

LOVE WITH POWER

Practicing
Transformation for
Social Justice

PRE RELEASE COPY

by Kristen Zimmerman
and Julie Quiroz
Movement Strategy Center



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CENTER

Love With Power: Practicing Transformation for Social Justice

By Kristen Zimmerman and Julie Quiroz

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Love With Power:

Practicing Transformation for Social Justice

PART 1

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“Who The Hell Are You?”

“Collective transformative practice is not some hippy dippy thing. It’s about how we are together and how we are successful as movements. This is how #Black Lives Matters thinks about transformative practice: It’s about transformative relationship building. It’s about practice as ritual.”

—Alicia Garza #BlackLivesMatter and National Domestic Workers Alliance

In early October 2014, Alicia Garza arrived in Ferguson, Missouri. Less than two months after Ferguson Police officer, Darren Wilson, shot and killed unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown, the community of Ferguson was under siege. In the wake of Brown’s death, grief and rage enveloped the city like dense smoke. Centuries of pain from racism, alive and embedded in schools, jobs, neighborhoods, and endless police harassment, rose to the surface. Police and white city officials responded to community protests with brutal force. National and international media descended on Ferguson, turning the spotlight on every corner of residents’ lives. As national organizations arrived—often removed from local relationships and experiences—residents reeled. The chaos of the moment and the trauma of witnessing and experiencing police assaults and murders left them not only angry, but disoriented and mistrustful.

With the backing of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Garza traveled to Ferguson to support the organizing on the ground, collect the stories of women on the front lines, and participate in the #BlackLivesMatter Freedom Ride. Garza hoped to engage Black communities in “building a movement to transform our nation.”

One year earlier, Garza and two other women, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, had conceived “Black Lives Matter” as a vision and response to Trayvon Martin’s murder by George Zimmerman in Florida. At the heart of Black Lives Matter was a message about humanity and human rights, shining a light on one question: what are all the things that stand in the way of humanity and valuing Black lives, all Black lives, in this country? Black Lives Matter was clear: police violence is both a crucial focus, and just the tip of the iceberg. In a communication from Ferguson, Garza wrote:

Every 28 hours, a black woman in this country loses her child to police or vigilante violence. When a child is killed by police or vigilantes, we all fall short in upholding the values that connect us all—care, love, respect and dignity. In a democracy that protects all of us, no child should have less of a chance at a future because of the color of their skin.

Opposite page: Black Lives Matter vigil at McGill University in Montreal, November 25, 2014.
Creative commons License, Gerry Lauzon.



**XX BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**



Millions March New York City, December 13, 2014.
Creative commons license, B.C. Lorio.

Garza, Cullors and Tometi had deepened their personal and political relationships with each other for over a decade. During that time, they cultivated transformative practices, including building a practice community together through Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, and applied these practices to organizing. They honed their vision for a changed world. When the outrage at Michael Brown's death erupted, they were able to move into the moment, ready or not, with new ideas and the sense that they wanted to support family—in the biggest sense of the word.

Garza spent her first few days in Ferguson listening and getting to know people. She wondered how local organizing could be strengthened in this excruciating time, particularly given the deep suspicion of outsiders, like her. Bringing the skills and politics she had developed in her 15 years of organizing, Garza knew that focusing on building authentic relationships and shifting people's way of being together could transform everything else.

My personal practice helped to ground me and reciprocate compassion, love, understanding even when I was faced with "who the hell are you?"

Seeking to bring out the best in themselves and others, the Black Lives Matter team began to weave questions that people could connect to from the heart, asking, "Why does this movement matter to you? What does "black lives matter" mean to you? What is your biggest hope for this movement?"

My work in Ferguson training organizers was about cultivating a practice of taking care of each other. When someone got a job they had been waiting for we celebrated. When someone else couldn't be with us because her mother was dying we made sure to call her and share the love and let her know her spirit was still there with us. When someone was fired from his fast food job for talking about organizing, we all came together, giving him love and telling him how brave and courageous he was. He came in upset but left feeling held.

These practices helped Garza build authentic relationships with the local organizing team relatively quickly. They were then able to return to the community and engage community members with that same spirit.

We went door to door simply trying to connect with people, finding what they need and where we share purpose and vision.

While they only spent two weeks together, Garza and the community of organizers she worked with found a rhythm, established practices that grounded their work in purpose, and built deep and authentic relationship with each other.

At the end of each day together we would come back and share food and experiences. Then we'd end with a chant or a song or a prayer. These rituals are really important. They ground us in our bodies and remind us how we got to this place. They remind us that all our ancestors did some kind of ritual. We were only together for two weeks in Ferguson but the people I connected with are still family.

The story from Ferguson is complex and still unfolding. It is a story of Black communities rising up to say "no" to the daily inhumanity of structural racism. It is the story of Black communities seeking to build from purpose and love. It is a story of movement builders nurturing transformative practices within social justice, then, stepping up and into a "movement moment." The future depends on building these moments of high quality presence, clarity, insight, and heart-felt love. "Together," says Garza, "we are organizing to build a new democracy and a society that values and protects ALL of our work and, ALL of our families, and embraces who we truly are as a nation."

Black Lives Matter vigil at McGill University in Montreal, November 25, 2014. Creative commons License, Gerry Lauzon.



Questions for our Movements

Alicia Garza's story from Ferguson leaves Movement Builders with important questions. Some of these questions are:

- How can we develop the collective strength and insight needed to transform a culture and an economy built on racism and domination?
- How can we cultivate our readiness to engage with extraordinary challenges—even when we don't feel ready?
- What aspects of our social movements will continue to serve us, and what do we need to leave behind?
- How can we respond to a world of injustice and violence with the love and power we are just beginning to imagine?
- How can we embody the world we want and need right now?



National Domestic Workers Alliance

A Revolution of Values

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

As Alicia Garza's story from Ferguson reminds us we, humanity, need a movement, a really big movement. A movement big and bold enough to get us out of the mess we have gotten ourselves into, and one that will get us to a better place. A movement that can transform the world and each one of us in it. A movement through which we shift from a world based on domination and extraction to a life-affirming world based on regeneration and interconnection.

Over the past decade, Movement Strategy Center has been asking the big yet simple questions echoing across social justice movements: What is the change we most need and want in the world? Who do we need to be to make that change? And how do we get there, all of us, together? On this journey we are learning from and experimenting alongside many incredible people who are

charting the way forward. We are excited to see that the contours of where we need to go—and who we need to be to find our path—are beginning to emerge.

The transformation we need in the world requires a revolution of values: one that includes systems and political leadership but that stretches beyond to shift the very DNA of our culture and the people encoded within it. This is a revolution that can be actualized and sustained because it leads from the power of love to fundamentally change individuals and groups, communities and systems. It's a revolution that does not divide or conquer but instead, as Taoist strategist Sun Tzu writes in the *Art of War*, *keeps everything under the universe whole*.¹

When movements are transformative they radically shift the way we think, the way we relate to one another, and even the way we perceive change. They fundamentally alter the way our society and our communities are structured, the way we live with one another and even who we are. When movements embody our deepest human values they bring out the best in us, spark our imagination, inspire us, and embolden us to take big leaps forward together. Today, humanity and the planet need a movement of power and love that can catalyze and sustain the massive, integrated change we need right now.

1. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2005).

There are many signs that “another world is not only possible, she’s on the way and, on a quiet day, if you listen very carefully you can hear her breathe.”² At the heart of this movement—and the world it is bringing—are individuals and groups that have experienced deep change in themselves and have brought the power of intentional practice to catalyze this change. It is in their breath, our collective breath, that we can hear if we listen.

When tackling humanity’s biggest problems (e.g., slavery, apartheid, and colonization), only social movements, mass movements, have had the courage, inspiration, power and practices to change the world and each of us in it. Social movements are about big, collective impact and a quality of change that is not possible through other means. Social movements provide a scale in numbers, a scale of ambition, and a scale in our capacity to love and to redefine and harness power.

Through practicing transformation individuals and groups are developing the capacity they need to generate and navigate transformation in the world. Transformation—profound, fundamental, irreversible, sustainable change—depends on and is made possible by the internal shifts in people³ and groups, as well as on external shifts in our culture, systems and lived reality. In transformative moments these two forms of change—internal and external—fuel each other in an interdependent catalytic dance. At times this change begins internally, at other times externally. *Love With Power* focuses on transformation guided by core human values including interconnection, dignity, justice and love.

Real change requires us to believe that fundamental, irreversible, systemic change is possible and that we are each a part of that change. We begin by allowing ourselves to experience the hunger and appetite for something more than what we have now. We can then take intentional action to embody this change in ourselves and with one another.

Systems and structures are ultimately a reflection of human beings, of our relationship to ourselves and to one another. Collectively, we create, run, follow, condone, and/or fight against systems and structures. They, in turn, shape us, our relationship to one another and to the natural world. But, we can commit to a vision beyond what we have inherited. When we come together as a critical mass of people who are ready to fundamentally change ourselves simultaneously with our culture and its structures and systems, we can then achieve the fundamental change we desire.



Forward Together

2. Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: a Ghost Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

3. Robert Gass, *What is Transformation? And how it advances social change* (Social Transformation Project, 2010): <http://www.stproject.org/resources/publications/what-is-transformation>.

In the words of Staci Haines, executive director of generative somatics,

We are at this unprecedented moment where the phase of critique is done. We need to create different structures and build different ways of being. We need to compel people with alternatives. We need to ask what institutions, economies and social myths we need, to have masses of people embody cooperation, interdependence and sustainability.

Movement Strategy Center and many others believe that transformative movements arise when individual and collective practice is embedded within a holistic path and a commitment to social transformation. Through practice we increase our awareness of the problem we are trying to solve and the personal and social patterns that keep the status quo in place. We open and allow ourselves to change in ways that feel fundamental to who we are. Transformative movement includes practice, cultivating ourselves personally and collectively to increase our skill, wisdom, relatedness and vision. When we are involved in transformative movement, we hold a big and bold vision of the world we want, hone methods to catalyze and link internal and external change, and implement concrete practices to support and embody these shifts.

MSC offers *Love With Power* as inspiration for all of us who believe that another world is possible and that we must find ways to get there together. In *Love with Power* we honor groups who are creating the new ways to bring about social transformation⁴—organizers who believe the time for *Love with Power* is now. We hope *Love With Power* will inspire social justice groups and other change agents to explore, adopt, and strengthen collective transformative movement building and practice as an intentional and ongoing part of their work.

LOVE WITH POWER Parts One and Two

We are releasing *Love with Power* in two parts. This publication, *Love With Power I*, offers the “what?” and “why?” of transformative movement building and collective transformative practice. *Love With Power II* will focus on the “how,” offering stories from the field of actual collective practices being used in movement building, and practical suggestions for how groups can begin their own collective transformative practice.

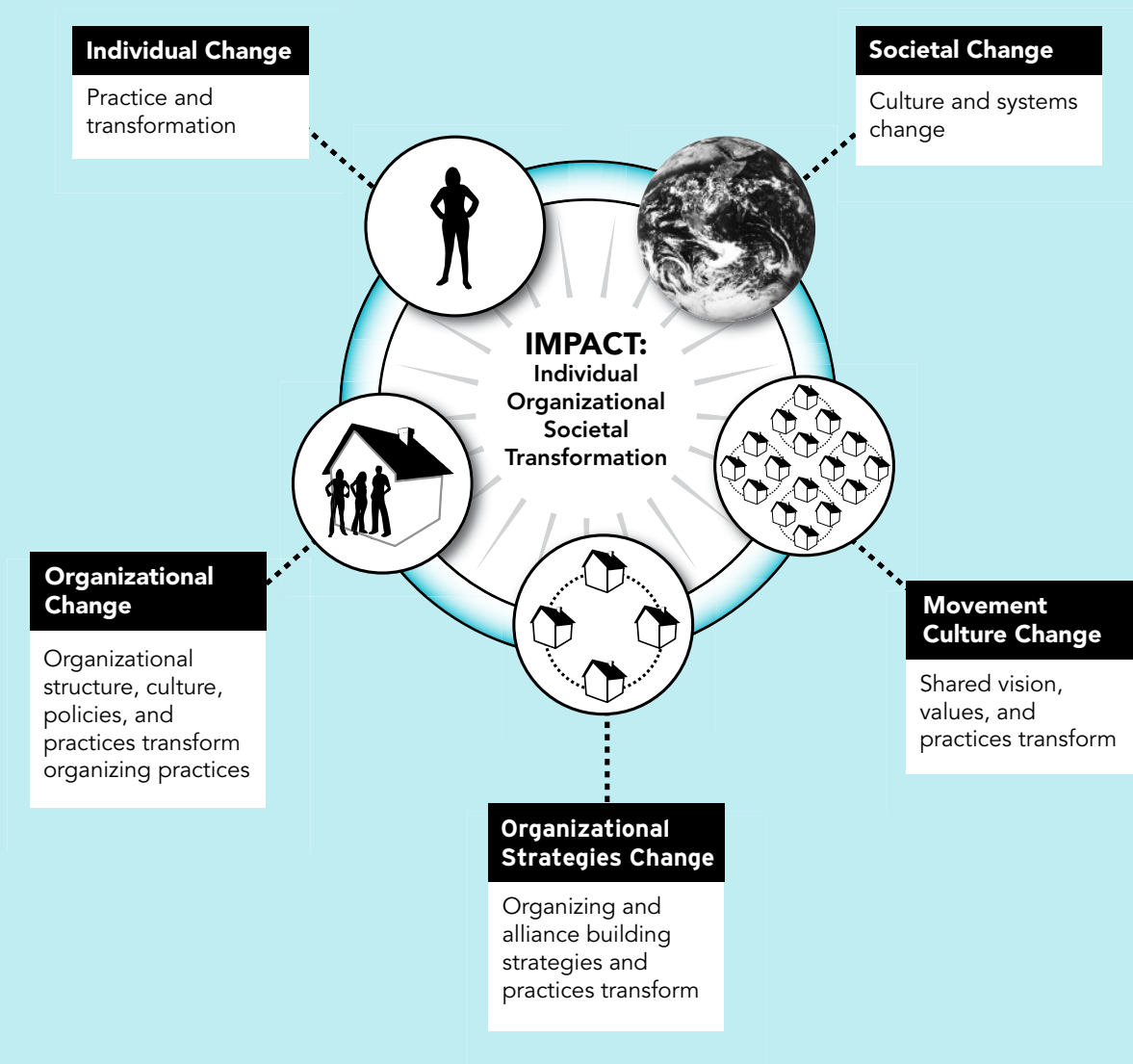
4. *Love With Power* reflects MSC’s on-going inquiry into the nature of transformation and its role in social change. The content of *Love With Power* is drawn from: MSC’s direct experience in bringing collective transformative practice and a transformative approach to social justice movement building; the relationships we have built with people and organizations seeking to bring transformative practice and approaches into social justice movement building; interviews with over 50 people over the past five years, and; an informal survey through social media in August 2014 that received 40 responses. A full description of our methodology will be included in the full report.

Transformative Movement Building:

Transformative Movement Building is a holistic and comprehensive approach to transforming the world that is guided by our deepest values, vision and purpose. Transformative movement building supports internal and external change simultaneously and integrates many levels of change—individual to interpersonal to institutional and systemic. This approach includes each of us individually, our relationships, and the ways we live to “be the change” in everyday life.

In “Out of the Spiritual Closet” (2009), MSC identified five interconnected levels of change in transformative movement building that support and catalyze each other:

- Individual change
- Supports and catalyzes organizational and community level change
- Supports and changes movement building and organizing practice
- Catalyzes greater social impact and systems change
- Culminating in deep cultural change



Practicing Transformation: The Highest Social Justice Priority

People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values.

—Grace Lee Boggs

Fifteen years ago, Movement Strategy Center set out to learn how to build movements that fundamentally transform society. Like most people in social justice we started out relying on a familiar set of recognized tools. At the time, talk about sustainability in organizing felt new and words like “love” and “interdependence” were not always welcomed in social justice conversations outside of faith-based organizing.

But much was changing. As we continued to work with and learn from many groups and individuals, we began to notice practices and approaches that did not fit the usual models and definitions of secular organizing.⁵ Moreover, these practices and approaches were having profound impacts.

Practices and approaches centering love and interdependence were emerging in many places, even at the 20,000-person US Social Forum in 2010.⁶ Art, mind-body practices, creative practices, and healing were formally incorporated into this major gathering.⁷ The

5. K. Zimmerman, N. Pathikonda, B. Salgado, T. James, *Out of the Spiritual Closet: Organizers transforming the practice of Social Justice* (Oakland, CA: Movement Strategy Center, 2010).

6. The Forum integrated transformative approaches in a number of ways including, (1) a dedicated track and physical space that highlighted the innovative work of movement groups who were incorporating transformative practice into their social change strategies; (2) a Healing Justice practice space and People's Movement Assembly that highlighted and helped to integrate the role of healers and healing in social transformation; (3) a strong integration of art and creativity through spaces like the Creativity Lab, which allowed people to make art together for the Forum's public actions; and perhaps most critically, (4) the Forum's leadership, who held the vision for how all the strands fit together.

7. “Defining Transformation for Social Change PMA Resolution adopted at US Social Forum 2010” (US Social Forum, June 25, 2010): <http://hiddenleaf.electricembers.net/wpcontent/uploads/2010/06/TransformationPMA.pdf>.

decision to place transformation at the center of the Forum reflected what could be seen throughout social justice organizing. Thanks to the many people who worked to bring about this shift, space began to open for nurturing the values that motivate us.⁸



National Domestic Workers Alliance

As a result of the Social Forum and gatherings throughout the country, more and more people began to believe that the changes we need are bigger than the movements we have built, and that the transformation needed will require a quality and quantity of response that we are just starting to see. Looking ahead we were beginning to understand that we, individually and collectively, would need to be different as people to make this kind of change.

Many groups and individuals have turned to a transformative practice or path because we have had a glimpse of its impact on other groups and have recognized the central role transformation was playing in their work. People in social justice are exploring practices that engage the body and spirit as well as the mind because these practices can shift deeply engrained habits and allow us to cultivate new ways of being. People are turning to transformative practice, anchored in and guided by vision of the world, movement, community and people we want and need to be. Over time, through intentional and repeated action and reflection, people can discover, cultivate, and embody new ways of being and thinking that advance and evolve our vision as a movement, enhancing even the most mundane parts of our work.

8. Harmony Goldberg, Ai-Jen Poo, “Organizing with Love,” (Organizing Upgrade, June 16, 2010): <http://transform.transformativechange.org/2010/06/ai-jenpoo/>; Mark Engler, “Ai-Jen Poo: Organizing Labor—With Love,” Yes! Magazine (July 29, 2011): <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-yes-breakthrough-15/ai-jen-poo-organizing-labor-with-love>.

Making Movement Pivots

Drawing on MSC's own accomplishments and lessons, the stories our partners and allies have shared, and observations of the broader patterns in and across social movements, we have identified five shifts that are beginning to occur in social change movements and that collective transformative practice can catalyze.

MSC offers these "Movement Pivots" as a way to name and feel these shifts:

Embedded in these pivots are the qualities needed for creating the transformative movements and world we need: interdependence, a proactive stance, leadership for the whole, synergy, alignment, and creativity. Transformative approaches give us a way to practice these qualities immediately; they begin to embody the future right now.

MSC believes that nurturing these qualities on a large scale is the highest priority for social justice today. They are the qualities that we need as social change agents, but also the qualities we need to flourish in a transformed world. By embedding transformative practice into all social justice work, we believe we can shift from our current movements into the movements we truly need to transform our world.

The present moment is magical because awareness and momentum for true social and ecological transformation is growing. Social justice movements have the opportunity to shape this transformation and lead us all to become bolder, more alive, more loving and more impactful. To make this transition we need to develop the courage to embrace a beautiful, bold, inspiring vision and align that vision with sharp strategy. Individual and collective practice helps us keep our faith that another world is possible and develop the focus needed to embody and manifest that world in the present.

Now is the time—time that we see that love is a more powerful force than anger. Time that changing ourselves individually and collectively will change the world. Time to step into leadership for the whole and breathe life into the values on which a just, dignifying, beautiful and life-affirming world can be built. Time to believe that our audacious vision is possible and that we are the ones to build it with everyone.



Sons and Brothers Alliance

MOVEMENT PIVOTS

PRACTICES

How we can get there

HABITS

Where we are stuck

Isolation

We are fragmented by issues and geographically isolated.

Defensive and Narrow Stance

We are reactive and fighting to maintain or create small reforms.

Marginalization

Our strategic sense of what is possible and needed is limited by our experience with structural and internalized marginalization.

Competition

We are unaligned and often in conflict.

Control

We Pressure ourselves to “know” and “succeed,” which prevents us from thinking and acting creatively.

Lead with Bold Vision

We practice keeping an eye on the horizon, envisioning what is truly needed, and reimagining what is politically possible.

Build the Bigger We

We practice creating shared purpose through love, connection, and finding a “third way” that is not limited by “either/or.”



Hold Broad Awareness

We practice expanding our awareness of the subtle and complex connections, interactions, and forces in and across our movement ecosystems and society.

Ground in People, Community, and History

We practice building authentic relationships, seeing what is unique and what is shared in our experiences, and developing the wisdom to inform our leadership.

Trust and Innovate

We practice openness to possibility through fierce inquiry, healthy debate, trying new approaches, taking risks, learning from mistakes, laughing, dancing, and playing.

HORIZON

Where we can go

.....

Interdependence

We act as a whole that depends on and rejoices in the strengths of each part.

Proactive and Open Stance

We lead with purpose, values and possibility. We are open, agile, flexible and ready for opportunities to create bold transformational change.

Leadership for the Whole

We lead and care for the whole of society by centralizing the wisdom, leadership, and strategies of communities most impacted by a problem.

Synergy and Alignment

We move together from vision and core values, with diverse strategies and functions for big collective impact.

Creativity

We generate unexpected fresh ideas and action that inspire and work for the good of all.

Practicing Transformation in Movement Strategy Center

Five years ago, Movement Strategy Center decided to explore forms of transformative practice that could ground our work and help us to develop a transformative approach to movement building and social change.

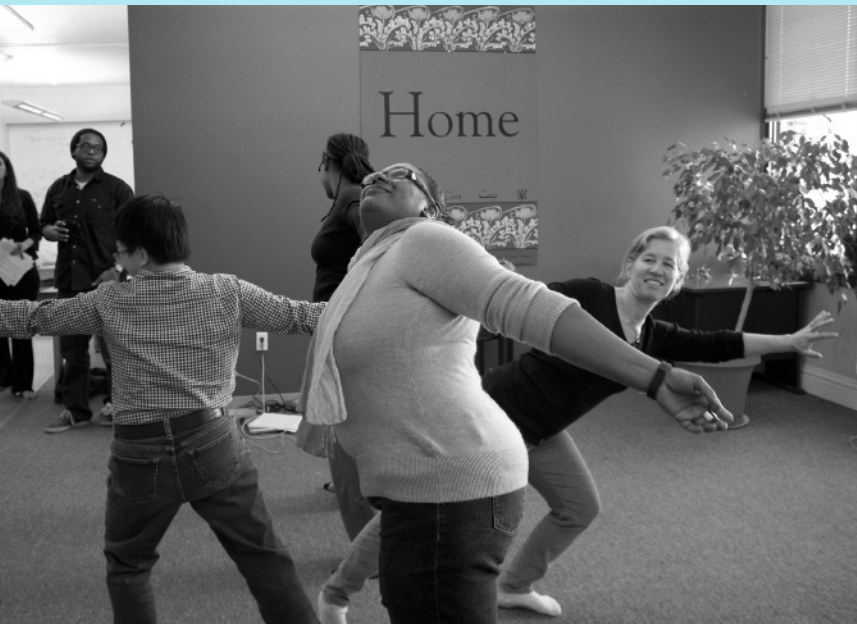
After trying out several practices—and finding use, beauty, and limitation in each—we chose the one that most resonated with MSC staff, as well as with our organizational role and strategy. While individual members of the staff continued their own personal practices or began new ones, we, as an organization, adopted 60-40 Stance as the primary transformative practice to learn and practice together. 60-40 Stance is a method developed by Norma Wong to integrate and apply principles of Zen and martial arts training to everyday life. Through physical movement we gained insight into the *physics* of movement building

and how this could impact our strategy. Specifically, the practice helped us cultivate our collective awareness, stance, energy, and rhythm in ways that made us more strategic and better movement builders. We integrated the physical practice of 60-40 Stance into our internal meetings and used the philosophy of 60-40 Stance to re-organize our work. Over time we used both to shape and influence our external engagements.

Through our on-going collective practice, MSC has experienced a profound and palpable increase in our group alignment, strength, momentum, interconnectedness, and organic capacity to build and sustain movement relationships. Our shared practice has changed each of us as people and helped us form the bonds of community. We have deepened our understanding of how each individual staff member's personal prac-

tices and core strengths contributes to the group's capacity for grounding and insight. As a strategic team we have a much clearer sense of our own big horizon and where we want to go. We also have a deepened capacity to let go and trust others. We find we can take bigger risks and leaps together because we've developed group synergy that comes with practice. And, we now have experience with stepping into something new, and unknown, together with courage and trust.

The impact of MSC's ongoing collective transformative practice has been exponential. It has made us more effective as movement builders, more strategic as partners, and more centered as individuals and a group, but ultimately it's about much more than this. It has helped us reconsider our purpose in the world and what it means to be strategic, by uncovering the dimension that is really about our shared humanity and how we serve that.



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People's Climate March, New York City September 21, 2014. Photo by Kate Evans for Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).



Collective Transformation Today

**Our transformation
is rooted in all of us
transforming together.**

—Cara Page

The learning edge of social justice organizing has surfaced new questions: What does a *collective* approach to transformation look like? What is the role of collective transformative practice within that? How can collective practice be understood as part of creating a culture where oppression and exploitation cannot take root? In the words of Claudia Horowitz, founder of Stone Circles,

This generation of activists, this era, is trying to define our own approaches. It's a different kind of movement building than what was happening in the 60s, 70s, 80s, or 90s. We are living in an era where there is more inner work happening . . . The work that has been going on personally has reached a critical mass. I don't know if we have reached a tipping point – but we are getting there . . . What is common is a recognition of possibility, hunger and interest in transformation at the group level.

Forward Together





MSC defines collective transformative practice as the intentional and continuously repeated action undertaken as a *group* to cultivate new ways of being and thinking *in that group and beyond it*. Collective transformative practice must be rooted in our individual and collective vision of a transformed world, the values at the core to that world, and our part in creating it by becoming it. For some of us this is about continuing and strengthening a way of life that has been passed down to us by our elders and ancestors; for others of us, it is about cultivating something that feels very new.

Collective transformative practice helps groups cultivate a new level of conscious awareness and increases the alignment and synergy among people in a group. It encourages people in a group to discover and unleash their core strengths, build transformative relationships, and generate resonance with others. Collective practice enables social justice groups to more fully accomplish their missions by increasing their capacity to set a bold horizon, stay on purpose, communicate across difference, catalyze breakthroughs, and stay grounded in difficult conversations and moments. Social justice groups that integrate transformative practice often experience an expansion and acceleration of their impact.

Individual and organizational change cannot be seen separately. They are intertwined. Our organizational culture and model has been deeply informed by our individual political and human development and our shared practice.

—Patty Berne, *Sins Invalid*

Collective transformative practice catalyzes and focuses our awareness of how change happens—often by accelerating change that is happening within individuals and the group—helping them “go somewhere” together. It shapes and transforms the collective body and all the elements within it. This is something that is clearly seen and experienced through music. When musicians become a jazz ensemble or an orchestra, they practice together. To experience themselves and be experienced as *one*, rather than individual musicians, depends on and offers more than individual practice alone. The sound they are trying to produce shapes how and what they need to practice. And, the experience of people listening and people performing is qualitatively different, as a result. If you talk to any musician, playing and performing in a powerful, well-practiced group is a transformative, often transcendent, experience.

A Word about “Practice”

Practice takes us beyond the conceptual into the experiential to access our full ways of knowing; what we gain from direct experience that cannot be grasped otherwise.

—angel Kyoto williams

Love With Power focuses on practice, the day-by-day, step-by-step action, that individuals or groups take on to intentionally learn and shift. In transformative movement building, practice helps us change ourselves in order to change groups, systems and culture. It is a crucial part of an overall commitment and approach to social transformation.

Musicians and scientists, artists and athletes, doctors and healers all know the fundamental value and magic of practice and what it means to be a practitioner of something. The magic of practice is that incremental progress grows exponentially. As one practices, giant leaps can occur through seemingly repetitive small steps.

In this report we have chosen to use the phrase “collective transformative practice” to describe the ways that groups have taken intentional and continuously repeated action to cultivate new ways of being and thinking *in that group and beyond it*.

We use the term transformative practice to convey what transformation involves and generates; the term is meant to be accessible and expansive. Our definition of transformative practice includes the intention-full ways we cultivate and shape a way of life and live our values; ways that are connected to the past and looking forward to where we need to go.

We understand and respect that the term “practice” does not resonate with everyone. For example, many organizers, particularly Indigenous organizers, see their work as cultivating a way of life, with ceremony, ritual, circles and culture as the vehicles. Ultimately, that is at the heart of what we are talking about—the paths we make and the actions we take to generate a life-affirming, interdependent and re-generative culture and way of being.



What collective transformative practices are being used in social movements today?

Practices are simple things you can do with yourself or others that keep a process alive. They keep one engaged in internal and collective process. They are people engaging in a shared identity and a collective. —Oona Chatterjee

- What makes these practices are that they repeated actions done with intention and continuously over time.
- What makes these collective is that a group of people do these practices together.

For a further listing and discussion of transformative practices, see Transformative Practices for Social Change: Lessons from the Field (May 2009), The Seasons Fund for Social Transformation, available at www.hiddenleaf.org.

The Historical Legacy of Transformative Practice

History is not the past. It is the stories we tell about the past. How we tell these stories—triumphantly or self-critically, metaphysically or dialectally—has a lot to do with whether we cut short or advance our evolution as human beings.

—Grace Lee Boggs

When a wave of change sweeps over society, where does it start and what determines its direction and outcome? As Gandhi began his march to the sea or Rosa Parks made her stand on the bus, what were all the threads, in their lives and others', that led to that moment? When Mandela sat with his former captors, negotiating the terms for a new government, what prevented the nation from falling into civil war? What set these great changes in motion? What prevented chaos from taking over? How did each of these movements reach critical mass—the point of no turning back—in society?

While the precise beginnings are likely synchronistic and multiple the paths and the practices of these movements were undeniably transformative. Guided by visions that were audacious, filled with wisdom and love, these movements were informed by the reality of the time, yet had radically departed from it. Their goals were often dismissed as unrealistic, delusional, or, as in the cases of slavery, abolition and apartheid, against the very laws of nature. The distances they attempted to travel were vast and reflected a clarity of vision and values that transcended prevailing social norms.



The degree to which a movement shapes society often hinges on the real-time practices of that movement—the way the people in that movement individually and collectively embody the core values and new culture at the heart of the movement.

Many wise leaders have discussed and modeled the power of *practice*—the intention-full ways we cultivate and shape a way of life—in transformation. Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Grace Lee Boggs, Aung San Suu Kyi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks are some of the most referenced leaders who embody and integrate political movements with spiritual traditions.

Afia Walking Tree opening "Beyond Ferguson: Calling in the Strength and Healing of Our Ancestors", a community healing ritual at East Bay Meditation Center. (Human Element Photography)



People's Climate March, New York City September 21, 2014. Photo by Kate Evans for Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

In order to create a new reality externally, they first cultivated and manifested it in themselves; they embodied being something new, right away, individually and alongside others. The dance between the internal and external, individual and collective, past, present and future, created fertile ground for transformation to occur, and for it to happen on a grand scale. Both Gandhi and Chavez had rich spiritual practices that included meditation and fasting. King and Parks drew on the power of prayer, reflection, and the cultivation of beloved community. All of them made little or no separation between their cultural practice, spiritual practice, and movement practice.

But what was happening with all the other participants in these movements? Was it just the transformation of the most visible leaders that made a difference or was a change occurring more broadly? What happens when the people in a movement—not just its leaders—experience transformation in their own lives and bring that into their movement building?

The social histories we tell often ignore the complex and nuanced elements that made these movements so transformative. The cost of this omission is great, skewing our understanding of how deep change happens. On the most elemental level, if we don't know our own transformative history we cannot access or leverage the tools and wisdom it offers. We are stuck recreating the wheel, rather than building vehicles for change.

The Way **Forward**

**It was a time when
the unthinkable
became the thinkable
and the impossible
really happened.**

—Arundhati Roy,
The God of Small Things

The present moment is calling all of us to tap into the transformative power of love to fundamentally change the world. Our path forward is uncharted, full of possibility and full of the unknown. In truth, it is not just one path. It is many that will get us to the new world. As people who believe this new world is possible, we must find ways to navigate these unfamiliar waters together in order bring something new and wonderful into being. We must be the change we seek in the world right now so that this new world comes into being.

National Domestic Workers Alliance



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