

First Draft of Teaching/ Discussion Questions for When we Fight We Win!
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December 2015

Starting Points/ Starting Activities

This is a book for “all those who yearn for big changes.” Take a few moments before you start reading the book to ask yourself what sort of change do you want to see in the world? Make a list of things you wish would change and issues you feel passionate about. Ask yourself why you feel passionate about these issues. Now ask yourself how you believe change is made in the world. List the ways that change happens that inspire you, that you have been a part of, that you have seen happen around you. What questions do you have about social change? What assumptions do you have about it? Refer back to your answers to these questions as you read the book.

Chapter 1- Reclaiming Wholeness- The LGBTQ Movement

Marriage Equality

In 2015 the Supreme Court ruled that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional- thereby legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide.

How has this amazing win been the result of decades of activism and struggle in the LGBTQ community? How are the activists featured here trying to “look beyond” marriage equality? Why is this integral to their politics and the projects they are involved in? How has the LGBTQ movement changed in the past 50 years? In the past decade?

Wholeness

The sub-title of the chapter is “Reclaiming Wholeness.” What does this mean? How are the different activists featured here all “reclaiming wholeness” in different ways? Why is this an important starting point for the activism that they do?

Linking Issues

What issues are linked in this chapter in ways that were different from what you expected, imagined or are used to? How does a focus on linking issues change the way you understood them? How can we organize around linked issues and why does this matter?

Gender and Queerness

How does the art in this chapter represent gender and queerness? How does it highlight the issues and expand the conversation around these issues in creative ways?

Chapter 2- Grounded in the Community: The Fight for the Soul of Public Education

Charter Schools and Public School Reform

How is public education in the United States, under the guise of “reform” changing and what values does this reflect? What different set of values, ideals and goals do the community members and activists in this chapter articulate?

Privatization of Education

What is a neo-liberal model of education? What do you think of this model? Have you seen or experienced these shifts in education in your community? What has been the impact? How do you imagine a just education system looking?

Strike

How did the Chicago Teachers Union build support around education issues for their strike? Why was it important for teachers and parents to join together to take on these issues?

Grounded in the Community

What lessons about activism and organizing can you take from the Chicago Teachers Union strike? Why was this an important show of power that differs from other types of activism? What lessons does Karen Lewis articulate about organizing and activism? Imagine how you could work with communities and groups to build power for an issue that you believe is important taking these lessons into account. What does it mean to be “grounded in the community” and why is this powerful and important? Give other examples you’ve seen of this principle for organizing.

Chapter 3- Transforming Visions: Ending Mass Incarceration

Prison Economy and Race

What is the prison industrial complex and who does it target? How does racism and capitalism combine to create this system? If we understand prisons as both racist and violent how does this change the way we think of their function in society? In the chapter what are some of the ways that prisons can be understood as racist institutions?

Beyond Prisons

People often say that we as a society “need” prisons. How can we challenge this taken-for-granted logic? Write a short few sentences that you can use in conversations to challenge this viewpoint.

If you imagine a world without prisons what do you imagine? What different way of seeing the world do we need in order to imagine a world without prisons?

Transformative Justice

In taking on and attempting to transform “root causes” transformative justice differs from prisons as a response to societal problems. What are some “root causes”? How they can be tackled without prisons? What are some of the ways that people are working towards abolition? What does abolition mean to you?

Connections Inside and Outside Prisons

Walidiah Imarisha says “Its really important that we recognize that prisons disproportionality affect many more people than those sitting in a prison cell” (pg. 68) what does she mean by this? How does Kevin “Rashid” Johnson connect to people outside of prison? Why are these connections so vital to building a movement beyond prisons? How can you help to foster these connections through letter writing or otherwise connecting people in prisons to the world outside of prisons?

Chapter 4- The Power of Stories: The Dreamers and Immigrant Rights

Storytelling

An integral part of the Dreamers strategy has been to use their personal stories to organize and push for social change. Why is this an important strategy both for the movement and for them personally? Can you think of times that the power of storytelling has changed your mind about something? Think of a story you could tell to change people’s minds about an issue that matters to you.

Visibility

Juan Rodriguez, Felipe Matos, Gaby Pacheco and Carlos Roa walked from Miami Washington D.C. to make the plight of undocumented youth visible. Why is this visibility important? What sort of political tactics, alongside this walk, have worked to push for political change around issues if immigrant rights? How does art make these issues more visible?

The Great Migration

Were you surprised at the reasons why people leave their homes to come to the United States? How do the reasons presented here contrast with mainstream media accounts of why people come to the United States?

Humanity

Undocumented immigrants are often harshly punished for the crime of being in this country. Parents are deported leaving their children in foster care. People die crossing the border. How can we fight the dehumanization of undocumented people that leads to this violence? Strategize everyday ways to do this.

Chapter 5- When We Fight We Win: The Struggle for Economic Power

Economic Power

How is the struggle for economic power tied to a variety of other movements? How is it tied to struggles for democracy? What root causes do we have to look to in the struggle for economic justice and economic power? What is class warfare and where can we see it happening? What are the structural issues at the heart of economic inequality?

Occupy

What do you think of the tactic of occupying space in order to achieve political goals? What are some of the critiques of the Occupy movement in relation to race and inequality? How did the Occupy movement change the discussion about inequality in the country? Did it? Why does this matter? What sort of activism was inspired by the Occupy movement? How do social movements live on in a variety of ways?

Personal, Political and Structural Change

City Life/ Vida Urbana is devoted to having strategies to help individuals while challenging systems of economic inequality. How can individual problems and issues, like Aloysius Nwankwo refusing to leave his home quietly lead to political issues? Put another way, how can the personal transform into the political? List some strategies for doing this or some “personal” issues that are actually political.

Why is working towards structural change important to Jayaraman of ROC? What does “When We Fight We Win” mean to you?

Repression

The Occupy movement was violently repressed by the police and city governments around the country. What does this tell us about the right to protest in the United States and the power of the police state?

Chapter 6- Environmental Warriors Going to the Root of the Problem

Going to the Source

A rallying cry at climate change protests is “we need system change not climate change”: What is this referring to? And how does it reflect the viewpoint of climate change activists who are trying to get the “root of the problem”? What do they describe as this “root”? How does the way we think about climate change differ when we think of its root problems?

Indigenous Leadership

The climate change movement is increasingly led by indigenous activists and communities such as Clayton Thomas- Muller. How are indigenous sovereignty, climate change and colonialism connected? Why is it vital that indigenous communities are in front and center in this struggle?

Environmental Justice

How is climate change connected to issues such as poverty, racism, gender and class? Professor Antwi Akom says that climate change can be thought of as eco apartheid. What does this term reference? How must we think about climate change differently if we do so within the context of environmental justice?

Art and Climate Change

Look at the art in this chapter, in particular the flow chart by Rachel Schragis on pgs. 140-141 and the Beehive Design Collective’s piece on pgs. 134-135. these pieces depict complex relationships and tell the complicated story of environmental degradation and climate change. What can you learn differently through these images? Try to make a flow chart or to use images to connect complicated issues that you are interested in. What happens when we think of art as central to building change and movements?

Wrap- Up/ De-Briefing

Go back to the questions that you answered at the beginning of the book. Would you change any of your answers to these questions now that you have read this book? Why? Or why not?

The core questions of the book are:

1. how do we create real and enduring change?
2. what have successful organizers done that works and what doesn't work?
3. how can anyone get involved and make a difference?

How would you answer these questions?

What challenged you about what you read about here? What did you agree with? Disagree with? Whose story or what movement did you feel inspired by? How can you translate this inspiration into social action?