

Anatomy of a Movement: Learning from History to create the Future¹

ANATOMY OF A MOVEMENT:

Learning from History to Create the Future

In a period when both young and old are looking for signs of a new movement and evaluating past movements, it is critical for us to gain a common understanding and vision of what “movement-building” work is and how we can begin or continue carrying it out.



Purpose of Case Studies in Organizing

To de-mystify the work of movement-building and lift up useful lessons from history. This workshop helps participants to dissect a historical organizing campaign or social movement in order to examine the critical elements of those events — the elements that made them effective, notable and part of a larger movement.

Using this Popular Education Tool

1 Examples of Workshop Settings

This workshop can be conducted in many different settings. You can use it with groups from different organizations or communities at conferences or trainings — to explore the concept and mechanics of movement-building. It is also effective within a single organization. For example, union members used it to help evaluate their own campaign strategy and tactics, while gaining inspiration for a long-term fight. Choose an event, campaign, or movement that is appropriate for your audience. We have used the Montgomery Bus Boycott, SNCC, the Zapatistas, and the Environmental Justice Movement.

2 Basic Materials

- Newsprint Paper/Markers
- Reading Packets (background info on the Movement in focus)
- Movement Building Timeline Handouts

Optional Materials

- Pictures, Video, or Music related to the Movement in focus
- Large print of the Timeline (for the wall)
- Post-it Notes

3 Introduction to the Workshop (Longer Version)

You can use Project South's Movement-Building Timeline to introduce the history of movements in the US and have participants share more information about their own history. Ask participants to answer the following questions on post-it notes and add them to the large timeline on the wall (*questions can vary according to audience and workshop goals*). What community organizations or trade unions were your family involved in? What policy change (or other movement victory) had the biggest impact on your family? Choose a select number of participants to share their stories.

¹ This activity first appeared in Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide, *Popular Education for Movement Building: A Project South Resource Guide* volume 2, issue 1 (Spring 2001): 114-117.

Introduction to the Workshop (Shorter Version)

Ask people to finish these sentences (this can be done by the participants or the facilitator on butcher paper): "I feel like I am part of a growing movement when....;" and/or "I organize (am part of this organization) because..."

4

Core Exercise

As you transition into the anatomy exercise, offer a brief explanation of the purpose for examining history, the history of this particular movement, and its relevance for the participants' work

today.

If you have music, video or pictures related to the movement in focus, share them at this time.

- In a large group discussion, ask the participants to answer the following questions; recording their answers on newsprint:

- What do we know about this movement? (When? Where? What? Why?)
- What were the major activities?
- What resources did they have/utilize? (Where did those come from?)
- Who was involved?
- What changes were made as a result of this movement?

Each of these questions will probably draw a significant amount of discussion. Encourage this, but keep a lively pace. (We've included sample answers on the next page.)

- Ask the group to apply any lessons they can take from the historical example to their current work (*especially if you are working with a group that is involved in a current campaign that is ready to be analyzed*). If your group is larger than 25, consider breaking into smaller groups and adding a report back.

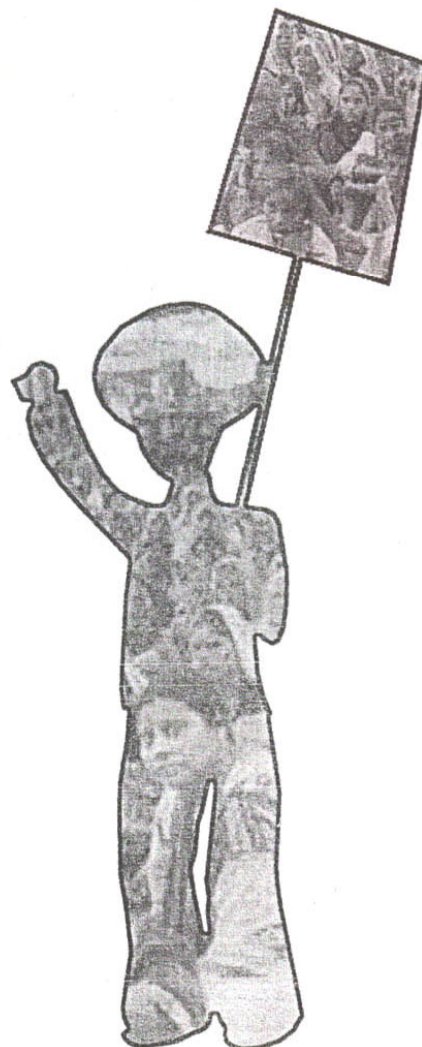
5

Key Points

We feel that there are several key points/lessons that should be lifted up during

this exercise. Often times the participants lift them up — but if some are overlooked, facilitators should lift them up.

- **Bold Goals** — Movements have historically accomplished what was thought to be impossible. We should aim high.
- **Long-term Change** — Our short-term victories and losses are part of a longer-term process that can (and should) lead to further progress.
- **Leadership is Key** — Lasting change is most often made (and sustained) by those most affected by an issue. Despite what we are often taught, low-income people and people of color are usually in leadership of our movements.
- **Resources from the Community** — The most important resources often come from within the community (not a foundation).
- **Culture and Spirit** — Every successful movement/campaign has built culture and spirit into its development.
- **Education, Planning and Strategic Thinking** — Movements don't happen by chance.



6

Opportunities and Challenges

The major challenge of this workshop is the research. You should do adequate (not exhaustive) research on your case study — so you can provide some basic

information and speak to the key points, if needed. Background readings and multi-media resources (music, video, pictures) can make all the difference.

- History is a funny thing — for those who think they don't know much history, it can be intimidating; for those who are "experts" it can be very controversial. It can be helpful to use a case study that is not directly part of people's experience at first. If you do the workshop a second time (or a longer version) *then* use an example that hits closer to home.

- This workshop provides many opportunities. It can inspire people to do more study of the movement-building process. It offers the opportunity to discuss strategy (long and short-term) and demonstrate the relationship between short-term wins and long-term strategy. The workshop can provide a way to do a more "objective" evaluation of a current campaign. It can also help mixed groups of people talk about the effectiveness of campaigns and whether they are framed and implemented in way that builds movement in concrete terms.

Your Notes

ANATOMY OF A MOVEMENT: the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Sample Questions and Answers about the Montgomery Bus Boycott

What do we know about this movement? When? Where? What? Why?

- 1955-1956
- Montgomery, AL
- Rosa Parks was chosen by her community to keep her seat on the bus. It was a complete boycott of the buses by African Americans.
- People were ready to take a stand against racism

What were the major activities?

- **PLANNING!**
- Walking to work
- Individuals made the choice not to ride the bus
- Organizing a transportation system — especially the taxi drivers
- Picketing and marching
- Leaders were chosen
- Handing out flyers
- Rallies every night
- Mass meetings
- Prayer and singing — keeping people's spirits fed
- A committee of leaders negotiated with city leaders to settle the boycott
- House visits

What resources did they have/utilize? (Where did those come from?)

- Churches — facilities and people
- People with cars
- Taxis and drivers
- Money
- People shared food and necessities with each other — when they lost their jobs because of the boycott
- Organization

What changes were made as a result of this movement?

- African Americans were able to sit in any available seat — not just in the back of the bus
- It brought the community together
- People's eyes were opened — they said "let's fight for more"
- Established African Americans' power
- It contributed to desegregation everywhere
- Created leaders
- Made the churches stronger
- The boycott spread to other cities — it was a model
- Raised the profile of Jim Crow laws to an international level
- Led to the hiring of African American bus drivers down the road
- It gave people hope
- Gave a model for organizing a boycott
- Helped build networks across the South
- It was a catalyst for a larger movement — it made the "impossible" possible

Who was involved?

- Everyday people — the majority of community people made sacrifices
- Black women
- Black men
- Black children walked to school.
- NAACP
- Rosa Parks
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The first women who refused to give up their seats — Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Smith were both arrested
- Black churches, including the ministers
- Taxi Drivers
- Highlander Center provided planning facilities and political education
- People with cars
- People from Monroe, LA staged an "unsuccessful" bus boycott several years prior and shared the lessons learned with Montgomery leaders

These answers are from past workshop participants.