From Grievance to Change

How collective action changes institutions

SS24.S.11 "Explain why social movements form, and identify the factors that produce large-scale social change as a result of these movements.* 11a Compare and contrast the major theories of collective behavior, including contagion theory..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the grievance that led people to act, circle two ways they organized, and number the three theories of collective behavior. These marks will help you trace how a movement can create change.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

1. In 1955, Rosa Parks's arrest for refusing to give up her bus seat helped spark the Montgomery bus boycott. Black residents had faced segregated seating and unequal treatment for years. Churches and local groups organized carpools, raised money, and spread news. For 381 days, many residents refused to ride city buses. A shared grievance, existing networks, and steady planning turned frustration into coordinated action. In 1956, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling against segregation on Montgomery's public buses.

2. Sociologists offer different theories about how people act in groups. Contagion theory suggests that feelings and actions spread from person to person in a crowd. Convergence theory says people with existing beliefs or goals are drawn together. Emergent norm theory says people develop new rules for behavior as they interact in an uncertain situation. These theories emphasize different starting points: influence within a crowd, beliefs held before gathering, or rules formed during an event. They can help explain participation without replacing the movement's history.

3. The boycott was one part of a broader Civil Rights Movement. Over the next decade, sustained organizing helped win the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Institutions played opposing roles. Montgomery's transit system enforced unequal seating, while churches provided meeting spaces and support. Courts could overturn discriminatory rules, but a ruling alone did not organize carpools or sustain a boycott. Large-scale change depended on people working together and on institutions changing the rules they followed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the boycott form, and what helped turn frustration into coordinated action?

2. How do contagion, convergence, and emergent norm theories differ in their explanations of group behavior?

3. How did the Civil Rights Movement create change beyond the Montgomery bus boycott?

4. How did institutions both reinforce inequality and help challenge it during the boycott?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In many towns, public libraries have no evening hours, limiting access for people who work during the day. Propose a statewide movement for expanded hours. Explain its cause, how it could grow, how one collective behavior theory could explain participation, and how an institution could change access.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.S.11

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the grievance that led people to act, circle two ways they organized, and number the three theories of collective behavior. These marks will help you trace how a movement can create change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the boycott form, and what helped turn frustration into coordinated action?	**Segregated seating and unequal treatment were shared grievances. Churches and local groups organized carpools, raised money, and spread news.**
2	How do contagion, convergence, and emergent norm theories differ in their explanations of group behavior?	**Contagion emphasizes feelings and actions spreading within a crowd. Convergence emphasizes beliefs people held before gathering. Emergent norm theory emphasizes new rules formed as people interact.**
3	How did the Civil Rights Movement create change beyond the Montgomery bus boycott?	**Sustained organizing helped win the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.**
4	How did institutions both reinforce inequality and help challenge it during the boycott?	**The transit system enforced unequal seating. Churches supported the boycott, and courts overturned discriminatory bus rules.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Working residents across the state cannot use libraries that close before their shifts end. They could form local groups, collect accounts of missed opportunities, and bring those accounts to state officials. Convergence theory could explain why residents with the same concern join a statewide rally: they cared about access before meeting one another. If the state provided funding and local libraries added evening hours, more residents could use library services.

Accept other accurate contrasts among the three theories. For Your Turn, look for a shared grievance, a plausible way to build a statewide movement, a correctly applied theory, and a specific institutional change.