

# Book Review: Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements

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*Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements* shows why we can't understand our world at all without grasping the profound impact of protest. **Gurpinder Lalli** think this book is particularly suited to activists who appreciate the dedication towards social movements and also those who are involved in policymaking.

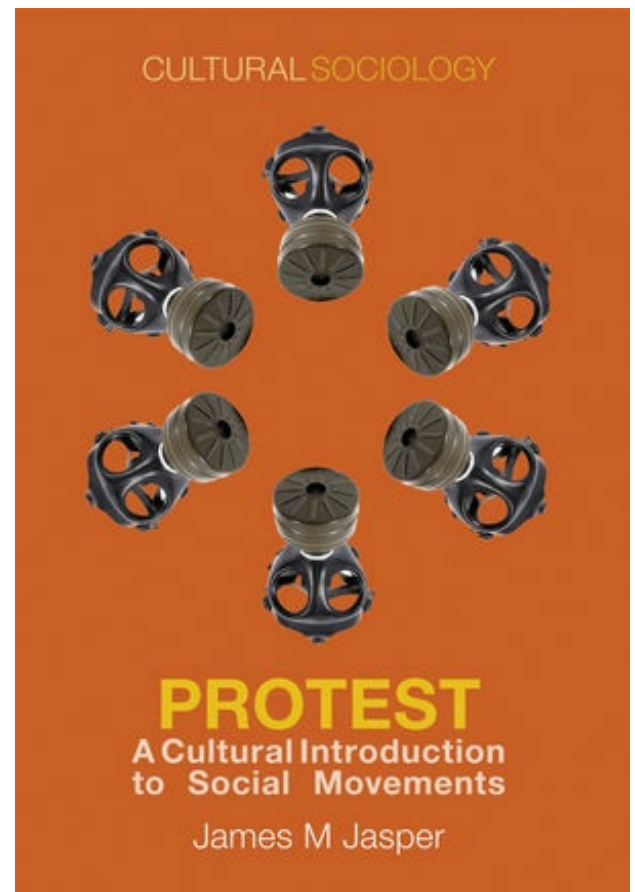
**Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements. James M. Jasper. Polity Press. 2014.**

*Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements* starts by saying, "...protest occurs every day, around the planet and it always has. Protest is a fundamental part of human existence, and every period in history has the potential to bring about important changes". Author [James M. Jasper](#) is an academic based in the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, with a vested interest and expertise in cultural and emotional dimensions of social movements. The key ideas presented in this book are that history should not be ignored in terms of the significant events that have shaped the way society functions today. He presents a view in favour of the 'protestor', with a particular focus on building an appreciation for the views of protestors.

This book offers a compelling account of the cultural meanings and feelings brought about by those who are protesting or fighting for a relevant cause. This review places a focus on the opening two chapters, "What are Social Movements" and "Meaning", bringing together interpretations behind what constitutes a social movement, giving reference to a working definition. Overall, this book is written in the form of an ethnography in that it seeks to capture the cultural meanings behind the values instilled in those involved in such movements.

Jasper forms his interpretation of social movements by arguing that they are sustained, intentional efforts to foster or impede broad legal and social changes, primarily outside the normal institutional channels endorsed by authorities. The book opens with an introductory view on all the key terms which form a fundamental part of the discussion throughout the text. These include defining social movements and differentiating between what constitutes culture and what does not. For Jasper, culture holds three key components: cognition, emotions, and morality. In his ideas of "not culture" he draws on issues of resources, arenas and political structures and develops an argument for how, together with culture, they interact with one another.

Chapter one draws on the history of political reign. It focuses on English radical John Wilkes, who is described as charismatic in all his pursuits, which aided his legal victories against the King and government. Importance is placed on the individual who gets groups together to pressure officials onto the streets. As Jasper notes, both protestors and players in opposition, put themselves in the heads of their opponents. It is through this interpretation that one is able to place meaning on the world. Questions are posed in terms of what it is that carries our meanings.



Where there is political movement, there is philosophical movement. Some of the key theories discussed in this first chapter include 'resource mobilisation theory' and 'political opportunity theory' which are referenced to support ideas of structure and organisation. Overall, however, the author provides an illustration of the four major theoretical orientations which lead to his theories on culture.

Chapter two highlights both a UK and US context, with reference to the feminist movement covering the post 1905 era which saw the women's suffrage movement to the present day. In order to further clarify meaning, Jasper distinguished between physical and figurative carriers. Physical carriers involved a variety of messages used to target the attention of the audience. It is argued that for a meaning to resonate, it must engage our feelings and not merely trigger a dictionary definition. This is illustrated by a table in which a number of figurative carriers of meaning are described. These include slogans and chants, facts, narratives and characters, as well as other relevant terms.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on a discussion on other forms of cultural meanings including 'political characters', 'memory', 'interactions' and 'our bodies and our selves'. 'Political characters' are identified as those who have the strength to fight back. The key message communicated here is that these characters can embody a conversion from 'villain to hero'. It is also identified that abused children who grow up tend to favour terms like survivor as opposed to hero. 'Memory' is framed as one which is 'collective' in nature. People, events and places from history are said to hold meanings just as much as books. It is through the field of collective memory that influential cultural meanings can be communicated. For example, governments tend to construct stone monuments in order to celebrate victories.

'Interactions' are also used for meaning-making purposes through various raw materials, including colours and lines in books, shapes and carvings in monuments, but the author argues that these can only be used to make sense of the world through the actions of people. The later section of chapter two addresses "Our bodies, our selves", making links to the influential feminist movements of the 1970s. Here, he argues that we understand others by how they look. Typical outcomes of reaction include rejecting those who do not look like us or developing an attraction for that person for their perceived beauty.

Together, this signifies that humans are unable to refrain from finding a meaning in the world and the example used here is one of emotions; which guides the process of meaning-making and engages us in our pursuits towards our attractions in a complex environment. Cultural sociology is said to have inherited cultural anthropology's apprehensive uncertainty toward interpreting cultures as comprehensible, cohesive systems of meaning. This book offers a philosophical account through theorising and practical methods detailing the complexities surrounding these social movements. There is a clear need for further review in this particular area; review in the philosophical and political sense. An anthropological account of meaning is pursued in the first section of the book which attempts to place social movements in context, drawing on historical references which include key social movements and which relate to the present day of scholars who have attempted to organise these events into issues of diverse complexity.

In essence, this book is particularly suited to activists who appreciate the dedication towards social movements and also those who are involved in policymaking, whom are able to take into consideration the complexities offered through the narrative of audience of protestors. In order to solve issues around the globe, it is important to recognise the involvement of those on the 'shop floor' and to consider their motives in developing future policy.

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