immigration status until I was fifteen. When I was fifteen, I decided it was time to get a job because my parents did not have a lot of money, and I wanted to buy things for myself. It was at this time that my parents notified me that I could not get a job

because I had not been born in this country. From that point on, my view of what my life would be like completely changed. . . . My work experiences have varied, but most have been “under the table.” . . . I had to wake up every morning before sunrise to work, and then I attended class late at night, only to come home to do class assignments. I worked very hard in school, and earned good grades, but I felt humiliated. . . . Even though I felt like a young American and had been educated entirely in this nation, my immigration status limited my options and ultimately how I could live my life.

The stories the Dreamers told at this stage, as Nicholls (2013:50–53) notes, embraced American national symbols: the flag, the Statue of Liberty, and values like “hard work” and “fairness.” Moreover, the chosen story-tellers were the “best and the brightest”—valedictorians, straight-A students, and other youth who were well poised for upward mobility if only they could win legal status. Their narrative proved highly effective in winning attention from both ethnic and mainstream English-language media. Nevertheless, a series of attempts to pass the DREAM Act (often as part of broader immigration reform campaigns) repeatedly failed in Congress. And notwithstanding massive grassroots mobilizations like the marches for immigrant rights that exploded across the nation in the spring of 2006, in which vast numbers of undocumented youth participated, immigration reform remained elusive.

Although initially they accepted the mentorship of older immigrant rights activists, over time the Dreamers grew impatient with the seemingly interminable struggle for comprehensive immigration reform. As they grew older and graduated from college, their frustration grew, and they began to break away from the mainstream immigrant rights movement that had mentored them for nearly a decade. At this stage, some also rejected “the passivity of the nonprofit industrial complex” and turned to more militant tactics.

The Dreamers did not abandon story-telling in this phase of their movement’s

development, but their narrative became less instrumental and more complex. One theme was captured in the slogan, “Undocumented, Queer and Unafraid”—adopting the language of the LGBTQ movement. Now the Dreamers also acknowledged explicitly that not all undocumented youth were valedictorians and that some in fact had criminal records; they insisted that all were deserving of legal status nevertheless. At this stage, the movement also rejected any suggestion that they should apologize for their parents having crossed the border without authorization, as the earlier narrative had implied, pointing out that the goal had simply been a better life for their families. Many Dreamers identified as LGBTQ, and the movement now deliberately adopted the language of “coming out,” in what Terriquez (2015) calls a “boomerang effect” and an aspect of the “intersectional mobilization of undocuqueers” (see also Chávez 2013).

The Dreamers are an early example of a Millennial movement that explicitly embraced the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality—a phenomenon that many leaders personified. Quintessential social outsiders, in addition to being undocumented, the leaders were almost entirely Latino/a, Black, and/or Asian, more often female than male, and disproportionately LGBTQ-identified (Terriquez 2015).

As they became increasingly independent of the mainstream immigrant rights movement, the Dreamers’ rhetoric became more radical. A 2010 DREAM activists’ manifesto (Zamorano et al. 2010), which begins with a quote from Martin Luther King’s 1963 “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” explained:

Many of us have been organizing in other movements such as the anti-war, LGBTQ and labor movements. We have also studied and learned through experience and academics from past freedom movements. . . . We understand that we are working within an imperialist nation. There is a long history of Nativism in the United States and it continues to manifest itself with laws that

criminalize immigrant communities and communities of color. We learned to see our struggle in a global perspective and historical context. . . . We face racist, sexist, homophobic attacks from the right.

Although many participants shared this left-wing worldview, Dreamers' organizations remained conventional in structure, using traditional forms of decision-making, and their political focus was on specific legislative goals. Their primary aim was winning federal immigration legislation to create a path to legal status for undocumented youth, and ultimately for their parents and the larger population of undocumented immigrants. In the meantime, the Dreamers campaigned—with considerable success—for in-state tuition and access to financial aid for undocumented college students, for access to drivers' licenses, and against deportations. These efforts relied on lobbying and pressuring elected officials, although after 2010 such traditional tactics often were supplemented by direct action and political disruption (Preston 2014).

A key turning point came halfway through the first term of the Obama administration, as it became apparent that no immigration legislation was going to pass in the U.S. Congress. Several Dreamer groups turned to direct action starting in 2010, occupying the Arizona office of Senator John McCain and launching a hunger strike in front of California Senator Diane Feinstein's office (Zamorano et al. 2010). They also engaged in civil disobedience, deliberately courting arrest and deportation at immigrant detention centers along the border. In 2012, a group of Dreamers staged a sit-in at Obama's campaign headquarters, urging him to use his executive power on their behalf. Other Dreamers' organizations continued to engage in lobbying and traditional political tactics, however, turning their energies to state-level legislation in the face of continuing congressional gridlock blocking progress at the federal level.

The Dreamers have won significant political concessions—most importantly the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, created by an Executive

Order issued by then-President Obama. DACA allows young undocumented immigrants to obtain work permits and temporarily protects them against deportation (although it does not provide a path to legal status or citizenship). By mid-2015, the Dreamers had also won in-state tuition laws in 20 states, as well as access to financial aid for undocumented students in five states (National Conference of State Legislators 2015).

After winning temporary legal status through DACA, some Dreamers retreated from political activism, in part because they were able to work legally for the first time (and thus were less biographically available). But many others remained engaged in the movement, now increasingly divided between those who continue to work “inside the system” and those who believe more militant and disruptive tactics are essential. Given the continuing congressional deadlock over comprehensive immigration reform, both factions have refocused their efforts on campaigns against immigrant detention and deportation (Hing 2016). In addition, as they witnessed the police violence and racism that galvanized BLM, some Dreamer groups have begun to build alliances with that movement. Just as they had recognized earlier that, as immigrants and LGBTQ people alike, they were outsiders with a shared experience of stigma and exclusion from full membership in U.S. society, the BLM movement now highlighted the reality that even if all undocumented immigrants could gain citizenship rights, as people of color most would still face racial oppression and exclusion (Schwartz 2016).

### *Occupy Wall Street*

Not long after the Dreamers began to establish greater autonomy from the larger immigrant rights movement, OWS exploded onto the world stage. To many outside observers, the gathering of 2,000 protesters in downtown Manhattan on September 17, 2011 appeared spontaneous, but in fact it was carefully planned. OWS was inspired by a series of events around the globe earlier the same year,

from the Arab Spring to the protests of the *indignados* in Southern Europe, to the occupation of the capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. In July 2011, *Adbusters* issued an online call for a “Tahrir moment” of direct action on Wall Street on September 17, the anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution. That call resonated for a variety of progressive activists, who spent the rest of the summer planning the launch of what would become OWS.

Soon after it surfaced, Occupy captured the imagination of the public in the United States and worldwide, especially for the two months when protesters remained in Zuccotti Park, the previously obscure space near Wall Street that was the site of the initial occupation. Yet their success came as a surprise to many of the Occupiers themselves, who had expected to be evicted by the New York Police Department after a night or two. None of them imagined that the uprising they had launched would win such broad support, or that it would spread to hundreds of other cities in the United States and around the world.

Like the Dreamers, the Occupiers (especially at first) were mostly young people but had older mentors: veterans of the anti-globalization protests a decade earlier and other seasoned activists, including some influenced by anarchism and autonomism. This was a less formal mentorship than the one that had incubated the Dreamers’ movement, but its impact was considerable. Older activists conducted trainings in direct action tactics and nonviolent civil disobedience during the summer of 2011, when the occupation was being planned. At that stage, as one of the OWS activists my colleagues and I interviewed recalled, “there were a few older people, and though there weren’t very many of them, they were listened to, welcomed and respected” (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013).<sup>17</sup>

Like the Dreamers, most Occupiers were college-educated Millennials. Our survey of New York City OWS found a sharp age gradient, with those under age 30 overrepresented (relative to the city’s population), especially among the most active movement

participants. Millennials were more likely than older respondents to have lived in an Occupy encampment, to have posted about Occupy on social media, and to have been arrested for Occupy-related activities.<sup>18</sup> Respondents of all ages were highly educated: 76 percent, and 80 percent of those most actively involved, had at least four years of postsecondary education, more than double the rate (34 percent) among New York City residents.

Occupiers were biographically available for a variety of reasons. About 10 percent of our respondents were unemployed, a rate comparable to that for New York City residents at the time. Another 6 percent were retired, and 4 percent were full-time students. The other 80 percent were employed, and within this group three-fourths worked in professional or managerial occupations. But nearly a quarter (24 percent) of employed respondents, and 33 percent of those most active in OWS, were working less than 35 hours a week. Like the Dreamers, OWS activists faced the predicament of the highly educated “graduate with no future.” As one interviewee explained, “It was the 26 to 29 or 30 crowd that was the strongest in terms of presence—people my age, who maybe had grad school or weren’t finding jobs, and had just blazed through college and a Master’s program, and then were, like, ‘What the hell is this?’”

Unlike the Dreamers, OWS famously embraced “horizontalism” and direct action from the outset. Rejecting the vertical structures of mainstream political parties and traditional left-wing organizations, OWS adopted a decision-making process based on consensus and participatory democracy. This was central to the movement’s organizational structure.

Whereas story-telling was a prominent expression of the Dreamers’ movement, OWS activists made far more limited use of this tactic. Some did produce social media posts sharing their personal experiences of economic distress, which helped foster both individual commitment to the movement and a

sense of identity and solidarity (see Gould-Wartofsky 2015).<sup>19</sup> However, those stories attracted limited attention from the media or the public. The Occupy narrative that gained traction was the slogan, “We are the 99 percent!” Along with the focus on the power and privilege of the “one percent,” this slogan thrust the issue of inequality into the center of the nation’s political conversation, where it has remained ever since (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2014).

In contrast to the Dreamers, OWS famously refused to define its “demands,” a stance for which it was often criticized but that participants defended as a key ingredient in the movement’s appeal. As one interviewee suggested (alluding to Laclau and Mouffe 2001): “The chains of equivalence: Anyone could come into the movement and see their grievances as equivalent to everyone else’s. If it’s like, I don’t have a job, I have student debt, I have huge medical bills, I’m thrown out of my house, the hydrofracking that’s going on, the BP oil spill, it doesn’t matter. Everyone felt, ‘It’s Wall Street, it’s the one percent that’s to blame. Because they have all the economic power, they have all the political power.’” Another interviewee agreed: “There were very smart, strategic reasons why there were no ‘asks.’ . . . It allowed there not to be one issue. As soon as there’s one issue, then I alienate the two of you who don’t have my issue. But with this hashtag, T-shirt, icon style of organizing, everyone showed up. And we could project onto Occupy whatever our issues were.” OWS, then, had an anti-systemic politics, not a reform agenda.

It also had a strong commitment to prefigurative politics, which directly shaped the organization of the physical space of Zuccotti Park (and occupied spaces elsewhere). The central principle was mutual aid: all participants were expected to support the daily life of the community. Basic needs like food, shelter, medical care, sanitation, and security were addressed, along with education and culture. Occupy had working groups to manage all these activities, emulating the Tahrir Square and *indignados* occupations.

For many OWS participants, prefigurative politics was both new and inspiring. As one recalled in an interview, “In the other organizing I had done, I hadn’t seen people coming together to create some sort of mini-society that really reflected our values, rather than just showing up to the meeting or the demo and then going back home. That’s what made me really excited.” Another agreed: “Going to the park and seeing people who don’t know each other sit next to each other, eat food together, free, get medical attention together, free, sleep next to each other. . . . A community was created, and it was just completely open.”

In contrast to the Dreamers’ explicitly intersectional perspective, within OWS issues of gender, race, and sexuality often were subordinated to class inequality. The original draft of the “Declaration of Principles of Occupy Wall Street,” produced early in the Zuccotti Park occupation, included the line, “As one people, formerly divided by the color of our skin, gender, sexual orientation, religion.” But this formulation was (successfully) challenged by a group that became the “People of Color Caucus.” As a caucus founder recalled, “We offered a crash course on white privilege, structural racism, and oppression . . . talking with twenty people, mostly white men” (Maharawal 2012:175). Yet even after they managed to modify the Declaration, internal tensions over race continued. “Throughout the occupation,” Gould-Wartofsky (2015:99) reports, “I often witnessed white speakers seize the People’s Mic from people of color.” Meanwhile in Los Angeles, Dreamers and other immigrant rights activists rejected the contention of local OWS activists that the police were part of “the 99 percent.” For them, this exposed the gulf between the affluent white activists who dominated OWS and the realities that immigrants faced (Uitermark and Nicholls 2012).

OWS also faced internal dissent on issues of gender and sexuality. Some feminist Occupiers complained about the behavior of “Manarchists”; many felt marginalized by newly radicalized white men who assumed

disproportionate visibility and power in the movement. Sexual harassment and assault also became issues in the camps (Smaligo 2014). As one interviewee recalled, “There were a lot of racist things happening, classist things and sexist things happening, homophobic things, transphobic things.” She and other participants believed the horizontalism that was an OWS hallmark actively contributed to the marginalization of people of color, women, and sexual minorities: “You still had leaders, and it was the same people who end up rising in the systems that we’re trying to address. We ended up recreating a lot of racist, sexist, classist structures. The people who you would see on TV or as the quote-unquote leaders [of Occupy Wall Street] . . . were often white, male and highly educated.” Freeman’s (1972) classic essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” was popular among participants concerned with these matters.

Indeed, the composition of OWS did not reflect its nominally inclusive politics. As our survey found, and as other commentators have noted, most Occupiers were white and affluent, with somewhat greater numbers of men than women. Non-Hispanic whites made up 62 percent of our respondents, and 67 percent of those who were actively involved (compared to only 33 percent of city residents). “Whole swaths of Americans . . . were largely missing,” Schneider (2013:38) notes, adding that the “overeducated young radical set was dominant.”

Although most respondents were from affluent households, many did have substantial debt, had experienced job loss, or both. Among those under age 30, over half (54 percent) were carrying student loans of at least \$1,000, and 37 percent had been laid off or lost a job in the previous five years. Those experiences gave them a personal connection to the economic issues that OWS targeted, despite their privileged family backgrounds.

Yet the most prominent participants in OWS—which eschewed formal leadership roles but nonetheless by all accounts had *de facto* leaders—were white, heterosexual

males from affluent families.<sup>20</sup> The core organizers, as one interviewee explained, were “more privileged and more college-educated, and sometimes beyond college educated.” They were social insiders—in sharp contrast to the Dreamers, whose ethnicity, undocumented status, modest family backgrounds, and for many, queer identities unmistakably marked them as outsiders.

Their contrasting positions as social outsiders and insiders were reflected in the two movements’ political agendas. The Dreamers were demanding access to the economic and social status that college-educated Americans were supposed to enjoy, but from which they were barred due to their undocumented status. As noted earlier, they relied primarily on conventional political tactics to advance their campaigns. By contrast, the social insiders who were predominant among OWS activists expressed disdain for the traditional political channels to which they had relatively easy access as affluent, largely white, educated citizens. They rejected mainstream politics as hopelessly corrupted by the influence of the “one percent” in favor of direct action and civil disobedience. Facing diminished economic prospects in the wake of the Great Recession, the Occupiers turned inward: their prefigurative politics sought to create an alternative social world in the occupied spaces—one they could directly control.

The Dreamers’ outsider status may appear to explain their conventional political strategies and organizational forms, whereas these tactics may have been anathema for OWS activists precisely because of their privilege as social insiders. However, there are at least two reasons to reject that hypothesis. First, just as some Dreamers eventually turned to direct action and other disruptive tactics, so too many Occupiers became actively engaged in conventional politics after the uprising dispersed. About 27 percent of the OWS participants we surveyed in the spring of 2012 indicated that they planned to actively participate in electoral politics that year. And four years later, when Bernie Sanders launched his campaign for the Democratic nomination, an

“Occupiers for Bernie” group took shape.<sup>21</sup> Other former OWS activists have entered the labor movement and other mainstream political arenas as well (Hing 2016).

Second, the cases of the movement against sexual assault and BLM directly contradict any hypothesized relationship of insider/outsider status to strategic repertoires and organizational forms. The anti-sexual assault movement, like OWS, is made up largely of educated, white, affluent social insiders (although unlike the Occupiers they are overwhelmingly female and often LGBTQ-identified), yet it relies on mainstream political tactics. On the other hand, BLM activists and leaders, almost all of whom are people of color, and many of whom are LGBTQ women, are outsiders to nearly the same extent as the Dreamers. Yet like OWS, BLM relies on direct action and eschews traditional organizational forms. It is not the social characteristics of their activist cadre, but rather the anti-systemic politics of BLM and OWS—challenging the policing infrastructure and class inequality, respectively—that limit their ability to work “within the system.” In contrast, the movement against sexual assault, like the Dreamers, focuses on concrete reforms.

### *The Movement against Campus Sexual Assault*

Sexual violence has long been a contentious subject in the United States. By the 1990s, after decades of work, second-wave feminists<sup>22</sup> had won a series of reforms reshaping the legal definition of rape and treatment of victims, and they had made progress in regard to other forms of sexual violence and harassment (Freedman 2013; Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015). After a period of declining visibility in the early twenty-first century, these issues won renewed attention starting in 2009. That year, a large cluster of sexual assault complaints were filed under Title IX of the Equal Education Act, the federal law that bans sex discrimination in education, sparking an upsurge of campus activism protesting “rape culture” and spotlighting the

inadequacy of college and university procedures for handling sexual assault complaints (Reynolds 2016).

Highly educated Millennial-generation college students and recent graduates, virtually all of them female, and most of them at elite colleges and universities, were in the forefront of this new movement. Many were survivors of sexual assault themselves. Some had been politicized previously around other, unrelated issues, but almost none had any previous engagement with feminism, and many were skeptical about it at the outset. As one activist recalled, “My freshman year, there was an activities fair with a table for campus feminists, and I picked up their information just so that I could make fun of it. . . . I thought it was so stupid, because obviously women have equal rights.” Another stated that she had considered feminism “antiquated” before she became involved in the movement against sexual assault.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, however, these young women did adopt feminist political identities.

Unlike the Dreamers and OWS, this movement was not mentored directly by older activists. It did attract support from some veteran feminists (including many of the lawyers who represented complainants) although others were explicitly critical (e.g., Kipnis 2015)—reflecting the long history of internal division among feminists over issues of sexuality. Some older feminists considered the young anti-sexual assault activists overly prudish; others were concerned about due process for those accused of sexual violence; still others questioned the movement’s focus on campus administrative remedies and their relative neglect of the criminal justice system. But second-wave feminists ultimately had little influence on this new movement, which was led by Millennial women from the start.

Just as the “waves of protest” literature suggests, the anti-sexual assault movement both benefitted from and helped fuel other Millennial movements that emerged around the same time, especially among students. “There was an explosion on campuses in general,” one activist recalled. “Right at the time

when we filed our sexual assault complaint, lots of other activists started coming forward about other things.” Some of the women who emerged as leaders of the fledgling anti-sexual assault movement had studied the history of previous social movements as part of an effort to develop effective framing strategies. They wanted to ensure that individual cases of campus rape would be seen not as examples of individual pathology, but as part of a larger, systemic phenomenon. As one activist put it, the challenge was, “How do we flip that frame to say, what happened at [campus X] is not the problem, it is a microcosm of the problem?” They reached out to activists in other movements for ideas. “We talked to a bunch of people in Occupy,” one leader recalled. “What worked with Occupy that also worked here was social media, being able to connect to people that you never would have been able to connect to fifteen years ago. Talking on Facebook, talking on Twitter. That was part of the Occupy movement and our movement as well.”

As individual sexual assault cases sprang up on various campuses, activists around the country interacted on social media, forming vibrant networks that soon coalesced into a national movement. They established a by-invitation-only Facebook forum for survivor-activists to share their experiences and offer mutual support, which attracted some 800 participants. But social media also had a downside: “I used social media a lot,” one activist recalled. “That was positive in that a lot of people were seeing what I had to say. But it was also negative in that it definitely made me a target of a lot of harassment.”

Like the Dreamers, the anti-sexual assault movement made extensive use of story-telling, but they simultaneously sought to link individual cases to a critique of the misogynist, pornography-saturated culture (see Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Krakauer 2015). “We live in a rape culture where sexual assault and intimate partner violence is normalized through the jokes we make and the media that we consume,” one activist explained. “Sexual assault

is not something that has to happen, it’s not something that is inherent to the human condition or even American society. If we have a deep commitment, we can seriously reduce the likelihood of it happening.”

The movement devoted a great deal of energy to educating survivors about their legal rights under Title IX and other legislation, and on improving the available remedies for sexual assault victims. Activists lambasted the police and the criminal justice system, which often failed to prosecute sexual assault cases, especially if the victims were intoxicated (Krakauer 2015). Although the required standard of proof is less rigorous in campus disciplinary procedures than in criminal courts—one reason many students choose to pursue their sexual assault cases through the former route—many complainants were frustrated by systematic foot-dragging on the part of college administrators, who often seemed more concerned with protecting the public image of their institutions than with protecting students from sexual violence.

Administrators are often particularly reluctant to pursue sexual assault cases that take place off campus, especially at fraternity houses, where rapes and other assaults occur with predictable regularity. This not only reflects the “rape culture” that dissuades many students from reporting such incidents to authorities in the first place, or from corroborating accounts of those who do. In addition, colleges and universities are wary of jeopardizing the financial support they receive from fraternities, ranging from savings on student housing costs to alumni donations. Administrators also value the role fraternities play in attracting future students to their campuses (Flanagan 2014), and are reluctant to pursue sexual assault cases involving student athletes for fear of alienating alumni and other donors (Dick and Ziering 2016). Activists found that administrators tended to go into “damage control” mode when faced with complaints. And when students did succeed in pursuing sexual assault cases in campus disciplinary proceedings, the resulting penalties were often minimal.

Many of the young women who emerged as leaders of this movement were galvanized into activism by outrage about the inadequacy of existing remedies for sexual assault at colleges and universities, a problem they experienced firsthand in pursuing their own cases. For example, during her first year as an undergraduate at UC Berkeley in 2012, Sofie Karasek brought forward a complaint alleging that she had been sexually assaulted by another student. Faced with seemingly interminable delays and what she calls “deliberate indifference” from university administrators and government agencies alike, she began organizing other students and soon became a movement leader. After graduating she joined the staff of End Rape on Campus (EROC), an advocacy group led by other former campus activists (Karasek 2016).

Karasek and her sister activists came to understand that the underlying reason for administrators’ poor responsiveness to complaints was the vulnerability of colleges and universities to negative publicity. But that very vulnerability afforded activists the opportunity to actively and strategically seek media coverage for their cases. It was obvious to all concerned that sexual assault incidents would readily attract extensive attention from print and broadcast media, especially at selective colleges and universities. Starting in 2012, sexual assault complaints at elite liberal arts colleges like Amherst and Swarthmore; Ivy League institutions like Yale, Columbia, and Harvard; and flagship public universities like the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of California at Berkeley became front-page news (Perez-Pena 2012, 2013; Perez-Pena and Taylor 2014).

One case that attracted extensive media attention involved the “mattress girl,” Columbia University undergraduate Emma Sulkowicz, who protested the way the university handled her sexual assault case by dragging a mattress behind her all over the campus (Grigoriadis 2014). The 2015 release of a documentary film, *The Hunting Ground*, brought further visibility to the movement. In 2016, Lady Gaga, who herself had been raped as a

young woman, invited 50 survivor-activists to join her on the stage at the Oscars ceremony as she sang her hit song, “Til It Happens to You.”

Media publicity, in turn, propelled campus activists into highly visible roles as spokespeople for the larger movement. Many were students at elite institutions of higher education and had affluent family backgrounds; indeed, the class profile of the movement’s leadership resembled that of OWS, although almost all of the anti-sexual assault activists were women. Like the Occupiers, however, they were quintessential social insiders. On the other hand, many anti-sexual assault activists, by some accounts a majority of them, were LGBTQ-identified, although this aspect of the movement remained largely invisible. Even when its spokespeople mentioned their LGBTQ identities to journalists, that information typically went unreported. News stories preferred to focus on the “perfect victims”—affluent female students, typically white, conventionally attractive, and heterosexual—despite the fact that victim surveys and other evidence suggest that less affluent women, bisexuals, and other sexual minorities are more likely to be targets of sexual assault (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Cantor et al. 2015; Rennison 2014).<sup>24</sup>

In addition to pursuing social media and “old media” strategies, this movement’s energies focused on providing legal advice and moral support to assault survivors, as well as on legislative campaigns and related efforts to improve the way complaints are handled in campus procedures, in Title IX proceedings, and in the courts. EROC assisted more than 700 survivors from April 2015 to April 2016 alone, and it helped craft proposed sexual assault laws in four states and at the federal level in that period. The movement has won significant legislative victories, most notably “affirmative consent” statutes: California’s 2014 “Yes Means Yes” law and New York state’s 2015 “Enough is Enough” law. They also focused on educating younger students about sexual consent at the high school level and even earlier (EROC 2016).

The movement has won support from high-profile elected officials, including

**Table 2.** Selected Demographic Characteristics of High-Profile BLM Activists

|                  |  | N   |
|------------------|--|-----|
| Age in 2016      | 85% 35 years old or younger; average (mean) age 29       | 210 |
| Education        | 95% attended college or have college degrees (or beyond) | 217 |
| Gender           | 64% women, 32% men, 4% trans/gender non-conforming       | 278 |
| Sexuality        | 57% LGBTQ; 43% heterosexual                              | 150 |
| Sexuality: Women | 64% LGBTQ; 36% heterosexual                              | 89  |
| Race             | 94% black (including African, Caribbean, and biracial)   | 278 |

Source: Database compiled for the author by Amelia Fortunato (see note 25).

President Obama, whose administration strengthened the remedies available under Title IX through the “Dear Colleague” letter that the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights sent to all colleges and universities receiving federal funds in April 2011. That document provided detailed guidance on how to handle sexual assault complaints, and it mandated that campuses use the “preponderance of the evidence” standard of proof in disciplinary procedures (in contrast to the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard used in criminal court). Subsequently, the Obama administration launched formal investigations of over 200 colleges’ and universities’ procedures for handling sexual assault cases (Steinhauer and Joachim 2014).

In its organizational forms and strategies, the anti-sexual assault movement resembles the Dreamers. Both movements make extensive use of story-telling, both lobby elected officials and deploy other traditional political tactics in campaigning for legislation, and both rely on conventional organizational forms and decision-making modes—in contrast to the “horizontalism” to which OWS was devoted. “We did not have any particular decision-making process,” one anti-sexual assault activist recalled. “I and one other student were in charge, and people who wanted to participate could choose to participate, but it was basically us two running the show.” This was typical of the movement as a whole. After they graduated, campus activists in the movement went on to establish formal non-profit lobbying and advocacy groups like EROC and “Know Your IX,” which were also conventional in structure.

Over time, anti-sexual assault activists—who, like other Millennial social movement

activists, use the discourse of intersectionality—sought to lift up the stories of women of color, men, and LGBTQ survivors (Clark and Pino 2016). They also began to actively support and ally themselves with other Millennial movements like BLM. But the focus of this movement continues to be winning reforms like affirmative consent legislation, supporting individual victims of sexual assault with legal advice, and launching educational efforts to challenge dominant cultural norms surrounding sexuality.

### *Black Lives Matter*

BLM was the last of the four movements to emerge. Like the other three, all of which influenced some BLM activists, it used social media extensively from the outset. BLM also resembles the other three movements in the commitment of its leaders and activists to the politics of intersectionality. As Table 2 shows, once again Millennials were the dominant group: among high-profile BLM activists and leaders for whom age data are available, 85 percent were 35 years old or younger in 2016, and the average age was 29.<sup>25</sup>

Like the anti-sexual assault movement, but unlike the Dreamers and OWS, BLM was not incubated or mentored by older activists. Although veteran civil rights leaders did participate in protests BLM initiated, the younger activists explicitly rejected their elders’ mentorship on numerous occasions; some asserted that BLM was “not your grandfather’s civil rights movement” (Cobb 2016). As one commentator observed, BLM exposes “a serious generational rift. It is largely a bottom-up movement being led by young unknowns who have rejected, in some cases angrily, the

presumption of leadership thrust on them by veteran celebrities” (Demby 2014). Indeed, as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016:161) has pointed out, “the division between the ‘old guard’ and the ‘new generation’ grew deeper” as the movement continued to develop.

As Table 2 shows, nearly all (95 percent) high-profile BLM activists are college-educated; in that respect they are direct beneficiaries of the civil rights movement. Yet after the 2008 financial crisis, black college graduates were about twice as likely as their white counterparts to be unemployed (Taylor 2016:28), and many more were underemployed. Not only did this render them biographically available, but the contradiction between the proclamations of a “post-racial” society and the reality of ongoing racism rankled especially deeply for those who experienced the privileges associated with postsecondary education, with its promise of economic security and middle-class status. Rightly or wrongly, some blamed their elders for this situation. “I feel in my heart that they failed us,” Dontey Carter, age 23, a BLM activist in Ferguson, Missouri, declared. “They’re the reason things are like this now. That’s why we’re here for a new movement” (Anderson 2014).

BLM activists were also critical of the civil rights movement’s reliance on hierarchical organizational forms and its centralized leadership. Like OWS, BLM instead strives for “leaderful,” horizontal organizational structures (Cobb 2016; Taylor 2016), and it rejects outright the civil rights movement’s historic reliance on charismatic leaders, the vast majority of whom were male (Smith 2014). Again like OWS, BLM relies primarily on direct action and disruptive tactics, and most of its activists disdain mainstream politics. Storytelling is not a significant part of the movement’s strategic repertoire, another similarity to OWS—although arguably BLM has benefited from media renderings of stories about African American victims of police violence.

Unlike OWS, however, BLM is made up almost entirely of social outsiders. Not only are the vast majority (94 percent) of BLM activists black or biracial, but less predictably,

the majority of its most visible activists and leaders are women (see Table 2). As Kendra Pierre-Louis (2015) notes, “a movement often described as ‘leaderless,’ and largely framed by the bodies of slain black men and boys, is being propelled by the efforts of women of color.” Moreover, a majority of high-profile BLM activists for whom information is available (64 percent of women and 57 percent of all genders combined) identify as LGBTQ. Here BLM resembles the Dreamers.

Given the demographic makeup of its activist cadre, it is not surprising that BLM’s rhetoric—again like that of the Dreamers—is permeated with the language of intersectionality, as exemplified by this excerpt from a 2014 statement by the umbrella group “Ferguson Action”:

This is a movement of and for ALL Black lives—women, men, transgender and queer. We are made up of both youth AND elders aligned through the possibilities that new tactics and fresh strategies offer our movement. Some of us are new to this work, but many have been organizing for years. . . . We are connected online and in the streets. We are decentralized, but coordinated. Most importantly, we are organized. Yet we are likely not respectable negroes. We do not cast any one of ours to the side in order to gain proximity to perceived power. Because this is the only way we will win. (quoted in Taylor 2016:172–73)

BLM is best known for organizing protests of fatal police shootings of unarmed young African American men. The original spark that ignited the movement, however, was not a police shooting, but rather civilian George Zimmerman’s murder of a 17-year-old African American, Trayvon Martin, in Sanford, Florida, on February 26, 2012. The local police initially chose not to arrest Zimmerman, on the basis that the shooting was legal under Florida’s “stand your ground” law, which allows use of deadly force in self-defense under some circumstances. The failure to arrest Zimmerman provoked a series of street protests by local high school and

college students; as a result of those protests and the publicity they generated, Zimmerman was finally arrested 45 days after the shooting and later put on trial. However, on July 1, 2013, a jury found him “not guilty.” Outraged local activists immediately organized further protests, and then formed a new organization, the Dream Defenders, which launched a month-long occupation of the Florida statehouse seeking to change the “stand your ground” law and to win other reforms (McClain 2016).

The Trayvon Martin case attracted attention not only in Florida but across the country. By coincidence, the same weekend the jury’s verdict was announced, African American activists were meeting in Chicago under the auspices of the decade-old Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100). This group, which was already exploring building an African American youth movement, was galvanized into action by the Zimmerman verdict. BYP100 members immediately organized a rally in Chicago protesting the acquittal, and they released a statement on the case as an online video (Smith 2014).

Another influential response to Zimmerman’s acquittal came from Alicia Garza, an experienced organizer in Oakland, California, who posted a “love letter to black people” on Facebook the day the jury’s verdict was announced. Her post included the phrase “Black lives matter,” and shortly afterward her colleague Patrisse Cullors (also located in Oakland) created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which soon went viral on Twitter and other social media (Cobb 2016). Garza, Cullors, and Brooklyn-based Opal Tometi then developed plans for “moving the hashtag from social media to the streets,” as Garza (2014) later recounted.

The protests against Zimmerman’s acquittal attracted broad public attention, building on earlier efforts, like Michelle Alexander’s 2010 book *The New Jim Crow*, to spotlight the racial bias embedded in the criminal justice system. But BLM did not crystallize into a large-scale national movement until the following year, after two other African

American men died at the hands of police in quick succession. On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner, age 43, was choked to death by a New York City police officer, an event that was video-recorded on a cellphone. A few weeks later, on August 9, a Ferguson, Missouri, police officer shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown, sparking massive street protests that were met with a widely criticized military-like police response. By that point, the combined impact of social media outreach and extensive coverage by traditional media had catapulted BLM to the center of the national political conversation, where it has remained ever since.

When grand juries failed to indict the police officers involved in the Garner and Brown deaths, a new wave of protests erupted across the nation. Twitter users active in BLM sent 2.4 million tweets the day it was announced that Brown’s killer would not be indicted; weeks later, when a similar announcement was issued about Garner’s killer, 4.4 million tweets were sent over a seven-day period (McClain 2016). Adding further fuel to the protests, on November 22, 2014, two days before the Ferguson non-indictment announcement, police in Cleveland, Ohio, shot and killed Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old African American boy who was holding a toy gun. The following months brought more such incidents, notably Freddie Gray’s death in police custody in Baltimore on April 12, 2015, and Sandra Bland’s death in a Texas jail cell on July 13, 2015, after her arrest during a traffic stop.

Police brutality toward African Americans is hardly new; it has long been a focus of anti-racist protests. But in the twenty-first century, the ability to document and disseminate information about incidents of police violence has increased exponentially, thanks to the ubiquity of cellphones and other digital technologies. The persistence of these incidents, along with the militarization of police forces around the country, in what is regularly proclaimed to be a post-racial society, has proven newly explosive.

BLM’s main thrust is to expose and challenge the legitimacy of racialized police

violence and mass incarceration. Like OWS, it has an anti-systemic character and agenda. Both movements' main success has been to transform the national conversation. Income and wealth inequality have continued to grow since 2011, when OWS appeared, but media attention to and public awareness of inequality have risen dramatically, and its legitimacy is regularly questioned. Similarly, police shootings have continued since the emergence of BLM, and almost none of those responsible have been punished, yet public awareness of the racial dynamics of policing, and racial injustice more broadly, has expanded enormously. A 2016 Pew survey found that the vast majority of blacks, as well as 40 percent of white adults, support BLM (28 percent of whites oppose it; the rest have no opinion); among white adults under age 30, 60 percent support the movement (Horowitz and Livingston 2016).

BLM already has endured for a much longer period than the short-lived Occupy movement, although not without setbacks. In the summer of 2016, two separate incidents of individuals shooting white police officers, although roundly denounced by BLM activists, tarnished the movement's legitimacy in the public eye. Meanwhile, as shootings by police continue unabated, some of the groups within BLM's decentralized network have begun to explore reform-oriented efforts and even to enter the arena of electoral politics. One prominent BLM activist, DeRay McKesson, ran (unsuccessfully) for mayor of Baltimore in the spring of 2016 (Eligon 2016). BYP100 released an "Agenda to Build Black Futures" in early 2016 laying out concrete reform proposals (Smith 2016). Later that year, a group of 50 BLM organizations issued a statement titled "A Vision for Black Lives," rearticulating the movement's anti-systemic (and intersectional) critique but also including concrete demands for "policies that address the immediate suffering of Black people," like jobs programs, demilitarized policing, and voting rights (Movement for Black Lives 2016). The movement's vision, however, continues to center on major, systemic change.

## CONCLUSION

These four movements embody the aspirations of a new political generation of college-educated Millennials. That generation has been profoundly shaped by the fact that its members are "digital natives," with unprecedented ability to deploy social media, by a labor market in which precarity is increasing, and by the prolongation of the transition to adulthood. Although these trends have affected the larger society, their influence has been particularly consequential for young people, whose worldviews were still in the process of formation as these transformations unfolded. As Mannheim argued nearly a century ago, this dynamic has led Millennials to develop a generationally specific worldview that is far more left-leaning than that of their Boomer parents today, and in many respects to the left of the views Boomers held during their own youth.

This Millennial worldview synthesizes the identity politics associated with the New Left of the 1960s and the traditional critiques of class inequality and capitalism associated with the Old Left of the 1930s. Millennials by the thousands have become politically engaged, participating in social movements like the four sketched here, especially since the 2008 financial crisis.

These movements are far from homogeneous, however. Some are led by privileged, young social insiders; others by quintessential social outsiders. Some focus on legislation and other short-term reforms; others reject conventional politics entirely and seek more radical, systemic change. Yet these variations—which I have argued are independent of one another—should not obscure the shared features of Millennial social movements: a highly educated, biographically available cadre of young leaders and activists, many of them LGBTQ-identified; heavy reliance on social media for organizing and outreach; and a politics that highlights the intersectionality of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, the strategic repertoires of these movements have begun to converge,

and some activists have been active in more than one of them.

Taken together, these post-2008 social movements suggest the spectre of a new wave of left-wing protest. They already have had an impact on U.S. political culture, and their further growth could contribute to a more enduring social transformation. To be sure, these movements have emerged in a highly polarized political context, and their counterpoint is a variety of right-wing populist movements supported by discontented older whites. The outcome of the contest between these two sharply opposed alternatives is far from certain, but time may be on the side of the younger generation.

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### Notes

1. Although some commentators use slightly different definitions, I have adopted that of the Pew Research Center, which has done extensive polling among Millennials and defines them as persons born “after 1980” in most of its publications (e.g., Pew Research Center 2010; Taylor et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2012). I use the term “college-educated” to include individuals who have attended (but not completed) college as well as college graduates.
2. Also led by Millennials are smaller efforts like the movement against student debt, Students for Justice in Palestine, and the associated Boycott, Divest, Sanction movement.
3. Here I am indebted to Beinart (2013), who uses the term “political generation” in the context of a similar argument regarding Millennials, and who also invokes Mannheim.
4. Social movement actors themselves often confess to an inability to predict when their efforts will gain traction. For example, the OWS activists my collaborators and I interviewed were uniformly surprised when the police failed to evict them from New

York City’s Zuccotti Park just after they occupied it in September 2011, and virtually none of them expected their efforts to spark a worldwide wave of protest (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013).

5. Mannheim borrowed the term “entelechy” from art historian Wilhelm Pinder, for whom “the entelechy of a generation is the expression of the unity of its ‘inner aim’—of its inborn way of experiencing life and the world,” but he criticized Pinder for ignoring the social and historical factors shaping entelechies (see Mannheim 1927:283–86).
6. Unlike Mannheim, Feuer (1969:32) argues that a central element of youthful activism is a conscious or unconscious rebellion against earlier generations, so that movements become “the means by which the young discredit the old.” Henry’s (2004) account of “third-wave feminism” echoes this claim. See also Eisenstadt (2003), whose structural-functional theory of generations parallels Feuer’s more empirical study in many respects.
7. The claim that highly educated middle-class youth were key to the movements that emerged in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis is contested by Sukarieh and Tannock (2015), who note that these movements had a more diverse age composition than Mason acknowledges. That is an important empirical point, but it obscures the impact of Millennials’ specific experiences on the agendas of these movements. Sukarieh and Tannock (2015:119) themselves point out that in the twenty-first century, “youth is experienced not just as an extended or protracted stage of life [relative to earlier historical periods] but also as being highly insecure, uncertain, and fraught with risk.” Precisely those experiences of extended youth and precarity have infused Millennial worldviews.
8. Exceptions include the climate justice movement and the “Fight for 15.” Both attract supporters of varied ages and are largely sponsored by long-standing social movement organizations—environmental groups and organized labor, respectively. By contrast, the four movements discussed here lack such sponsorship and are led by Millennials themselves. A partial exception, as discussed in the text, is the Dreamers, who were initially part of the established immigrant rights movement. The Dreamers broke away from the parent movement and formed their own autonomous organizations after 2008.
9. Unless otherwise noted, data in this section are from Taylor and colleagues (2014).
10. Although this poll was conducted just after the emergence of OWS, the results were little changed from a 2010 Pew poll (Kohut et al. 2011). Millennials grew up after the Cold War and thus had little exposure to socialism prior to 2008, when right-wing critics of Barack Obama frequently called him a “socialist.” Many Millennials were infatuated with Obama at the time, which may help explain

- their positive responses to the survey question regarding socialism.
11. Unpublished data from Taylor and colleagues (2014), supplied to the author by the Pew Research Center.
  12. The GSS variables analyzed in Table 1 are EQWEALTH, POLVIEWS, GRASS, HOMOSEX, and HELPBK (for the question wording, see <http://sda.berkeley.edu/D3/GSS14/Doc/hcbk.htm>). The analysis used the probability weights specific to the GSS dataset for each year. "Don't know" responses and those categorized as "not applicable" or "no answer" were omitted. Four variables were recoded to create binary categories: "liberals" are those who identified as "extremely liberal," "liberal," or "slightly liberal"; respondents who considered homosexuality "not at all wrong" are compared to those who considered it "always wrong," "almost always wrong," or "sometimes wrong"; responses to the question about whether the government should reduce income differences (EQWEALTH) were recoded to collapse scores of 1–3 and 4–7; and responses to the question about whether the government has a special obligation to assist blacks (HELPBK) were recoded to collapse scores of 1–2 and 3–5.
  13. More generally, Millennial college graduates fared far better during and after the Great Recession than did those with less education (Pew Charitable Trusts 2013).
  14. See the data on bisexual and gay identities in the National Surveys of Family Growth analyzed by England, Mishel, and Caudillo (2016). The predicted probability of identifying as bisexual or gay for women born between 1985 and 1995 is more than double that for women born between 1966 and 1974 (and nearly triple among Latinas); for men, however, the predicted probabilities are similar for these two cohorts. The most recent data on transgender populations also reveal an age gradient, with more younger than older respondents identifying as transgender (Flores et al. 2016).
  15. As I will discuss, many activists in the anti-sexual assault movement also identify as LGBTQ, but in contrast to the Dreamers and BLM activists, that aspect of the movement is rarely visible to the public.
  16. In mid-2012, the Obama administration issued an executive order creating a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allowed eligible undocumented youth to obtain work permits and to legally remain in the country without risk of deportation. By March 2016, more than 800,000 of the estimated 2 million eligible youth had applied for DACA, and over 700,000 applications had been approved ([https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/I821\\_daca\\_performancedata\\_fy2015\\_qtr4.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/I821_daca_performancedata_fy2015_qtr4.pdf)).
  17. Unless otherwise indicated, this study is the source of the data and interview quotes in this section.
  18. We defined "actively involved" as participating in at least six of the following: (a) visiting the New York Occupy camp in Zuccotti Park, (b) visiting another Occupy camp, (c) living in an Occupy camp, (d) attending a General Assembly meeting, (e) monitoring Occupy events or meetings online, (f) taking part in an Occupy working group, (g) marching in earlier Occupy protests, (h) participating in an Occupy direct action, (i) being arrested for Occupy-related activity, (j) posting about Occupy on social media, (k) donating food, money, or goods to a camp, or (l) another Occupy activity not listed.
  19. See <http://wearthe99percent.tumblr.com>. Later, Occupy Sandy launched Sandy Storyline, explicitly embracing story-telling as a strategy, see <http://occupysandy.net/storyline/>.
  20. Of the 25 New York leaders we interviewed, only one of the 15 for whom we have information on sexuality identified as "queer." This was a convenience sample, and we deliberately sought diversity, yet 15 of the 25 were male and only seven were people of color.
  21. See <http://www.peopleforbernie.com/about>.
  22. Second-wave feminists refers to feminists active in the 1960s and 1970s, as opposed to the first-wave feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
  23. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in this section attributed to anti-sexual assault activists are from interviews I conducted during the spring of 2016, with assistance from Wilson Sherwin.
  24. These surveys are difficult to interpret, because heterosexual respondents may be less critical of the dominant "rape culture" or less likely to report incidents of sexual assaults.
  25. The figures in Table 2 are drawn from a database compiled for me by Amelia Fortunato. They include activists and leaders who appeared at least five times in press coverage of BLM and/or on the websites of Black Lives Matter Network local chapters and other organizations. Demographic information was collected from those sources as well as from individual activists' postings on Facebook and LinkedIn. These data may be biased toward individuals who do not avoid media attention and who do not accept leadership roles in local organizations. For more details on the methodology, contact the author.

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