

# Alliance Building across Social Movements: Bridging Difference in a Peace and Justice Coalition

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*Alliance building across social movement groups is an important aspect of social movement dynamics, contributing to their viability and capacity to promote social change. Yet, with few exceptions, cross-movement coalitions have received little sustained theoretical or empirical attention. This article contributes to an understanding of cross-movement coalition building through the examination of a successful case of alliance: a coalition of environmental justice and peace and anti-weapons proliferation groups to stop a federally funded U.S. biodefense laboratory from being built and operated in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Cross-movement collaboration was challenged by tensions arising from differences in positionality. Positional differences reflect status distinctions such as race, class, gender, and place and the differential experiences and expectations that result. Nonetheless, this coalition was able to resolve positional tensions and, as a result, remained a viable protest vehicle. We found this was accomplished through a cross-movement bridging process that involved (1) cause affirmation, (2) strategic deployment, (3) exclusion, and (4) co-development of cross-movement commitments. We extend existent accounts of cross-movement coalition by providing both a culturally founded and fine-grained account of coalition work in the maintenance of alliance relations. The article and its conclusions also address the broader implications of understanding successful trans-positional cross-movement alliances. Keywords: social movements, coalitions, environmental justice, peace movement, microdynamics.*

Alliances among social movement groups are an important aspect of social movement dynamics associated with greater levels of success (Gamson 1990; Steedly and Foley 1979; Van Dyke 2003). Research has also shown that conflicts of interest and perspective both within and across movement groups can erode membership, break down collective incentives and commitments, and thus undermine social movement efficacy (Barkan 1979; Freeman 1972–1973; Gamson 1990; Lichterman 1996; Staggenborg 1986). Understanding what inspires and facilitates collaboration and how movements form alliances or fail to is thus a crucial aspect of social movement dynamics (Rucht 2004; Van Dyke 2003).

Sociologists have extensively documented collaborative efforts *within movements* where protest groups and organizations, with relatively aligned causes and goals, engage in joint planning and actions (Barkan 1979; Benford 1993; Fantasia and Stephan-Norris 2004; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Ferree and Hess 1994; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Polletta 2002; Shaffer 2000; Rochon and Meyer 1997). Less attention has been explicitly afforded *cross-movement coalitions*, where protest groups with different causes, but shared goals seek to engage in joint planning and actions (Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Rose 2000; Van Dyke 2003). This neglect

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is surprising because cross-movement coalitions pose special problems for collaboration that cannot be sufficiently addressed through within-movement studies. To successfully ally, cross-movement coalitions must often reconcile distinctive, sometimes competing explanations as well as remedies for the social problems they jointly seek to stem. As a consequence, cross-movement coalitions can be freighted with relations that increase the potential for intergroup conflict because issues that are taken for granted within movements must be defended and explained in cross-movement contexts (Lichterhan 1995).

In this article, we explore the microdynamics of a successful cross-movement coalition through a case study of an alliance formed by groups from the environmental justice movement and (mainly) from peace and anti-weapons proliferation movement. This coalition was committed to stopping a federally funded, high security National Biocontainment Laboratory (hereafter NBL or biolab)<sup>1</sup> from being built and operated by Boston University Medical Campus in Roxbury, Massachusetts (Enserink 2002; Enserink and Kaiser 2005). While the groups involved shared the goals of stopping the biolab, they came to the protest for different reasons that reflected differing causes and impressions of what the NBL represented.<sup>2</sup> The movement began when a small group of Roxbury environmental justice activists attended an early public forum concerning the NBL and were allegedly belittled by University officials when they asked questions about the potential risks associated with the NBL (Ecklein and Gosseline 2006). They were soon joined by activists from peace and anti-weapons groups<sup>3</sup> from across the Boston metropolitan area. Together, they formed the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition.

The coalition did more than merge groups with initially different causes and grievances; it also merged groups who, by merging, had to cross some of Boston's enduring social divisions of race, ethnicity, and class (c.f., Formisano 1991). Indeed, many of the issues noted in the social movement literatures as corrosive to collaboration were present, such as divergent identity-based and ideological motivations (Benford 1993; Staggenborg 1986), differing organizational characteristics (Fantasia and Voss 2004; Freeman 1975; Ferree and Hess 2000; Polletta 2002), and competition for scarce resources (DiazVeizades and Chang 1996; Van Dyke 2003; Zald and McCarthy 1980). Likewise, potentially divisive issues of race, class, and culture identified in the focused but sparse literature on cross-movement coalitions also figured prominently in the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition. Yet, this coalition succeeded where many others confronting similar challenges have faltered or failed (see Bell and Delaney 2001; Diaz-Veizades and Chang 1996; Guinier and Torres 2002; Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Pulido and Peña 1998; Rose 2000; Van Dyke 2003). By success, however, we do not only mean success at achieving the movement's stated objectives, but also the capacity of an alliance to persist and thus continue to be a viable vehicle for social change. In this, we borrow from Suzanne Staggenborg's (1986) definition of *coalition work*: "Success in coalition work means first of all that the coalition actually gets off the ground, but beyond formation, coalition success can be measured in terms of its goals and longevity" (p. 375).

The Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition thus provides an excellent case for addressing issues of both *theoretical* and *practical* significance. Theoretically, we were concerned with explaining the success of this cross-movement coalition given that the challenges identified in previous

1. NBLs are the highest security facilities known to laboratory science, where the world's most virulent naturally occurring and manmade diseases and pathogens are studied (Malakoff 2003a, 2003b; Miller 2004; Preston 1999; Thacker 2003). There are currently less than a dozen NBLs in the United States, with only six occurring in civilian contexts and only two in urban centers. However, it is very difficult to get an exact count or sense of the total square footage (another measure used by experts) devoted to BSL-4 research because much of it is secret and not publicly available.

2. For background information on the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition visit the group's Web site ([www.stopthe-biolab.org/](http://www.stopthe-biolab.org/)).

3. We use "social movement group" (SMG) rather than social movement organizations (SMO) because the connotation of SMO implies a mature, highly structured, and institutionalized movement vehicle and does not align with many of the groups we observed in the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition. The SMGs that populated the coalition, indeed that are often characteristic of community-level and grassroots movements and actions, were less formal in their deliberations, authority structures, and missions than implied in the SMO designation.

studies as undermining to collaboration were strongly present. In providing answers to this question, our analysis adds to an understanding of cross-movement coalition in three ways. First, we extend existent accounts of cross-movement coalition by providing a culturally founded and fine-grained account of coalition work in the maintenance of alliance relations. The few studies that have sought to explain what facilitates success in cross-movement coalition have emphasized external conditions, protest events, and organizational characteristics (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Obach 2004; Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke 2003) rather than internal conditions, the characteristics of movement participants, and micro-social processes as we develop in this article.

Second and related, we provide a case of cross-movement coalition success, one in which we explicitly outline the collective *bridging processes* that explain this coalition's persistence over time. On this, observations of conflict within and between movements are not uncommon in social movement scholarship. What is not present, however, is an explicit accounting of the social processes through which such differences are resolved so that an alliance can persist in spite of them. The bridging process we identify took shape through an ongoing set of social interactions that lessened the potential for intergroup conflict over time. The bridging process reflects four aspects: *cause affirmation*, *strategic deployment*, *exclusion*, and the *co-development of cross-movement commitments*. We believe that the process we describe and some or all of the dimensions we name are applicable to other successful cross-movement coalitions as well.

Lastly, to account for the multidimensional quality of the cross-movement coalition we observed, we import the concept of "positionality" from environmental justice, race studies, and cultural studies, modifying it to better fit our attention to a cross-movement coalition (Pulido and Peña 1998; see also Guinier and Torres 2002; Omi and Winant 1986; Robnett 1997 on race; and Bourdieu 1984, 1988 on distinction in cultural fields). Positional differences reflect status distinctions—i.e., race, class, gender, and place—in a given social formation and the differential experiences, preferences, and expectations that result. This aspect of collaboration, especially as it relates to race (Pellow 2007), has been both underappreciated and underdeveloped in social movement treatments. We further develop the concept of positionality by linking it to important and overlapping insights by social movement scholars on the role that cultural expectations (Alexander and Smith 1993; Bourdieu 1984; Gamson 1995; Swidler 1995; Williams 2004), repertoires of organization (Clemens 1993; Clemens and Minkoff 2004), and styles of commitment (Lichterman 1995, 1996) hold for both within- and cross-movement collaborations.

What we report also holds a good deal of *practical* relevance to a dialogue taking place among environmental justice (EJ) scholars and activists concerning the long-term strategy, successes, and failures of the EJ movement (Bowen 2001; Brulle and Pellow 2006; Pellow and Brulle 2005; Sze and London 2008). An increasing number of scholars and activists are calling for the EJ movement to expand and link up with sympathetic SMGs, affinity groups, and public bystanders at the local, national, and even global scale to better promote social and environmental justice (Anthony 2005; Brulle and Pellow 2006; Faber 2007; Faber, Loh and Jennings 2002; Gordon and Harley 2005; Pellow 2007). Yet, research on the EJ movement has tended to focus on the strong antinomies between, for example, it and mainstream environmentalism rather than the factors that could make alliances between the two more likely (Chiro 1995; Peña 2003, 2005; Sandler and Pezzullo 2007; Taylor 2002). Practically, then, our case also provides an opportunity to address an alliance involving EJ and non-EJ groups that has successfully persisted and promoted social and environmental justice.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. We first review the literature, then describe our research strategy and case. Next we present our findings, first showing positional aspects of the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition that clearly generated tensions and then how the coalition was able to adequately resolve these differences. We conclude with attention to the lessons this case provides students of social and community movements in general and alliance building specifically.

## Alliance in Social Movement Contexts

Sociologists have extensively documented collaboration *within* a range of historical and contemporary movements, including the women's (Ferree and Hess 1994), labor (Fantasia and Stephan-Norris 2004; Fantasia and Voss 2004), civil rights (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Polletta 2002), environment (Shaffer 2000), and nuclear freeze movements (Barkan 1979; Benford 1993; Rochon and Meyer 1997). Collectively, this research has demonstrated that the likelihood of coalition formation within a movement increases with heightened levels of environmental threat or opportunity, plentiful resources, and high levels of identity alignment among collaborators (Van Dyke 2003). Cross-movement coalition, however, has not received the same sustained theoretical attention even though they pose both different and more extreme conditions for collaboration than do within-movement coalitions. As a consequence of this neglect, answers to when, how, and why they form and succeed and/or fail remain tentative. Nonetheless, within-movement collaboration studies along with the handful of studies of cross-movement coalition do provide a view of some of the issues that influence collaboration and coalition in general, such as the role of movement structure, ideology, resources, and culture.

### *Structure, Ideology, and Resources*

Most theorists of social movement collaboration have shared in an underlying rationalist assumption that individuals and groups join forces when doing so will enhance goal achievement or refrain from doing so when it does not (Gamson 1961; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Yet, even in accounts of coalition within movements, where causes and goals are ostensibly shared, this assumption has been found complicated if not mistaken (Obach 2004; Staggenborg 1986).

For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, the women's movement found collaboration among its groups difficult for "structural reasons." The SMGs that comprised it were characterized by both decentralized, nontraditional, consciousness raising groups seeking radical transformation as well as by more conventional, centralized SMGs that embraced hierarchy, bureaucratic organization, and reform rather than radical change (Ferree and Hess 2000; Freeman 1972–1973, 1975). Epic struggles within the U.S. labor movement also reflected SMGs with different structures as well as "ideological alignments," such as those that distinguished the radical and anti-bureaucratic unions Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) from the conservative and highly bureaucratized American Federation of Labor (AFL) (Fantasia 1988; Fantasia and Stephan-Norris 2004; Fantasia and Voss 2004). Similarly, during the civil rights movement, disagreement over leadership and organizational structures—relatively flat, informal, and consensus based *versus* hierarchal, formal, and leader driven—led to open conflict among participating activists (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Polletta 2002). And in a recent (and rare) study of cross-movement coalition among labor unions and environmental organizations, Brian Obach (2004) found that collaboration across movement boundaries was least likely among movement organizations with very narrow goals and that were concerned primarily with limited membership gains and most likely among movement organizations that embraced a broader conception or "range" of issues, concerns, and constituents (Obach 2004; see also Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

Ideology has also been found important to understanding conflict and cooperation within other movements. Todd Gitlin (1980) identified strong ideological differences between old and new left in the Students for a Democratic Society that fomented conflict within the organization that eventually transformed its strategy and membership. Research by Robert Benford (1993) also showed how ideologically driven disputes within the anti-nuclear movement exposed deep fissures that undermined the movement's unity and overall efficacy. And Staggenborg (1986), in her study of coalition formation within the pro-choice movement,

found that pro-choice organizations that used similar strategies and evinced similar ideological commitments were more likely to work together than those that did not. Staggenborg also found that ideological differences, even small ones, were least likely to be bridged when *resource competition* was high and success of a campaign seemed remote. Lastly, collaborative relations among social movement groups have also been found more likely to occur when resources are plentiful (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Van Dyke 2003; Zald and McCarthy 1980) and political opportunities or threats are imminent (McCammon and Cambell 2002; Rochon and Meyer 1997).

### *Culture and Reflexivity*

While clashes within movements over structural, ideological, and resource issues have been relatively well documented, the influence exerted by less obvious “cultural differences” on collaboration and coalition within and across movements has been comparatively understudied. Influenced by the cultural turn of the 1990s, however, social movement research began to more explicitly attend to culture as emergent, received, and expressed through codes, tropes, themes, and practices (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Geertz 1974; Swidler 1995; Wuthnow 1987). The studies that followed also made it clear that relations within movements and between social movements and their adversaries were highly reflective of cultural expectations; we would expect some of the same of relations in cross-movement coalition as well.

For example, at the level of American political discourse and dispute, Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (1993) showed that disputants must frame their points according to culturally founded democratic codes. William Gamson (1992) similarly found that a handful of “cultural tropes” are deeply engrained in American political consciousness and frame most protest movement efforts. And Thomas Beamish, Harvey Molotch, and Richard Flacks (1995) found that contemporary U.S. anti-war protestors are impelled to use a now institutionalized protest code—a *we support the troops not the war* mantra that reflects a collective memory of Vietnam era protests—in order to avoid accusations that they are “blaming the troops” for war (see also Lembcke 1998). Movements that are associated with undemocratic or illegitimate protest codes hazard pariah status; those that employ known and socially vetted tropes make sense to publics (see also Jasper 1997; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Polletta 2006; Williams 2004). This helps explain why some protest frames resonate with the public and why others do not (Snow 2004; Snow and Benford 1998; Snow and Corrigall-Brown 2005). Such cultural frames of reference also hold obvious ramification for understanding both collaboration and clash in cross-movement coalitions.

Recent treatments have incorporated cultural dimensions that extend the conventional focus on instrumental features of collective action, such as in repertoires of collective action (Tilly 1978, 1995; Traugott 1995) and tactical repertoires (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004), with appreciation of how the organization of daily life, styles of commitment, social status, even place-legacy influences movement formation and carry through. The implications of this research stream also complicates understanding culture as frequently approached in the social movement framing literature, where emphasis has been on movements as discursive projects (Benford, 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Carroll and Ratner 1996; Polletta 2002; Snow 2004). For example, Elisabeth Clemens (1993) found that the organization of daily life and what is learned through structurally distinct experience can supply a potent repertoire for social and political contestation (Clemens 1993; Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Steinberg 1995, 1999; Stevens 2001). Such “repertoires of organization” reflect more than the application of instrumental tactics because they act as both “vehicles for mobilization” as well as “signals of movement identity,” indicating to opponents and possible alliance partners alike who movement participants are, where they come from, and what they stand for (Clemens and Minkoff 2004).

The type and form of commitment expressed by an SMG has also been found to play a distinctive role in alliance potential. In research that takes up cross-movement coalition, Paul

Lichterman (1995) examined the impact that differing “styles of commitment” had on coalition efforts among U.S. greens and anti-toxics<sup>4</sup> SMGs. Different activist communities, Lichterman found, practiced culturally distinct styles of commitment that complicated their collaboration. Given that the SMGs Lichterman observed did not successfully ally, he concluded that the styles of commitment he had observed—greens embraced a personalistic style and toxic’s groups a communal one—were largely incompatible without substantial reflexivity and compromise on the part of collaborators. In his recent work, Lichterman expands on the role of reflexivity in collaboration, but does so by studying civic group participation rather than social movement coalition. Specifically, he found that religious social service groups that exhibited heightened levels of social reflexivity more easily bridged to outside people, groups, and institutions and were also more successful at maintaining those ties over time. In this, lessons from Obach (2004) and Fred Rose (2000) on cross-movement coalition between labor and environmental movement organizations implicitly dovetail with these findings. Both observed that “coalition brokers,” highly reflexive individuals familiar with the cultural characteristic of cross-movement groups, played important roles in establishing the contact and the common ground for collaboration to occur across movements.

### *Positionality*

Interrelated with cultural repertoires, forms of commitments, and reflexivity is the important role social status plays in how grievances are identified, causes framed, adversaries understood, and, we would add, potential allies approached and collaborations sustained (or not). For instance, environmental justice scholars and scholars of race have sought to expose the role that “positionality” within a given social formation plays in shaping movement perceptions and grievances (Guinier and Torres 2002; Peña 2005; Pulido 1996; Pulido and Peña 1998; Robnett 1997; Sze 2007; Sze and London 2008; see Omi and Winant 1986 on racial formation). For example, Laura Pulido and Devan Peña (1998) compared how Latino/a farm workers and mainstream, middle class, and white environmental activists differently mobilized around pesticide issues: the former around worker exposure, the latter around wilderness and consumer protection. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres (2002) also develop the notion of “political race,” claiming that racial/ethnic consciousness is a response to a dominant culture’s justification of racial/ethnic subordination that provides the pretext for both collective identity and political mobilization. And Rose (1997, 2000) concluded that it is “class culture” that has confounded cross-movement coalition among middle class environmentalists and working class labor unions. Working class social movements emphasize tangible and immediate outcomes such as economic gain, while middle class movements tend to emphasize universal values and less immediate goals like education and legal challenge. Paradoxically, the implication of this work is that positionality can provide both a strong basis for movement identity and solidarity, but an equally durable impediment to alliance across race, ethnicity, and class (see Hochschild and Rogers 2000).

Finally, we would add the influence of *place-legacy* in the cross-movement coalition we have studied (Beamish 2001; Beamish et al. 1998; Feagin 1990; Hayden 1997; Jasper 1997; Molotch, Freudenberg, and Paulsen 2000). That is, the influence that the material character, traditions, and legacy of “location” have on cultural outlooks, and thus social causes and movements, is also an important influence on the coalition we recount. Attention to the role of place-experience shifts analysis away from a solely discursive account and towards the nexus of both lived experience and the social and cultural currents that embed activists and movements.

4. Lichterman (1995) didn’t make a distinction that environmental justice activists and scholars currently do; that anti-toxics and environmental justice activism are different movements with different histories, tactics, claims, and demographic profiles (Bullard 1993; Freudenberg and Steinsapir 2000; Szasz 1994).

In brief, then, cross-movement coalition has not received a great deal of focused empirical or theoretical consideration. This neglect is surprising as coalitions with a broad assortment of groups and constituents have been shown to increase the chances of social movement success. Yet, cross-movement coalitions pose special problems for collaboration not well represented in the study of within-movement collaborations. In the following, we explore the micro dynamics of cross-movement coalition through a case study that both illustrates the influence that significant positional differences have on cross-movement coalitions, but one where participants were able to successfully bridge their differences, ally, and promote their shared cause.

## Research Strategy and Case

We interviewed a total 94 respondents who had to varying degrees “engaged” the biolab issue, both in support and opposition to its installation in Roxbury, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> We relied on purposive and then snowball sampling techniques to first identify engaged persons, then contact and interview willing informants. Respondents were initially identified through an analysis of case documents including local and national mass media coverage, all letters to the editor and opinion columns published in the *Boston Globe* and *Herald*, city council and public meeting transcripts and video coverage, public comment sections of environmental impact reports and court proceedings, pro- and anti-biolab literatures, and state and federal legal documents, as well as through personal connections to Boston area citizens and experts. Having identified key informants, we proceeded with interviews and concluded our conversations by asking for referrals to other informants. Through referrals we gained access to still more movement and nonmovement informants. In this way, the initial purposively selected sample of engaged informants “snowballed” as the study tapped into existing protest networks.

Of the 94 total interviewees, we conducted 40 in-depth interviews with what we term “issue elites;” 35 of these were with coalition activists. We defined issue elites as those who played a significant part in framing the biolab issue through direct leadership, advocacy, and sponsorship. We also conducted 54 telephone surveys with what we term “engaged citizens.” We defined engaged citizens as those who expressed strong commitments and sentiments regarding the NBL in one or more of the documentary sources that we had collected for this project, but did not play a leadership role for or against the biolab. These interviews included both closed- and open-ended questions. Interviewers recorded responses to open ended questions as they did with in-depth interviews; either with a tape recorder or by taking handwritten notes of informant responses.<sup>6</sup> Of the 54 survey interviews, 27 were conducted with informants active in the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition. We distinguished between issue elites and engaged citizens on both qualitative grounds—i.e., knowledgeable respondents shared who the movement leaders were—and quantitative grounds—i.e., we counted the number of times a person’s name or comments appeared in and across relevant documentation to ascertain different levels of issue engagement as well as references to movement leadership status.

### *The Case*

The movement to stop the NBL grew out of an association of neighborhood activists who had previously organized to influence local urban development in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Their focus on the NBL began after attending early public forums sponsored by Boston

5. This study of Boston’s anti-biolab coalition is part of a national comparative case study in which we assess similarities and differences in how three U.S. communities have responded to what federal sponsors call a public health initiative (NIH/NIAID 2001; NIAID 2002) and detractors call a dangerous bioterror agenda (Powell 2003; SafetyNet/ACE 2004; Scheitzer 2002a, 2002b).

6. In this article, we use only informant responses to open-ended questions from the survey’s we conducted.

University Medical Campus (BUMC) and one in particular (circa May 2003) that left them feeling disrespected. University officials allegedly belittled them when they voiced concerns over the risks the biolab might pose the local community. Indeed, community activists claim they left the meeting with a keen sense that they and their neighborhood was left out of decision making precisely because it is largely African American and lower income. According to a neighborhood activist from Roxbury who was part of this protest group: “This proposal is another example of environmental racism on a community of color; if this was an affluent white community, public meetings would have been held and respect given to the community” (CRG 2003). Neighborhood activists claim that their impressions derive not simply from the proposed laboratory, but from a long history of broken promises by the City of Boston (c.f., Faber et al. 2002; Leong 1995/1996; Sze 2008).

Roxbury is indeed a poor, largely African American inner city neighborhood<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 1) whose socioeconomic decline and urban decay began with white flight in the 1950s and 60s (Medoff and Sklar 1994; O’Connor 1993). In the intervening years, Roxbury has become a target for unwanted and noxious land uses such as bus and truck depots, trash transfer stations, junkyards, incinerators, and a resulting share of superfund sites (ACE 2004; Faber et al. 2002; Loh et al. 2002). It is ranked as the eighth most polluted community in Massachusetts (Faber 2007).

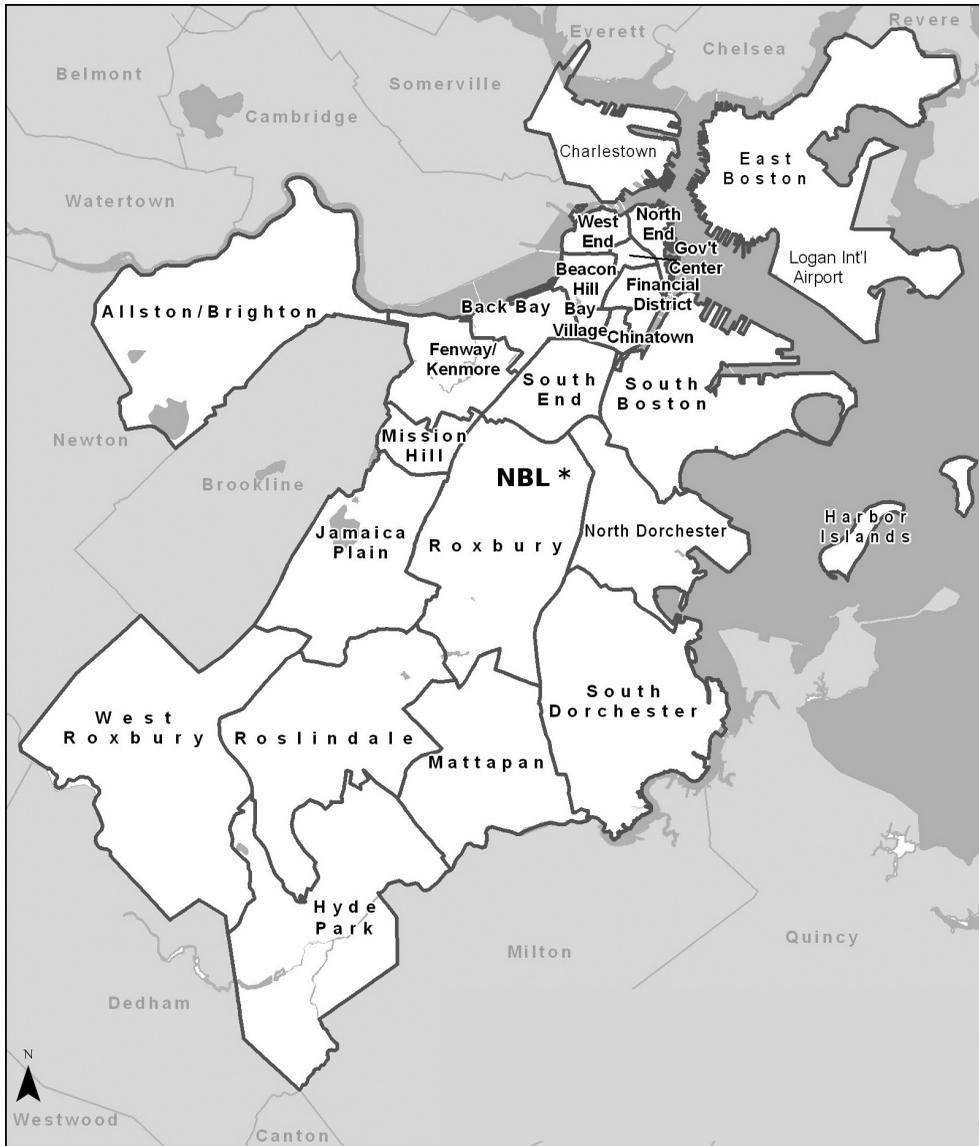
Specifically, the Roxbury Environmental Justice Group (REJG) grew from housing projects along Malenea Cass Boulevard and had initially organized to influence the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s<sup>8</sup> urban renewal plans for the neighborhood. The core activists of REJG were the housing representatives from each of the housing developments. Tenant representatives from each housing project comprised the inside of an SMG organized by a representative hierarchy whose center was a charismatic and outspoken leader. Theirs was a movement founded on claims of distributive justice, local governmental accountability, and the specific empowerment of their community on issues of urban development and environmental justice.

REJG activists were soon joined by activists from outside Roxbury in their opposition to the NBL. Early on, REJG reached out and sought to establish links to representatives from each of Boston’s city districts and formed what they called the Citywide Coalition. In October 2003, when BUMC’s award of the biolab was widely reported in the local and national press, REJG was also joined by SMGs that hailed from outside Boston city limits—mostly anti-war and anti-weapons proliferation activists, but also an assortment of others (see Table 1 and note 3 for details).<sup>9</sup> In the main, these activists were white, well educated, and middle class. They formed what came to be known as the “Outside Boston Committee” as they did not have formal district representation in Boston city government and thus did not organize to influence city districts as did other coalition groups and activists. They came to the NBL issue mostly concerned with its broader implications, tending to view it as part of a post 9/11 expansion of the domestic military industrial complex, a violation of international weapons accords, as well as a misapplication and expenditure of public health money on “exotic pathogens” rather than what they felt were legitimate public health threats (Byravan and Krimsky 2003).

7. This is a small point of contention as the area immediately adjacent to BUMC and the proposed NBL has in recent years gentrified. However, a majority of the neighborhoods just south of the University—Roxbury and North Dorchester—are indeed poor and largely African American with a growing Hispanic population (The Boston Foundation 2004–2006).

8. The Boston Redevelopment Authority is Boston’s planning and economic development agency (BRA 1957).

9. Our account of the SMGs that participated in the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition reflects our use of a listing made by a central activist organization (see [www.stopthebiolab.org/](http://www.stopthebiolab.org/)), references made by our informants to different participatory groups, and archival research and listings done early in the project to identify potential informants. The listing, however, requires qualification. First, of the 58 listed SMGs, according to those we have spoken with, activists from eight to ten groups played a lead role in coalition deliberations. By our count, two groups from Roxbury and four to six groups from outside Roxbury—most from outside Boston city limits—were central to coalition deliberations. Second, some activists belonged to more than one listed SMG, making “groupness” less clear than it might appear when listing the number of participatory SMGs. Third, some activists who participated in the coalition did so unaffiliated with any particular SMG and others while affiliated to SMGs did so as independent activists. And finally, a number of the participating SMGs were local affiliates of the same “parent” social movement organization, but because they represented separate groups we counted them as individual SMGs.



*Source:* Map reprinted courtesy of the Boston Redevelopment Authority. This map is displaying a combination of Research and Planning Districts and Zoning Districts. The Boston Redevelopment Authority's Policy Development and Research Department created the Planning Districts layer to facilitate the comparison of U.S. Census Department demographic information. It is difficult to define neighborhoods with physical boundaries. Boston has many smaller neighborhoods which are not depicted on this map. These boundaries are used for planning purposes only.

**Figure 1 • Boston Neighborhoods**

Given that the contrasts and distinctions made by activists in our interviews were almost exclusively made between those that hailed from REJG and Roxbury and those that did not, rather than making a distinction between “REJG, Citywide, and OBG activists” we make reference simply to REJG and those that we will collectively refer to as the “Outer Boston

**Table 1 • Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition**

<i>SMG by Mission Statement</i>	<i>SMG Place</i>			<i>Totals</i>
	<i>Roxbury</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Outside City</i>	
Animal rights	0	1	1	2
Peace/anti-weapons proliferation	0	0	3	3
Faith/peace/social justice	0	0	11	11
Labor union	0	0	4	4
Peace/justice	2	2	12	16
Social & environmental justice	3	8	4	15
Neighborhood associations	6	1	0	7
Totals	11	12	35	58

Groups" (OBG) for their residence in places outside the area immediately adjacent to the NBL site and the city district of Roxbury, Massachusetts. We should also underscore that unlike REJG, OBG was not a pre-formed, tightly organized, or centralized social movement organization, but rather reflected a loosely organized association of activists who came together from other SMGs with the express purpose of opposing the NBL.

Finally, from our informants' discussions of the coalition we can sketch broadly some of its organizational characteristics as well. Early on (circa 2003), before the Outside Boston Committee had formed, the Citywide Coalition led by REJC activists was organized by city district; groups from each city district were tasked with bringing pressure on their city councilor to reject the biolab. At this time, a handful of activists from outside of the city—Cambridge, Brookline, Somerville, Newton, and beyond—began attending coalition meetings to see if they couldn't aid in the campaign against the NBL. According to our informants from both REJG and OBG, on important matters at least, the coalition worked as a two-tiered project: ideas about possible actions and strategies required both a quorum of coalition member support, achieved at meetings by vote, at the same time that plans were also subject to approval by the REJG's leader and the group's inner circle of activists.

Boston's anti-biolab movement is ongoing and has been a vibrant one that may yet thwart the operation of an NBL in Roxbury. While the movement's attempt to influence Boston's political elites was initially unsuccessful, two lawsuits filed in 2006 in state and federal courts on the movement's behalf have shown promise and an independent National Academies research panel convened by the State of Massachusetts to review the NBL plan also found serious flaws with its sponsor's claims (Smith 2007a, 2007b). Thus, while opponents have not been able to halt construction of the facility, the coalition has persisted and thus has been able to apply a great deal of pressure, exposing the NBL and its sponsors to a review process and national spotlight they could not have anticipated.<sup>10</sup>

### **An Unlikely Alliance? Race, Place, Class, and Clash**

Notwithstanding success in court, we have found that initial and longer-term collaborations among REJG and OBG have reflected both mutual admiration and also significant tensions and disagreements. To successfully persist, the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition had to

10. BUMC began building the lab in 2006, but recently (circa 2008) the state supreme court and a national research group found that the NIH and BUMC inadequately addressed potential "risk scenarios" given the dense urban setting within which the NBL would be embedded and as stipulated by federal law. Whether this will stop the biolab from going on line or operating at a BSL-4 designation—the most secure and high risk designation—is yet to be seen. However, the coalition and court cases have indeed stalled the NBL from going online as a BSL-4 biolab at least for the time being (circa 2009).

weld together activists with differing organizational, ideological, and cultural orientations that manifested both as different instrumental preferences and latent cultural expectations. In the following section, we begin by outlining the ways REJG and OBG differed such that the likelihood of a lasting alliance forming between them seemed remote. Specifically, in this section we focus on the positional differences that were characteristic of the SMGs and activists involved in the coalition. These positional differences further manifested in differing repertoires of organization and culturally founded styles of commitment that had coalition groups differently interpreting how best to organize their collective efforts and engage in effective protest.

### *Race and Place*

Among Roxbury residents the City of Boston has earned a reputation of being recreant; to their minds, it rarely follows through on the promises it makes (c.f., Beamish 2002, 2001; Freudenburg 1993). This view is based on a long history of neglect and deceit reflected in the “urban renewal projects” promoted in their name, without their input, and often at their expense (Medoff and Sklar 1994b; O’Connor 1993). As one local activist reflected, “Roxbury is the dumping ground. If there’s trash to be dumped, it’s dumped in Roxbury” (informant\_12 2006, REJG, female, community activist). In this context, the NBL was another betrayal; a violation of recent efforts in local community planning that promised that neighborhood development would benefit its residents. Beginning in 1999, community advocates had been participating with the City of Boston in the design and implementation of a new “Roxbury Master Plan.” Ideally, the plan sought to develop jobs and community services that would directly benefit the area and incorporate local residents in discussions of development strategies (c.f., Faber et al. 2002). According to activists, after discussions of a grocery store or hotel—developments that activists claim could directly benefit the low-skilled labor in the neighborhood—the City of Boston announced its plans to develop a biotechnology corridor on Malnea Case Boulevard (circa 2002). The new “BioSquare” development came to include BUMC’s NBL in 2003.

Community activists felt deceived. Such high tech development, to their minds, would have little if any positive impact for local inner city residents; as one stated at the time, “What’s in it for the community?” (Schweitzer 2002) and another said in interview:

I asked [BUMC] why they wanted to build [the biolab]. Frankly, I told them, I told the news media, I’m not as much against [BUMC] doing the research—I’m not against the lab. I’m against the location and where they want to build it. That was supposed to be a hotel there . . . but this is what they do, they let the community help plan what they want built on certain land and then we think the deal is sealed, you know, and then the next thing you read—I don’t know how we got from a hotel to a biolab (informant\_12 2006, REJG, female, community activist).

In this sense, “the biolab” embodied a list of social grievances that reflect Roxbury as a place and its historical legacy. REJG activists viewed the biolab as more than an isolated development project or risky biolab, but as a symbol of how they were routinely disregarded because of their race, class, and neighborhood.<sup>11</sup> The NBL symbolized that Roxbury’s neighborhood—primarily poor people of color—was at best ignorable and at worst expendable.

It’s crazy. It’s crazy, you know? . . . Why the poor neighborhoods? It’s about respect. We just fighting because we love our neighborhood, we love our residents, you know? This is where we live, this is where we were raised. Nobody do it, we have to do it, you know? People step over other people if we don’t step up (informant\_14 2006, REJG, female, community activist).

11. We do not claim that gender is not also a salient “positional category” in this movement as the majority of core members of REJG were indeed women. In OBG, gender composition was more mixed but women played a central role in its leadership and ranks as well. However, the activists to whom we spoke did not make gender a central or even peripheral aspect of their articulations, motivations, or protestations to us, but rather they explicitly and implicitly emphasized race, place, and class issues in explaining their reasons and rationales for mobilization.

As it relates directly to the NBL, activists repeatedly and repetitively also cited the manner by which BUMC acquired permission from the city and state to build and manage the biolab—through back channels and political lobbying—as violating their sense of justice that furthermore reflected of their race and class positions. The treatment of local community activists once they began to ask questions about the biolab only increased their alienation and with it their resolve to stop the biolab.

Arbitrary and capricious . . . if there's anything that could characterize the way they went about this process [it's that] . . . In the first place, they didn't care about community and community input. They didn't care about any opposition to [the biolab], they didn't set it up in a way that the opposition could have an impact on what they were proposing. They framed it in economic terms, not in human, safety, and needs terms—they framed it as a way to create some jobs. And with that they lined-up the unions, construction and [it's] their way of saying they don't care about the impact on people—the kind of adverse impact people raised about having serious pathogens in a community . . . (informant\_15 2006, REJG, male, community activist).

Indeed, REJG's early treatment by BUMC officials at a handful of public forums became coalition legend. Retellings of these interactions functioned to galvanize coalition participants; they were recounted in some way in nearly every interview we conducted with both REJG and OBG activists, regardless of whether they had observed directly the treatment they recounted. The retelling related outrage over the hardship and inequity represented in the biolab issue. In the following, the activist quoted above also recounted how a BUMC official refused to discuss the details of the NBL with them until "they knew more."

What are you all talking about? All these diseases? What diseases are they? [The BUMC official] was like, "Well, it seems like you all don't know nothing, so we're not going to even bother (with) you" . . . He's really calling us, like dumb . . . "Unaccomplished," that's what he said, some kind of word . . . So the white lady from South Boston, she said . . . "You bringing this to Roxbury and they're organizers from Roxbury . . . so can you answer their question?" And (he) was like, "Well, when they learn a little bit more" . . . basically he didn't listen to us. So we went downstairs and . . . said, "We are going to learn everything about what they're talking about; we're going to investigate, we're going to take classes; we're gonna do this and we're going to tell everybody and their mama about this . . . So that's how we started (informant\_14 2006, REJG, female, community activist).

Their deep sense that they were being disregarded because of their race and class both confirmed their initial misgivings and hardened their resolve; it was a fight about extant social relations as much as it was about a risky biolab. The NBL acted as a metonym that captured all of this: BUMC's dismissiveness, the city's betrayals, the place-based legacy of being black and poor in Roxbury; the biolab epitomized the disregard Roxbury neighborhood activists had come to expect from, as one REJG activist put it, "the Man" (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

*Suspicious Allies* However, positional tensions did not end with the city or BUMC, as REJG activists also spoke of their initial discomfort with allied "white progressives" who were characteristic of OBG and their anti-war and anti-proliferation SMGs. In this case, white subsumed race, class, and place. While somewhat ethnically diverse, OBG members shared higher social and economic status, more education, and resided in the neighborhoods, suburbs, and townships outside of Roxbury and North Dorchester, Boston's poor areas (Boston Foundation 2004–2006). White progressives were not to be entirely trusted because their intentions, however noble, were assumed to be different than those of "the neighborhoods."

In my community, people are sometimes resistant to the idea of building citywide coalitions because we've been screwed before. White progressives with more resources might join our struggle and end up getting more of the funding and they'll end up taking leadership on something that more directly affects our communities. We have to learn from our past and be cautious, but we also have to find

ways to build coalitions that keep the core group of residents in the forefront. The people who are most immediately affected by the struggle should not get overshadowed by coalition members who might have more resources. Sometimes progressive people who care about what is happening in the community are associated with powerful institutions. Here in Roxbury, we are surrounded by academic institutions that are nationally known and that seem to know everything in the world that there is to be known, and yet there's no clear way for us to benefit from all this knowledge that's housed right next door (Peters 2004; REJG, female, community activist).

Positional tensions were not restricted to REJG activists though; for their part, some OBG activists also claimed that they struggled with issues of race and class. OBG activist's initial interest and participation in the Stop Bioterror Lab Coalition principally reflected ideologically motivated affinities, not explicitly place-, race-, and class-based solidarities, even if these were latently self-evident given the demographics of those interviewed. They also tended to share an initial rationale for protest: peace and anti-weapons proliferation and a concern with the diversion of resources from "real" health issues.

Some OBG activists—but not a majority in our interviews—even went so far as to claim that the effectiveness of the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition had been compromised by a handful of complicit white peace activists who "believed that this issue would allow them to link up with black peace groups, to bridge communities" and took shape through their deferring leadership on the issue to "the black group," i.e., REJG (informant\_16 2006, OBG, female, peace activist). Supporting this interpretation, another activist from OBG mentioned that REJG's disorganization surprised her, that "it was also obvious that they just didn't know how to do things," which prompted her to commit because she "thought. . . I bet I can help them" (informant\_7 2006, OBG, female, animal rights activist). A stronger version of this, articulated by a handful of OBG informants, was that "guilty, wealthy, white liberals" had effectively sold out the anti-biolab coalition to what they viewed as an authoritarian REJG that lacked the experience and resources to succeed (informant\_3 2007, OBG, female, peace activist; informant\_4 2007 OBG, male, peace activist; informant\_16 2006, OBG, female, peace activist). More typical, however, were comments like those of the following OBG activist who consciously struggled with issues of race and her participation in the coalition:

We had all agreed . . . that it was [REJG's] campaign and that we were essentially joining with them to support it . . . Some of us had deep-down issues of race: most of us are white and most of the leaders of the activists [from] the other parts of the Boston community are African American and we, you know, were very attentive to working on those issues . . . (informant\_6 2007, OBG, female, peace activist).

Strains among coalition members also reflected contrasting ideological views and how those views linked up with their opposition to the NBL. According to coalition activists, ideological tensions surfaced early during coalition meetings:

There are basically two lines of opposition, one comes mainly out of community residents [REJG] about the danger of this laboratory, how building this huge facility in their neighborhood will change the character of their part of Boston, and seeing this as another example of environmental racism. And then, I think, there are people coming out of the anti-war community [OBG] who see it as much more of a struggle against U.S. militarism and Boston being an important medical city. I think early on there was greater discomfort, there were peace activists from the suburbs who would come to meetings and say, "Oh, we have to oppose this lab because it's going to develop biological weapons," and the community people didn't like that (informant\_1 2007, OBG, male, peace activist).

Specifically, OBG activists typically articulated two primary grievances. For one group, their outrage reflected the authoritarian and unilateral decision to create what many viewed as a weapons lab. For them, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and BUMC were hiding behind claims of health-based research. The second group felt that the NBL was more boon-dogle than military installation or a danger per se. They typically added that if public health

were the true motive, money would be spent on a handful of more “common pathogens that one could be exposed to while riding public transportation” rather than studying exotic pathogens that were not known to exist in the United States (paraphrased informant\_18 2006, OBG, male, public health activist). All the OBG activists we interviewed, we should add, were outraged at what they viewed as the public deception involved: that the NBL was being sold as a public health asset meant to protect and enhance public safety when it was, to their minds, something else entirely.

OBG activists, then, tended to view the NBL as reflecting social issues that they and the organizations to which they belonged were organized to fight for and against such as war and peace, weapons proliferation, and public health. Many OBG activists also tempered their views of these causes with a strong dose of realpolitik not paralleled in our conversations with REJG or in the archival materials we had access to. For example, a central coalition activist stressed that while BUMC and the city were indeed behaving reprehensibly, she was also willing to admit that they had pursued the biolab in pretty much the only way they could have, given a city notorious for its protest organizations.

From the perspective of BUMC, they have done a real good job. They got the politics (right). They began in the right place and they did all the right things. I can't help but think that, because if I put myself there, I would do it exactly like that, too (informant\_9 2006, female, anti-weapons proliferation activist).

Thus, while they opposed the biolab, behavior of this sort was an expectation given their experience in formal politics and the institutional lobbying that went along with it; “politicking” and strategic, even amoral behavior, while abhorrent was unsurprising, even an expectation.

In brief, OBG's initial interest in and rationale for protesting the biolab as well as their strategies for stopping it contrasted sharply with REJG's, whose members were mainly African American and lacking the same formal educational, political, and protest experience, and who hailed from the poorest neighborhoods in the city. What is more, their SMG was organized around a representative hierarchy, with a charismatic and outspoken leader at the center who was openly hostile to the idea of realpolitik. In none of our interviews nor in the media or other documentation we collected and analyzed did REJG activists speak of negotiating another outcome nor did they speak in terms of “the realities” of fighting the NBL. Theirs was a movement founded not on abstract contentions, but on personal claims that sought distributive justice, local governmental accountability, and their specific local community's empowerment.

### *Repertoires of Organization and Collective Action*

REJG's SMG structure and protest preferences reflected familiar social arrangements, place-legacy, and their struggles in Roxbury. Again, REJG initially grew from the projects along Melina Cass Boulevard; the core activists of REJG were the housing representatives from each of these housing developments (c.f., Clemens 1993). Tenant representatives from each housing project were recruited and were considered by REJG the “first tier” in the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition.

Okay, the way the structure is set up is in three tiers. So the first tier is the [REJG] and the [REJG] are Roxbury residents. Some are from the housing developments that are vacant parcels on Melnea Cass Boulevard and some are the residents at Cathedral, Villa Victoria . . . The citywide coalition [tier 2]. And then Outside of Boston is the folks who don't live in Boston who didn't have power over the city council really [tier 3] (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

Once the City of Boston and BUMC announced their plans to build a biolab and REJG became convinced that it would not be a community friendly development, they sought to stop

the project. Initially, community activists took direct action, going to public meetings to voice their objections, contacting their city councilman, and taking to the streets to protest and rally local support; “informing neighborhood residents that BUMC planned to bring frightening diseases to their neighborhood” (Byravan 2004). Tactically, then, REJG relied on direct actions—for example, packing council meetings, engaging in protests, knocking on doors, and handing out materials—to make their point, inform the community of the danger posed by the biolab, and, in so doing, influence the public and local officials to resist it with them.

By contrast, the OBG groups efforts tended to be less direct and more reform oriented. Initially, they sought to gain the ear and support of local experts, lobbied state representatives, and drew up legislation to regulate the proposed NBL. Reflecting their efforts, the alliance first made headlines when they presented the mayor of Boston, the city council, and BUMC trustees with a petition, signed by 165 prominent and respected local experts, scientists, and academics stating their collective opposition to the NBL (ACE 2004).

OBG activists also met and drafted legislation that sought to heavily regulate the biolab that would be presented at the statehouse by State Representative Gloria Fox.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, OBG’s strategy of regulating the biolab would result in significant tension among coalition participants. REJG activists saw it as a compromise, while OBG felt it reflected a pragmatic strategy given the circumstances the coalition confronted. REJG’s claims, founded in personal experience and moral indignation, were nonnegotiable: the biolab was dangerous, unfair, and reflected a disregard of them and their community. Seeking to regulate the biolab meant to them admitting it could be built. For OBG, pursuing regulation didn’t mean compromising the moral basis of their claims, it simply meant opening a new front, gaining public attention, and being pragmatic since many felt it may be built regardless of their protest efforts.

These approaches, in part, reflected the positional differences of coalition participants. Lobbying, marshalling expert opinion, drafting legislation, and seeking policy reform was how OBG “could help” stop, and if not, regulate the biolab. Yet, this initially upset REJG activists who viewed regulation as a dangerous precedent that compromised their claims making by undermining the legitimacy of their demands. Based on their past experiences it also meant giving an inch to “The Man” who, once given an inch inevitably took a mile.

It was a little topsy-turvy at first . . . Regulating the lab felt like we were saying, “Okay, build the lab but just regulate it,” and so to go before the media or anyone else, we couldn’t talk out the side of our neck. It’s either, “You want the lab and you want it regulated,” or “You don’t want the damn thing at all” (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

This initially confounded OBG activists, as they viewed the legislative tack as complementary not incompatible with REJG aims. For their part, OBG activists’ comfort level and experience with protest tactics and political lobbying had them embracing reformist strategies that even many of them admitted would most likely fail, but that would gain them immediate publicity and the leverage they felt the coalition needed to stop the biolab. In short, given the different social positions of the activists involved in the coalition, *being effective* had a different meaning for positionally distinct groups. For OBG, *realpolitik* meant remaining pragmatic while they sought to stop a biolab they viewed as morally reprehensible. For REJG, *effective* meant holding fast to the moral foundation of their claims; no biolab and no compromise was their cause.

OBG’s strategic focus could also be explained by their lack of direct representation in the city as well as their physical distance from the NBL. Indeed, this was part of their decision making and was a rationale some OBG activists gave when discussing their strategic choices. Yet, this ignores the distinct cultural and class-based repertoires of collective action mobilized by REJG and OBG that reflected place and race differences and associated life experiences as

12. “Ensuring Safety and Security in Biomedical Laboratories and Facilities.” House Bill #4937, 2004, State of Massachusetts Legislature, Boston, MA, sponsored by Gloria Fox.

well as the amount and type of cultural capital that each mobilized. First, on the direct threat posed by the biolab, even those outside of Boston proper—neighborhoods like Brookline, Jamaica Plain, and the City of Cambridge, home to many OBG members—were less than three miles from the proposed NBL site. Second, while lack of representation was also at issue and did indeed push OBG activists to “think about how they could be most useful” (informant\_5 2007, OBG, male, peace activist), their strategies fundamentally differed. OBG did not suggest being useful by throwing their bodies in front of the proverbial gates to stop construction nor did they organize and pursue street protests and pamphleteering, although most did participate in these activities as well. Rather, each group organized and pursued specific forms of civic engagement and political protest that they pulled from their figurative protest tool boxes (Perrin 2006; Swidler 1995; Tilly 1978).

In the end, neither strategy paid off directly or immediately. REJG’s protests and pamphleteering; strong attendance and questioning of BUMC at the handful of public meetings; and the organization of Boston district captains meant to influence city council persons did so, but not strongly enough to change the course of events.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, OBG’s draft legislation did not pass at the Massachusetts State house nor did their op-eds, resolutions in neighboring cities, or their publicly distributed petition change the City of Boston’s backing of the NBL. These initiatives, however, did uncover differing repertoires of organization that further exposed the coalition to some discord among its members: REJG wanted to keep their efforts local, locally controlled, and focused on a relatively un-nuanced environmental justice frame—a call for distributional justice, accountability, and community empowerment—where “No Biolab!” was the only acceptable message and outcome. OBG activists, on the other hand, sought to leverage their expertise and legislate and/or regulate the biolab in an effort to, at the very least, render it transparent and democratically controlled.

### *Conflicting Styles of Commitment*

The differences outlined above point to the different ways coalition participants thought about the issue and how they organized to both resist and foment change. Similar in many ways to the communitarian “community based movements” Lichterman (1995) outlined in his study of anti-toxics groups, REJG was a small group whose strong, charismatic leader supplied it a figurative and literal center. Inside-outside member distinctions reflected and reinforced REJG’s identification with race (African American and persons of color), class (poor and less well educated) and place (inner city Roxbury).

The core activists of REJG shared strong bonds of trust and mutual obligation that also stemmed from their shared, positionally informed sense of place. REJG’s bond was also reflected in how core activists spoke of their mission; they frequently justified their actions and decisions as reflecting the neighborhood: “Oh, yeah, all my neighbors know what I do and they’re with us (in this fight)” (informant\_14 2006, REJG, female, community activist).<sup>14</sup> REJG drew moral strength from their real and rhetorical connection to the cause of protecting their community. For instance, another activist related her reaction to a question asked of her by a local journalist, couching her answer in terms of community outcomes: “I told them, I will always be opposed to the biolab. It will never change because it’s not a good thing for the community. We don’t need it” (informant\_12 2006, female, community activist).

Styles of commitment also reflected REJG members’ personal deference to their SMG; seldom did REJG activists—outside of their outspoken leader—seem comfortable speaking on behalf of the group. During our interviews they would defer from sharing their personal

13. There are nine city council districts and four “at large” seats and thus eleven total city council members. Only four of eleven city council members publicly opposed the NBL.

14. Claims of “community representation” have been disputed by some not aligned with REJG, such as the prominent editor of an African American newspaper (Miller 2003).

opinion when pressed on specific points and positions and typically suggest that we speak with the leader of their group to gain details on the positions and points we sought to address. Their in group focus was also evidenced in their recruitment and alliance-building efforts; while they did recruit from beyond Roxbury's borders, REJG members remained reluctant and protective of both their constituency and their cause. Allied "outsiders" were not to be entirely trusted. If outsiders wanted to ally with REJG they had to capitulate with REJG's claims and their style of commitment. Again, positionality strongly shaped the views of REJG activists (as it did OBG's) and their perceived relationship to outside activists and adversaries alike:

Well, the [REJG] has the inside folks, the community, and, okay, the out of Boston group; they're not working this because they're helping us out, they're working this because they could be affected by it, because I mean once these diseases are airborne . . . they keep going, you know (informant\_12 2006, female, community activist).

By contrast, OBG activists evinced many expectations that were relatively consistent with Lichterman's ideal-type personalized community movements. For example, OBG activists tended to pay homage to egalitarian principles that paralleled their ideological positions on issues of peace and participatory democracy. Indeed, this made some of them uncomfortable with REJG's leader-centric SMG architecture, or as an OBG activist put it, "There's basically [their leader], who basically [is] the entire organization—she's not, but she seems to do most of the work—she's a very bright woman, but she's very authoritarian; meaning that it's basically [her] way [or she will denounce you]" (informant\_4 2007, male, peace activist). OBG activists and their respective SMGs tended to adhere to a model of activism that assumed politics to be an individual pursuit forged through open dialogue and negotiation. For example, OBG members consistently spoke on behalf of their SMGs; seldom did they defer to a leader or the cause, even at times criticizing the coalition's efforts and their own SMGs:

[Our SMG] dubbed it "bioterrorism" . . . [We] had laminated posters on all the [subways] that goes through Cambridge to Boston . . . [the poster] literally had a bull's-eye over the map of Boston. And in a way it was kind of shocking to me. Their intention was to raise awareness about the issue . . . But I was a little taken aback that it was so sensationalized . . . rather than having actual facts. My intention . . . include more facts and to educate the citizens at large about the issue rather than scaring the bejesus out of them (informant\_2 2007, male, peace activist).

Again, this type of commitment stands in marked contrast to our conversations with REJG activists. This goes for criticisms as well; REJG members did not criticize their SMG's leadership, other members, or the coalition's performance in our interviews with them. Two further examples illustrate the clash of commitment styles and how REJG took precedence in coalition deliberations. In the first instance, very early in the community movement a neighborhood activist was thrown out of REJG because he was accused of "looking out for himself" and not the SMG. In his own words:

I [got] booted out, man. They had a meeting and they didn't tell me when—I was co-chair . . . They said I was looking out for myself, man, I had gotten too big. When you're on TV two or three times a week all about the biolab, in the papers and everything else, reporters wasn't calling them anymore. But that was their fault (informant\_13 2006, male, community activist).

In another, the leader of an OBG-affiliated SMG left the coalition because, in the minds of REJG insiders, she was acting in ways that undermined the coalition and more importantly REJG's central place in it. She and her SMG were accused of holding fundraising meetings without the alliance's prior knowledge or approval. According to a REJG activist:

And we literally had to kick people out of the coalition . . . You know, they were doing fundraisers, house parties, whatever the case may be—nobody else in the coalition knew about it and they were raising money. You know, one minute, when they first began, they didn't have money to pay their own executive director. They do a couple of house parties . . . their funding got real good . . . So

the coalition . . . and then [REJG] themselves . . . sat down and spoke to [her] and then she understood what was going on. It was hard . . . And people couldn't really understand how [we] could kick people out of the coalition. But it was more mental stress to try to watch this person, see what this person's doing—are they making us look bad when they go [into the public]? It was too much shit, you know what I'm saying? And so it was more easier to say, "Bye," because we don't own the biolab issue. Anybody and their mama can work on the biolab—that [person] doesn't necessarily have to be part of the coalition. But if you're under the coalition, you have to found coalition rules (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

Independently acting on behalf of the coalition without coalition approval or in ways that did not benefit the coalition was simply not acceptable. Such a stance on rule following reflected, in part, the deep distrust that REJG activists had for outsiders and the communitarian style they adhered to. This included allied white progressives who they believed had the inclination to "take over" their movements and interests based in an "I know more than they do" attitude (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

Likewise, OBG expressed some of their own misgivings of REJG's organizational capacities and leadership style, believing that they might undermine the coalition's effectiveness.

(REJG) has had a very difficult time of it. [Their leader] is an incredibly charismatic, powerful person. I think that this campaign—there are certain parts of it that she is fabulous at but there are other kinds of things, like communications, and sort of building a communication network which she is terrible at . . . [Kicking out a key SMG and alliance member] turned into a disaster for the coalition (informant\_6 2007, female, peace activist).

Observations of conflict within and between movements are not uncommon in social movement scholarship. Indeed, the environmental (Obach 2004), anti-nuclear and peace (Barkan 1979; Jasper 1990), women's (Freeman 1975), and civil rights (Polletta 2006) movements have all been noted for their clashes over organizational characteristics, tactical decisions, ideological claims, and cultural differences. What is not present is an explicit accounting of the social processes by which such differences are resolved so that an alliance can persist in spite of them.

### **Resolving Tensions, Aligning a Coalition**

How then did the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition persist despite positional differences and tensions where other movements documented in the literature have faltered or failed? We found that the movement endured, in large measure, because strong differences were minimized through a bridging process we recount below. In brief, on most coalition issues activists reflexively modified their practices in ways that helped diffuse and resolve positional issues, or exited, before they could destroy the coalition. In many cases this was because the activists claimed they cared deeply about both the cause but also the coalition itself; "I think that we have done as well as we have because there are a lot of people across the city who really care about this issue" (informant\_6 2007, OBG, female, peace activist). This finding alone contrasts and compliments a small number of studies of cross-movement coalition that have found coalitions falter when movement characteristics and cultural differences stand in the way and activists do not reflect on these issues and modify their interactions (Bell and Delaney 2001; Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Rose 2000).

In the following, we begin with attention to a simple yet crucial aspect of the alliance—initial recognition by OBG activists that the neighborhood and REJG activists "owned the cause" to stop the NBL. Cause affirmation reflected OBG's recognition and support of the grievances and principles that REJG was initially striving to attain and that alliance members agreed to collectively work towards. Following this, we argue that the coalition bridged, through strategic deployment, organizational and commitment issues that could have proven

toxic to coalition work. By strategic deployment, we mean the manner by which movement planning, tasks, and actions were delegated and carried out by participating activists. Then we focus on the role exclusion played in purging and/or marginalizing nonconformists and generating a center of gravity around which the coalition further coalesced. Finally, we note how long-term participation in the coalition resulted in the co-development of commitments; indeed cooptation among alliance participants that straddled REJG-OBG boundaries fomented mutual respect and trust that sustained the coalition in the face of positionally based tensions.

### *Cause Affirmation*

An important initial step toward a viable alliance was founded in the willingness of OBG activists to implicitly and explicitly affirm that REJG's environmental justice claims would hold center stage in coalition deliberations and public actions. Issues of peace, anti-proliferation, and public health would continue to be important motives, but would play a secondary role in what may best be called the coalitions collective platform. For their part, REJG activists considered this nonnegotiable. "Outside" SMGs and activists either embraced their grievances and thus cause, or an alliance was impossible. As a REJG activist put it:

We stressed from the very beginning . . . that [REJG] have the lead in the organizing and the decision making, so that no one would take off and do their own thing. So with any coalition meeting that we had, we always discussed everything that everyone was doing . . . if somebody has a great idea, I at least have to call at least half the coalition to see, "What you all think about this?" and then I go take it to [REJG for final consideration] and then I can get back to [the greater coalition] and say, "Okay, cool [or not]" (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

Cause affirmation was a crucial beginning, but didn't entirely rid the coalition of distrust and the tensions that, according to activists, were initially hard to surmount.

I think that's been the most complicated part of it, really, the fear of some of the community people [REJG] that the struggle is going to be taken over and then they would be co-opted into something else—being pawns in some other agenda, and that fear has been—and I think it actually now has disappeared . . . it really complicated the functioning of the coalition for a while (informant\_1 2007, OBG, male, peace activist).

Indeed, tensions also resulted from OBG's affirmation of REJG's cause and central standing because this established REJG as arbiter of many of the terms and conditions that governed coalition machinations. As we outlined above, participants varied widely in their positionally informed expectations. As a consequence, those who did not (or would not) play by coalition rules left, and in a handful of instances, we document coalition participants were forced out.

Another basis for OBG's cause affirmation was the strong commitment some activists claimed they had to forming a cross-movement coalition with working class and minority groups from Boston's city center. This manifested, in part, in the reflexivity they exhibited when speaking of why they had accepted REJG demands. Several OBG activists we spoke with also made it clear that over time something more than a fight against the biolab had become important to them. They spoke of a desire to create a lasting alliance with groups and persons that crossed some of Boston's enduring social divisions (c.f., Formisano 1991).

I was asked to represent [my anti-weapons proliferation group] in the community meetings that were going on about the lab . . . I guess my beef at the moment, which has changed since I started, [is] outrage at the political process . . . [The leader of REJG] spoke . . . and her description of the University's treatment of this small neighborhood would be enough to make red-blooded, free-minded, American's blood boil . . . So it's been quite a journey for me (informant\_10 2006, OBG, female, anti-weapons proliferation activist).

Stories concerning REJG's early treatment by BUMC also played a significant role in cause affirmation and commitment to the coalition. As we noted earlier, the retelling by coalition members of the treatment REJG activists received at early public forums was recounted in nearly all our interviews. The retelling invariably related outrage over the inequity represented by the biolab. Thus, while the biolab was wrong (i.e., grievances) for a number of reasons including militarism, war, and government excess, many OBG activists articulated that over time they also had come to realize that their "real reason for fighting them [was] because of their [BUMC's] racism" (informant\_8 2006, OBG, male, health expert and public health activist).

Yet, for some in the coalition, the biolab was all along an opportunity to both ally with community groups and seek to stop a project they felt was either menacing and/or of no social value. The commitment and reflexivity of these activists played a key role in coalition maintenance, making the commitment exhibited by other coalition members, like the informant quoted above, in part possible (c.f., Lichterman 2005). Indeed, the following OBG elite claimed the alliance was the reason for her participation all along:

For me, in some ways, figuring out a way to [create a viable alliance], which never goes well—middle class whites working with a community groups—[is] sort of on my personal agenda. It's the most important thing to me is to make [the alliance] work; more important in some ways than [defeating the lab]. It's personal (informant\_6 2007, OBG, female, peace activist).

These sentiments were echoed in many of our interviews, but were also at times accompanied by ambivalence. The desire to make the coalition work was joined by discomfort with REJG's leadership and organizational capacities. The charisma of REJG's leader, the highly motivated character of its members, and the true depth of their cause was tempered by some discomfort with that leader's equally bombastic style and the lack of coherent organizational structure and protest strategy demonstrated by REJG.

What pushed many OBG activists to affirm REJG's grievances and with them their cause, and in turn, REJG activists to hazard a coalition with white progressives? In this, the shared desire and urgency to stop the biolab certainly played a key role, at least early in the coalition's formation. That urgency initially both spurred REJG to reach out to other groups and parts of the city to the stop the NBL and OBG activists to capitulate, in good faith, with REJG's demands and affirm their central place in ongoing coalition. Affirming REJG's cause, according to some we spoke with, was the only way to get the coalition off the ground, even if some were uncomfortable with REJG's organizational and commitment styles.

I think the people that remained [in the coalition] from the peace movement, we tried to work with the community people . . . We needed to do it in order to build up opposition as widely as possible . . . Now, I think, a lot of the peace people involved in [the coalition] have both of the perspectives (informant\_1 2007, OBG, male, peace activist).

Cause affirmation thus reflected the nexus of relatively urgent conditions and personal and ideological commitments, high levels of reflexivity, and a longer-term cooptation process. As expressed by our informants, these included a shared desire to stop the biolab, a commitment to forming an alliance across difference, and the racism they came to associate with the biolab's placement in Roxbury. Early cause affirmation gave the coalition a chance to coalesce. Without it, such a coalition across difference would have been improbable at best.

### ***Strategic Deployment: Bridging Styles of Commitment***

Cause affirmation, however, involved more than simply accepting neighborhood claims as first among the newfound alliance's grievances or embracing outsiders in the name of stopping the biolab. It also meant that alliance participants had to negotiate participation with groups and activists whose expectations concerning coalition leadership, strategy, and

commitment markedly differed from their own. On the one hand, for REJG it was the primacy of their connection to their community and the potential threat OBG activism posed to that connection; that if they were not vigilant the coalition could begin to reflect causes and issues other than their own. On the other hand, OBG activists expressed some discomfort with the ineffectiveness they attributed to REJG's organizational capacities and the positives and negatives reflected in the coalition's heavy reliance on a single, charismatic leader.

In smoothing over such difficulties, the division of labor within the coalition played a clear role in initially generating tensions, but over time also provided a foundation for workable relations within the coalition. For example, while the attempt to regulate the biolab was initially a point of contention, the coalition discussed the legislative tack at length and ultimately voted on and approved OBG efforts to regulate the biolab. They would ultimately frame their strategy as a two-pronged approach: direct action and pressure on local Boston politicians would be the primary and legislation meant to stop the NBL, not simply more heavily regulate it, would be secondary.

Reflecting a strategic deployment of coalition groups, the two-pronged approach allowed OBG and REJG activists to pursue coalition-sanctioned ends, but reduced the frequency of group decisions where friction among activists could have been unavoidable. For their part, REJG organized inside the city. They mobilized to influence city districts through street protests. They hit the streets and canvassed neighborhoods and drummed up attendance for public meetings. And at meetings, they were prepared and they frequently intervened in what they felt were deceptive presentations by BUMC and the City of Boston that amounted to little more than "theatre." OBG, on the other hand, focused on issues that seemed within their reach given their place outside of Roxbury along with the cultural capital they could bring to bear,

so the work that I've been involved with and the others in the [OBG] have often involved . . . planning campaigns, getting signatures together, [doing] op-ed piece(s) for the local newspaper(s), but [we were] always trying to coordinate with the central campaign being run out of the Roxbury's South End group (informant\_5 2007, OBG, male, peace activist).

They also drafted legislation, organized adjacent towns meetings and city council votes against the biolab, and also sought to connect the local fight with a broader national one against such facilities (Hammond 2001). As a consequence, different styles of commitment and organization coexisted in this coalition.

### ***Exclusion: Reaffirming Alliance Commitments***

As we showed in our discussion of forms of commitment characteristic of different groups in the coalition, several participants were expelled or marginalized for violating or appearing to violate the terms initially affirmed by the alliance. While we don't claim to have captured all such exclusions or defections, the examples related to us by coalition activists do shed further light on both the troubles this coalition confronted and how it managed to overcome them. One reflected the strong intra-group dynamics characteristic of REJG and the other two positional tensions among REJG and OBG. In the first example, REJG expelled one of its own for giving unvetted public commentary. In another, the leader of an OBG anti-war SMG was expelled for seeming to fundraise on behalf of her SMG while hosting a coalition event. And finally, a falling out between REJG and the advocacy group that had facilitated their early efforts to influence urban development also led to the advocacy group's exit from direct involvement in the coalition. Tensions, as related to us, arose over a clash of agendas and who seemed to be "facilitating" whom. As the coalition advanced, "mutual benefit" was reappraised and a split and exit ensued.

Acting on behalf of the coalition without coalition approval or in ways that seemed to question the primacy of the coalition's cause—and by extension REJG—was simply unacceptable.

This was affirmed by alliance participants at the outset. In the later two examples, the dynamic, as with other aspects of the coalition, reflected deeply entrenched positional differences that the SMGs and activists brought to the alliance. They reflected, on the one hand, the distrust REJG activists had for outsiders, even allies, because white progressives might, “end up taking leadership on something that more directly affects our [Roxbury] communities and we have to learn from our past and be cautious, but we also have to find ways to build coalitions that keep the core group of residents in the forefront” (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist). On the other hand, the desire of OBG activists to stop the biolab had them stepping in to “help out” and make the movement more effective in ways that reflected their experience, expertise, and cultural capital. This, however, also tended to confirm REJG fears that “their cause” might be co-opted and tensions and exclusions were the result.

Exclusions may seem an ironic means of maintaining an alliance since it involves exit. Yet, in the exclusions we documented, while the coalition’s cause may have indeed been weakened as talented people and SMGs were forced out, the coalition’s remaining constituents seemed largely unaffected; the alliance continued to persist despite these episodes. This was surprising in part because the exclusions, especially of the OBG anti-war SMG leader and the legal advocacy group, generated a good bit of regret among OBG issue elites. Nevertheless, while they claimed that these expulsions were unnecessary and that they may have harmed the alliance’s overall effectiveness, the exclusions also seemed to have reaffirmed coalition expectations regarding participation, especially the central role that REJG demanded it play. At the same time, the exclusions also worked to allay REJG fears that their interests would not be overwhelmed by well meaning white progressives even if it also dismayed OBG activists who saw them as unnecessary.

### *Developing Co-Commitment, Cementing an Alliance*

Cause affirmation, strategic deployment, and exclusions provided room for the coalition to coalesce and over time an accommodative pattern took hold. Alliance members related that they began to experience mutual commitments and that the coalition became more cohesive (c.f., Hart 2001). For example, the development of mutual commitments was reflected in the shared stories of outrage activists from across the coalition told about the hardships the Roxbury activists had to endure.

I [was] just thunderstruck at my own ignorance and I also, um, that, I felt so badly that—it was just that—the stories that I heard and how they were treated by BU just fucking blew my mind—you know? (informant\_7 2006, OBG, female, animal rights activist).

BU doesn’t even want to sit in the same room [with us]. They have promised us that they was going to have a debate with us, you know . . . So every time we go to a meeting and hear more about this and you know—it’s really stressful. It’s really crazy (informant\_14 2006, REJG, female, community activist).

The shared outrage expressed in stories like these by both groups of activists ultimately provided a foundation from which differently positioned activists could mobilize and share in their commitment to right a wrong: the unjust placement of a biolab in Roxbury. In this sense, the outrage over their mistreatment at the hands of a BUMC official—their collective adversary—provided both motive and rationale for their continued collective fight.

Further reflecting the development of co-commitments, activists across our interviews also related that the coalition had opened them to new causes, concerns, and deeper commitments that they had not formerly embraced. For their part, many OBG activists that initially came to the NBL fight for its larger social and political significance claimed that over time they had increasingly come to see it as a neighborhood issue reflective of race and class that demanded their continued commitment: “My admiration for these Roxbury folks is boundless, that’s one reason I stay with this [coalition]” (informant\_10 2006, OBG, female, anti-weapons

proliferation activist). As for REJG, while the biolab was initially a neighborhood justice issue that reflected their mistreatment at the hands of callous elites, with time they would also come to see it as a military installation, a danger to society (in general), and something that no community—black, white, or other—should have to contend with. “[The biolab is] unfair to anybody. I’m not looking to say, ‘You move it out of my community into somebody else’s community’ [because] as far as I can see there’s no real reason for having a level four lab, except for weapons of mass destruction (informant\_12 2006, REJG, female, community activist). Finally, co-commitment also manifested in REJG’s increasing dependence on OBG to carry forth what they originally viewed as “their” cause. This, as we have related above, is something REJG activists were initially very reluctant, even unwilling, to do.

[We] opened up a little bit more to include certain key people within the [coalition] to help make decisions, or to be more involved in decisions . . . Which is a good thing, because the trust has been built when there really wasn’t that much trust from the beginning, when everybody kind of wants to do their own thing. But now, like I said, over the years we’ve grown to trust and weed out the ones that we had to watch . . . They hear us and we hear them so let’s put something together that says what we both want to say (informant\_11 2007, REJG, female, community activist).

The development of co-commitments holds strong parallels with Obach’s (2004) “organizational learning” and Philip Selznick’s (1980) classic notion of “cooptation” wherein activists from OBG and REJG, through experience and repeated interaction, expanded their goals and built trusting relations. This too was a critical aspect of the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition’s evolution over time as a viable protest vehicle.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition worked to maintain a viable cross-movement coalition. Indeed, many of the tensions we observed were expected, since the coalition work we recount reflected many of the challenges noted as problematic in previous studies of both within-movement collaboration and cross-movement coalition. We also found these challenges strongly cohered with the positional differences of groups and activists participating in the coalition. SMG leadership styles, decision-making processes, and levels of participant independence were not “independent variables,” but reflected differing cultural expectations concerning how the individual ought to relate to the group and how the group ought relate to the outside. These manifested as positionally distinct grievances, repertoires of organization, styles of commitment, as well as strong differences concerning what “effective protest engagement” meant to REJG and OBG activists. Positionality thus provided a strong pretext for cross-movement conflict. Given previous studies that document racial and ethnic tensions between movements (Chiro 1995; Peña 2003, 2005; Polletta 2002; Sandler and Pezzullo 2007; Taylor 2002) and those that have documented cross-movement failures (Bystydzienski and Schacht 2001; Diaz-Veizades and Chang 1996; Lichterman 1995) and successes (Obach 2004; Rose 2000), this should have made the chance of successful alliance remote.

Yet, despite these positional impediments, the cross-movement coalition we studied both coalesced and persisted long enough to succeed at some of what they set out to accomplish. The question we asked was why and how? It is in answering these questions that we extend existent treatments of both within- and cross-movement coalition. The bridging process we describe is not present in the literatures on cross-movement coalition. The literature has emphasized external conditions and organizational characteristics (Obach 2004; Van Dyke 2003; Staggenborg 1986; Gerhards and Rucht 1993) rather than internal conditions and the micro-dynamics as related in this article.

Specifically, the successful bridging process we recount took shape through an ongoing set of social interactions and decisions that lessened the potential for intergroup conflict and

that reflected four aspects. Initially, cause affirmation played a crucial role in the coalition. In affirming REJG's cause, OBG agreed that they would abide by a set of commitment rules concerning how they would carry out coalition work. That or they could protest the biolab outside the coalition. Underlying the willingness of OBG activists to affirm REJG's cause was a nexus of both personal and ideological commitments that included their strong desire to stop the biolab, their commitment to forming a cross-movement coalition, and the inspiration many of them claimed they gained through their association with REJG and its charismatic leader. Notably, their personal and ideological commitments to the coalition resulted in high levels of reflexivity that in many ways made cause affirmation possible.<sup>15</sup> Without it, one can only think many would have simply walked away from the coalition as it asked of them participation in a style of commitment and organization many admitted they did not feel comfortable.

In practical terms, alliance participants also created the context for a successful cross-movement coalition by deploying their efforts in strategic ways. The effect of this strategic deployment was initial tensions over strategy, but over the longer term the breakup of tasks also minimized the potential for conflict. What is more, exclusion, while not a strategy per se, also played a role in reaffirming alliance ground rules even if it may have weakened the coalition's access to resources—e.g., knowledge and skills. And finally, co-commitments evolved over time that smoothed over many of the initial positionally based tensions and even compelled activists to adopt grievances they had not originally embraced.

Beyond the limits of this case and its focus on cross-movement coalitions, our findings also have implications for better understanding general social movement coalitions, especially issues concerning cultures influence on movement collaboration. Again, our findings are theoretically consistent with Lichterman's (1995) conclusion that different culturally informed styles of movement commitment can and do shape alliance-building potential well apart from explicitly held ideologies. We would add, however, that preferences for personalistic versus communal styles of commitment are not free floating, but in the case we observed cohered with positional differences. For instance, some activists from OBG related that all along they had an ideologically based interest in forming cross-movement coalition to address racial and class based inequalities; yet, they simultaneously articulated feeling uncomfortable with the organizational characteristics and style of commitment REJG expected of them. The cultural clash reflected the positionally informed style REJG evinced that violated basic cultural expectations that many of the middle class, educated, and (mainly) white OBG activists valued. Yet, in contrast to Lichterman's (1995) account, where an alliance never gelled between toxics and green groups for much the same reasons, over time, because they confronted an imminent threat (i.e., the biolab) that dovetailed with their ideological commitment to cross-movement coalition, the activists that stayed with the coalition expressed a growing commitment to the alliance for the alliance's sake.

And while most of the commitment, accommodation, and participatory modification may seem to have originated with OBG activists because of the demands made by REJG, this would be a mischaracterization. On this, some important points are worth emphasis. First, while the body of OBG activists did affirm REJG's centrality in the fight against the NBL, neither they nor the coalition gave up on their initial reasons for protesting the biolab even if they were initially deemphasized. Secondly, REJG was indeed the first to seek out citywide allies, initially creating the Citywide Coalition. What is more, as evidenced in our interviews with them, REJG activists also recognized the importance of the coalition to stopping the NBL, even if they demanded with equal resolve that they and the community they represented remain at the center of the fight. And finally, REJG also changed in ways that made the alliance possible. Over time, REJG progressively embraced a broader view of the NBL they had initially resisted; that the biolab was

15. See Lichterman (2005) for comparable findings as they relate to religious civic groups seeking to cross group boundaries in their attempts to administer social welfare benefits to the poor and less fortunate.

both an issue of environmental injustice but also a weapons lab and a threat to global security. It was not simply a Roxbury-specific, locally unwanted land use. A result of their collective efforts and sustained interaction was those that remained with the coalition observed they had bridged the differences that divided them and embraced new causes and perspectives. This bodes well for future collaborations (see also Faber 2007).

The bridging process we identified involved OBG and REJG building trust and mutually accommodating one another over time. This reflected the longer-term institution building, generation of co-commitment, and cooptation that occurs when groups form and interact over time and that can result in more durable organizational learning if movement groups persist long enough to institutionalize their efforts. The initial admission by coalition participants of the very real issues of inequity and empowerment that characterized the Roxbury activists' grievances would be a first step toward a workable cross-movement coalition. Yet, in this case, it was also the nexus of an imminent threat and shared goal to stop the NBL coupled with an ideologically driven aspiration to create a viable alliance that fomented the kind of reflexivity necessary to initially build the coalition, but also through developing co-commitments its continuation over the longer term. Thus, while positional differences could have undermined the Stop the Bioterror Lab Coalition they did not. In the end, what has potentially come out of this alliance is a level of trust and co-commitment across positionality distinct activists and SMGs that future collaborations will be more likely and, more importantly, more likely to succeed.

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