Collective Behavior

People make social change happen in groups. Group actions are either not organized (collective behavior) or very organized (social movements). Collective behavior is to when people engage in social interactions in response to unstructured, ambiguous, or unstable situations.
Neil Smelser’s Conditions for

- Structural conduciveness—something in the social structure conducive for collective behavior
- Structural strain—system strain
- Generalized belief—shared interpretation of events
- Precipitating factors—trigger incident
- Mobilization for action
- Failure of social control—agencies of social control (ex. Police) don’t work
  Jim Jones cult massacre example
Kinds--Crowds

- Temporary group of individuals who are close enough to interact.
- Casual crowd—no purpose but to stand on street corner
- Conventional crowd—audience
- Expressive crowd—rock concert
- Acting crowd—riot ing crowd
- Solidaristic crowd—unified by ideology
Mobs

- Emotionally aroused crowd intent on violence or destructive action
- Directly challenges social order
- Riot—a large-scale mob whose behavior based on sense of deprivation, anger
Panic

- Collective but irrational reaction to a serious threat.
- Associated with disasters
- Tend to occur immediately before or in first moments of threatening event, not afterward
Rumors

- Unverified report, information, communicated from one person to another
- Likely to occur in situations where people deprived of information (also gossip) to help outsiders construct an interpretation of event
- Rumor’s roles: messengers, interpreters, skeptics, protagonists, decision makers, audience
- Play telephone
Urban legends

- Folklore tales which are untrue about recent alleged events with a moral to teach. Example—teenagers will be punished in “Makeout” alley or Kentucky Fried Rat.
Mass hysteria

- Widespread anxiety caused by some unfounded belief. Like panics but not due to disasters. Example, national response to 1938 Orson Welles’ radio show, The War of the Worlds.
Fashions

- Currently valued styles of appearance or behavior (Dah--!)
- Capitalist societies dependent on consumption (shopping) which fosters novelty, future orientation, status-consciousness.
Fads

- Group behaviors which large numbers of people follow which are temporal/temporary. Examples include college behaviors like stuffing people in cars/phone booths, streaking, eating goldfish. Children’s toys—Razor, dolls, etc.
Public opinion

- Substantial numbers of people who have differing opinions but a shared interest in a public issue. Subject of beliefs more than action.
- The sum decisions of members of a public on a particular issue.
- Example—to hand-count or not to hand-count the Presidential election results?
Propaganda

- Information/views presented with deliberate attempt to persuade public opinion
- Appeals can use various strategies including glittering generalities, name calling, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card stacking, bandwagon
Theories of behavior

- Contagion theory: people get swept up in behaviors of others and act like herds of cattle—the “herd mentality”
- Convergence theory: crowd unity results when people share/converge on an interpretation of events
- Emergent norm theory: behavior is guided by culture’s norms, and during collective behavior a norm will emerge—example, students will insist on non-violent action during a protest.