

Political Consumerism, New and Old

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Abstract: We examine claims about how political consumerism differs from older social movements, particularly in the role played by consumption-based identities and in the character of movement organization. We then evaluate these claims, using three old and three recent U.S. examples of mobilization focused on food. These examples do vary in how consumption identities are politicized and how protest is organized. The variations do not, however, line up with old vs. new cases. Moving from critique to alternative, we attribute these variations to prevailing threats and opportunities and to the broader movements and networks our six examples of food protest drew on for resources and cultural models.

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INTRODUCTION

Guiding the work of Transfair USA (which certifies products as meeting fair trade standards) is a vision of socially responsible consumption. "We envision millions of American consumers, increasingly concerned about the state of the world, looking for opportunities to use their power in the marketplace to make a positive difference. Through their shopping decisions, people have the ability to vote with their dollars for a better world. . . . We believe the rise of the Conscious Consumer is causing a fundamental shift in the way companies do business" (<http://www.transfairusa.org/content/about/mission.php>). For Transfair, this shift is towards sustainable production and a fair return to producers. Opponents of third world sweatshops set a somewhat different goal. "One of the most powerful things you can do as a consumer is to avoid companies with poor human rights records and shop with responsible companies who go the extra mile to treat their workers with dignity and give them a living wage." Green America (formerly Coop America) helps consumers do so by providing a Retailer Scorecard, grading the labor conditions at the companies that supply Walmart, Target, and other major outlets (<http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/sweatshops/scorecard.cfm>). Investors can follow the same principles, consulting buy lists that "include enterprises with . . . good employer-employee relations, strong environmental practices, products that are safe and useful, and operations that respect human rights around the world" (<http://www.socialinvest.org/resources/sriguide/srifacts.cfm>).

These are examples of what has been dubbed political consumerism. Activism of this kind is growing. Only 3.3 percent of coffee sold in the United States in 2006 was certified Fair Trade, but that represented an eight-fold increase over 2001 (*New York Times* October 2, 2007). And socialinvest.org estimates that socially responsible investments account for nearly one in every ten dollars of America's \$25.1 trillion investment marketplace. By virtue of its rapid spread and its social-change goals, political consumerism may be seen as a type of social movement. Certainly this is how activists view it. "Fair Trade is not just a market," Transfair USA organizers assert. "It is also a social movement that brings strength, hope and real choice to the world's consumers."

Scholarly analysts --- most of them political scientists -- agree (see Micheletti 2003; Bennett 2004; Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005; and the contributors to Micheletti, Follesdal and Stolle 2004). They view political consumerism as a fundamentally new style of social movement, rooted in participants' consumer identities and composed of individual market choices rather than well-organized and collective political protest.

We make two main counterarguments. First, we show that the novelty of contemporary political consumption has been greatly overestimated. After reviewing the main claims for how political consumption differs from traditional social movements, we compare three contemporary with three older movements, each centered on the consumption of food. These comparisons show that key characteristics of modern political consumerism appear in the past as well. Our cases do indeed vary in the salience of consumer identities, the balance between state-centered and more personal politics, and the character of movement organization. But these variations lie among historically specific cases, not between broadly drawn ("old" versus "new") time periods. Our second counterargument is that sociologists offer better ways to explain variations among cases of political consumerism than those advanced thus far by political scientists. One part of our alternative emphasizes the impact of prevailing threats and opportunities, a common theme in the literature on social movements. But we also build on accounts of how frames, tactics, and organizational models diffuse to new movements. These accounts typically emphasize diffusion from one movement to another. We emphasize, in addition, the influence of the specific communities and networks in which political consumerism is embedded. We also stress that this piggybacking -- whether on prior protest or on other kinds of infrastructure -- is particularly important for organizing the individualized and atomized protest characteristic of political consumerism. By intervening in political scientists' discussions of this form of activism, we can refine our own sociological understandings of social movements.

POLITICAL CONSUMERISM

As the name suggests, political consumerism makes consumption choices a form of political engagement. The leading scholar of political consumerism, political scientist Michelle Micheletti, defines the practice as "action by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. Their choices are based on attitudes and values concerning issues of justice, fairness, or noneconomic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practice[s]" (2003, 2; Micheletti and Stolle 2007; Stolle and Hooghe 2004; Holzer 2006). Clear-cut examples would be boycotts of goods manufactured in sweatshops and buycotts in which consumers patronize socially responsible companies. These examples illustrate how purchasing decisions can be oriented towards specific social change goals. But scholars also allow for a less instrumental lifestyle politics. "Activist political communication increasingly adopts a lifestyle vocabulary anchored in consumer choice, self-image, and personal displays of social responsibility. In particular, attaching political messages to corporate brands becomes a useful way to carry often radical ideas into diverse personal life spaces, as well as across national borders and cultural divides" (Bennett 2004, 102; Shah, et al. 2007). Subversion of corporate brands through culture jamming (Klein 2000; Lasn 1999; Peretti 2004) or opting out of the commercial food system through freeganism (foraging for, rather than buying, food [Singer and Mason 2006, 166–168]) illustrate this variant of political consumerism. Whether consumers target specific products to realize social goals or engage in a more diffuse lifestyle politics, "a model of citizenship with some of the . . . dimensions of civic duty, public-spiritedness, and self-education, is an increasingly apt description of consumer behavior" (Scammell 2000, 352).

Sociologists have written extensively on consumption as a marker of class differences and as an expression of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Walton 1989; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Holt 2000; Prasad 2006; Johnston and Baumann 2007). The expression of political preferences through consumption has attracted more interest from political scientists. Some have compared political consumption to

traditional forms of citizenship, often disputing the view that consumption can only distract from and undermine serious politics (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Nava 1991; Shah, et al. 2007; and -- a sociologist -- Schudson 2007). Others have sought to show that political consumption can substitute for, and counteract, declines in the more familiar forms of civic engagement analyzed by Putnam (Micheletti, et al. 2004; Stolle, et al. 2005; Putnam 2000).

More important for our purposes, students of political consumerism also treat it as a type of protest different from social movements of the past (Scammell 2000; Micheletti 2003; Bennett 2004). The difference is, in part, a matter of degree: making political claims or expressing political views through one's purchases is seen as much more common now. But the contrast is also in kind: political consumption as a social movement differs in character from prior protest, even such prior protests as colonial Americans' boycott of English tea in the 1770s, English consumers' boycott of U.S. slave products before the Civil War, or UFW-supporters' boycott of California grapes in the 1960s. It is the specific claims about how political consumption involves *qualitative* changes in the nature of social movements -- in the role of identity, in the relationship to globalization, in the organization of activism -- that we assess in this article.

In treating political consumerism and lifestyle politics as social movements, we are following the scholarly trend to expand the meaning of both "politics" and "social movements." The popular claim that "the personal is the political" has its academic counterparts. Theorists of new social movements emphasize that social control operates through social organizations and the life world as well as through the state. Challenges to that control, wherever it operates, count as political, and collective efforts to construct alternative identities rather than to win government concessions are an increasingly common form of social movement (Melucci 1996; Castells 1997). More recently, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) have expanded the meaning of politics and social movements in a similar way. After criticizing political process approaches, they argue that power is both material and symbolic and is exercised through multiple social institutions. Collective challenges to cultural authority and the rules of the game in any of these institutions

merit the label social movements; demands levied on the state by outsiders are only one example, and only one sort of politics. As we will see, food-related protests can be social movements, and political ones, in this expanded sense. They vary in the character of their politics, but the lines of variation do not run between old and new cases.

Consumption as the Basis for Social Movement Identities

One claim for the novelty of political consumerism concerns the link between consumption-based identities and political activism. Social movements in the past have used consumer choice as a political tool. The Progressive Era's White Label campaign, for example, superficially resembles contemporary anti-sweatshop certification programs. The label was awarded to garments made under acceptable labor conditions, and the campaign educated consumers to look for the label (Sklar 1998). But students of political consumerism argue that, in this and other apparent precedents, the consumer campaign was in the service of and subordinate to traditional labor unionism (Hilton 2007). Earlier boycotts, for example, were "embedded in social movements of the past" rather than concentrating "directly on market actors [who] are the main focus of activity today" (Micheletti 2003, 14). This contrast corresponds to a larger shift from production to consumption as the basis for postmodern identities (Inglehart 1977; Livingston 1998). Indeed, historians of consumption argue that, before the 1920s and 1930s, there was no such thing as consumer consciousness *distinct* from older identities as workers, immigrants, and so forth. Only with the rise of consumer research, consumer representation in government agencies, and Depression-era concerns about under-consumption did consumers come to be thought of as a "self-conscious, identifiable interest group" (Cohen 1998, 114; Sorenson 1941; Mayer 1989; Thelen 1983). Now, however, we commonly express our individual identities through the goods we purchase, and to the extent that we share collective identities, they are more likely to be defined by consumption styles than by production roles (Buttel 2000; Micheletti 2003, 5–8). Bennett makes a similar point about lifestyle politics and its independence from

older bases of identity: "As lifestyles become more diverse, they are poorly articulated with old political categories such as class, party, or religion" (2004, 102).¹

Consumer identities may be detached from traditional political categories, but they are themselves increasingly politicized. Personal consumption becomes an arena for political resistance for at least three reasons. First, this personal sphere is more and more colonized by corporate advertising, including the use of lifestyle branding as a marketing tool (Klein 2000). Second, in these matters of personal interest, national governments -- and thus the traditional tools of citizenship -- provide diminishing leverage, thanks to globalization and neoliberalism (Micheletti 2003, 15). Third, corporate reliance on branding hands recalcitrant consumers a weapon for resistance, as in campaigns to link the Nike logo with sweatshops (Peretti 2004). To these secular trends should be added the strategic efforts of activists, who help the rest of us make the connections between social justice goals and particular consumer goods (Holzer 2006; Bennett 2004, 102).

Political Consumerism and Globalization

Political consumerism is also bound up with contemporary globalization, according to its theorists, and in this way too it departs from earlier social movements. On one side, globalization poses some of the problems to which political consumerism responds. Ever-lengthening commodity chains make it difficult to monitor the safety of products or the conditions under which they are made. And even if shoppers were able to identify problems, globalization undercuts traditional political controls over corporate malfeasance, based as these are on the nation state (Micheletti 2003).² To these novel problems, political consumerism

1. Students of Weber might object that social groups have long used consumption as a means of social closure, and that stratification along these lines need not coincide with inequalities of class or party. Bennett's point, however, is not just that lifestyle practices are increasingly independent of class and party. In addition, he sees them as the basis for politics in their own right.

2. This claim is made for many anti-globalization movements: see Bandy and Smith 2005; Tarrow 2005.

offers such novel solutions as the use of non-governmental organizations, often transnational, to set standards and certify compliance. The best example is Fair Trade, in which NGOs like Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International and Transfair USA designate commodities (such as coffee, sugar, and roses) as having been produced by adequately paid workers and with environmentally sustainable methods. By selecting Fair Trade products, consumers can reinsert social justice considerations into global commodity chains, even in the absence of democratically accountable institutions for global governance (Andersen, et al. 2004; Hilton 2007; Bennett 2004; Linton, Liou and Shaw 2004; Webb 2007; Jaffee 2007).

Political Consumerism and Social Movement Organization

Every social movement must have organization of some kind, however casual, to coordinate action among participants. Even when an individual's involvement consists of nothing more than signing an online petition, there are some organizers drafting the petition, sending out alerts, and setting up the website to make activism as easy as a mouse click. With many conventional social movement tactics, organizing work of this kind is both obvious and centralized. Planning for marches, for example, is the work of relatively small numbers of activists preparing publicity materials, securing permits, arranging transportation, and enlisting speakers. There are, of course, all sorts of formal organizations involved in consumption politics as well. They set standards ("organic," "sweatshop free"), monitor compliance, label products, and do some public education. But the basic unit of activism for rank-and-file participants is the individual choice to buy this product and not that one. That action is more removed from organized guidance and coordination among participants than is signing petitions and attending marches. The fact that significant numbers of consumers observe common standards and make similar choices when shopping suggests that there are other mechanisms of coordination at work.

Students of political consumption clearly agree. And it is in assessing both the style and the means of coordination that scholars make a third claim for the novelty of political consumerism. Bennett, for example, presents contemporary lifestyle politics as different from older social movements in its loose networks and transient campaigns (2004, 25. See also Holzer 2006). Micheletti describes political

consumerism as "individualized" collective action, noting participants' self-direction, their involvement in multiple and informal networks, and their loyalty to causes rather than organizations or leaders (2003, 27). What makes some minimal coordination possible is a sort of collective piggybacking on ancillary networks, institutions, and movements. For Bennett, the most important of these are digital technologies associated with the internet -- technologies that enable some concerted action among dispersed people and that impart a distinctive "node and hub" structure to lifestyle politics (Bennett 2004, 108–110). For Micheletti and her collaborators, coordination relies heavily on labeling and certification organizations (Micheletti, et al. 2004, xx). She also notes the importance of "established political homes as base and point of departure" for individual actors (Micheletti 2003, 25), homes which might be provided by *other* social movements. Campaigns against sweatshops, for example, found a political home in established labor unions, and opposition to genetically modified organisms depend in part on existing environmental organizations (see also Cherry 2006; Micheletti, et al. 2007; Terragni n.d.).

THE CASES

To assess these claims about the novelty of contemporary political consumerism, we compare three U.S. movements from the past with three in the present.³ All six politicize the production and consumption of a particular consumer good, food, but to different degrees and in different ways. All six involve collective challenges to political or cultural authorities. And all six make use of unconventional or extra-institutional tactics (by the standards of their time). They thus fit the usual definitions of "social movements" (Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2004).

The first of the historical cases consists of that conventional form of food protest that historians label food riots. These were concentrated in the colonial period, but there have been occasional examples as late as the Great Depression (Smith 1994; Frank 1985; Orleck 1993). The name is misleading, because

3. Confining the cases to the U.S. serves both to hold national context constant and to hold the article to a reasonable length.

these popular actions did not generally entail rioting as that term is understood today. Typically they involved short-term popular mobilization against price increases on staple foods, with protesters either boycotting expensive goods or confiscating them for resale at a "just price." Particularly when they involved boycotts, food riots required significant organization and continuity. These protests also were sufficiently ritualized in tactics and discourse to merit treatment as a single case. The second historical case is the healthy food movement associated with William Sylvester Graham in the 1830s and 1840s (Nissenbaum 1980; Whorton 1982). The movement promoted home-cooked vegetarian meals made from natural (e.g., whole grain) ingredients, and it made ambitious claims for the physiological and moral benefits of this diet. The third historical case is the pure food crusade of the 1890s and 1900s (Goodwin 1999). This campaign was a classic political reform movement, mobilizing popular outrage over unhygienic and adulterated foods and pushing for government regulation.

The three contemporary cases are organic food, "locavorism," and anti-GMO activism. The organic movement began with the "countercuisine" (Belasco 2007; Cox 1994) of the late 1960s and 1970s, in which organic production and consumption were closely tied to an ideological rejection of the prevailing capitalist system for growing and manufacturing food. It has continued as a consumer movement of a different kind -- less adversarial, more commercialized, and less tied to other movement communities. Locavorism is a catch-all term. It covers campaigns for farmers' markets, local food security programs, community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements, and related efforts to promote alternative, sustainable agricultural systems (Green 2003; Hinrichs 2000). The movement against the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food, finally, is most developed in Europe but gaining ground in the U.S. (Purdue 2000; Schurman 2004). Reminiscent of the pure food movement, much of the focus here is on exposing and labeling GMO adulterants and on restricting their use.

Why choose these particular cases? We do so as an alternative to the approach taken by students of new social movements and students of political consumerism, who commonly juxtapose their modern cases with traditional labor movements. The latter are seen as representing the basic lines of conflict and the typical organizational character of protest in industrial society. Accordingly, what gets highlighted are

differences between production-based and consumption-based identities and between relatively bureaucratic protest organization and more fluid and decentralized post-modern activism. But selecting cases that way exaggerates the contrast: if one compares apples and oranges, then of course one will find differences. We take a different approach. Comparing historical and contemporary cases with a common focus on the consumption of food permits a more discriminating assessment of what is and is not new about contemporary political consumerism. It might be objected that we have simply reversed the selection bias, stacking the deck in favor of similarities between old and new movements. But these cases have also been chosen because they *differ* in several important ways. They vary in the degree to which they represent radical challenges to the status quo of their times; in the extent to which food choices serve as markers for alternative collective identities; in the balance they strike between market-based and state-centered protest strategies; and in the level of organizational coherence they display. These variations do not neatly line up with old versus new cases, however. Instead, they highlight the importance of threats, opportunities, and movement piggybacking in shaping political consumerism, past *and* present.

For the purposes of our comparison, we are able to rely on secondary historical and sociological accounts of our cases. Claims for the novelty of contemporary political consumerism put particular emphasis on the character of collective identities and movement organizations. These are common themes in existing studies of each of our six cases. The main task is to put these cases into comparative perspective and relate them to the larger theory of change in the nature of social movements.

EVALUATING THE CLAIMS

For each of the main claims for the novelty of political consumerism, we discuss contemporary food movements that illustrate those claims. We then compare them to older cases, evaluating what is and is not new -- but also drawing more positive lessons for the study of consumption-based social movements. The goal is to highlight key properties of each case rather than to provide well-rounded historical narratives. And in the interest of bringing out the main comparative points while keeping the article to a reasonable length, we typically use only two of three past or present cases in each section.

Social Movement Identities, Present and Past

Theorists of political consumerism emphasize both the novelty of consumption-based identities and the politicizing of those identities. We examine each for contemporary and older cases of food protest.

Consumption-based Identities

Among our contemporary food movements, the one that best illustrates how consumption practices can be the focus for collective identities is the organic countercuisine of the 1960s-70s. The movement's leading historian, Warren Belasco, recounts how buying and eating organic food were markers of a broader lifestyle and identity. As with most identities, this one was constructed in large part through boundary work. Organic enthusiasts drew invidious comparisons between their food -- how it was grown, sold, and consumed -- and conventional food. Organic agriculture saved the planet rather than destroying it. Co-ops sold real food instead of plastic; whole grains instead of processed; brown eggs, rice, and sugar instead of the white kinds. Even the eating of food underscored departures from convention, with its greater use of fingers, its sharing, and its spurning of the canonical structure of American meals (appetizer, main dish plus sides, dessert). Organic food, in short, marked its supporters off as part of a larger counterculture (Belasco 1999, 2007. See also Kamp 2006; Beardsworth and Keil 1997). Attacks on the movement by industry critics and the media reinforced this boundary. The stereotypes stigmatized organic foodies as scientifically illiterate extremists who shopped in dirty co-ops, where they bought limp produce, half-eaten by bugs (Belasco 2007, 155–157).

Organic food's transition from countercuisine to mainstream is well known (Belasco 2007; Guthman 2004), and it is harder to generalize about the meaning of organic for the far-larger number of shoppers who buy these foods today. A Whole Foods survey in 2005 found that major reasons for choosing organic included a desire to avoid pesticides (70.3% of those surveyed), freshness (68.3%), and health and

nutrition (67.1%) (http://media.wholefoodsmarket.com/pr/wf/national/pr_11-18-05.aspx). Shoppers with these motivations may not make their purchases central to any self-conscious identity (avoiding pesticides, for example, may be an effort to safeguard personal health rather than to protect the environment). But for others, choosing organic remains a marker of a social commitment -- above all, to ecological responsibility -- that informs many aspects of their lives (Zepeda, Chang and Leviten-Reid 2006). Of the shoppers surveyed by Whole Foods, 52.4% agreed that organic foods were better for the environment. Individuals who buy organic for these reasons clearly illustrate the consumption-based identities emphasized in theories of political consumerism.

Local, it is said, is the new organic (for the parallels and some cautions, see Goodman and Goodman 2007). Like buyers of organic food, those who choose to buy locally produced foods have varied motives and may not see that choice as part of a larger cause (for one survey, see Cone and Myhre 2000). Shopping at the local farmers' market may be little more than a pleasant Sunday outing or an opportunity to meet friends. But for those most committed to supporting local food systems, buying local defines one as socially and environmentally responsible, a practitioner of "ecological citizenship" (Seyfang 2006, 384). That ecological citizenship, according to a major resource center for Community Supported Agriculture, dedicates consumers to "proper land stewardship," reduced chemical use, closer links between food producers and consumers, and the wider availability of wholesome food (Robyn Van En Center, <http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=1273>). And like their organic predecessors, locavores construct identities through boundary work involving the sources of their food. They contrast the virtues of small scale production, agricultural craftsmanship, and sustainable production to the vices of agribusiness, industrial farming, and environmental degradation. Hinrichs' (2003) study also finds invidious distinctions that have less to do with the character of production. Her locavores see themselves as supporting community well-being rather than the profits of impersonal corporations, as building up rather than undermining local networks, and as cultivating rather than erasing regional tastes (see also Kloppenburg,

Lezberg, De Master, et al. 2000). Whether by enrolling in CSAs, buying seasonal produce at farmers' markets, or favoring locally sourced products at upscale groceries, locavores declare their identities through their choices of food.

But is this really so new? Some of the country's earliest protests were based on consumer identities related to food. So-called food riots were part of a still older popular repertoire inherited from England (on the English model, see Thompson 1971; Taylor 1996). When shortages of staples like flour drove prices sharply upwards, American consumers claimed a community's right to affordable food, a right they expected governments to protect and that they were willing to enforce on profiteering merchants -- if necessary, by confiscating flour and reselling it at a just price. Such popular action was concentrated in the colonial period. Smith (1994) finds thirty food riots just in the four years from 1776 through 1779. They reappeared from time to time, often in the form of organized boycotts of expensive staples, into the Great Depression.

It would be easy to dismiss these protests as having less to do with consumer identities than with material needs, that is, as an early point on some historical trajectory "from a matter of survival to a statement of values" (Kamp 2006, 362, quoting Frank Bruni of the *New York Times*). As we will see in the next section, when we examine the politicizing of consumer identities, however, there was no such distinction to be drawn between high-minded citizen and hungry consumer. And even where there was no explicit political claim involved, minimum standards of food consumption were an important part of rioters' identities -- whether as respectable members of their communities, in the colonial era, or as mothers responsible for feeding their families, in early twentieth-century protests. "We are just mothers," New York City women declared at a 1917 mass meeting to attack high wartime food prices, "and we want food for our children" (quoted by Frieburger 1984, 221. See also Hyman 1980; Nusco 2003). Students of political consumerism have suggested that these consumer protests do not really merit the name, because they were subordinated to larger and quite traditional labor movements; only gradually would citizens develop a

distinct consumer identity and act on it (Cohen 1998; Hilton 2007; Micheletti 2003). In fact, the trend in food riots was the other way. Through most of the 18th and 19th centuries, there was little or no involvement in food riots and boycotts by labor organizations. Union (and sometimes socialist) allies appear only late, mostly during World War I and the Great Depression, and even then they became involved only after demonstrations and boycotts had already been organized and launched by neighborhood women (Frank 1985; Orleck 1995, 148; Frieburger 1984, 223. Glickman [1997] points out that consumption standards were already part of labor identities in the early twentieth century.)

Food riots were usually short-lived event. The Grahamites were a more sustained social movement. They were most active in the 1830s under the inspiration of William Sylvester Graham, promoting fresh vegetables, whole grains, and moderate consumption. The same basic regimen, however, gained new champions in the Seventh Day Adventists and among health gurus at the Battle Creek Sanatorium in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Graham was a Protestant minister who turned his redemptive energies first to temperance and then to healthy eating (the best sources are Nissenbaum [1980] and Whorton [1982]). He gained a large following through his lectures, his publications, and his "Graham boarding houses," where dietary sinners could check in for redemption. The religious metaphor is apt, because for Graham and his acolytes, proper choice of foods was very much a declaration of a larger social identity. A vegetarian diet rich in whole grains was, of course, good for the body. Graham developed elaborate theories about the pernicious physiological effects of meat, spices, and the processed foods of his day, and believers filled the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* with testimonials to their newfound vigor. But Graham emphasized that his diet also brought *moral* health. In particular, meat and spices inflamed sexual appetites at the same time that they injured the digestive system. Moderate eating of bland foods and moderate indulgence in conjugal sex were twin keys to the good Christian life. Proper diet carried an additional meaning for the middling artisans and tradesmen who were most likely to join Graham's crusade. This was a newly expanding

stratum of uncertain social status in Jacksonian America. Their testimonials suggest that they saw in Graham's diet a means to achieve a much-sought social identity as members of the respectable middle class -- pious, disciplined, and self-improving (Nissenbaum 1980; Haber 2002).

As with the early organic consumers, Grahamites constructed their identities not only through what they chose to eat but also in what they spurned. To wholesome food and wholesome living they contrasted all manner of corruption: adulterated food, diseased bodies, tainted souls. And among the latter Graham and his followers included not only the sexually profligate (Graham set a very low bar here) but also new immigrants debased in their diets, hygiene, and morals (Cole 1975; Nissenbaum 1980). And here too, the boundary lines drawn by Grahamites were underscored by their many critics, who dismissed them as cranks and their food as little better than "a soggy bunch of asparagus [and the] corpses of potatoes" (quoted by Whorton 1982, 58). These anticipations of claims for and against organic food are especially striking in the bakery. For Graham, virtue lay not just in whole grain bread, but in bread made by hand, in the home, by loving mothers -- everything that commercially prepared bread from processed grain (the Wonderbread of the day) was not. Natural, pure, healthy, traditional, hand-crafted, all these came together in Graham's loaf and were morally above reproach. "The simpler, plainer, and more natural the food of man is . . . the more healthy, vigorous, and long-lived will be the body . . . and the more active and powerful may the intellectual and moral faculties be rendered" (Graham 1839, vol 2, p. 14). Graham's opponents, too, made his bread a symbol. The movement's American Physiological Society, for example, was dismissed as the "bran bread and sawdust pathological society" (Whorton 1981, 58. See also Graham 1837; Nissenbaum 1980, and, for the organic echoes, Belasco 1999).

Politicized Consumer Identities

In their claims for the novelty of political consumption, theorists argue not only that consumption has become the basis for collective identities. They add that these identities are politicized. And contemporary food movements certainly illustrate that point, although they also show how identities can be politicized in different ways. We noted earlier that students of contemporary social movements have expanded the

definition of political well beyond challenges to or through the nation state. Conventions governing gender relations and sexuality, for example, might become targets of social movements and may be fought through the construction and public presentation of alternative norms. Such identity politics is clearly quite different from mobilization to win new government policies, but it is no less political.

The early organic movement exemplifies a politicizing of identity seen in many new social movements. Activists believed that their personal choices -- to consume only organic products, to contribute labor to the local co-op, to lend a hand in communal gardens -- promoted a larger political goal, providing an alternative to the capitalist-industrial food system. Growing crops without pesticides, for example, not only produced healthier food but struck a blow against agribusiness. Co-ops not only sold organic food, they were operated for the community rather than for profit. They also were managed democratically rather than like a corporation. The organic countercuisine sought social change not through conventional political action but through personal politics, creating a better society by living differently (Belasco 2007). Some of that ethos continues among locavores. The most ideologically committed among them seek alternatives to corporate agriculture. And they do so by building local or regional networks of sustainable small-scale farms selling their products to restaurants and markets. They also educate consumers to patronize them (Tovey 2002; Allen 2004; Seyfang 2006).⁴

Similarly, both the earlier organic enthusiasts and today's locavores *also* act in the political system, such as by lobbying the Department of Agriculture on certification rules (Ingram and Ingram 2005; Klintman 2006), getting farm bills to include research funding for agricultural innovation, and winning subsidies to give the poor access to fresh local produce (Henderson 2000; Allen 2004). These more conventional forms of political action are even more prominent in organized opposition to " Frankenfoods" (Schurman 2004). In the U.S., key goals of the anti-GMO movement include more rigorous testing for

4. Maye, Holloway and Kneafsey (2007) note that in the U.S., alternative food networks are often viewed as oppositional movements, whereas in Europe that are commonly parts of official regional development plans.

health hazards in genetically modified crops and mandatory labeling of food made with GMOs. Pursuing those goals means lobbying federal bureaucracies like the FDA and the Department of Agriculture (Charles 2001; Roff 2007; Purdue 2000). But much as locavores pursue conventional political strategies along with the techniques of political consumerism, so with opponents of GMOs. For example, they have organized boycotts of retailers and manufacturers in campaigns to get artificial growth hormones out of milk and GMOs out of Gerber's baby food (Buttel 2000; Charles 2001).

In these three cases, then, identification with certain consumption practices -- organic, local, GMO-free -- involved political challenges. But the political strategies varied among cases and over time. Sometimes they focused on the state and made use of conventional political channels; sometimes they relied more on mobilization in the marketplace through buycotts, boycotts, or corporate campaigns.

Consumption was no less politicized in older movements, and they pursued equally varied political strategies. Among the oldest cases -- food riots in late colonial America -- one finds a particularly radical turn in consumption identities. Reversing the usual view that public citizenship and private consumption are at odds, some historians have shown that it was through consumption that many colonial subjects forged specifically American ties and developed a practical understanding of liberty and rights. Colonial consumers did so most visibly in the years leading up to the revolution, politicizing consumption in new ways. Food riots had long been political in their assertion that community needs trumped private rights to charge high prices or hoard food. They were political, too, in their call for local governments to enforce that priority. And as we saw, participants relied on some of the techniques of political consumerism, including boycotts. But in the context of increasing conflict with England over taxes on staple commodities, food riots took on new meaning. They became assertions of republican rights against a colonial oppressor. Eventually, they would feed into a political strategy quite different from the consumer boycott: the armed revolution (Smith 1994; Breen 2004; Steigerwald 2006).

Consumption-based identities among the Grahamites, too, involved political critiques. We saw that for Graham, choosing the right foods guaranteed physical and moral health. But at a time of widespread concern over the corruptions of a commercializing urban society, dietary reform served a larger civic

purpose: it promised to restore an imagined community of nurturing families and trusting social relations, essential pillars of a healthy republic. "The true principles of political economy," according to Graham's American Physiological Society, "are founded on the physiological laws of nature . . . The best interests of man in his social, civil and political capacities" requires conformity to those laws, in food choices as in other respects (quoted in Whorton 1982, 60). Graham's insistence on purifying body, soul, and nation through wholly natural remedies also challenged the professional authority of doctors. Medical practice, he charged, relied on "the eternal and suicidal drugging! drugging! . . . of mankind" (Graham 1834, iv). In recounting their salvation through Graham's diet, his followers frequently offer the same narrative. They had suffered all manner of afflictions, physical and mental. Numerous physicians only made matters worse through their prescribed treatments. "None of them seemed to have correct notions concerning diet," and a full return to health came only after becoming "convinced of the folly of depending on medicine" (Graham 1834, 89, 71) -- and depending instead on Graham.⁵ Both in these critiques of commercial food and medical authority, and in presenting food choices as the means to social reform, Graham anticipated the organic food movement. And because Grahamites made no use of more conventional political strategies (they did no electoral mobilization, for example, and demanded no laws to safeguard food), the case is a particularly good illustration of the *kind* of politics highlighted by theorists of political consumerism.

Food riots typically politicized consumption through collective action in the marketplace. Grahamites did so through their public claims about what we should and should not eat. Pure food advocates in the late 19th century, by contrast, applied to consumption more conventional political tools. They pressed legislators for federal laws to bar the adulteration of food and drugs, to require labeling of ingredients, and to establish a system for food inspection. The quest for pure food goes back at least to the

5. Graham's followers also appear to have been engaged in a less high-minded quest for middle-class respectability, but this should not disqualify them. The political consumption of contemporary food movements, after all, has also been interpreted as a conspicuous display of upper-middle class cultural capital (Guthman 2007; Glassner 2007; and, for an Australian case study, Peace 2006).

late 1840s, with local campaigns in response to periodic exposés of deceptive or unsafe products (Okun 1986; Egan 2005). Popular involvement in the push for federal legislation, however, came mainly in the 1890s and 1900s, part of a broad coalition that included self-serving businessmen, interested professional associations (notably those of chemists and doctors), women's clubs, and temperance groups (Anderson 1958; Young 1989; Goodwin 1999). Both in its focus on federal regulation and its wide-ranging coalition of organized actors, the movement has much in common with contemporary campaigns against GMOs. Where the pure food movement differs -- thus far -- is that it succeeded. Thanks to a timely boost from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Congress finally approved a Food and Drug Act in 1906, giving the federal government the broad authority and many of the specific tools that we still rely on (sometimes in vain) to improve safety.

The main tactical approach in the pure food case thus involved collective political pressure on the state rather than the weapons of consumer choice, much as theorists of political consumerism would expect. But in two respects, the case complicates matters for these theorists. First, the *logic* of federal reform resembled the logic of political consumerism. Both were responses to the declining effectiveness of prevailing government institutions. Today, the argument goes, globalization undercuts the nation state, and so movements turn to the techniques of political consumption. For pure food advocates, a similar geographic expansion of markets and commodity chains undermined the ability of local and state governments to manage food safety. Second, like opponents of GMOs, the pure food movement complemented its primary strategy of lobbying with more modern tools of political consumption. Particularly in local communities, advocates resorted to direct action in the marketplace. The temperance wing of the pure food movement, for example, pressured merchants to drop tainted products and educated consumers about dangerous foods and drugs (Goodwin 1999, 63, 110; Young 1989).

There is no denying that the politicizing of consumption identities today has some distinct roots. To the extent that this politicizing reflects a backlash against intrusive corporate advertising, there are no comparable factors at work among food rioters, Grahamites, or pure food reformers. And to the extent that corporate branding gives activists leverage for pursuing political goals, there are no such strategic

opportunities fueling earlier movements. But a more important finding is that *both* the historical and the contemporary cases display a mix of state-centered political tactics and such marketplace weapons as boycott, buycotts, and consumer education. That finding suggests that there may be no general trend from conventional politics to political consumerism, or from apolitical to politicized consumption identities.

A more positive lesson can be drawn from this survey of political consumption, and one consistent with sociological accounts of social movements of other kinds. In *any* era there will be characteristic threats and opportunities, in distinctive mixes. These will politicize consumption to greater or lesser degrees and will favor political responses that balance government action and strategic consumption choices in different ways. The women who participated in food riots and in the grass roots of the pure food movement may have relied on consumer protest in part because suffrage restrictions limited their alternatives. Among contemporary participants in the "slow food" variety of locavorism, conventional political mobilization may vary according to whether prized local foods (such as raw milk or traditional cured sausages) are restricted by the state (Katz 2006; Ingram, et al. 2005). And in comparative perspective, the reliance on governmental (in the U.S.) and consumerist (in much of Europe) strategies by anti-GMO activists may reflect, in part, opportunities granted or withheld by the state. European governments generally require labeling of GMOs, thus making it possible to mobilize consumers and pressure retailers to avoid those products. Opponents of GMOs in the U.S. have no such option (Schurman 2004). Comparing movements in specific times and places in this way is likely to be more fruitful than comparing contemporary consumption politics with older social movements *in general*.⁶

6. Calhoun (1993, 415) makes a related point in his use of early-19th-century protest to criticize generalizations about "new" social movements. We are more likely to understand the character of movements, he argues, by looking at their age rather than at the era to which they belong. Comparing "mature" movements of the past with newly formed ones in the present creates a false impression of unidirectional change in the nature of social movements.

Responding to Globalization and Neo-liberalism

A second broad claim for the novelty of political consumerism links these movements to globalization. Globalization is thought to foster political consumerism in two ways. First, the transnational extension of commodity chains and corporate operations makes it more difficult for consumers to monitor the quality, safety, or integrity of products. Second, the same changes render less effective traditional instruments of democratic control, tied as these are to the nation state.

The contemporary movement in support of local food networks appears consistent with these arguments. Locavores' motives are quite varied, as we noted, and some of them -- a desire to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture, for example -- reflect other influences. But studies do find substantial numbers of locavores getting involved because they find locally sourced foods more legible. Foods from farmers' markets or in CSA baskets are preferred because they are the products of small farms, identifiable farmers, and more artisanal agricultural techniques. Local food thus conjures up an idealized community of face-to-face relations and tradition (DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Darby, Batte, Ernst, et al. 2008). Local produce is also deemed safer than the products of more or less anonymous industrial farms. And by relying on nearby sources, many locavores see themselves as supporting their community economy, not some remote profit center (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Allen 2004. For a critique of such "defensive localism," see Winter 2003). In all these ways, locavorism can be seen as an attempt to compensate for the longer commodity chains and powerful multinationals associated with a global economy. And by constructing this alternative through consumers' own choices of what to buy and where to eat, locavorism provides some leverage to individuals whose electoral votes carry little weight in shaping the food system. "Vote with your fork," the San Diego Roots Sustainable Food Project tells us. "The choices you make every day create the world in which you live," and "by eating, you vote at least three times a day" (advertisement in *Edible San Diego*, Summer 2008, 38).

If political consumerism is in part a response to globalization, and globalization has accelerated in the contemporary period, then this particular claim for novelty seems unassailable. But once the claim is disaggregated into arguments about the geographic expansion of markets and the diminished utility of

traditional governance institutions, the comparison between new and old food movements suggests a different conclusion: contemporary political consumerism involves a scaling-up of some very long-running economic and political dynamics.

Rapidly expanding markets and unaccountable businesses were common ingredients in food riots. Protesters may have been driven to action by spikes in food prices. But they typically blamed those prices on merchants who put profits ahead of community needs (Smith 1994). And although historians have not systematically examined the causal relationship between markets and riots in the United States, in England they have found food riots clustering in areas where local products were moved through newly developed transportation channels to other markets where they fetched higher prices. Rioters, in turn, proclaimed their determination to block this market-driven export of local food (Stevenson 1974; Williams 1984). There are plenty of motives for buying local today that have no precedents in food riots of the 18th century, including principled commitment to sustainability and aesthetic preference for fresh, seasonal produce. But the factors that best illustrate claims about political consumerism are clearly anticipated in food riots.

Our other cases make the same point. For Graham's followers, whole grains and home-made bread offered an antidote to ills of market capitalism -- ills only beginning to become apparent in Jacksonian America. Urban dwellers of that era worried that commercially prepared flour, for example, was less nutritious because of the way it was processed for transport and was less dependable because manufacturers' anonymity provided cover for fraud. Graham's proposed solution was to rely on flour embedded in traditional social relations, with wheat grown and milled by known members of the community and flour made into bread at home (Nissenbaum 1980). Similar fears of contamination drove the pure food movement, with the same underlying causes. To use the example made infamous by Upton Sinclair, large urban butchering operations and rail transport were replacing the slaughter of local stock by neighborhood butchers using traditional craft methods. That shift made meat, the centerpiece of the American diet, suspect. This larger context for popular concerns is also clear from the language used by reformers, who denounced tainted or adulterated food not just as health risks but as "demoralizing" relations between producers and consumers (Young 1989, 159; Goodwin 1999, 21).

As for globalization's impact on the nation state, there are no direct parallels in the three historical cases. But the underlying causal logic of argument is that consumer movements develop because customary tools of citizenship have become ineffective, and this was clearly the case in the past. People turned to food riots in part because municipal authorities no longer had the ability to regulate local provisions and prices. And at a more cultural level, food riots reflected a clash between traditional republican assumptions, giving government the responsibility to protect community interests, and the development of freer markets and laissez-faire ideology (Smith 1994). The pure food movement involved a further scaling-up of this political dynamic, in which state as well as local governments had lost the capacity to ensure food safety. In this respect, political consumerism updates rather than changes an old story.

Social Movement Organization

As we have seen, scholars frequently associate political consumerism with novel forms of social movement organization. Engaged consumers are linked only by loose and informal networks, or come together at most for transient campaigns rather than out of loyalty to any organization or leaders. To the extent that their activism is coordinated and focused, they rely on new communications technologies, on third-party certifying bodies, or on ancillary social movement organizations.

Our contemporary cases certainly illustrate these points, with opposition to GMOs and locavorism representing quite different points on a continuum of organization. Anti-GMO activism looks the most like the stereotypes of older social movements because it has some sustained organizational infrastructure of its own, including global associations like GenetiX and the Genetic Engineering Network. But much of the activism involves ad hoc coalitions working on particular campaigns. For instance, representatives from the Union of Concerned Scientists, Friends of the Earth, various Green parties, and the Women's Environmental Network, among many others, joined forces to collect petitions to deliver to the 2005 WTO meeting, defending the European Union's right to exclude genetically modified imports from the U.S. More-

local coalitions bring together wide-ranging alliances of organic farmers, consumer advocates, and environmentalists for such purposes as protesting trials of genetically modified plants or demanding appropriate labels when milk comes from cows treated with bovine growth hormone. And as these examples suggest, the movement against GMOs draws resources of various kinds from more general-purpose environmental, agricultural, and consumer rights organizations (Purdue 2000; Buttel 2000; Reisner 2001; Charles 2001).

Among locavores, by contrast, the balance between organization and "individualized collective action" (Micheletti 2003, 27) tilts much more towards the latter. If one focuses exclusively on consumers, there appears to be no organization at all, only shoppers at farmers' markets and subscribers to CSAs with widely varying rationale and levels of commitment. But their political consumption is made possible by organizations representing the industry, including associations of small farmers, local farm bureaus, and trade groups acting on behalf of organic farmers. And further behind the scenes are various groups offering technical advice to farmers and information for concerned consumers. These include associations such as the CSA Resource Center, the Community Food Security Coalition, Slow Food USA, and the Organic Consumers' Association, as well as sections of more general-purpose environmental and anti-poverty organizations (Allen 2004). The more one focuses on enabling institutions like these, the more organized the movement appears and thus the more like traditional social movements.

The movement for pure food parallels that against GMOs. It had its base in formal organizations, but the characteristic form of activism was the campaign, usually for legislation, mounted by a diverse network of associations. The 1898 National Pure Food and Drug Conference, for example, included representatives from the National Confectioners' Association, the American Chemical Society, the National Farmers' Congress, the National Beekeepers' Association, the National Peace Congress, and almost one hundred other bodies, briefly united in their call for effective federal regulation (National Pure Food and Drug Congress. 1st 1898). Local campaigns were often handled by specialized committees within the

Women's Christian Temperance Union, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the National Consumers' League. And the movement even anticipated contemporary certifying organizations, with an Association of Official Agricultural Chemists testing foods and offering to be the arbiter of purity under proposed legislation (Goodwin 1999; Young 1989).

Like contemporary consumers of organic or local food, devotees of Graham's health food appear less organized. Most expressed their beliefs through the flour they bought and the diet they practiced, not through collective action. But here too, the movement had an infrastructure that coordinated consumer action. The technologies of the day did not include the internet, but a popular journal and public lectures served Graham well. The movement also had roots in Graham's boarding houses and, deeper still, in the temperance organizations and churches that sponsored Graham's talks and broadened his network. And Graham himself resembles contemporary activists (as portrayed by students of political consumerism) in his itinerant journey from evangelicalism to temperance and then on to health food, showing little sustained loyalty to any one organization or cause (Whorton 1982; Cole 1975).

An Alternative Approach: Piggybacking in Consumer Movements

It would require a study different from ours to determine if there is any secular trend towards *more* transient campaigns, towards *looser* ties among participants, or towards a *greater* importance of piggybacking on other networks, institutions, and movements. The small sample of cases examined here merely shows that these characteristics of consumer politics are hardly new. But we want to add to this critique a more positive point: discussions of the political consumerism of any era can benefit from sociological accounts -- properly amended -- of diffusion and transposition in social movements. One benefit is to augment political scientists' treatment of political consumerism's infrastructure, highlighting an expanded range of networks, institutions, and movements on which political consumerism may piggyback. A second benefit it to show how that infrastructure, in turn, can shape the character of political consumerism.

We have two kinds of infrastructure in mind. There are the enabling services and resources that institutions provide, such as volunteers, meeting places, mailing lists, etc. These are well known from discussions of cooptable institutions in political process theory (the classic example being the Civil Rights Movement and southern black churches and colleges. See McAdam 1982). But there are also cultural models that define collective identities, purposes, and repertoires of action. Nineteenth-century workers, for example, often drew on republican traditions to define themselves as productive citizens with a corresponding right to a measure of independence on the job. That cultural model both supported collective action and defined the appropriate allies and goals in particular ways (Wilentz 1984; Gerteis 2007). Sociologists have argued that both kinds of piggybacking are at work in diffusion and spillover among movements. Meyer and Whittier (1994), for example, show how the U.S. peace movement of the 1980s took over frames, tactical innovations, and organizational devices from the women's movement -- diffusion that reflected common personnel, overlapping coalitions, and shared activist networks. Soule (2004), similarly, sorts out the varieties of direct and indirect ties that facilitate the spread of strategies, frames, and slogans across movements (see also McAdam 1995; Minkoff 1997; Strang and Soule 1998; Whittier 2004). Sociologists more influenced by cultural accounts of organizations make a similar point. Clemens's (1997) analysis of early-20th-century suffrage, farmer, and labor movements shows how their ideological direction and organizational forms reflected cultural scripts from other institutional settings. And Armstrong (2002) emphasizes how organizational logics governing gay activism in San Francisco drew on earlier interest group politics and shaped both expressions of identity and choices of strategy as the movement evolved.

This literature should be extended in two ways. First, the sources of diffusion or cultural borrowing should be expanded. Most of the sociological accounts of diffusion trace frames, tactical repertoires, and organizational choices from one movement to another. Our cases, by contrast, highlight a broader range of networks and communities on which political consumerism relies for its cultural models.

A similar move can be seen in Futrell and Simi's (2004) study of Aryan nationalism, which finds Bible study groups providing ideological rationale as well as local networks for mobilization (see also Taylor and Whittier (1992) on "submerged networks"). And Cherry (2006) shows how punk subcultures offer legitimation and supportive networks for vegans. Second, compared to conventional social movements, in political consumerism diffusion and cultural borrowing are both more important and work in different ways. It is not so much that political consumerism mimics organizational forms from other settings. Instead, this is a movement that consists of relatively individualized collective action; here, identities, frames, tactics, and goals transposed from other settings help provide the coordination that formal organization might otherwise provide. Piggybacking of this kind thus shapes political consumerism in ways that go well beyond the influence of internet technology or certifying organizations cited by Bennett and Micheletti. They depict these resources as helping coordinate the activities of scattered individuals and providing information to guide individual decision making. We emphasize, in addition, how supporting movements, networks, and institutions provide mobilizing frames applicable to new issues, familiar tactics that can be put to new uses, and larger goals under which consumption concerns can be subsumed.

If we adopt this broader view of the problem of coordination identified by political scientists who study consumer movements, new questions arise. For any given case, on what is the movement piggybacking, and what difference does this make? What networks, communities, institutions, or other movements provide cultural templates and strategic resources to guide relatively atomized consumer action? And how do these dependencies affect the nature of the consumer movement -- its own organizational character, the way it frames issues and solutions, the strategies it adapts, etc.?

Consider the Grahamites. The most important resources for this movement were the evangelical revival and related temperance agitation of the 1830s. It was as a hired speaker for the Pennsylvania Society for Discouraging the Use of Ardent Spirits that Graham first gained a wider audience and introduced his ideas about proper diet. Churches offered the venue for some of his public lectures. Beyond

these strategic resources, the evangelicals provided a transposable cultural script for Graham's movement. Most obviously, it shaped the framing of his health crusade. Graham justified his dietary advice in part on the basis of physiological science. But choosing to follow that advice, much like choosing to follow Jesus Christ, was also a means to religious salvation. Most importantly, it would free the individual from sexual temptation. The movement also adopted the evangelical model of public confession, with open forums provided by the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* and other publications. Graham's followers wrote to him of their past sins (dietary and otherwise) and described their ultimate redemption (proper eating leading to a restoration of health and self-control). "The change in my body," one adherent informed Graham, "was as great as it was in my soul when I was converted to the Lord" (Graham 1834, 45). And as in the temperance movement, Grahamites relied on the public lecture as a major strategy for spreading the word (Nissenbaum 1980; Whorton 1982).⁷ A similar story of borrowing can be told of food riots. Particularly among those that occurred in the early 20th century,⁸ protesters built on neighborhood ties among women. These connections provided some of the resources emphasized by political process theorists -- the networks for micromobilization, for example, and the social leverage to keep individuals from defecting from boycotts. The protesters' roots in these networks also had an obvious cultural impact: they defined their identities as mothers and wives and framed the conflict over prices in terms of meeting the responsibilities of these roles (Taylor 1996; Hyman 1980).

7. Young (2006) makes a similar point about churches and the national temperance and abolitionist movements. These movements took over from the evangelical revival of the 1820s-30s the discourse of public confession and national sin. In contrast to Young, however, we see our account of cultural and strategic piggybacking as supplementing rather than undermining a political process approach to cooptable institutions and as making no particular assumptions about the social-psychological roots of activism.

8. Most early-twentieth-century food riots occurred during WWI and the Great Depression, when rapid inflation or extended unemployment put the cost of food out of reach for many people.

Our contemporary cases may be analyzed in the same way. Co-ops provided one kind of resource -- cooptable networks -- for the organic countercuisine, such as through bulletin boards advertising goods and services offered by like-minded individuals (Cox 1994). As for ideological piggybacking, Belasco's history of the early organic movement shows how firmly it was rooted in the broader New Left. Those roots ensured that participants would think of food in terms that went well beyond pesticides, fertilizers, and health. From the New Left they drew their notions of food as personal politics, one of several areas for linking individual liberation and social change. They shared the broader New Left's embrace of authenticity and pre-industrial craftsmanship over conformity and mass production, whether the latter took the form of tacky tacky houses or plastic food. And New Left ideals of participatory democracy show up in the main organizations of the organic countercuisine, food co-ops and communal farms. In some cases, these affinities reflected personal connections. Cox notes that pioneering figures in organic food cooperatives were veterans of SDS or the Civil Rights Movement; others retained dual membership in co-ops and antiwar organizations (Cox 1994, 49, 61, 77). Even if they had no such personal roots in the New Left, organic enthusiasts were well aware of ideological common ground, and they put it to use -- for example, spicing up practical guides to composting with indictments of the Vietnam War and traditional schooling (Belasco 1999; Belasco 2007). Opposition to GMOs, by contrast, builds primarily on the environmental and consumer rights movements. As noted, much activism in this area is based on a coalition of environmental and consumer groups. But GMO opponents' framing of the issues also draws on the language of environmental risk and the right to informed consumer choice (Reisner 2001). And anti-GMO activists followed precedents established by consumer advocacy in their tactic of focusing on food and using food safety laws to mobilize opposition to GMOs. Indeed, Charles suggests that the movement may have embraced this strategic model *too* closely, giving biotechnology companies free rein to pursue genetic engineering as long as its products do not end up on our plates (e.g., for "pharming" drugs) (Charles 2001, 300–301. See also Roff 2007).⁹

9. In EU countries, Kurzer and Cooper (2007) find, environmental and consumer associations are the key

These are merely suggestions for how an analysis of piggybacking in political consumerism might begin. With regard to evaluating the novelty of political consumerism, the point is a more methodological one: differences between specific historical cases in the character of their organization are likely to be greater, and more fruitful points of comparison, than are differences between broadly defined time periods. Time does matter. It is worth asking, for example, why particular mechanisms for coordinating consumer action (such as neighborhood networks as opposed to non-governmental certifying organizations) are more common in certain periods. But this keeps the focus on differences in how political consumerism works rather than making political consumerism the basis for blanket distinctions between old and new types of social movements.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have not questioned the view that political consumerism is more common today. But we find the claims that it differs in *character* from prior movements to be largely unfounded. Scholars have distinguished contemporary political consumerism (1) in the way that consumption is the basis for social movement identities and politicizes those identities; (2) in the way it relates to neo-liberal globalization; and (3) in the way it rests on loose networks and individualized collective action, with coordination achieved through ancillary institutions and movements. Our comparison of food-related movements found no such distinctions separating recent from older cases. Whether in the past or the present, consumption choices were central to movement identities and the basis for political challenges, broadly conceived. Food riots and pure food advocacy followed a logic similar to contemporary responses to globalization in dealing with the extension of markets and the declining efficacy of traditional governance. Finally, the older cases showed a *range* of organizational styles, from loosely networked and individualized to more formally coordinated by dedicated social movement organizations. But the same range appears in contemporary political consumerism.

partners, with small farmers' organizations, in anti-GMO mobilization.

Questioning claims about the novelty of political consumerism was our first step. We also used these criticisms to suggest more fruitful lines of inquiry. The general recommendation was to compare specific cases rather than broad time periods. Past and present movements alike, we argued, politicized consumer identities in different ways. Some, including the Grahamites and organic consumers, did so at the level of personal politics and marketplace choice. Others, including pure food champions and GMO opponents, did so through more conventional, state-centered political strategies. Explaining differences among movements (or, for a given movement, differences over time) in this balance requires attention to familiar factors like prevailing threats and opportunities as well as to the cultural models, rooted in supporting movements and institutions, on which activists draw. Variations in these influences from one case to another mattered more in our survey than did variations between broad epochs. We expect that pattern to hold in a wider range of consumption-based movements.

A similar lesson can be drawn from the organizational characteristics of our six cases. Features commonly associated with contemporary political consumerism -- individualized collective action, loose networks, transient campaigns -- appear as well in earlier cases. And like contemporary political consumerism, we saw that earlier movements piggybacked on other institutions and movements to coordinate action. Owing to the nature of consumption-based movements, this is likely to be the typical pattern. But this pattern raises a more interesting question for research: how does piggybacking on particular movements and institutions shape the character of each consumption movement? We offer no general answer, and probably none exists. Answers for specific cases, however, will require attention both to resource and cultural piggybacking and to the ways in which these can influence tactical repertoires and ideological framing in consumption movements.

We have emphasized that consumption-based social movements confront particularly stark problems of coordination. Most members of these movements are unconnected to any movement organization and participate through individual, private consumption choices. How do they come to frame issues in similar ways, embrace common goals, and act, if not quite in concert, at least in parallel? We

argued that one answer lies in the ways consumption-based movements piggyback on other communities and movements, such as evangelical religion or environmentalism. This answer assumes that members are those who at least share the social change agenda of the movement, such as simplicity and Christian values in food choices or sustainability in agriculture. But what of those who participate in a different way, such as buying Fair Trade coffee because they think it is trendy or joining CSAs because they like the taste of fresh vegetables? Since these individuals are not oriented towards social change goals, they would not normally be defined as members of a movement. Yet they clearly advance movement goals, much as do potential customers who decline to cross picket lines out of fear rather than out of support for unions.

These two types of participation have two implications for future scholarship. First, the very distinction between members and non-members is more problematic in consumption-based movements than in other forms of protest; it is not simply a matter of different *degrees* of commitment and involvement. In addition, there is a second-order problem of coordination in consumption-based movements that merits further research: How do activists in these movements harness, or even construct,¹⁰ standards of trendiness and taste (for example) so as to enlist apolitical consumers in their causes?

Our focus has been on a relatively few cases of political consumption, all related to food. Political consumerism takes many more forms. Anti-sweatshop campaigns, socially responsible investing, and boycotts of media companies or tourist destinations on behalf of political goals also are characterized by individualized collective action and depend on resources and cultural models provided by other movements

10. This task should not be confused with that of "social marketing," which uses commercial marketing techniques to advance social goods, such as energy saving or condom use. Social marketing's goal is to persuade individuals to embrace and be guided by these values. By contrast, we are raising the possibility that support for such goals can be enlisted by tapping quite different motives, such as status striving or aesthetic preferences. People can come to act collectively for the right goals for the "wrong" reasons; how can this be brought about?

and institutions. We believe our focus on the character and effects of piggybacking is more broadly applicable to cases like these, and that more explanatory leverage will be achieved by comparing this process in specific cases of political consumerism than by trying to distinguish them, wholesale, from historical precedents.

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