

# The Constructive Dimensions of Social Movements

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This paper addresses the relationship between resistance and building in collective political struggle. Although protests, strikes, and other repertoires of contention are well-studied in the contentious politics literature, relatively few scholars examine the interplay of contentious strategies and tactics with constructive action that builds social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs. I draw on a case study of the campaign to divest from fossil fuels and reinvest in climate solutions to illustrate how contentious and constructive dimensions are intertwined in the climate movement. I generalize from this example to argue that constellations of ideologically-saturated constructive strategies and tactics – what I call *repertoires of construction* – have unique dynamics and implications for social movement theory that warrant analytical attention in their own right.

*What really matters now isn't that we do the visionary work and we do the oppositional work and we find how they're connected [...] What we need to be doing is being simultaneously visionary and oppositional at the same time.*  
~ Gopal Dayaneni, *Movement Generation*, June 2018

“I want to be as practical in my radicalism as I can ... and to actually get stuff done,” Chris Porter said. “And I don’t think burning it all down is the way for me to get there.” As Chris shared his story of joining the movement to address climate change, exploring ways to move money from the fossil fuel industry to just transition projects in his home state of Kentucky, and founding the Patchwork Cooperative Loan Fund in Lexington, I was struck by his aversion to protest. Here was someone with a long history of activism who had rarely, if ever, taken to the streets. Instead Chris engaged in collective action to build a new economy from the ground up. Since 2014, the question motivating him had been: “How can we combine the powerful resistance created by divestment movements with the visionary work of those building alternatives to capitalism that empower communities and nourish people and the earth? (Bottger et al. 2018:vii).

A vast literature on contentious politics examines the dynamics of strikes, protests, and other disruptive challenges to authority in the political arena (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, Snow et al. 2019b:5, Walder 2009). Yet many movements are composed of both protestors and people like Chris Porter. They pursue resistance and building in tandem and reconfigure the balance according to the political, historical, and cultural context. In this paper, I bring the constructive dimensions of social movements to the fore and argue that they have unique dynamics and theoretical implications that warrant analytical attention in their own right.

I define the constructive as sustained, organized challenges to institutional or cultural authority that build social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs (Day-Farnsworth and Morales 2011, Snow et al. 2019a:10, White 2018). Constructive collective action takes a variety of forms on the ground from establishing worker cooperatives (Schlachter and Már 2022) to aligning the operations of local utilities with principles of climate justice (Schlachter 2020). Yet they share an ideological orientation toward solutions and engage in praxis to affirmatively build material and symbolic power (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). Drawing on Charles Tilly's (1978, 1995) concept of "repertoires of contention," I propose the complementary concept of *repertoires of construction* to describe the ideologically-saturated constellations of constructive strategies and tactics movements employ to pursue their goals. The ideology of intersectional anti-capitalism, strategies of Resilience-Based Organizing, and tactics of translocal non-extractive finance that comprise the Divest/Reinvest Campaign's repertoire of construction is a prime example.

The paper begins with an analysis of contributions and critiques of contentious politics theory, including its definition of collective action repertoires in narrow and state-centric terms. I then examine concepts and historical studies that help lay the groundwork for more

comprehensive theorizing of the constructive dimensions of social movements, focusing especially on constructive resistance (Sørensen 2016) and U.S. movements for mutual aid, Black Power, and second wave feminism. Although these examples demonstrate that repertoires of construction are widespread, I suggest that the prominence of protest, emphasis on upswings in the protest cycle, and discomfort with activism in the economic sphere makes contentious politics ill-equipped to systematically study the constructive in its current form. Monica White's (2018) framework of Collective Agency and Community Resilience and my ethnographic case study of the campaign to divest financial assets from the fossil fuel industry and reinvest in climate solutions illustrate how paying attention to repertoires of construction can extend contentious politics theory in useful ways. The discussion explores how repertoires of construction raise new questions related to resource acquisition, tactical innovation, and movement continuity and outcomes. I conclude that expanding our conception of what counts as activism contributes to both theory and empirical knowledge.

## **CONTENTIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Contentious politics has been the leading theory in Western scholarship on social movements for several decades. It emphasizes ways movements pursue social change via disruptive challenges to authority in the political arena (Snow et al. 2019b:5). Contentious politics analyzes collective political struggles like movements and revolutions under a common analytical framework in order to break down disciplinary silos and identify shared causal mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001:5). For instance, scholars have compared the Cochabamba Water War and protests against rising corn prices in Mexico City to explain how

resistance to market reforms occurs through common bundles of underlying mechanisms (Simmons 2017). It has been a generative framework for empirical studies.

Contentious politics theory offers several advantages over its predecessors in the resource mobilization and political process traditions. First, its comparative sensibility directs analytical attention to strategic interaction among multiple actors in a field (Edwards, McCarthy and Mataic 2019, Fligstein and McAdam 2011, McAdam and Tarrow 2019, Walder 2009). This dynamic, networked perspective is consistent with a broader relational turn throughout sociology (see e.g. Auyero, Hernandez and Stitt 2017, Burawoy 2017, Emirbayer 1997, Zelizer 2012). Second, contentious politics highlights the period beyond initial mobilization (Tindall 2003:483). This more expansive temporal frame has helped scholarship around long-neglected areas like movement outcomes to flourish (see Part V in Snow et al. 2019a). Another key contribution of the framework has been challenging the rigid boundary between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics. Although McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) accentuate non-institutionalized (“transgressive”) politics in their seminal book outlining contentious politics theory, *Dynamics of Contention* inspired many subsequent studies that examine the distinction and relationship between the two (McAdam and Tarrow 2010, McAdam and Tarrow 2011:4, O'Brien 2003).

Scholars working in the contentious politics tradition use Charles Tilly’s concept of “repertoires of contention” to describe the “culturally saturated, relatively stable” bundles of strategies and tactics movements use in specific campaigns (Doherty and Hayes 2019:272). Tilly (1993:264) uses the metaphor of a jazz performance or improvisational theatre to emphasize that repertoires are both extemporaneous and constrained. The “spontaneous consensus” around leaf blowers, umbrellas, and a wall of moms in recent protests against police brutality in Portland is a

prime example (Baker and Fuller 2020). Ideological, historical, political, and other factors limit the set of routines actors choose from at any given moment (Doherty and Hayes 2019, Tilly 2006), meaning that repertoires of contention are inherently interactive and innovation occurs primarily “at the perimeter” (Tilly 1993:265). The term typically denotes the disruptive actions of extra-institutional actors and is thus a fruitful concept for analyzing the protests, strikes, and other forms of episodic public resistance to the state that dominate the contentious politics literature (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001:5).

Yet the close association between contentious politics and this specific image of what constitutes a repertoire of collective action has also been the focus of trenchant critiques.<sup>1</sup> Many scholars argue that social movements are more than “just ‘politics by other means’” and that contentious politics overlooks important types and modes of collective action (Snow 2004a:21).

As Tindall (2003:487) writes:

Ironically, the authors [of *Dynamic of Contention*] simultaneously broaden the scope of relevant phenomena (e.g. phenomena that fall outside the traditional definition of social movement) for social movement scholars to consider, while simultaneously excluding many types of social movements from the new agenda (various religious, lifestyle and self-transformation movements, etc.).

In particular, critics have lamented the theory’s exclusion of “collective efforts at escape or self-renewal” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996:21, Snow 2004a)<sup>2</sup> and stress on state targets (see e.g. Katzenstein 1998, Klawiter 2008, Rojas 2007, Seidman 2003, Van Dyke, Soule and Taylor 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> As McAdam and Tarrow (2011:6) write, “Tilly often quipped that DOC was the most successful failed experiment he had ever been involved in.”

<sup>2</sup> Citing Hirschman (1970), Snow (2004:18) classifies communes and other forms of escaping mainstream society as “indirect collective challenges to authority” that indeed count as claims-making because exit and voice are intertwined: “Exit, under some conditions, may not only constitute a form of voice, but sometimes it may even speak louder than the voices commonly associated with direct collective challenges.”

Early on, the architects of contentious politics theory attempted to preempt concerns about centering the state: “Contention is not something peculiar to the realm of politics. It is a generic phenomena inextricably linked to the establishment of institutionalized power relations (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001:343). They later conceded its “enduring state-centric bias” (McAdam and Tarrow 2011:5) and attempted to rectify this oversight in part by contributing to a growing literature on “movements and markets” that explores how contentiousness operates in economic domains and often targets firms (King and Pearce 2010, Walker 2012). Although contentious politics has continued to emphasize disruptive, visible resistance targeting the state, in principle its adherents recognize that “not all politics entails contention” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996:17) and that social movement activity indeed “takes many forms – brief or sustained, institutionalized or disruptive, humdrum or dramatic” (Della Porta 2013, Tarrow 1998:3, Tilly 2008). Even Tilly (1993:271) acknowledged that repertoires need not necessarily “involve overt conflict” and may very well feature “assemblies that escape the wrath of authorities” such as art or coordinated expressions of solidarity (Juris 2014, Mathieu 2019).<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, many scholars remain unconvinced that contentious politics fully appreciates the role cultural, discursive, and identity-based strategies and tactics play in collective action repertoires. Some critics dispute McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s (1996:17) view that activities like “work[ing] in consensus” and “celebrat[ing] shared memories” are not forms of claims-making in and of themselves. As Jasper (1997:237) writes, “Tactics represent important routines, emotionally and morally salient in these people’s lives. Just as their ideologies do, their activities express protestors’ political identities and moral visions.”

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Eltantawy (2008) on Argentine women banging pots and pans as a form of resistance, Streeter (2020) on taking a knee in the N.F.L., and VanDerWerff (2020) on Italians singing from their balconies during quarantine.

Advocates of a more actor-centered approach emphasize the importance of meaning-making and emotions in tactical repertoires and their core features of “contestation, intentionality, and collective identity” (Doherty and Hayes 2019, Melucci 1996, Taylor and Van Dyke 2004:264). Others have proposed wholesale alternatives to the contentious politics framework altogether. For example, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) present a model of multi-institutional politics that accounts for various targets and sources of both material and symbolic power. In so doing, they refute an assumed boundary and implicit hierarchy between culture and social structure (also see e.g. Bernstein 2003, Polletta and Jasper 2001, Sewell 1992).

Contentious politics theory has undoubtedly shaped the questions scholars of social movements have asked – and overlooked – in the past 20 years. In this paper, I focus specifically on raising new questions about the ideologically-saturated movement strategies and tactics that build social-relational infrastructure in order to meet collective needs.

## **CONSTRUCTIVE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Although repertoires of contention are well-studied in the social movements literature, relatively little research examines the interplay of resistance and building in political struggle. Yet many movements pursue social change by simultaneously engaging in contentious and constructive collective action. The Knights of Labor organized strikes to resist oppressive employers and founded worker cooperatives to emancipate members from wage labor in the early U.S. union movement (Leikin 2005, Voss 1993). Gandhi’s theory of change in the struggle for Indian independence was premised on both *Satyagraha* – the “truth force” of nonviolent civil disobedience – and a Constructive Programme that promoted economic self-reliance by encouraging the domestic production of textiles and other goods (Gandhi 1945, Salla 1993:52,

Sørensen 2016).<sup>4</sup> During colonialism, Koreans both directly resisted military occupation and created autonomous economic and civic institutions that indirectly challenged the authority of Japanese rule (Snow 2004a). These examples of construction – which literally means “together build” in the original Latin (Bell et al. 2020:354) – all involve building social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs. They also represent the kinds of sustained, organized challenges to institutional or cultural authority that differentiate social movements from other forms of collective action (Snow et al. 2019a:10). I argue that constellations of ideologically-saturated constructive strategies and tactics – what I call *repertoires of construction* – warrant analytical attention in their own right.

My definition of repertoires of construction draws on Tilly’s foundational concept and scholarship on the crucial but often-overlooked social-relational infrastructure underpinning resilient local food systems. For example, Day-Farnsworth and Morales (2011) argue that food hubs help make midtier food value(s) chains tick by meeting needs for aggregation, transparency and source identity, and fair pricing. Day-Farnsworth and Miller (2014) illuminate how building relationships and scale-appropriate transportation and distribution infrastructure is essential for the success of values-based regional food economies.<sup>5</sup> I propose that the “ideologically structured” bundles of actions (Zald 2006) movements undertake to build social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs are a similarly “diverse and complex set of empirical

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<sup>4</sup> As Sørensen (2016:52) notes, the constructive programme was central to Gandhi’s political philosophy: “For Gandhi, the constructive programme was more important for the liberation of India than the non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaigns.” The call to produce Khadi (homespun cloth) as an alternative to purchasing imported British textiles was its most widespread campaign.

<sup>5</sup> The authors emphasize the social and ideological dimensions of effective regional food transportation networks: “Relationships drive logistics and logistical decision-making. Logistics drives transportation infrastructure development. Supply chain relationships foster efficiencies and economic opportunities [...] Regional food distribution faces the competing goals of reducing costs and improving quality, while balancing market efficiencies with relational values [...] The businesses that are building values-based supply chains are looking for strategic partners who are committed to sustainability in terms of environmental, economic, and social goals.” (Day-Farnsworth and Morales 2011:9-11).



instances” (Oliver 2008:13) ranging from alternative economic institutions (White 2018) to Transformative Narratives (Movement Generation 2013). In all cases, however, constructive repertoires involve both a solutions-oriented ideological position that “no is not enough” (Klein 2017) to achieve social change and concrete collective action that seeks to affirmatively build a movement’s material and symbolic power (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). In this sense, my empirical object is better conceptualized as practices of constructive challenges to authority than as a particular group or geographic place.<sup>6</sup> This definition is relational and contingent rather than typological.

Although many scholars in sociology, history, political science, peace studies, and other disciplines have written about building social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs, studies of the constructive dimensions of social movements comprise a fragmented rather than coherent body of work. A number of concepts and empirical examples help lay the groundwork for more comprehensive theorizing of the broad range of ideologically-saturated constructive strategies and tactics movements employ to pursue their goals.<sup>7</sup>

One line of thinking is the framework of constructive resistance. Anchored in resistance studies, constructive resistance describes efforts to build social structures that operate outside the dominant system such as parallel educational institutions, squatter settlements, and worker cooperatives (Koefoed 2017, Lilja 2020, Sørensen and Vinthagen 2012, Sørensen 2016, Wiksell 2020). Architects of the framework present it as a useful way to theorize:

initiatives which not only criticise, protest, object, and undermine what is considered undesirable and wrong, but simultaneously acquire, create, build, cultivate and experiment with what people need in the present moment, or what they would like to see replacing dominant structures or power relations (Sørensen 2016:57).

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Monica White for this insightful observation. For debates on defining the ethnographic object, see Small (2009), Desmond (2014), Burawoy (2017), and Jensen and Auyero (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Pamela Oliver for this helpful formulation.

In particular, they argue that constructive resistance opens up opportunities for comparative analysis of prefigurative politics, or “the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present” (Yates 2015:1). Prefiguration can take many different forms including communes, free spaces, and kindred efforts to foster oppositional consciousness and create small-scale models of the world as activists believe it should be (see e.g. Evans and Boyte 1986, Groch 2001, Kanter 1972, Morris and Braine 2001, Roth, Saunders and Olcese 2014, Vaisey 2007).<sup>8</sup> The constructive resistance framework posits that these types of activities can be usefully analyzed according to their ratio of how much resistance (operationalized as visibility or the repressiveness of the response provoked) versus construction (operationalized as consequences or scale of social change achieved) is involved (Sørensen 2016:59). In this sense, it is related to schemas that classify strategies and tactics according to the extent to which they are disruptive versus non-disruptive (Rojas 2007), orderly versus violent (Tarrow 1995), or based on conflict versus consensus (Bell 2007).

Constructive resistance provides a model of the kind of framework needed for theorizing the constructive dimensions of social movements, yet its utility for extending contentious politics theory is limited in two critical ways. First, constructive resistance is limited to action that takes place outside the state (Sørensen 2016:73) whereas my definition of constructive action acknowledges the overlap between institutional and non-institutional politics (O'Brien 2003). Second, constructive resistance includes “unorganized and individual acts” (Sørensen 2016:57) such as everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985) and the atomized consumer choices prevalent in many lifestyle movements (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones 2012). While recognizing that private

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<sup>8</sup> As Yates (2015:1) points out, prefigurative politics often take place “either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest.”

decisions have the potential to create the conditions necessary for movement emergence (Willis and Schor 2012), repertoires of construction constitute forms of *collective* action that cannot be undertaken by individuals alone.

A more empirical line of inquiry also helps lay the groundwork for systematic study of repertoires of construction. A diverse set of studies grounded in archival research and thick description examines how movements have actually gone about the work of building social-relational infrastructure throughout history, often lifting up actors and activities less visible in traditional accounts. What they share is not a single theoretical lens but a common preoccupation with cases of constructive action within and beyond the state.

For example, historical studies of self-help movements in the United States illustrate longstanding traditions of organizing within marginalized communities to meet collective needs. Benevolent and mutual aid societies that provided insurance, burial services, and other forms of social support were critical for the survival of subaltern groups throughout the nineteenth century (see e.g. Du Bois 1898, Gamm and Putnam 1999, Gordon Nembhard 2014). In 1902, Russian anarchist Petr Kropotkin published *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* outlining a theory of mutual aid as political participation that proposed solidarity rather than social Darwinism as the driving force of human progress (Gulick et al. 2020, Katz 1981). These ideas were influential during the early labor movement (Leikin 2005) and inspired neighbors to explore “new ways to put two and two together” when inadequate government relief programs left millions destitute during the Great Depression (Rowe 2006). Historians like Jonathan Rowe have documented self-help cooperatives that operated in over 30 states in the early 1930s. For example, the Unemployed Cooperative Relief Organization in Compton, CA began in 1932 as a barter network that allowed members to trade their time for essential goods and services. Governance

was democratic, benefits were distributed according to need, and the cooperative often utilized more contentious tactics to stop evictions and utility shutoffs. Although many such “economies of reciprocity” (Schor 2011) disintegrated with the advent of the Works Progress Administration (Rowe 2006), others evolved into the 40,000 established cooperatives still operative in the U.S. today (Haveman, Rao and Paruchuri 2007, Schneiberg 2011, Schneider 2018).

Although contentious politics scholars frequently examine how disaffected workers engage in strikes and other contentious actions, they have largely ignored their informal, self-organized, and ostensibly spontaneous efforts to help each other directly. Debates about whether mutual aid qualifies as social movement activity persist (Katz 1981). Yet as Polletta (2006:475) writes, “I suspect that the lines separating movement groups from [...] self-help groups often reflect the idiosyncrasies of how subfields have developed rather than anything intrinsic to the phenomena themselves.” Informal practices of self-help and mutual aid have persisted since the Great Depression, thriving during periods of social upheaval under guises ranging from time banks to local currencies. Most recently, there has been a renaissance of mutual aid organizing in response to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>9</sup> Many of these efforts identify as “solidarity not charity,” challenging the authority of elite philanthropic and state institutions by “caring for one another” in ways that build “new social relations that are more survivable” (Spade and Carrillo 2019). These developments have prompted some scholars to reconsider their assumption that self-help movements are necessarily ad-hoc, short-lived, and uninterested in broader social change (Tolentino 2020).

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<sup>9</sup> See Mutual Aid Hub (<https://mutualaidhub.org/>) for a map of mutual aid networks across the U.S., Mutual Aid Disaster Relief (<https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/>) and Big Door Brigade (<http://bigdoorbrigade.com/>) for primers on mutual aid principles, and the March 20, 2020 episode of Democracy NOW! ([https://democracynow.org/2020/3/20/coronavirus\\_community\\_response\\_mutual\\_aid](https://democracynow.org/2020/3/20/coronavirus_community_response_mutual_aid)) for an introduction to mutual aid organizing during the COVID-19 crisis.

A growing literature on “the long civil rights movement” (Hall 2005) also features rich historical accounts that emphasize the centrality of repertoires of construction in the struggle for Black liberation. Although a lesser-known aspect of Black Power activism during the 1960-70s, “community survival” programs that provided free breakfast, medical care, and other services were a major focus of the Black Panther Party (BPP) after 1968 (Abron 1998, Austin 2009, Bloom and Martin Jr. 2016, Nelson 2011). A network of free health clinics “serve[d] the people body and soul” by providing basic medical care and screening for sickle-cell anemia (Nelson 2011). BPP members supervised traffic stops and organized grocery giveaways to combat malnutrition (Bell 2014). Party leaders studied Black cooperative business traditions (see e.g. Du Bois 1907, Gordon Nembhard 2014, White 2018) and launched grassroots projects to increase economic autonomy (Hill and Rabig 2012). As one member said, “People’s needs are land, bread, housing, education, . . . , clothing, justice, and peace, and the Black Panther Party shall not, for a day, alienate themselves from the masses and forget their needs for survival” (quoted in Bloom and Martin Jr. 2016:181). Although the BPP is best known for its militant resistance to white oppression, it pursued social change with both “guns” and “a helping hand” (Nelson 2011:54).

The dominant academic narrative dismisses BPP social service programs as evidence of deradicalization and movement degeneration (Bell 2014, Nelson 2011:2-7). Yet recent empirical studies demonstrate the ideological and practical significance of efforts to build social-relational infrastructure in the Black Power movement. The Party’s founders viewed self-sufficiency and self-determination as integral to the transformation of racial and economic inequality.<sup>10</sup> As

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<sup>10</sup> As Wilson (1973:99) observes, “The most basic and most obvious theme in Black Panther ideology is the diagnosis of Black people’s trouble as being due to institutional racism, which in turn is a reflection of the evils of capitalism.”

Chicago chapter head Fred Hampton said, “First you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have FREEDOM!” (quoted in Nelson 2011:58). In terms of praxis, BPP programs patched holes in the social safety net and supported recruitment, mobilizing, and organizational legitimacy. For example, the Party’s 1972 foray into electoral politics ran candidates for the Oakland mayor and city council on a “Community Survival Ticket” that promised to serve constituents left behind by the War on Poverty (Nelson 2011). Building social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs also spurred long-term institutional and cultural impacts in arenas like medicine (Nelson 2011), agriculture (White 2018), the academy (Rojas 2007), and the profession of social work (Bell 2014). As Bell (2014:11) writes: “The work of changing racialized norms and practices, while necessarily a dispersed and somewhat amorphous process, was partially carried out in the institutions of civil society.” Inspired in part by the BPP, many Black activists in subsequent decades have continued to pair overt resistance to institutional racism with constructive mutual aid in the face of state repression and neglect (see e.g. Gulick et al. 2020, Oliver 2020, White 2011b).

A third group of historical studies explores cases of constructive action in the context of second wave feminism. During the 1960s and 1970s, activists established independent social service infrastructure like women’s shelters and reproductive clinics and built alternative economic institutions like credit unions and bookstores (Enke 2007, Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Recognition of the importance of free spaces, consciousness-raising, and cultural activities for mass feminist mobilizations like the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality is widespread. Relatively few movement scholars, however, have explored the social change implications of constructive activities in and of themselves. This is partly because, as Enke (2007) notes, building this kind of infrastructure was “fueled by diverse people who did not

necessarily identify themselves as political activists or feminists” (2) and often “spontaneous, unattached to named organizations, and left little record in print” (4). This “dazzling array of action” is thus much less visible than protests and marches in the historical record (Enke 2007:2).<sup>11</sup>

As in the case of the Black Power movement, observers often glossed over these examples of constructive action during the 1960s and 1970s or cited shifts from public, disruptive actions targeting the state to more constructive activities like advocacy and self-help as evidence of feminism in abeyance (Epstein 2001, Sawyers and Meyer 1999). Yet several empirical studies have challenged this narrative (Staggenborg 2001, Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Notably, Verta Taylor’s (1996, 1999) careful analysis of the postpartum self-help movement prompted a dramatic change in her thinking about the implications of therapeutic feminism and identity politics for social change. Whereas her previous scholarship had seen the decline in protest activity and appearance of cultural groups as hallmarks of the feminist “doldrums” after World War II (Rupp and Taylor 1987, Taylor 1989), Taylor (1996:5) came to see the pivot toward meeting collective needs in the 1980s as a strategic response to failure of the Equal Rights Amendment and anti-feminist sentiment more broadly:

This shift to a more hostile national political climate did not spell the death of feminism. Rather, it transformed both the form and the strategies of women’s movements [...] As new generations of activists continued to be drawn to feminism in the 1980s, they found new arenas for political action as they struggled to define a feminism that would reflect the specific disadvantages of gender in their own lives.

Like scholars of the long civil rights movement, researchers taking a broader view of what counts as feminist collective action have also found that institutions like the church and military

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Enke (2007:5) writes, “the historiography of the movement has largely confined itself to studying feminist-identified organizations and people who embraced a feminist identity.”

became key sites of contestation during this period (Katzenstein 1998, Walker 2012).<sup>12</sup> Taking the constructive seriously thus “rethinks the parameters” of the movement (Enke 2007:12) in important ways by looking for feminism in less obvious places, from inside the beltline to anti-nuclear demonstrations (also see Klawiter 2008, Meyer and Whittier 2014, Taylor and Van Dyke 2004).

U.S. movements for mutual aid, Black Power, and second wave feminism within the past 150 years illustrate that repertoires of construction are widespread. This discussion is far from comprehensive, neglecting numerous cases of building social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs throughout history and around the globe. Yet these examples are analytically useful in highlighting more general features of constructive action. For example, they demonstrate that repertoires of contention and construction are deeply intertwined. Like institutional and non-institutional politics, resistance and building are not always mutually exclusive or sharply distinct. BPP community clinics both constructed alternatives to public health services and contested state control of Black bodies (Nelson 2011). Furthermore, contentiousness or constructiveness is not an inherent feature of any particular strategy or tactic. Depression-era food cooperatives and feminist credit unions did not inevitably resist capitalism simply by virtue of their legal status (Enke 2007, Wright 2010). Rather, these alternative economic institutions adopted and transformed market logics in unpredictable and sometimes contradictory ways. In other words, complementary sets of movement practices tend to cohere around contention or construction in ideologically-saturated ways.

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<sup>12</sup> Arguments about the expansion of politics to nonpolitical arenas also links to Elizabeth Clemens’s (1993, 1997) work tracing the rise of lobbying and interest group politics in the U.S. to women’s adaptation of “nonpolitical” forms of organization for political ends in the early twentieth century.



My conceptualization of the relationship between resistance and building draws inspiration from Erik Olin Wright's (2010) concept of Real Utopias, which analyzes the interplay between diagnosis/critique of capitalism and pathways to viable socialist alternatives in actually-existing institutions like worker cooperatives and participatory budgeting. Wright (2013:3) refrains from drawing crisp dividing lines between the real and the utopian in the empirical examples he studies, instead recognizing that the "tension between dreams and practice" is constantly renegotiated. Similarly, my definition of repertoires of construction assumes that the process of "constructing new space for collective agency" is rarely linear (Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015:714).

Movements for mutual aid, Black Power, and second wave feminism also exemplify how the configuration of contentious and constructive practices is context-specific. Just as repertoires of contention are "historically conditioned" (Doherty and Hayes 2019:273, Tilly 1993, Tilly 2006), the balance of resistance and building varies with historical, cultural, political, geographic, and other factors. Reconfiguration is a form of "strategic adaptation" (Koopmans 2007). For instance, the BPP de-emphasized militancy and expanded survival programs in response to the "tactical exigencies" of state repression and concerns that a reputation for inciting violence was eroding community support (Bloom and Martin Jr. 2016, Nelson 2011:5).<sup>13</sup> And like the "innovation and strenuous bargaining" involved in developing new repertoires (Tilly 1993:265), shifting the relative weight of contention and construction requires movement actors to navigate quandaries that often provoke moments of conflict. For example, many feminist activists who called for equal rights in the streets during the 1970s pivoted to organizing within

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<sup>13</sup> As Bloom and Martin Jr. (2016:186) point out, however, community survival programs were not exempt from state repression. As the free breakfast program won "hearts and minds" and highlighted failures of the War on Poverty, the police and FBI spread disinformation campaigns and even violently raided meals with children present.

state agencies and the ivory tower in the 1980s (Stacey and Thorne 1985, Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Some observers lifted up benefits of professionalization for personal and organizational sustainability (Roth 2016, Staggenborg 1988). Others decried it as the death knell of the women's movement (Epstein 2001, Sawyers and Meyer 1999). In short, shifts in the political opportunity structure are likely to necessitate strategic repertoire reconfiguration (Schlachter 2020).

Taken together, this relational and contingent understanding of constructive action implies that it is a feature of every social movement rather than a classification criterion.<sup>14</sup> I contend that some movements emphasize building social-relational infrastructure more than others but most pursue contention and construction in tandem. Several typologies miss this interplay by assuming they are mutually exclusive. For example, Aberle (1966:318) categorizes organized group efforts toward widespread systems change as Transformative Movements that “involve a radical rejection” of existing systems and the creation of new ones to enact a total “shift from things as they are to things as they should be.”<sup>15</sup> Other scholars similarly distinguish between movements oriented toward reform and affirmation of existing structures versus movements that are “world-rejecting” and seek more fundamental systems change (Smelser 1962, Wallis 1984).<sup>16</sup> These and other attempts to create space for “awkward movements”

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<sup>14</sup> I conceptualize the configuration of resistance versus building as akin to the way in which every movement takes some stance along a continuum of violent versus nonviolent repertoires.

<sup>15</sup> Aberle (1966:318) classifies social movements according to the “locus” (individual versus systems) and “amount” (total or partial) of change they seek. He defines Transformative Movements as “organized groups of people who actively seek, by whatever means, ritual or practical, a transformation of the socio-cultural, or indeed the natural order, including the socio-cultural – and this in their own lifetimes” in part through disengagement from mainstream society. In this scheme, Transformative Movements are similar to prefigurative politics as practiced in communes or what Snow (2004) describes as indirect challenges to authority via “exit” rather than “voice.”

<sup>16</sup> Smelser's (1962) distinction between “norm-oriented” (i.e. reform) and “value-oriented” (i.e. radical, seeking more fundamental change) movements is related to Wallis's (1984) distinction between “world-affirming” and “world-rejecting” movements.

(Polletta 2006) in social movement theory usefully suggest that more systematic study of constructive action would enrich our understanding of the broad range of strategies and tactics collectivities employ to pursue their goals. The problem is that they view construction as a distinctive rather than constitutive feature of social movements.

My proposal that repertoires of contention and construction are contingent, context-specific, and operative in all sustained, organized challenges to authority has important empirical and theoretical implications. Thus far, however, I have shown that studies of the constructive dimensions of social movements have been fragmented and largely overlooked in the dominant literature. The next section explores some reasons why repertoires of construction seem to be peripheral in extant contentious politics research. I then examine a particularly detailed and illuminating example from Monica White (2018) to argue that constellations of ideologically-saturated constructive strategies and tactics warrant greater analytical attention in their own right.

### **WHY REPERTOIRES OF CONSTRUCTION HAVE BEEN OVERLOOKED**

Given that constructive collective action is prevalent in many movements clearly within the purview of contentious politics, why have so few scholars placed it in the center of analysis? As Snow (2004a:19) points out, there is “an abundance” of work that looks beyond public, disruptive protest targeting states – yet it “is rarely used at the basis for refining and sharpening how we conceptualize social movements.” I suggest three main explanations for the relative dearth of theoretical attention to repertoires of construction in dominant theories of social movements: the prominence of protest, an emphasis on upswings in the protest cycle, and discomfort with the “gray zone” (Thayer 2017) between movements and markets.

Protests loom large in the academic imagination. As Taylor and Van Dyke (2004:263) note, mass mobilizations demanding social change outside conventional political channels are “integral to popular views of social movements” and a key indicator of movement activity in political sociology (Walder 2009). Protests that took the form of nonviolent mass mobilizations were also decisive in the 1960s U.S. Civil Rights movement, which was the prototypical case for scholars developing theories of resource mobilization, political process, and contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2006, Oliver 2008, Seidman 2001). Steve Schapiro’s photographs of the 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr. linking arms with fellow (male) leaders of the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march are some of the most iconic social movement images of all time, projecting “models for political participation and action” that had profound impacts in the 1960s and beyond (Snow et al. 2019b:2). Not only did the Civil Rights Movement provide empirical fodder for quantitative protest event research designs, but it also cemented cultural assumptions about what effective resistance looks like.<sup>17</sup> For example, “patriarchal bias in our understanding of social resistance has rendered many strategies unnoticed and unappreciated” (Kuumba 2001:100). A narrow focus on protest often obscures resistance by women, who are more likely to take the lead on providing basic needs like food, shelter, and education that nourish and sustain activists on the streets (Kuumba 2001, Payne 1995 [2007], Taylor 1999, White 2011a, White 2017).

A second and related reason for the lack of systematic study of constructive action is that social movement research tends to focus on upswings in the cycle of contention when mobilization targeting the state is visible and widespread (McAdam and Sewell 2001). Dominant

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<sup>17</sup> Selection and description bias is especially pronounced in protest event data based on mainstream newspapers, which systematically lift up “great men” and confrontation while leaving out leaders and tactics that are less disposed to grabbing headlines (Earl et al. 2004).

theoretical frameworks provide limited traction, however, on the question of how actors sustain collective action when openings in the political and cultural opportunity structure are limited and activity takes less recognizable forms (Meyer 2004). For example, innumerable studies focus on the period leading up to and immediately following the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 (see e.g. Andrews 1997, McAdam 1983, Morris 1984). Relatively few center on the Poor People's Campaign, protest repression after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968, and institutionalization in the movement for Black liberation (for exceptions, see e.g. McKnight 1998, Oliver 2020, Walton 1988). This may be because constructive activities have often been dismissed as having limited prospects to achieve meaningful social change. Abeyance scholars have theorized that less confrontational strategies and tactics are evidence of a "holding pattern" and diminished movement strength (Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015, Taylor 1989, Taylor and Crossley 2013). Alternatively, taking for granted that protest is an adequate indicator of a movement cycle might mean "we miss out on where the real action happens: the movement to implement the movement" (Bell 2014:28).

Finally, constructive activities often take place in the market sphere and thus have largely been the domain of subfields like economic sociology, organizational sociology, and Marxism (see e.g. Collins 2017, Gibson-Graham 2006, Wright 2010, Wry and York 2015). Many social movement scholars have expressed antipathy toward efforts to build alternative economic institutions like cooperatives, viewing them as a slippery slope towards oligarchy or neoliberalism (Clemens and Minkoff 2004, Harrison 2015, Piven and Cloward 1977, Thayer 2017). These critiques tend to view the market as sullyng the ostensibly non-calculative logic of movement actors (Block 1990, Jaffee 2014 [2007], Thayer 2017:159). The movements and markets literature has begun bridging this gap by examining how social movements play a role in

the emergence of new fields and alternative organizational forms (King and Pearce 2010, Walker 2012). Yet these studies still tend to assume a clear boundary between the spheres of economy and civil society whereby social change results from spillover rather than transformation of these spheres in and of themselves (Meyer and Whittier 2014, Schlachter and Már 2020).

These reasons why contentious politics has largely overlooked constructive collective action suggest that accounting for the broader range of ideologies, strategies, and tactics movements employ to pursue their goals requires expanding our analytical toolkit. Decentering a narrow understanding of protest, analyzing the entire course of the movement cycle, and actively exploring links between movements and markets have in fact all been aspirations of many prominent contentious politics scholars (King and Pearce 2010, McAdam and Sewell 2001, McAdam et al. 2006, Tindall 2003, Walker 2012). In other words, systematically theorizing the constructive is not a challenge rooted in an inherent incompatibility with the contentious politics framework. Instead I see it as a promising opportunity for theory extension.

## **ILLUMINATING REPERTOIRES OF CONSTRUCTION IN ACTION**

My concept of repertoires of construction builds on the framework of constructive resistance and the types of historical studies I described earlier of movements for mutual aid, Black Power, and second-wave feminism to encourage more systematic study of constructive collective action. Again, *the constructive* includes a broad range of activities movements engage in to build social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs. *Repertoires of construction* are constellations of constructive strategies and tactics that are grounded in ideologies. Following Oliver and Johnston (2000:43) and Wilson (1973), I understand ideology as “a system of meaning that couples assertions and theories about the nature of social life with values and

norms relevant to promoting and resisting social change” that includes three elements: diagnosis, prognosis, and call to action.<sup>18</sup> Following Ganz (2009:8-10), I understand strategy as “a verb” that captures “how we turn what we have into what we need to get what we want” and tactics as the particular actions movements take to implement their strategies. Monica White’s (2018) study of Collective Agency and Community Resilience is a particularly detailed and illuminating example of a repertoire of construction in action. It suggests these constellations of these elements have unique dynamics and implications for social movement theory that warrant greater analytical attention in their own right.

A key takeaway of White’s story of Black agricultural cooperatives is that the constructive has long been central but overlooked aspect of the struggle for Black liberation. Her story weaves together history and ethnography to demonstrate direct links between food sovereignty projects in contemporary Detroit and the Jim Crow South. As she argues:

Even the study of everyday forms of resistance misses activities that are not disruptive but rather constructive, in the sense that the aggrieved actively build alternatives to existing political and economic relationships. The acts of building knowledge, skills, community, and economic independence have a radical potential that the term does not encompass. We might then ask: Is it possible to conceptualize these ways of building self-sufficiency and self-reliance as resistance in their own right? (White 2018:6)

White’s framework of Collective Agency and Community Resilience provides a way to analyze constructive action across her empirical cases. As such, I view it as a particularly rich example of a repertoire of construction featuring three elements: an ideology of collective agency and community resilience, strategies of commons as praxis, prefigurative politics, and economic

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<sup>18</sup> Oliver and Johnston (2000:43) draw “heavily” on Wilson (1973:91), who defines ideology as “a set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates” including an assessment of the justice of social arrangements and what should be done about them. This definition captures both cognition and values. Wilson describes the elements of ideology as “diagnosis – what is wrong” (95), “prognosis – what must be done” (108), and “rationale – who must do the job” (124). Also see Snow and Benford (1988) for application of these three elements to framing theory.

autonomy, and tactics of building alternative economic and political institutions like farm co-ops, local and regional co-op networks, and urban food justice projects.

Collective Agency and Community Resilience also demonstrates how repertoires of construction can shed light on questions of interest to social movement scholars. For example, in terms of resource acquisition, White's case study of Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Farm shows us that the demonstration project successfully accessed fundraising dollars inaccessible to other civil rights organizations known for more contentious repertoires like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Hamer wasn't able to fully achieve her vision of economic self-determination, however, because the project became dependent on external donors when local whites threatened by Freedom Farm's vision of Black self-determination were able to block access to crucial indigenous resources. In terms of tactical innovation, White shows us that Black agricultural cooperatives in the South preceded an upsurge in food justice mobilization in the North: Freedom Farm and the North Bolivar County Farm Cooperative prefigured regional networks like the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and eventually projects like D-Town Farm in Detroit. CACR also has implications for movement continuity and outcomes. White echoes scholars of the long civil rights movement in demonstrating that repertoires of contention and construction are deeply intertwined in agriculture – an arena often assumed to be “non-political” by contentious politics scholars. In particular, she shows that farmers carried strategies, tactics, and “an ideology of self-sufficiency and self-determination” from their experiences in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements into their work of building alternative economic institutions (White 2018:98). Agricultural cooperatives were also sites of political activism in and of themselves:

The transition from organizing cooperatives to participation in local politics was clear [...] The organizing mechanism that allowed black farmers to increase their profits



and provide for their livelihoods also educated them on the mechanisms to push back against oppressive political power (White 2018:112).

In sum, CACR illustrates that paying attention to the constructive can yield generative insights for social movement theory. It also provides a point of departure to ask how the concept of repertoires of construction generalizes to other movements. The next section takes up this question through a case study of a campaign in the movement for climate justice.

### **CASE STUDY: THE DIVEST/REINVEST CAMPAIGN**

*Social movements have shown us the power of divestment to resist the flow of social and financial capital to industries and economies of violence. We believe that there is enormous potential in not just halting this flow but redirecting it into a new economy based on solidarity, justice, and sustainability.*  
~ Bottger et al. (2018:vii)

Although a number of social scientists have examined activism calling for divestment from fossil fuels (see e.g. Bratman et al. 2016, Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016, Hunt and Weber 2019, Seidman 2015, Yona and Lenferna 2016), the reinvestment demands of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign have been largely overlooked. This campaign is an opportune empirical site to examine the interplay of resistance and building in the climate movement because it explicitly pairs repertoires of contention and construction to move money from the fossil fuel industry to “frontline” communities most affected by climate change (Roberts and Toffololon-Weiss 1999). As Stoner (2019) writes, “Most initiatives, like campus fossil-fuel divestment movements or #DefundDAPL, fight environmentally destructive projects [...] The next logical step [is] working ‘to build the good’ ones.” Proponents of reinvestment argue that moving divested assets from extractive activities to “regenerative” institutions like agricultural cooperatives and community-owned solar farms enacts principles of equity, democracy, systems

transformation, and radical inclusion that characterize a “just transition” (LNS and SPGPP 2018, Pellow 2020, United Frontline Table 2020).

I develop the concept of repertoires of construction through a multi-sited ethnographic case study (Marcus 1995) of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign. Thanks in part to a collaborative research relationship with the Working World, a nonprofit deeply enmeshed in the story of reinvestment, I observed trainings and meetings related to the campaign between October 2017 and March 2019.<sup>19</sup> Many of these events took place online. I also conducted fieldwork about just transition organizing in Kentucky in July and August 2018 and attended a weekend workshop for non-extractive finance activists in Montreat, North Carolina in February 2019. My field notes paid special attention to strategic debates, network ties, and moments of conflict. Semi-structured interviews with 22 individuals (see Table 1) focused on professional trajectories, turning points in the campaign, perceptions and interpretations of changes in the political opportunity structure, and resource acquisition.<sup>20</sup> I triangulated these observations and interviews with organizational documents shared by the Working World, archival sources from the Special Collections Research Center at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and secondary sources.

**Table 1. Interview Participants**

Primary Campaign Focus	Gender Identity		Racial Identity		Age in Years			
	Female	Male	White	Nonwhite	Under 30	30-45	46-60	Over 60
<b>Divest</b>	3	0	2	1	2	1	0	0
<b>Reinvest</b>	9	10	15	4	2	8	5	4
<b>Total</b>	12	10	17	5	4	9	5	4

<sup>19</sup> The Working World facilitated interview recruitment and allowed me to observe invite-only trainings and network calls. Our collaboration had an action research component whereby I drafted narratives about the history of the Our Power Loan Fund to support fundraising and outreach activities. For more details about the Working World, see <https://www.theworkingworld.org/us/>

<sup>20</sup> I secured consent to record from 22 interviewees; five people preferred to speak more informally and I use their insights for background purposes only. All quotations are from interviewees who consented in writing to be directly quoted using either a pseudonym or their real name.

Two considerations guided my case selection. First, the Divest/Reinvest Campaign clearly links resistance targeting states and corporations with building social-relational infrastructure to meet collective needs.<sup>21</sup> By intentionally “selecting on the dependent variable” (Small 2009b), I aim to demonstrate how repertoires of construction can extend contentious politics theory to account for the broader range of ideologies, strategies, and tactics movements employ to pursue their goals. Second, my own involvement in movements for economic democracy and climate justice provided background knowledge and facilitated access to key actors in this case. Although my role was more observer than participant in the Divest/Reinvest Campaign, I have been involved in climate activism as a volunteer leader at my local affiliate of 350.org since 2013.<sup>22</sup> This positionality made it possible to conduct interviews and review primary sources that might otherwise have been inaccessible. Per my consent process, I refer to all characters in this tight-knit movement circle using real names except individuals who actively chose a pseudonym (Jerolmack and Murphy 2017). My account looks behind the scenes of the few publicly available debates about the relationship between divestment and reinvestment (see e.g. Davidson and Kaufman 2015, LaSala 2015, Smith, Brecher and Sheeran 2014) to identify

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<sup>21</sup> Mainstream philanthropic interest in divesting from fossil fuels and reinvesting in climate solutions has coalesced under the banner of Divest Invest, a network of financial professionals and foundations who pledge to shift investments in the top 200 oil, gas, and coal companies to “climate solutions, broadly defined,” within the next five years (Vondrich et al. 2017:11). The network’s tag line is “Doing Good. Performing Better. Beat your Benchmarks. Beat Climate Change.” Although Divest Invest has intersected with the Divest/Reinvest Campaign, the former is largely an elite advocacy initiative that does not recommend particular reinvestment opportunities. As such, it is distinct from the Divest/Reinvest Campaign I focus on in this case study, which clearly utilizes contentious and constructive repertoires composed of specific grassroots movement ideologies, strategies, and tactics. A separate Shake the Foundations initiative that seeks to channel philanthropic resources directly to Seed Commons has been emerging from conversations between foundations and reinvestment activists since the 2016 EDGE Conference and is explicitly linked to Reinvest in Our Power. See <https://reinvestinourpower.org/philanthropy-finance/> for details.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, a 2014 interview with Wisconsin Public Radio in my capacity as 350 Madison Co-Coordinator (accessed July 2020). “Wisconsinites Join World’s Largest-Ever Climate March in New York Last Weekend” <https://www.wpr.org/people/laura-hanson-schlachter>.

elements of the campaign's repertoire of construction and questions it invokes for social movement theory and practice.

### **Origins of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign**

In the United States, political opportunities for action to address the climate crisis have been severely constrained by a powerful corporate-funded countermovement of “organized climate change denial” (Dunlap and McCright 2015:309, McCright and Dunlap 2011). Global warming was a largely nonpartisan issue under the Reagan and H.W. Bush administrations, and there was broad public support for U.S. participation in an international climate treaty in the 1990s (McCright and Dunlap 2003). The “Republican Revolution” brought a number of vocal climate deniers to power, however, and the Senate blocked ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. UN climate treaty negotiations also collapsed in 2009. Congress rejected a comprehensive federal climate bill shortly thereafter. Party affiliation is now a more important factor than scientific understanding in attitudes toward climate change in the U.S. A 2019 poll by the Pew Research Center found that only 17 percent of republicans with high science knowledge believe “human activity contributes a great deal to global climate change” compared to 89 percent of democrats.<sup>23</sup> A number of groups in the climate movement have persisted in calling for legislative action on climate change despite this inopportune political environment (McAdam 2017) while others have turned their attention beyond the state.

The fossil fuel divestment campaign began in 2010 when students at Swarthmore College, a Quaker institution near Philadelphia, began calling for the removal of coal

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<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center (accessed June 2020). “How Americans see climate change and the environment in 7 charts.” Updated 21 April 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/21/how-americans-see-climate-change-and-the-environment-in-7-charts/>

investments from their university endowment.<sup>24</sup> They had formed Mountain Justice in the wake of a class trip to West Virginia where they met environmental justice activists fighting a particularly destructive form of coal mining called mountaintop removal (Apfel 2015, Bell and York 2012, Bell 2016). “We saw and heard about how toxic the coal mining industry is,” said Kate Aronoff, then a first-year student in the nonviolent activism seminar. “It was a moment when the connection between economic injustice and environmental injustice was just so clear” (quoted in Stewart 2014). Locals challenged students to leverage their influence at “an elite and wealthy college” to stand in solidarity with the cause (Apfel 2015:914). As the students considered this call to action back on campus, they also studied student resistance to apartheid South Africa. It inspired them to embrace divestment as a strategy to shame extractive industry in their own backyard (Bartley and Child 2014, Seidman 2015).

Climate justice principles were central to Mountain Justice’s theory of change, prefiguring demands that divested assets serve as reparations for communities like the West Virginian coal towns that had long been exploited by extractive industry (Coates 2014, Harlan et al. 2015).<sup>25</sup> As students wrote in their rebuttal to the Swarthmore Board of Managers’ refusal to divest in September 2013, “Justice and equity lie at the core of our understanding of climate change, environmental justice, and institutional responsibility, as well as the stated values of the college itself.”<sup>26</sup> Mountain Justice demanded both an end to Swarthmore’s endowment profiting

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<sup>24</sup> The 2007 Step It Up Campaign (Schlickeisen 2007), a precursor to 350.org, and the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal Campaign (<https://coal.sierraclub.org/>) helped pave the way but most accounts point to Swarthmore Mountain Justice as the spark for what would become the global fossil fuel divestment movement.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the link between climate justice and reparations, see Coronel et al. (2016) and New Economy Coalition. 2015. “Reparations: What It Looks Like and How We Get There.” 10 November webinar. <https://youtu.be/N7IcENRZfaU>.

<sup>26</sup> The Phoenix (accessed July 2020). “Letter-to-the-Editor: Mountain Justice Responds to Board Divestment Statement.” Originally published in *The Daily Gazette* 13 September 2013.

from mountaintop removal and transformation of the economic system they saw as the root cause of injustice: “Endless growth is a false methodology [...] It is the same logic on which the fossil fuel industry has operated since its inception, and what has driven us to our current economic and environmental crises.” Early on, their diagnosis of the problem held that capitalism and climate injustice are deeply intertwined (Bratman et al. 2016, Klein 2014).

Despite targeting a nonstate institution, in many ways campus divestment activism typified the collective action envisioned by scholars of contentious politics. “From the beginning,” writes Daniel Apfel (2015:925), former executive director of the Responsible Endowments Coalition who worked closely with Mountain Justice, “the fossil fuel divestment campaign’s plan was to spark serious public and confrontational organizing on the issue of climate change and fossil fuel extraction.” By the fall of 2011, campaigns were ratcheting up at Swarthmore and dozens of other schools. Students organized protests, occupied administrative buildings, and formed national networks to mobilize their peers. Hampshire College – an early adopter in the anti-apartheid divestment movement – became the first campus to divest from fossil fuels (Cadan, Mokgopo and Vondrich 2019). Wins at Sterling College and College of the Atlantic followed shortly thereafter (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016).

Student efforts soon caught the attention of other well-resourced organizations that helped spread divestment “fever” to other institutions (Polletta 1998). The Wallace Global Fund was an early champion of Mountain Justice and recruited other foundations that were newly open to supporting more grassroots strategies as alternatives to the failed legislative initiatives “that

left a demoralized climate advocacy community in its wake” (Vondrich et al. 2017:4).<sup>27</sup>

Divestment also piqued the interest of 350.org, then an up-and-coming organization pivoting from international days of action to sustained resistance to the fossil fuel industry.

With thousands of local groups on six continents, 350.org is now the world’s largest social movement organization focused on climate change (Caniglia, Brulle and Szasz 2015:251).<sup>28</sup> A group of Middlebury College students founded 350.org in 2008 with Bill McKibben, an author-activist who has written extensively about environmental issues and become an influential leader in the climate movement (see e.g. McKibben 1989, McKibben 2007, Schifeling and Hoffman 2019).<sup>29</sup> Members often say “our mission is in our name” because 350.org’s founding goal was to keep warming at livable levels by limiting the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million.<sup>30</sup> The group’s first campaigns were decentralized mobilizations that asked communities around the world to show their support for policies to limit carbon emissions. The 2009 International Day of Climate Action, for example, called on policymakers to negotiate a global agreement to limit carbon emissions at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen (COP 15). Local demonstrations

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<sup>27</sup> Mainstream philanthropic interest in divesting from fossil fuels and reinvesting in climate solutions has coalesced under the banner of Divest Invest, a network of financial professionals and foundations who pledge to shift investments in the top 200 oil, gas, and coal companies to “climate solutions, broadly defined,” within the next five years (Vondrich et al. 2017:11). The network’s tag line is “Doing Good. Performing Better. Beat your Benchmarks. Beat Climate Change.” Although Divest Invest has intersected with the Divest/Reinvest Campaign since its founding in 2014, the former is largely an elite advocacy initiative that does not recommend particular reinvestment opportunities. As such, it is distinct from the Divest/Reinvest Campaign I focus on in this case study, which clearly utilizes contentious and constructive repertoires composed of specific grassroots movement ideologies, strategies, and tactics. A separate Shake the Foundations initiative that seeks to channel philanthropic resources directly to Seed Commons has been emerging from conversations between foundations and reinvestment activists since the 2016 Edge Conference. See <https://reinvestinourpower.org/philanthropy-finance/> for details.

<sup>28</sup> 350.org (accessed June 2020). “Get Involved.” <https://350.org/get-involved/>

<sup>29</sup> 350.org (accessed June 2020). “History.” <https://350.org/about/>

<sup>30</sup> 350.org (accessed June 2020). “Science.” <https://350.org/science/>

ranged from divers unfurling an underwater 350 banner in the Maldives to skiers who made a human 350 on a snow-covered slope in New Zealand. Unlike most “Big Green” groups (see e.g. Braun 2009, Morford 2009), 350.org’s support for the ill-fated American Clean Energy and Security Act (the “Waxman-Markey” bill) was lukewarm. Environmental justice activists argued the cap-and-trade system for U.S. carbon emissions it would have created did not go far enough (Frosch et al. 2009, Mazur 2016).

In response to the “spectacular” failure of politicians in Copenhagen and Congress, 350.org set its sights on firms profiting from the burning of fossil fuels (McKibben 2012). In August 2011, McKibben led a civil disobedience action at the White House to protest TransCanada Corporation’s proposed construction of a tar sands pipeline called Keystone XL.<sup>31</sup> Over 1,200 scientists, faith leaders, and activists were arrested over the course of ten days, thrusting Keystone XL into the center of a national energy policy debate (Kojola 2017, Liptak 2020).<sup>32</sup> As the campaign against TransCanada picked up steam, 350.org began to explore additional strategies to challenge the authority of the fossil fuel industry.

Divestment was a perfect fit. “Movements require enemies,” wrote McKibben in a July 2012 article titled “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Match.” He argued that policy solutions were a non-starter until climate activists tackled fossil fuel corporations head on:

And enemies are what climate change has lacked. But what all these numbers make painfully, usefully clear is that the planet does indeed have an enemy – one far more committed to action than governments or individuals. Given this hard math, we need to view the fossil-fuel industry in a new light. It has become a rogue industry, reckless like no other force on Earth. It is Public Enemy Number One to the survival of our planetary civilization.

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<sup>31</sup> TransCanada Corporation, a Canadian company, changed its name to TC Energy in 2019. See <https://www.tcenergy.com/TC-Energy/>.

<sup>32</sup> I participated alongside my indomitable mother-in-law, the late Rev. Dr. Barbara Schlachter, and NASA scientist James Hansen.



McKibben laid out the case for divestment as a strategy to loosen the fossil fuel industry's grip on political action to cut emissions and called on readers to demand that their institutions divest from the world's top 200 coal, oil, and gas companies. The article attracted widespread attention in environmental circles and heralded a dramatic upswing in the divestment protest cycle.

A crucial aspect of 350.org's theory of change was straight from the Mountain Justice playbook: college students leveraging their "moral outrage" to stigmatize university endowment investments "that guarantee they won't have much of a planet on which to make use of their degree" (McKibben 2012). In November, 350.org launched a 21-city tour featuring McKibben and figures like author Naomi Klein, anti-apartheid leader Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, and indigenous activist Winona LaDuke. It was "called the Do the Math tour, but it's not a calculus class," said McKibben. "Think of it as more of a campaign rally meets TED talk, with a very dire warning about the future attached" (Rolling Stone 2012). The tour deliberately engaged students and brought fossil fuel divestment to the national stage as 350.org "packaged and popularized divestment [...] in an easily digestible format, leading to its rapid mass diffusion on campuses" (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016:665). Recruits moved to start their own divestment campaigns could find an organizing guide, talking points, and links to peer efforts online.<sup>33</sup> 350.org also forged partnerships with organizations like the Responsible Endowments Coalition to provide additional resources and support under the banner Go Fossil Free, including a fellowship program that placed student interns with allied groups in the network. As student pressure and fiduciary evidence of an impending "carbon bubble" mounted, Go Fossil Free became the fastest-growing divestment campaign in history (Ansar, Caldecott and Tilbury 2013, Braungardt,

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, 350.org's "How to Run a Campus Divestment Campaign" guide outlining seven distinct phases of a successful campaign: <https://gofossilfree.org/usa/divestment-guide/>.

van den Bergh and Dunlop 2019, Hunt and Weber 2019). It soon expanded to other types of institutions such as congregations and state pension funds (Ayling and Gunningham 2017).

Empowered by this momentum, student activists built their own networks to coordinate campus-based strategy and assert themselves in the rapidly expanding divestment strategic action field (Fligstein and McAdam 2011). Mountain Justice hosted over 200 people at the first national youth convergence at Swarthmore in February 2013 (Stewart 2014). Shortly thereafter, a group of students and alumni founded the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network (DSN) to “unite campus campaigns across the country and galvanize the power of the student divestment movement” (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016:665). DSN soon began dispatching peer trainers to seed new campaigns and mentor emerging leaders. “I’m looking back at past movements of history, and [the DSN trainer is] now telling me that I can be a part of this and start a campaign on my campus and take down the fossil fuel industry,” recalled Erin Bridges of the inaugural training on her campus. “That was just really transformative for me.” Like many students whose professional trajectories were transformed by participation in the divestment campaign, Bridges went on to found the University of North Carolina-Asheville Divestment Coalition, join the DSN staff after graduation, and serve as Fundraising Director for Sunrise Movement. DSN also began developing its own analysis of what would be necessary to transform the broader climate policy debate.

### **The Divest/Reinvest Campaign**

DSN’s emerging “politic” was deeply shaped by Mountain Justice’s commitment to climate justice (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016:666) and the mentorship of Gopal Dayaneni, an educator and co-founder of the Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project (Movement

Generation).<sup>34</sup> Since Swarthmore’s divestment campaign grew out of being “in direct relationship with frontline communities in Appalachia,” said Dayaneni, “it created an opportunity to do a kind of political education about the nature of capitalism and extractivism in particular [...] that didn’t have traction before.” The theory of change that developed out of conversations between Dayaneni and youth activists at Resource Generation<sup>35</sup> and DSN held that “divestment from fossil fuels is not an end in itself, but rather a critical step in the movement for climate justice, towards a new energy economy that values people and the planet” (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2016:666). This implied that institutions divesting from fossil fuels must go beyond a sin stock screen to actively reinvest in climate solutions. It called for a just transition that directly moved money from the “extractive economy” into building a “regenerative” alternative “based on ecological restoration, community protection, equitable partnerships, justice, and full and fair participatory practices” in frontline communities (United Frontline Table 2020:6).

Centering the question of where the divestors should invest (Smith, Brecher and Sheeran 2014) was distinct from 350.org’s approach, which was much more focused on challenging the authority of the fossil fuel industry than the extractive economy writ large. 350.org has consistently sought to build a big tent around cutting greenhouse gas emissions rather than taking a firm stance in the capitalism-versus-climate debate (Klein 2014, Schifeling and Hoffman 2019). “‘Where are we going to put that money?’ was a big question that we had across the board,” said Jay Carmona, a former divestment campaign manager with 350.org. “Well, probably into things that are doing the opposite of what fossil fuel companies are doing for the

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<sup>34</sup> Movement Generation (accessed June 2020). “Who We Are.” <https://movementgeneration.org/about/who-we-are/>

<sup>35</sup> Resource Generation is a group of people aged 18-35 who leverage their class privilege to redistribute wealth. See Resource Generation (accessed July 2020). “Who We Are.” <https://resourcegeneration.org/who-we-are/>.

planet [...] but certainly we didn't have an answer to that for a while." When asked about alternatives to fossil fuel investments in the early days of the Do the Math tour, McKibben offered anodyne answers like clean tech or campus sustainability programs. "He even said things like, 'It's okay to make money – it's just not okay to make money off of the companies that are destroying the planet,'" said Dayaneni, who lamented that "a lot of opportunity to liberate people's revolutionary imagination was lost." In response, Dayaneni set about bringing his "freedom dream" (Kelley 2002) – reinvesting divested assets in a just transition – to life with colleagues in the climate justice movement.

The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), a national network including Movement Generation and over 70 other organizations, has been the "center of gravity" of the U.S. climate justice movement since 2013.<sup>36</sup> The first international Climate Justice Summit took place in conjunction with the UN climate summit (COP6) in the Hague in 2000. Since then, more and more U.S.-based groups have called for action to address climate change that is consistent with environmental justice principles of equity, participation, reparations, and restoration (Harlan et al. 2015:136, Schlosberg and Collins 2014). CJA grew out of a three-year grassroots process of bringing these groups together around a strategy and vision that expands the definition of just transition from compensation for displaced workers to systems transformation (LNS and SPGPP 2018). "We've reclaimed and expanded the definition of just transition to mean not just workers, but transitioning whole communities in different sectors," said CJA Reinvest Project Director Yuki Kidokoro. "Whether it's energy or waste or transportation or housing or food ... all those systems need to shift."

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<sup>36</sup> Climate Justice Alliance (accessed June 2020). "About." <https://climatejusticealliance.org/about/>

In contrast to traditional campaign-based organizing calling decision-makers to account, CJA's just transition framework is consistent with Movement Generation's (2013, 2015) Resilience-Based Organizing strategy. This approach leads with "a bold vision worth working for"<sup>37</sup> and explicitly connects the dots between capitalism, colonialism, and climate change:

To understand the climate crisis we cannot simply look up at the atmosphere and count carbon. We must look down at the economy – at the erosion of seed, soil and story and the exploitation of land, labor and life" (Movement Generation 2015:22).

Resilience-Based Organizing also combines La Via Campesina's philosophy of *buen vivir* or "living well" (von Redecker and Herzig 2020) with the Black Panthers' praxis of economic self-determination (Movement Generation 2013). Guided by the maxim, "What the hands do, the heart learns," it promotes community-based labor as the foundation of self-determination and systems change. This strategic sensibility prioritizes concrete solutions that meet immediate needs in communities most vulnerable to climate disruption. It soon became foundational to the theory and practice of reinvestment.

Much of CJA's organizing around just transition has taken place under the umbrella of Our Power, an initiative to resist resource extraction and build regenerative demonstration projects that has intersected with the Divest/Reinvest Campaign in formative ways.<sup>38</sup> Our Power began in June 2013 with a camp hosted by the Black Mesa Water Coalition (Black Mesa), a Diné- and Hopi-led organization in northern Arizona that has been fighting coal companies while building new, green jobs since 2001.<sup>39</sup> CJA members from California to Kentucky came together

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<sup>37</sup> Movement Generation (accessed June 2020). "Resilience-Based Organizing." <https://movementgeneration.org/resources/key-concepts/resiliencebasedorganizing/>

<sup>38</sup> Movement Generation (accessed June 2017). "Climate Justice Alliance/Our Power Campaign." <https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/movementbuilding-2/cjaourpower/>.

<sup>39</sup> Although the Navajo Nation rejected a proposal to change its name to the Diné Nation in 2017, many members of Black Mesa prefer the latter term. Black Mesa has successfully used litigation and protest to shut down the Mohave Generating Station and Black Mesa Mine and advocacy to establish a Navajo Green Economy Fund and

to share stories and chart a new way forward together: “The time is now, we’re at a crossroads,” said Black Mesa Executive Director Wahleah Johns. “We can continue this business-as-usual path or we can create solutions for our future generations.”<sup>40</sup> Black Mesa joined Detroit, MI and Richmond, CA in the 2013 cohort of Our Power pilot sites, which began coordinating their just transition activities as a “translocal” network of frontline communities sharing resources and lessons learned (United Frontline Table 2020:9). A 2014 cohort of pilot sites in Jackson, MS; Antonio, TX; and Eastern Kentucky joined the following summer.<sup>41</sup>

One goal of Our Power was to encourage environmental justice groups to expand their scope beyond resisting extractive industry to building economic alternatives: “We must struggle to fight the bad, build the new, change the story, and move the money” (United Frontline Table 2020:11). As part of this effort, CJA initiated a research project to identify potential sources of financing for “local living economy” projects in each pilot site. As Kidokoro said:

We looked at a couple of different strategies, things like the financial transaction tax and other things, including the divestment student movement [...] The divestment movement had been going strong, but reinvestment – where the money’s going – was still not talked about very much.

Several CJA leaders were frustrated with 350.org’s “carbon fundamentalism” (Movement Generation 2015) and saw its narrow focus on divestment as a failure of imagination. Institutions needed substitutes for investments in fossil fuels. Our Power pilot sites like Black Mesa needed capital to build regenerative infrastructure. Why not bring these two pieces of the puzzle

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Commission within the Navajo Nation tribal government. For a discussion of these examples, see Mersha, Sara. 2013. “Black Mesa Water Coalition resists coal, forges vision for climate justice” (accessed July 2020). 23 April. <https://grassrootsonline.org/blog/newsblogblack-mesa-water-coalition-resists-coal-forges-vision-climate-justice/>.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in video about 2013 Our Power Camp available at Movement Generation (accessed June 2017). “Climate Justice Alliance/Our Power Campaign.” <https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/movementbuilding-2/cjaourpower/>.

<sup>41</sup> Movement Generation (accessed June 2017). “Climate Justice Alliance/Our Power Campaign.” <https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/movementbuilding-2/cjaourpower/>.

together? With CJA's blessing, Dayaneni began collaborating with Deirdre Smith, 350.org's Strategic Partnerships Director and advisor to many student divestment activists interested in broader systems transformation. She persuaded 350.org to fund a meeting to explore the potential of pairing divestment with reinvestment in a more intentional way.

By all accounts, the gathering Dayaneni and Smith convened in Oakland in April of 2014 marked the launch of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign. The meeting brought together CJA members, campus activists, and organizations with technical expertise in building alternative economic institutions to strategize about how to channel divested fossil fuel assets into values- and place-based economic development in frontline communities.<sup>42</sup> "It was a watershed moment," said Working World Executive Director Brendan Martin, whose presentation on non-extractive finance offered a model for how to move money in alignment with just transition principles.<sup>43</sup> As Dayaneni said, "that's what sort of set things in motion, that meeting. And it wasn't that that was where the idea [of reinvestment] came from per se, but it was where we suddenly went from a bunch of people having a similar vague idea to actually saying, 'This is the thing we could move.'" The relationship-building, collective visioning, and reparations frame established common ground among groups that hadn't previously worked together. It also piqued the interest of newcomers to CJA's just transition framework: "I think I slept, like, four hours the whole weekend," said Chris Porter, a former staffer at the Mountain Association for Economic Development (MACED) in Kentucky who would go on to co-found the Patchwork Cooperative Loan Fund in Lexington, KY. "I was just so excited about it [...] this idea is so brilliant about

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<sup>42</sup> CJA member organizations in attendance included the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Black Mesa, Communities for a Better Environment, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, MACED, and Movement Generation. Divestment organizations included DSN and the Responsible Endowments Coalition. Alternative economic development organizations included the New Economy Coalition and the Working World.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the Working World and Seed Commons' approach to non-extractive finance, see <https://seedcommons.org/about-seed-commons/seed-commons-approach-to-non-extractive-finance/>.

how to take money from the places that have robbed and stolen and extracted from communities and give it back to people to remake their future.” Members of this nascent network decided to report back to their groups and continue brainstorming in the coming months.

Momentum continued to grow during the eventful summer and fall of 2014, which brought several turning points in the Divest/Reinvest Campaign (see Appendix 1). In June, a critical mass of participants from the Oakland meeting reconvened at the New Economy Coalition’s conference in Boston. Dayaneni, Smith, and Martin led a standing-room-only session on reinvestment, invited new groups to get involved, and spoke about just transition in plenary sessions. In July, 30 campus divestment activists attended a Reinvestment Summit hosted by DSN, the Responsible Endowments Coalition, 350.org, and the New Economy Coalition in Philadelphia. Several of these students also attended CJA’s national convening in Richmond in August, where they built relationships and participated in a joint strategy session with climate justice organizations across the country. In September, the People’s Climate March brought over 400,000 protestors to New York City to demand political action on climate change in advance of UN talks. Divestment activists timed the mobilization with announcements of several major victories.<sup>44</sup> Groups interested in reinvestment also hosted a joint strategy session with DSN, New Economy Coalition, and 350.org in conjunction with the mobilization. DSN’s decision to incorporate reinvestment into its trainings for campus organizers scheduled for the fall semester suggested that coordinated divest-and-reinvest demands had the potential to diffuse widely.

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<sup>44</sup> The announcement featured a report by Arabella Advisors estimating the campaign had secured over \$50 billion in divestment commitments in less than three years, as well as new commitments from the World Council of Churches and over 50 foundations, including the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (Vondrich et al. 2017:7). At least 181 institutions had made divestment pledges by September 2014 (Yona and Lenferna 2016:190).



Challenges emerged, however, as the inchoate coalition navigated dilemmas about how to actually build the movement bridges (Roth 2003) necessary to implement their ambitious vision together. In February 2015, Dayaneni and Smith facilitated a Divest/Reinvest Campaign strategy session in parallel with the CJA steering committee meeting in Jackson. The invite list included participants from the April 2014 meeting in Oakland along with groups like the Fund for Democratic Communities, which was collaborating with the Working World to establish a “values-based financial commons” to promote economic self-determination in the South.<sup>45</sup> The goals of the Jackson meeting were to create “a shared political analysis,” explore the nuts and bolts of moving money from fossil fuels to frontline communities, and build consensus around governance and next steps (Coronel et al. 2016:10). The agenda was largely consumed, however, by what MACED staffer Brianna Isaacs recalled as “tense” but “productive” debates about structure, decision-making authority, and inclusion. Dayaneni described the meeting as “challenging and essential,” and it resulted in the creation of a working group that volunteered to draft more tangible plans. Yet the debates raised a number of lingering questions: Should campaigners prioritize divestment or reinvestment demands? Who would do the legwork to identify alternative investment options for institutional targets? How would capital be allocated among frontline communities? And perhaps most fundamentally, who was entitled to make these types of decisions on behalf of the group? “It was very up in the air at that point,” said Porter.

The Jackson meeting also exposed deeper rifts emerging between and within key players in the Divest/Reinvest Campaign. The working group began meeting regularly to create the social-relational infrastructure for a coordinated reinvestment effort. During the summer of 2015, they “advance[d] thinking and discussion around culturally appropriate technical assistance and

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<sup>45</sup> The Fund for Democratic Communities was instrumental in establishing Seed Commons before it voluntarily sunset in June 2020 and created the Southern Reparations Loan Fund in its stead. For details, see <https://f4dc.org/>.

that kind of thing,” said Kidokoro, and developed more “concrete” proposals for getting regenerative demonstration projects in Our Power pilot sites off the ground. In September, the Working World hosted a training about non-extractive finance at the Watershed Center in upstate New York. Over the next five years, this workshop would become an annual event for the Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative, a decentralized national network of local loan funds that follow principles of “productive sustainability, democratic inclusion and ownership, radical inclusion that centers historically marginalized communities, maximizing community benefit, and non-extraction.”<sup>46</sup> Several reinvestment working group members attended in 2015, but divestment activists were conspicuously absent. Gopal continued to mentor students as DSN and 350.org organized a separate training on reinvestment for staff and campus activists in November 2015. Strategic conversations about moving money to frontline communities, however, were clearly becoming organizationally siloed.

Within DSN, the idea of reinvestment became more contested as the organization pursued it more actively. By March 2016, DSN had helped six campus groups incorporate a specific reinvestment demand into their campaigns: reinvest at least 5 percent of divested funds into local regenerative projects within five years (Coronel et al. 2016:9). In May, several leadership team members helped publish a “Reinvestment Toolkit” with Movement Generation and CJA that underscored the centrality of this demand in DSN’s theory of change (ibid:6-8):

[Reinvestment] allows resistance-based movements, including the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Movement, to align with frontline communities to contest for and build real solutions to the climate crisis [...] [Students] have taken aim at the fossil fuel industry [and] also understand that it is time for us to contest in the realm of solutions.

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<sup>46</sup> Reinvest in Our Power (accessed June 2020). “Just Transition Projects.” <https://reinvestinourpower.org/just-transition-projects/>

Yet constituents in DSN's network were not actually of one mind on the subject. "The core questions that divided student organizers are the same questions facing the broader environmental movement," wrote faculty and students reflecting on their experiences with Fossil Free American University (Bratman et al. 2016:683). "To what extent does meaningfully addressing climate change require a revolutionary reimagining of our economy and society?"

Proponents of reinvestment like Meaghan LaSala of Divest UMaine argued that divestment in and of itself didn't go far enough. They criticized investment screens that rule out fossil fuels without provisions to ensure that divested assets aren't channeled into other industries they saw as extractive, such as Big Tech. Instead, they contended that students needed to "put the idea of climate justice into practice" by demanding that their schools move money into local loan funds owned and controlled by frontline communities (LaSala 2015). This argument had obvious synergy with the Our Power initiative and expanded common ground between students and CJA. It proved controversial, however, within DSN. "The student divestment movement really forked around this question of whether we should just do divestment because that's measurable wins or whether we should make reinvestment demands, which are actually about social change," said Dayaneni.

Reinvestment skeptics supported moving money from the extractive to regenerative economy in the abstract but saw developing alternative investment options in frontline communities as beyond the capacity of most campus organizers – and potentially even a distraction from their core task of stigmatizing the fossil fuel industry. Training student activists to find endowment managers' pressure points was a herculean task, but calling for divestment from the top 200 fossil fuel companies required relatively little financial savvy or context-

specific coaching in and of itself. In contrast, expanding the scope of student demands from divestment to reinvestment significantly expanded the need for staff resources. As Bridges said:

[DSN] had to be really strategic about where we were going to be organizing students to do reinvestment because we realize there have to be partners in those areas that we can connect students to, to do that organizing with. [Reinvestment] was part of the strategy, but only in certain places [...] When I became a coach [...] it was like – I’m just trying to get folks to run a basic campaign, and that by itself is super difficult [...] So when you take it to this next level of reinvestment ... I’m not saying it’s not possible, it just takes a lot of time.

Seeking to bridge the difference, another faction within DSN proposed that campus campaigns push for more straightforward – albeit less radical – reinvestment options like bolstering campus sustainability plans, which are now common in higher education (Augustine and King 2019).

Bridging the difference was consistent with 350.org’s approach, which endorsed the idea of reinvestment while leaving aside the question of radically reimagining the economy.

Although 350.org had taken initiative to convene and coordinate groups directly resisting the fossil fuel industry and those building a just transition, this work was largely driven by a single staffer: “Deirdre [Smith] was really instrumental in all of this, said Dayaneni, “She really commandeered a lot of resources from 350 to keep the [reinvestment] work moving forward.” As Strategic Partnerships Director, Smith saw reinvestment as an opportunity for 350.org to take a stronger stand in the national conversation about intersecting forms of injustice that followed Michael Brown’s death at the hands of police. Her August 2014 essay on 350.org’s blog echoed Movement Generation’s (2015) call to “look down” at exploitation in daily life to find the cause of carbon accumulation in the atmosphere:

It was not hard for me to make the connection between the tragedy in Ferguson, Missouri, and the catalyst for my work to stop the climate crisis [...] Part of that work involves climate organizers acknowledging and understanding that our fight is not simply with the carbon in the sky, but with the powers on the ground (Smith 2014).

Smith became deeply engaged with the Movement for Black Lives, eventually leaving her directorship in the summer of 2015. 350.org continued to push divestment forward, but its leadership around creating alternative investment vehicles tapered out shortly thereafter. A twelve-page Divest/Reinvest Campaign update in 2019 devotes only four sentences to reinvestment, calling on institutions to commit 5 percent of their portfolios to unspecified “climate solutions” (Cadan, Mokgopo and Vondrich 2019:11). As of this writing, the Go Fossil Free website is similarly abstract: “Reinvestment may be but is not limited to support projects that stem from a just transition to renewable and clean energy sources such as trainings for workers and infrastructure development.”<sup>47</sup> In lieu of a specific call to action, 350.org has largely left the work of creating non-extractive reinvestment opportunities to organizations more deeply rooted in frontline communities.

CJA continued to develop pathways to move money to Our Power communities throughout 2016. In April, several key players in the Divest/Reinvest Campaign participated in the annual conference of the EDGE Funders Alliance, a philanthropic network focused on supporting “systemic alternatives that support justice, equity and the well-being of the planet”<sup>48</sup> that had recently launched a Just Transition Collaborative with Movement Generation and CJA.<sup>49</sup> The Our Power initiative inspired the conference theme of “Build the New: Resourcing Change for a World in Transition.” The Working World, Fund for Democratic Communities, and Black Mesa were all in attendance. A session on reinvestment laid the groundwork for Shake the Foundation, an initiative to channel foundation resources directly to Seed Commons.<sup>50</sup> In June,

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<sup>47</sup> Go Fossil Free (accessed 20 June 2020). “Reinvestment.” <https://gofossilfree.org/divestment/reinvestment/>

<sup>48</sup> Edge Funders Alliance (accessed July 2020). “About Us.” <https://edgefunders.org/about-us/>

<sup>49</sup> Edge Funders Alliance (accessed July 2020). “The 2016 Just Giving Conference.” <https://edgefunders.org/annual-conference/the-2016-conference/>

<sup>50</sup> See <https://reinvestinourpower.org/philanthropy-finance/> for details.

CJA members formally adopted a new strategic initiative called Reinvest in Our Power. Maintaining that “we will not resource a Just Transition from charity alone,”<sup>51</sup> the initiative’s first task was to incubate a non-extractive loan fund for regenerative projects in Our Power pilot sites. CJA shared the idea with 350.org and DSN during a network gathering at the New Economy Coalition conference in Buffalo in July.<sup>52</sup> Staff capacity to implement these plans was limited, however, as all three organizations focused on keeping a climate denier out of the White House.

### **A Shift in the Political Opportunity Structure**

The November 2016 presidential election dealt a devastating blow to the movement for climate justice. Donald Trump promptly announced his intention to deliver on campaign promises to greenlight Keystone XL and withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. 350.org Executive Director May Boeve called Trump’s designation as president-elect a “disaster.”<sup>53</sup> CJA Executive Director Angela Adrar declared “the end of the inside game” and pledged to “hold the line on environmental and climate justice.”<sup>54</sup> As the #NotMyPresident hashtag went viral and hundreds of thousands took to the streets (Frumin 2016), many divestment activists began to question their strategic approach. “A lot of students were just like, why are we fighting for this

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<sup>51</sup> Climate Justice Alliance (accessed June 2020). “How We Work.” <https://climatejusticealliance.org/how-we-work/#Build-the-New>

<sup>52</sup> New Economy Coalition (accessed June 2017). “Commonbound Network Gathering: ‘Reinvest in Our Power Convening.’” <https://neweconomy.net/commonbound-network-gathering-reinvest-our-power-convening>

<sup>53</sup> 350.org (accessed July 2020). “November 9, 2016 Press Release: 350.org Responds to Election of Donald Trump.” <https://350.org/press-release/350-org-responds-to-election-of-donald-trump/>

<sup>54</sup> Climate Justice Alliance (accessed July 2020). “November 10, 2016 Blog Post: The Election Crash: The End of the Inside Game.” <https://climatejusticealliance.org/the-election-crash-the-end-of-the-inside-game/>

when [...] there are some other really high-stakes battles being fought right now?” said Pilar Nuñez of Columbia Divest for Climate Justice; divestment “just wasn’t resonating in the way that it might have in a previous political moment.” 350.org discontinued its Fossil Free Fellowship and expanded programming internationally.<sup>55</sup> Other organizations sunset their divestment programs shortly thereafter.<sup>56</sup> The election was also a turning point for DSN. As Bridges said:

It was honestly just a key moment of the DSN coming together and being like, are we doing enough to win this fight? [...] If we were going to actually take on this crisis in the way that it demanded, we needed to take this fight off of the university arena [...] We want to be building political power in a way that is not possible when we’re just focusing on endowments [...] We want to be organizing young people to disrupt and to take back political power.

DSN and 350.org organized nationwide student walkouts to denounce Trump’s inauguration on January 23, 2017 (Sidahmed, Puglise and Milman 2017). Yet shielded by a Republican majority in Congress, the new administration soon began systematically dismantling decades of federal environmental regulations and protections for frontline communities (Pulido et al. 2019, Rios 2020). DSN shut down operations that spring. Several staffers, including Bridges, went on to launch Sunrise Movement in the summer of 2017. Their goal is to resist the Trump administration by challenging Republican authority on the national stage.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 350.org’s strategic international expansion has been underway since at least 2014. Its global pivot accelerated after the 2016 presidential election, although U.S.-based 350.org groups have continued to be active in criticizing the Trump administration and attempting to protect gains made during the Obama administration.

<sup>56</sup> For example, the Responsible Endowments Coalition, which helped coordinate campaigns on 45 campuses, closed in late 2019 due to funding shortfalls and lack of capacity. Responsible Endowments Coalition (accessed July 2020). “Public Statement on REC’s Closing.” [http://www.endowmentethics.org/public\\_statement\\_on\\_rec\\_s\\_closing](http://www.endowmentethics.org/public_statement_on_rec_s_closing)

<sup>57</sup> Sunrise Movement is “building an army of young people” to protest the new administration’s climate policies, elect climate champions, and advocate for the Green New Deal. It has gained national prominence for its militant tactics including sit-ins targeting Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell. As of this writing, Sunrise Movement had “hubs” at over 300 high schools and colleges in nearly every state. For details, see <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/> and NBC’s March 6, 2019 documentary “Anatomy of a Movement: Sunrise and the Ascent of the Green New Deal” available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/embedded-video/mmv055315525982>.

Although much of the moral urgency that once propelled campus fossil fuel divestment has been redirected, the Divest/Reinvest Campaign has persisted in other forms. The fiduciary case for divestment has never been stronger; more and more institutions are recognizing the “carbon bubble” as a threat to their bottom line (Cadan, Mokgopo and Vondrich 2019, Leaton 2011). Over 1,200 universities, foundations, municipalities, and faith groups have divested more than \$14 trillion from the fossil fuel industry since 2011, and activists have increased the pressure on high-profile private sector targets like JP Morgan Chase.<sup>58</sup> The world’s largest fund manager pledged to lower its exposure to fossil fuel investments in a major victory in January 2020 (Partridge 2020). At the time, the BlackRock announcement seemed to herald a resurgence of youth-led divestment campaigns after a period of abeyance. The Better Future Project had launched Divest Ed to “step into the gap” left by 350.org, DSN, and the Responsible Endowments Coalition in October 2018, creating a new fellowship program to mobilize the next generation of student divestment leaders (Shemkus 2019). On 13 February 2020, Divest Ed coordinated a day of action involving students from 60 North American schools who held sit-ins, walkouts, and banner drops to demand their endowments divest from fossil fuels. This organizing feat “would have been unimaginable” in early 2019 (Engelfried 2020).

Relative to DSN and 350.org, Divest Ed’s messaging is much more focused on detailed reinvestment demands. At the time of this writing, its website listed six reinvestment-specific campaign resources including CJA and Movement Generation’s just transition framework and their May 2016 reinvestment toolkit published with DSN (Coronel et al. 2016).<sup>59</sup> It also featured plans to form a Reinvestment Research Cohort of students who will write a series of reports

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<sup>58</sup> Fossil Free: Divestment (accessed 20 June 2020). “1000+ Divestment Commitments.” <https://gofossilfree.org/divestment/commitments/>

<sup>59</sup> Divest Ed (accessed July 2020). “Reinvestment.” <https://divested.betterfutureproject.org/reinvestment>



highlighting “viable investment options” for university administrators seeking alternatives to fossil fuels in their regions. The model report on New England cites Reinvest in Our Power as the “seeds for this work” and profiles several place-based social impact funds, including Seed Commons members Boston Ujima Project and the Working World (Bottger et al. 2018:vii). Its authors – all veterans of Boston-area divestment campaigns – seem eager to preempt concerns that identifying reinvestment opportunities is beyond the capacity of student activists or a distraction from their core task: Reinvesting the money once used to finance extractive industries into communities that have faced injustice is a powerful and necessary strategy for our movements (ibid:vi). They call on the next generation of student leaders to recalibrate the balance of resistance and building in the Divest/Reinvest Campaign:

“What we focus on grows.” This is a saying from social justice facilitator and author Adrienne Maree Brown, who writes about the idea that we cannot just focus on and react to negative forces; we have to imagine and build models for healing relationships with each other and the earth (ibid:vii).

Divest Ed’s efforts around reinvestment signal ongoing dialogue and collaboration between student activists and communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis, yet it’s unclear whether the group will be able to sustain campus-based organizing momentum among students scattered by COVID-19. In the meantime, CJA has also begun putting flesh on the bones of reinvestment through the Our Power Loan Fund.

The closure of DSN in 2017 prompted CJA to reevaluate its vision of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign, in particular the mechanisms that would actually move the money. It was “a big hit for our model,” said Kidokoro, who has been central in carrying the vision forward. The Reinvest in Our Power steering committee spent a year processing lessons learned and developing a new strategy. In late 2017, CJA announced the creation of a new initiative to provide technical support and non-extractive loans for regenerative projects in Our Power pilot

sites.<sup>60</sup> CJA's Our Power Loan Fund is a lending member of Seed Commons, a cooperative that now includes more than 25 non-extractive loan funds that pool capital and allocate it democratically among members.<sup>61</sup> Seed Commons members have invested \$7.8 million in building alternative economic institutions to date. In 2019, the Our Power Loan Fund made its first loan to a worker cooperative in Maryland called Earthbound Building, Farm, and Forestry (Stoner 2019).<sup>62</sup> Shake the Foundation has continued to promote Reinvest in Our Power in the philanthropic sphere.<sup>63</sup>

The Divest/Reinvest Campaign exemplifies how repertoires of contention and construction are simultaneously operative in the movement for climate justice and deeply intertwined. Although previous accounts of the campaign have focused on public, disruptive activities that mount direct resistance to fossil fuel industry influence in the economy, building social-relational infrastructure that meets collective needs is also central to its theory of change. In the next sections, I identify three elements of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign's repertoire of construction and questions this case invokes for contentious politics theory.

### **Elements of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign's Repertoire of Construction**

The Divest/Reinvest Campaign includes many examples of the constructive. "Our social movements need to actually be building meaningful infrastructure that meets people's needs, that realizes the world that we want," said Dayaneni. I focus on three key elements of the campaign's repertoire of construction: 1) an ideology of intersectional anti-capitalism, 2) strategies of

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<sup>60</sup> Climate Justice Alliance (accessed June 2020). "Reinvest in Our Power." <https://climatejusticealliance.org/workgroup/reinvest/>

<sup>61</sup> Seed Commons (accessed June 2020). <https://seedcommons.org/>

<sup>62</sup> Ceres Trust (accessed June 2020). "Climate Justice Alliance." <https://cerestrust.org/climate-justice-alliance/>

<sup>63</sup> Chorus Foundation (accessed July 2020). "Grants: Shake the Foundations." <https://chorusfoundation.org/what-we-fund/edge-funders-alliance/>

Resilience-Based Organizing, and 3) tactics of translocal non-extractive finance. I then explore implications of this bundle of activities for resource acquisition, tactical innovation, and movement continuity and outcomes.

The Divest/Reinvest Campaign's ideology of intersectional anti-capitalism locates the root cause of injustice in capitalism. Rather than focusing narrowly on counting carbon or privileging certain forms of oppression, this diagnosis holds that "The climate and economic crises are fundamentally intertwined and must be solved together."<sup>64</sup> As Martin said, "This is about climate justice, this is about racial justice, this is about local economic control." Bringing an intersectional lens to the work of building anti-capitalist social-relational infrastructure involves what Choo and Ferree (2010) describe as a "system-centered" understanding of climate change that foregrounds the "fully interactive, historically co-determining, and complex" nature of an existential threat caused by exploitation (Klein 2014). Mountain Justice and CJA laid the groundwork for an intersectional anti-capitalism that created opportunities to build broad alliances across race, class, gender, and other lines. It also raises dilemmas about ideological purity. As Dayaneni said:

My personal struggle is like, I go to these activist meetings and everybody talks about how much they hate capitalism and how they don't want to do these [regenerative] businesses because these businesses are about making money and all this stuff, and we shouldn't be doing that. And then it's all super high road, ideological anti-capitalist stuff. And then everybody leaves at the end of the meeting and goes across the street to the bar. And it's like, wait, we could own that bar. We could be making our folks go to that restaurant and then using that money to do cool shit. And sourcing our food from the farmer down the street, you know. We're ceding all of this landscape of struggle because we don't want to get our hands dirty navigating the contradictions. We're not going to get anywhere if we don't try to navigate the contradictions.

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<sup>64</sup> Reinvest in Our Power (accessed June 2020). "Home." <https://reinvestinourpower.org/>

Actors attempting to erode the system from within argue that what needs to be done is not armchair anti-capitalism but actively engaging in the slow, hard work of building the new (Wright 2019).

Intersectional anti-capitalism involves redirecting the activist gaze to nonstate targets and standing in solidarity with frontline communities by supporting the emergence of alternative sectors and organizational forms in the here and now (Guigni and Grasso 2019). As Grady-Benson and Sarathy (2016:663) observe, the Divest/Reinvest Campaign's prognosis for state-led policy change is grim; it "may be understood as a response to years of inadequate political action to address climate change and the social consequences of fossil fuel extraction." Yet "to just focus on the 'no' is obviously not going to do a whole lot," said Farhad Ebrahimi, founder of the Chorus Foundation and Shake the Foundation initiative. Moving money into the regenerative economy says 'yes' to eroding the current economic system, one demonstration project at a time (Wright 2010). "We're doing it. We're building it. We'll see what we learn," said Kidokoro. "The step feels like it's small scale, but it's the exact direction we need to be going in [...] We need to be bolder about the things that we actually think we need, and then build it." The campaign's prognosis for the reconfiguration of capitalism is modest, iterative, and hopeful.

Intersectional anti-capitalism also includes an urgent call to action: challenging the authority of overlapping systems of oppression by pursuing contention and construction hand in hand. "Capitalism is not going to be toppled under the weight of the alternatives," said Dayaneni. "You are not going to co-op your way out of capitalism unless the co-op movement actually has an interventionist strategy." Reinvestment activists are enthusiastic about divestment but argue that the devil's in the details: moving money is counterproductive if it simply goes from one extractive industry to another. Channeling divested assets into frontline communities, in contrast,

is a form of reparations and what former CJA staffer Ananda Lee Tan called “real, place-based, ground-truth pathways for resolving this ecological crisis (quoted in Stoner 2019).

The second element of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign’s repertoire of construction is strategies of Resilience-Based Organizing (Movement Generation 2013, Movement Generation 2015). As described above, this approach adapts constructive strategies practiced by La Via Campesina and the Black Panthers to meet this moment through self-determination in the everyday: “We need to shift capital into more just and democratic forms of energy, food, transit and community economic development.”<sup>65</sup> Resilience-Based Organizing strategies also deliberately construct empowering frames of visionary opposition:

People will not go someplace we have not first traveled to in our minds [...] We must first craft together and paint for others an irresistible vision of the future. A vision that is not built on a fear of the worst, but of knowing that everything can be better. A vision that recognizes that social inequity is a form of ecological imbalance, and the solution to millions just “getting by,” is not in “getting ahead,” but in “getting together” (Movement Generation 2013:3)

By leading with the possible, centering local knowledge, and focusing on tangible collective needs, Resilience-Based Organizing actively builds social-relational infrastructure in frontline communities.

Tactics of translocal non-extractive finance are the third element of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign’s repertoire of construction. Reinvest in Our Power has been especially focused on providing “political and popular education that build[s] community capacity to govern community wealth.”<sup>66</sup> For example, in August 2017 CJA and Seed Commons co-hosted a Creating a Financial Commons training for 47 representatives of environmental justice groups in Detroit. “We thought it was going to be like pulling teeth getting five people there, and we had a

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<sup>65</sup> Reinvest in Our Power (accessed June 2020). “Home.” <https://reinvestinourpower.org/>

<sup>66</sup> Climate Justice Alliance (accessed June 2020). “Power Rooted in Community: Highlights from 2018.” <https://climatejusticealliance.org/power-rooted-community-highlights-2018/>

goal of 30” said Kidokoro, “But there were way more people who were interested in it than we thought.” Thirty-eight people attended a similar training in Voluntown, CT the following May and turnout was high in all subsequent years. A key theme of these trainings was addressing skepticism around finance as a vehicle for social change because CJA needed to introduce the Our Power Loan Fund “in a way that showed there was alignment with the values of environmental justice organizations,” said Kidokoro. “Our economic system has mostly been used to extract wealth out of our communities, so it’s no wonder that many organizers have a strong reaction to talking about money. We recognized the need to create a space to unpack our relationship to money, finance, and debt.” Whereas divestment demands can be easily adapted to different institutions, successful reinvestment necessitates a relational, place-based approach (Collins 2017).

Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative also utilizes tactics of translocal non-extractive finance as a decentralized network of local loan funds. Each fund manages its own portfolio and participates in Seed Commons governance according to the principle of one member, one vote. As a member of this national cooperative, all financing from the Our Power Loan Fund originates in a collectively managed pool of capital reserved for values- and place-based economic development. This means that interest and principal on the \$50,000 reinvested in Earthbound Building, Farm, and Forestry does not need to be repaid until the business covers operating costs – including living-wage salaries. It means that the loan terms did not require the Black, formerly incarcerated, and queer farmers who run this social enterprise to disclose their credit scores or provide personal guarantees.<sup>67</sup> And it means that the Our Power Loan Fund is

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<sup>67</sup> Seed Commons (accessed July 2020). “Seed Commons’ Approach to Non-Extractive Finance.” <https://seedcommons.org/about-seed-commons/seed-commons-approach-to-non-extractive-finance/>

radically reimagining what kind of financial infrastructure is needed for a just transition (also see Chapter 4 in Bell et al. 2020). Table 2 summarizes elements of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign's repertoire of construction.

**Table 2. Elements of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign Repertoire of Construction**

Element	Description	Examples
<b>Intersectional anti-capitalism</b>	An ideology that views ecological and economic problems and oppression based on race, class, gender, and other identities as intertwined	Diagnosis locates the root cause of climate change in capitalism; prognosis for state-led policy change is grim; call to action emphasizes interplay of contention and construction
<b>Resilience-Based Organizing</b>	Strategies based on Movement Generation's Resilience-Based Organizing framework	Constructive strategies to promote self-determination in frontline communities through increasing democratic control over energy, food, transit, and other systems; frame of visionary opposition
<b>Translocal non-extractive finance</b>	Tactics to finance a just transition in frontline communities by building a network of non-extractive loan funds	CJA Our Power Loan Fund, a member of Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My analysis of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign demonstrates that the concept of repertoires of construction can be a useful tool for studying the constructive dimensions of social movements. As with CACR (White 2018), identifying ideologically-saturated constellations of constructive strategies and tactics sheds light on several issues of interest to social movement scholars. For example, it reveals dilemmas related to resource acquisition. Previous research has found that adopting more radical strategies and tactics channels resources to more moderate groups (Haines 1984). My case study similarly indicates that some stakeholders perceived

reinvestment – and its ideology of intersectional anti-capitalism – as too extreme. 350.org’s withdrawal from active reinvestment organizing perpetuated the resource constraints of climate justice groups relative to the mainstream movement. In contrast, other stakeholders saw CJA’s decision to foreground a more constructive “solutions agenda” through the Reinvest in Our Power initiative as a move toward moderation that opened up access to networks like the EDGE Funders Alliance and prompted debates about whether a pivot toward building signaled progress or cooptation. At the same time, participating in networks like the Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative also provided opportunities for frontline communities to reduce dependence on private donors by building their own financial commons. Like many separatist projects with aspirations of economic autonomy, whether and to what extent they should accept support from external institutions was a topic of much deliberation among reinvestment activists.

The Divest/Reinvest Campaign is also relevant to research on tactical innovation. Campus divestment organizers developed specific “tastes in tactics” (James 1997:250): they were savvy at staging protests and nonviolent occupations but unskilled in the “action technologies” (Oliver and Marwell 1992) necessary to achieve their reinvestment demands. As Bridges observed, it was more feasible to coach inexperienced activists in a one-size-fits-all call for divestment than teach the (trans)local knowledge required for non-extractive finance. Tactical innovation within the divest and reinvest camps was largely siloed as a result. Similar dynamics are at play in the contemporary movement to defund the police as activists encounter the place-based complexities of creating alternative justice systems (Herndon 2020). Under what conditions is it easier to say what you’re against than create what you’re for?

Finally, my case study has implications for movement continuity and outcomes. I find that divestment lost steam after the 2016 presidential election whereas reinvestment has



flourished despite an inopportune political context for the climate justice movement. A similar trend is evident in the renaissance of mutual aid during the COVID-19 crisis (Tolentino 2020), the long civil rights movement (Hall 2005), and among feminist postpartum depression self-help groups (Taylor 1996). This suggests that repertoires of contention may be more sensitive to shifts in the political opportunity structure than repertoires of construction. Further study of strategic reconfiguration that involves a pivot from direct confrontation to prefiguration and institution building is clearly in order.

Ultimately, expanding our conception of what counts as activism can contribute to both theory and empirical knowledge. I have argued that extending contentious politics theory to accommodate more systematic study of the constructive represents a promising new research agenda for the field of social movements. This paper lays the foundation for a more robust understanding of the relationship between resistance and building. It also articulates opportunities to explore links between the constructive dimensions of social movements and literature on institutionalization (Bell 2014, Nelson 2011), care work (Gaddis 2019, White 2011a), and civic enrichment (Schlachter and Már 2022). Empirically, it contributes to social movement scholarship through the first detailed analysis of the reinvestment side of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign. This study demonstrates how repertoires of construction play out on the ground in one particular case. I hope it spurs others to explore the transferability of these insights to other settings.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Chronology of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign

2008	Middlebury College students and Bill McKibben launch 350.org
December 2009	UN climate conference in Copenhagen (COP15) concludes without a binding global agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions
June 2009	House passes Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill, which Senate declines to take up
Fall 2010	Swarthmore College students launch Mountain Justice and call for divestment from mountaintop removal
Fall 2011	Hampshire College becomes the first higher education institution to divest from fossil fuels
July 2012	Bill McKibben publishes “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math” in <i>Rolling Stone</i>
November 2012	350.org begins a 21-city “Do the Math” tour
2013	A network of U.S.-based environmental justice groups launch the Climate Justice Alliance
February 2013	Mountain Justice hosts 200 student activists for the first national youth convergence on divestment
Spring 2013	Campus leaders launch the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network
June 2013	The Black Mesa Water Coalition hosts inaugural gathering of the CJA Our Power initiative
April 2014	Inaugural event of the Divest/Reinvest Campaign: CJA and 350.org bring together climate justice, divestment, and new economy groups for a meeting on reinvestment in Oakland, CA
June 2014	Several participants in the Oakland meeting reconvene at the New Economy Coalition in Boston
July 2014	Thirty campus divestment activists attend a Reinvestment Summit in Philadelphia
August 2014	Several students who participated in the Reinvestment Summit attend CJA’s national convening in Richmond
September 2014	People’s Climate March in New York City features 400,000 protestors, the announcement of several major divestment victories, and a strategy session on reinvestment; DSN decides to incorporate reinvestment into fall semester campus trainings
February 2015	CJA hosts a reinvestment strategy session in parallel with its steering committee meeting in Jackson; reinvestment working group forms
Summer 2015	Reinvestment working group begins meeting regularly; Dierdre Smith leaves her role as 350.org Strategic Partnerships Director
September 2015	The Working World hosts inaugural workshop for non-extractive finance activists who would eventually form Seed Commons; several members of the reinvestment working group attend

November 2015	DSN and 350.org host a training on reinvestment for their staff and student leaders
March 2016	DSN helps six campus groups incorporate a specific reinvestment demand into their campaigns
April 2016	Shake the Foundation initiative emerges out of a session on reinvestment at the EDGE Funders Alliance conference in Berkeley
June 2016	CJA announces Reinvest in Our Power initiative to incubate a non-extractive loan fund for regenerative projects in Our Power pilot sites
July 2016	CJA, 350.org, and DSN strategize about Reinvest in Our Power at a New Economy Coalition conference network gathering in Buffalo
November 2016	Donald Trump becomes president-elect
January 2017	DSN and 350.org organize nationwide student walkouts to protest Trump's inauguration
Spring 2017	DSN discontinues operations
August 2017	CJA and Seed Commons co-host a Creating a Financial Commons training for 47 environmental justice activists in Detroit
2018	CJA establishes the Our Power Loan Fund, a member of Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative
May 2018	CJA and Seed Commons co-host a second Creating a Financial Commons training for 38 environmental justice activists in Fallentown, Connecticut
July 2018	Boston-area divestment activists publish a report on reinvestment opportunities in New England
October 2018	The Better Future Project launches Divest Ed to "fill the gap" left by 350.org and DSN
2019	CJA's Our Power Loan Fund makes its first loan to Earthbound Building, Farm, and Forestry
February 2020	Divest Ed coordinates a day of action across 60 North American campuses
March 2020	COVID-19 shuts colleges and universities across the U.S.

## Appendix 2. List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Black Mesa	Black Mesa Water Coalition
CJA	Climate Justice Alliance
COP	Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
DSN	Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network
MACED	The Mountain Association for Community Economic Development

Movement Generation	Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project
Seed Commons	Seed Commons Community Wealth Cooperative