

WHAT IS SOCIAL ACTION?

Social action is the practice of taking action – usually as part of an organized group or community – to create positive change. Sometimes social action can lead to profound social change, as in the case of the Civil Rights Movement; sometimes social action seeks more limited and specific changes – the preservation of an open space, for example, or better pay for a specific group of workers.

Social action, by its nature, is often practiced by those who either traditionally have little power in society – the poor, minorities, or people with disabilities, for example – but it may also be used by any group that feels its concerns are being ignored. By working together, members of these groups can exercise power collectively because of their numbers, using the media, their votes, boycotts, and other types of social, political, and economic pressure to convince those in power to rethink their positions.

A few of the numerous reasons that a group might engage in social action:

- To include in policy considerations, the interests of those who have traditionally been ignored in these discussions, most often low-income and minority communities
- To institute fairer policies and eliminate discrimination
- To right past wrongs, as in providing apologies and restitution
- To prevent harm to the community. This might mean challenging the siting of an industrial facility because of pollution concerns, for instance.
- To gain particular benefits to the community, or a part of the community, sometimes on quite a small scale.
- To preserve something of historical or social value.
- To include in policy deliberations those who have been previously shut out, as in, for example, involving minority citizens on a police review board.

These are only a small number of the nearly endless possible reasons for engaging in social action.