

ORGANIZING UPGRADE

LEFT ORGANIZERS RESPOND
TO THE CHANGING TIMES

WILLIE BAPTIST: It's not enough to be angry

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November 1, 2009

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Willie Baptist was interviewed by John Wessel-McCoy for Organizing Upgrade in June 2009

Present Situation

Any approach to social change, organizing and leadership development has to be based on your assessment of the situation and of the problem. If you have one assessment or one diagnosis, you're going to have a particular prescription and a particular approach to the solution. Either we're dealing with a teddy bear or we're dealing with a grizzly bear, and either estimate will determine your set of tactics, your organizing approach. If you think you're dealing with a teddy bear and in reality it's a grizzly bear coming at you, you're going to be in trouble. So this estimate of the situation is absolutely crucial to the process.

I've learned some important lessons in my experience of having, for example, helped organized among homeless people in the Detroit area where we established a local chapter of the National Union of the Homeless. In Detroit, many of the homeless people had been stable "middle class" autoworkers, but they had undergone such a dislocation as a result of the computerization and automation of auto production. What you find, throughout the entire economy, is this gigantic and unprecedented technological revolution that is shaping sources of income, places of work, but also communities. Communities are undergoing tremendous changes. So if you organize from prevailing influences of organizing that served the past, and you've had this tremendous change that has taken place, then your organizing approach and your tactics are not going to fit the new situation.

I don't think you would have had certain social theories such as Marxism or industrial unionism if it they were not shaped by tremendous technological changes that were taking place back during the latter 18th century and in the 19th century. Before the Industrial Revolution, you had the feudal agricultural societies that dictated an approach towards organizing different from when the industrial revolutions took place. Changes in our times are analogous to those changes, but I think it's on a scale more comprehensive and a rapidity much greater than ever before. Deindustrialization alongside of the growth of urban populations globally is historically unprecedented. I think we're dealing with a grizzly bear, because there're tremendous dislocations happening in communities today, and I think the current crisis punctuates this problem. Our organizing has to reflect that.

Pitfalls of large parts of the Left

You can see the continuing influences on large part of the Left of the 1930s trade union organizing and of the 1960s community organizing, which is heavily shaped by the influences of the Civil Rights Movement and world's National Liberation Movements. There's a saying that 'most generals are always fighting the last war.' That is what we're finding in the Left. We're dealing with a totally new situation. In this new day you must do things in a new way.

Last year, the food riots that took place in more than 30 countries globally had the immediacy that Watts had in the 1960s. Our approach today has to reflect these new elements, elements that didn't exist in 1930s and 1960s. On the "Left," there's a tendency to categorize different issues, different fronts of struggle – put them in different silos – and approach them from the perspective of solely organizing among this ethnic community or organizing among that trade union, or among women as a separate group. Although organizing in the different fronts of struggle is very important, the perspective in approaching them has to change given the changed situation. The problems today are problems that revolve around the growing concentration of wealth on a global level on the one hand, and the spreading of poverty on a global level on the other. Our organizing strategy and tactics have to be based in a comprehensive and ongoing assessment of this fundamental polarization that defines our times. This is crucial because to limit your perspective as to the fundamental problem and solution is to ultimately make your effort aimed at leveraging pity, not power. At most, this results in sort of a "militant do-gooderism" or charity paraded as "social justice" or "the end to

extreme poverty.” It amounts to much corporate funding of efforts that only strike down the leaves and branches of the problem leaving its roots untouched, only for the leaves and branches to grow back in more devastating and fascist forms.

In history, different periods were defined by major social polarities. And the class forces or elements of class forces that were most dislocated or most affected by that problem had to be organized and placed at the forefront in order for that problem to be brought to a solution. The struggle against the British Crown in this country had to be led by the colonists, because they were the ones that were immediately affected. There was opposition to the British Crown coming from Spain, from France, even from within the United Kingdom. And these forces played a role in the struggle against the British Crown. But it was the colonists in that particular period that had to be at the forefront – that had to exhibit initiative – to actually galvanize and bring those other forces into play. The French support of that struggle was very important, but it was all predicated on the fight – and the military and political organization of the fight – by the American colonists themselves.

The overall struggle against slavery in this country had to be led by the struggle of those forces oppressed by the slavocracy, that is, the slaves of course but also the industrial classes of the North. These most adversely affected social forces had to find some organizational expressions and thereby place their needs and demands at the forefront in order for that struggle to be brought to a successful conclusion. Take the struggle for women's suffrage. Can you imagine a struggle for women's suffrage led by men? Those forces most affected by the problem have to be at the forefront. They know when their pain is relieved.

In organizing today around the issues of poverty and the issues of extreme wealth concentrated in a few hands, to resolve this problem, social hegemonic leadership must come from that segment of the population that is the most directly affected, that is, the poor and dispossessed sections in the struggle. Our organizing and developing leaders today must first focus on uniting this segment. This must be the only basis of developing and uniting revolutionary leaders.

Power and Organizing

Part of an accurate estimate of the social problems we face involves power

relationships. In the National Union of the Homeless we coined the slogan, "Power grows from organization... Freedom is never given. It must be taken. And therefore you only get what you are organized to take!" All of history – US and world history – confirms this statement. Are you able to generate a critical mass of power to counter the existing power relationships to make change? We've got to be real about that. Otherwise we're playing games. As Malcolm X once stated, "power only respects power... power never takes a step back except in the face of more power."

A lot of the Left tends to avoid this question, but you can't get away from it. One of the problems we've had in American history is that, although there have been a lot of social movements over time, they have been basically divided into two types of movements. One, dealing with power changes: shifting power relationships, a social-economic group or section of a class out of power taking power. Here I'm not talking about the regular electoral changes in government administrative and legislative offices. And the other type of movements that generates a tremendous amount of activity but ultimately results in the reinforcing the position of major social elements in existing power relationships by social reform. They allowed for a modification or an adjustment of existing power relations, not changing those power relations.

For example, the Anti-Slavery Movement, including the Civil War, resulted in power changes in terms of the slaveocracy being taken out of power and the Northern industrial classes being put into power. Or the American Revolution: the Tory elements within the colonies connected to the British Crown were in power. And what happened as a consequence of that struggle was that you had a change of places in terms of power relationships. But most of the other major struggles – the Women's Suffrage Movement, the industrial movements of the 30s, the Civil Rights Movement – these movements were reform movements, but they didn't result in power changes. We have to look at history and see what we can learn from movements for power as well as what we can learn from reform movements. The problem is that there has been very little study of US history with regard to these two types of social movement and social changes.

Today, again, we are confronted with the question: Are we dealing with a teddy bear or are we dealing with a grizzly bear? Are we dealing with a fundamentally a reform movement or are we dealing with a transformation

movement? My experience and the experiences of others I've been involved with over the last forty years – in my study of American history and world history – suggest we're dealing fundamentally with a problem of power. That raises a question of how you generate a critical mass that's strong enough to take power.

The only thing that the oppressed classes have at their disposal is their numbers. They only enter in the scale of power struggle if those numbers are organized and are led by knowledge or an understanding of what they're up against. The influences of industrial union organizing and of community organizing – Saul Alinsky and some of the Civil Rights organizing – have left us very ignorant on the problems of power. Power grows from organizing, but *how* you organize – your approach to organizing under different circumstances – is something that's very critical.

Part of the problem of power in this country – a central aspect of the problem – is the relationship between color and class. The history of slavery, the slaughter of the Native Americans – these things have impacted American society all the way to today and have placed the color factor deeply in the thinking of the American people. You disregard this question at your own peril. But how you pose it is very important. The position of the poor and the dispossessed in the struggle to end poverty is very crucial, because what the poor shows in their social and economic position is that ultimately the color question is inseparably tied to the class question. And then not only is it tied to the class question, but that the color question ultimately is or revolves around the question of class, that is the problem of the concentration of wealth and power.

The tendency has been to separate these issues because the prevailing influence around the issue of race, for example, has been the kind of petit bourgeois, "middle-class" kind of conception that is closely allied with the upper classes. This conception says: "The economy? I have no problem with the economy. Even with the current crisis, I have no problems with the fundamentals of the capitalist economy." Therefore, you can discuss the problems of race separate, as if it's parallel to the problems of whether I eat or not, have a house or not, do I have the power necessary to at least have my basic necessities secured or not. From the standpoint of the economically exploited and excluded, I can't discuss the questions of whether or not we're going to be able to resolve the problems of color or resolve the inequities of gender and all of the other ills in society

disconnected from the questions of class and power.

I think this is where Martin Luther King in the last years of his life offers a bridge in terms of getting people to understand the inseparableness of these things. He pointed at the inseparableness of the three major evils: of unjust foreign policy in terms of the global situation and how it is tied to race relations and how race relations are inseparably tied to the problem of economic exploitation and poverty. You can't deal with one without dealing with the other. If we orient ourselves on the basis of those at the bottom, we're going to tend to see the inseparableness of these questions in reality.

There's this poster that I saw on one of my trips from Philadelphia to Atlanta to see my daughter. There's this billboard put up by the furniture industry in South Carolina. And it references a very common slogan put out in our country that I think influences the Left, that I think influences the whole of society. It said: "Let the sons and daughters of the former slaveholders unite with the sons and daughters of the former slaves." Now what's critical about that formulation is that they leave out the fact that most whites in the South were not slaveholders. They were mostly poor and working-class whites.

Left out of most discussions of history is this formula of power that W.E.B. DuBois talked about that pitted the poor non-whites against the poor whites. Even today, when we are discussing the need of people of color to unite, it's usually done in a way to leave out the strategic necessity of finding ways of uniting with poor whites to ensure real emancipation from poverty and all forms of human misery. As DuBois suggested and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr directly pointed out in his 1967-68 Poor People's Campaign, this can and must be the starting point in building the necessary critical mass to move power relations in this country of 300 million. And historically that has been a stumbling block in terms of any kind of struggle for power in this country. When you consider the power relationships as expressed in the composition of the civil bureaucracy and government jobs on all levels — municipal, state, and federal — or you consider the military and police forces, you're talking about mostly white folks. This also true of the key corporate jobs in the "commanding heights" of the economy, i.e., the auto industry, housing, steel, energy, etc. A growing number of these strategically positioned employees, their relatives and communities are beginning to have difficult times. Poverty is increasing among whites at a faster rate than among non-whites, especially resulting from the current crisis with the dismantling of the so called "middle class." These are real pivotal problems

of power. Aristotle once stated, and this has been more than corroborated by world history, that “Where the middle class is large, there are least likely to be factions and dissension.” Today we are confronted with greater opportunities and dangers with regard to problems of political influence and power relations than have rarely happened in American history. Yet we leave these opportunities for the fascists to win sections of the poor and working class whites.

W.E.B. DuBois pointed out this problem of power in his *Black Reconstruction*, where he talks about how the political situation of slavery in the South was different from slavery in the Caribbean and South America. There, the opposition among the slaves tended to have a much wider and more of a mass character. That even culminated in the Haitian Revolution, which is the only actual slave-led uprising to successfully take the slaveocracy out of power. You had this massive uprising in the Caribbean and South American slavery, but in America – in the Southern United States – you had smaller resistance in the forms of runaway slaves and preempted slave rebellions. DuBois pointed out very clearly, that at its height in the Southern United States, you had something like four million black slaves, but at the same time, right alongside the black slaves, you had something like five million poor whites. You didn't have that kind of demographics in Haiti where enslaved blacks outnumbered whites by 12 to one.

The poor whites in southern United States were plentiful. They were the social base for the police forces, including the slave drivers and slave patrols. The ruling slaveholders were able to use these two sections of the bottom against each other. And with the accumulation of wealth from the brutal exploitation of black slaves, the powers that be controlled the poor whites, and they employed poor whites to control the poor blacks. This formula of plantation power politics is what we have been dealing with in the US all the way up to this day. For instance, we can see how this racial political formula is being effectively employed to control and oppress immigrant workers. For us to not completely appreciate power relationships of class rule is to our detriment and to the peril of the struggle.

You see this lack of appreciation in most discussions of gentrification and the growth of global cities today. The tendency is to limit the discussions as to the whole complexity of these processes by only seeing what is perceived as simply white folks coming in and displacing poor peoples of color. You don't see the whole class question. You don't see that the people coming in are

not poor whites, because poor whites can't afford to come in. Or you don't see communities like poor multi-racial Kensington in Philadelphia, PA that are proliferating throughout the country, where you have an equality of poverty developing. I've gone to places within Kensington and the neighborhoods around it where we'd go into these homes, and you see homeless families – poor whites – who are stacked up in the housing; where you have the holes in the roof, holes in the ceilings, holes in the floor, living under horrible conditions. Certainly the blacks in the community of Mount Airy, for example, where the petit professionals live have better homes and far better living standards than these poor whites in Kensington and neighboring Fishtown. And the key political question is: Do poor blacks in Kensington have more in common with poor whites in Kensington, or do they have more in common with former Merrill Lynch CEO, multi-millionaire Stanley O'Neil or with Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice or other upper class blacks folks? No, they have absolutely nothing in common with these black folks and everything in common with poor whites.

In fact, I think that speaks to a dangerous kind of racist exceptionalism that says you can have class differentiation among whites but it doesn't exist as a factor among people of color. And no the upper class blacks are not puppets or modern "Uncle Toms". Despite their adroit use of racial colloquialisms and coquetries, they are quite class conscious of their integration into the ruling capitalist class and bent on intelligently and steadfastly defending their class interests like any other of their capitalist brothers and sisters. Of course, the questions of class factors in majorly in terms of how the political dynamics are played out – in terms of the prevailing and historically evolved formula of power in this country, that is, the cruel and shrewd manipulations of the color divisions within the bottom class. And I think this persistent aspect of power relationships in the US has to be taken in account if we're going to have the tactics and the organizing approach that really brings about social change. Otherwise, it's ultimately comes to pity for poor folks – especially poor nonwhite folks who are down and out and people should feel guilty about that. Well, people don't feel guilty about that especially when they are beginning to hurt from increasing class exploitation and dislocations. Historically and politically, we have to have them understand how their oppression is tied to your oppression, how their exploitation is tied to your exploitation.

Your arm is cut off and my finger is cut off. A cut off finger is certainly less than a cut off arm, but it still hurts. If we don't link your hurt with my hurt but

keep comparing whose injury is worse, we're not going to be able to unite the critical mass necessary to move the existing power relationships. Somehow we've got to solve this formula of power described by Dubois if we're going to succeed.

The development of leaders with a proper grasp of social theory and political strategy allow for a deeper grasp of the big picture so we don't become a pawn to a greater power game. You can see the Left – the so-called “Left” – falling into that trap where the tendency, because of the influence of the recent Civil Rights Movement and the National Liberation Movements is for the Left to gravitate and hover around the inner-cities and the people of color exclusively. Whereas the Right – the so-called “Right” – gravitate and hover around the poor whites. Therefore the bigger picture is that both the “Left” and the “Right” are manipulated by the powers that be. And they're continuing to play out a game W.E.B. Dubois described as beginning with the origins of this country.

Lessons From MLK's Last Years

One thing that's very crucial in this period is the role of education and consciousness raising. What I've learned in my experiences in organizing is that building socio-political movement is about more than simply mobilizing bodies. It's essentially about moving minds and hearts. And education is central, especially in an information age. The technological revolution I alluded to earlier has created this ability to impact on people's worldviews that ultimately influence people's political wills, which is what we're trying to get at. Today, unlike any other period, these influences work like a 24/7 netwar against the poor as the first line of attack against all of us.

In looking at the way you fight today as opposed to how we fought yesterday, the question of the relationship of education to organizing is more intimate and integral. You've got to talk as you walk. You've got to teach as you fight. You've got to learn as you lead. These things are inseparable to the problem of organizing, and I think the Saul Alinsky influence and some of the trade union influence and even standard community organizing has separated those questions. These approaches tend to de-emphasize the importance of education and thus miss out on the opportunity of using the daily struggles as a school to elevate consciousness particularly in terms of leadership development.

Part of that education is a recognition of lessons from history. The powers-that-be have done a great disservice with regards to curriculum and the philosophy of education in this country. They've left out whole periods of history and obscured certain periods of history that have direct bearing on what we are trying to do today. The experience of Martin Luther King in the last period of his life is obscured. It is something that is pushed under the rug. Clearly up until a certain point in his development, he was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement that was focused on *de jure* racial apartheid in this country. But at a certain point towards the end of his life, he began to recognize that – even though they were able to get the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Right Act of 1965 passed - the black masses who were succumbing to economic exploitation couldn't benefit from the results of the Civil Rights Movement. He pointed out: What good is it to be able to go into a restaurant now since they've taken down the "whites only" sign if you can't afford a hamburger? Today you don't have the "whites only" sign in the front window of restaurants. You have another sign. It's the menu, and the menu has the different items and their costs. And if you can't afford what's on that menu, I don't care what color you are; there's no need for you to go in there.

This is a very significant development because it offers us the opportunity to move American thinking in a way that focuses on power shifts and social change. But we've got to grapple with this reality. Martin Luther King said "It didn't take a penny to integrate lunch counters in this country" (that is, to defeat *de jure* segregation). But when we talk about ending poverty, to paraphrase him, you're talking about a whole reconstruction of "economic and political power" relationships. He recognized that. And the powers-that-be saw that not only did he recognize that, but that he began to utilize his great international prestige to take actions that were a real political threat to them and their domestic and foreign policies. That's why he was killed; that was proven by the virtual media black-out of the 1999 MLK assassination trial in Memphis, Tennessee.

People should look at the transcripts of the [testimonies of this historic trial](#) where they proved that MLK's proposals threatened the powers that be. The evidence showed that the much-publicized theory – that a lone fanatical white racist killed MLK – was false, that this was the big lie spread by the FBI because they knew public opinion would be prone to believe it at the time. Indeed his murder involved the complicity of elements from all levels of government and intelligent services. It says a lot in terms of lessons for us today. How do we resolve this fundamental problem of power? How do you

unite the dispossessed – the bottom – in order to turn things upside down in terms of resolving the problems of homelessness, healthcare, and all of these problems that are manifestations of this basic problem: the polarity between the concentration of wealth on one hand and the spread of poverty on the other?

4 Cs: A Networked Core of Clear, Connected, Competent, and Committed Leaders

When we talk about really developing a successful movement, there has to be an advanced theoretical and intellectual development to the movement. It has to be an engaged intellectualism. This is something that is indispensable, and this is where the education and consciousness raising element is critical. Theory is basically the summary of historical experience. It's a means to take the general lessons of history as a way to guide your analysis, so you don't find yourself bumping your head against walls that other people before you have bumped their heads against. Yet we have in our culture and mindset an anti-theory, anti-intellectual approach especially when it comes to social struggle. Now, this anti-intellectualism is not coming from the poor and dispossessed. It's coming from the intellectuals. In fact the whole anti-theory philosophy of pragmatism came out of Harvard. It came out of people thinking through a philosophy that would divert attention and be an apology for the economic and political status quo. And it still has influence today as expressed in its most recent variants such as "post-structuralism" and "post-modernism." It has the effect of having people not see the importance of taking the lessons of history and the lessons of experience in terms of theory and using them to guide our analysis and actions. This is something that is a real disservice, because – even though there's reference to theory on the Left – a large part of the anti-intellectualism comes from the Left. It doesn't come from poor folks or people who are trying to figure out what in the hell is happening to them. They're hungry for analysis of why it is that they are poor and who benefits from it and what their strategy is and how we counter their strategy with a strategy. These are the basic yearnings of those who are in a position of pain and suffering every day.

We need advanced theory that enables a kind of organizing that allows us to match our sophistication with the sophistication of the strategists, ideologists, and theologians of the present "powers and principalities." You can't meet sophistication just with sentimentalism. There has to be an engaged

intellectualism – an engaged scholarship – to successfully guide our thinking and fighting. If we don't outsmart the enemy, there's no way we're going to outfight them.

If we're going to go forward, we've got to resolve this problem of education and theory. The important thing that I've learned in my political life was that the major defeats and mistakes were largely a result of a lack of a historical perspective that comes from theory, a lack of understanding of political economy that comes from theory, a lack of leadership development that comes from theoretical development.

And not having leaders – a core of leaders – who are connected to the struggles of the poor and dispossessed, who are committed, who are competent, and who are clear in terms of their analytical approach is problematic in terms of your ability to sustain an effort, to stick and stay the course, to go up against the sophistication of the forces we're dealing with. What I've learned most is that the first stage in any kind of organizing is how do you identify and develop those leaders that emerge in those struggles, how you use those struggles to identify leaders and concentrate them into a guiding intellectual force that can then organize the movement. They have to have the sophistication that matches the sophistication of the powers-that-be.

I don't think that we understand what we're up against. The forces we're up against, on the one hand, don't give a damn about us. They go around the world and subject people to the most excruciating horrors. You think they're not prepared to do that with us? Certainly the history of people of color suggests that they are prepared to do dirty to anybody for dominance and the dollar. Still among broad sections, people cannot think that the people we're up against are people who are very fascistic and who are prepared to sweep us under the rug, throw us off the cliff and have us to live out the most horrible existence. These people don't give a damn about us. You've got to understand that. That's what you're up against.

At the same time, we must respect them, which means to study to know and keep up with them in their strategic thinking and moves. They are the powers-that-be, and they are the most organized. They have the chambers of commerce and the different trade associations and most importantly, they have very sophisticated "think-tanks:" the Rand Corporation, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the Carnegie Endowment, Center for Strategic and

International Studies (CSIS), and other such groupings. The Carnegie formation is now organized as the first global think-tank. These major think-tanks study the daily developments around the world; they study a problem before it becomes an issue. This is a tremendous opposition that we face. We've got to know our enemy and strive to know what they know. For if we only know ABC and they know A to Z then we stand to be outmaneuvered and manipulated. Our organizing strategy and tactics must be and can be developed directly in opposition to theirs.

But a lot of organizing makes general references to capitalism and the oppression of people of color at the hands of white folks or something like that, and not an examination of what and who we are really dealing with. Leadership development and the theoretical development that undergirds that leadership development has to take those kinds of things into account if we're going to proceed effectively, if we are going to organize an independent mass socio-political movement that can move the issues that affect us today.

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6 Comments



Nitza Vera

Nov 4, 2009,
16:14

HI Willie; God bless you. How is Marion, the General and everyone at NWRU? Give them my love. Together in the struggle, Nitza

[\[Reply\]](#)



Vinny

Nov 5, 2009, 2:27

Willie,

Your article was a pleasure to read. I may or may not have more to say after I have had some time to reflect on it. For now I would like to say that the two quotes that really resonated with me were:

1) "Your arm is cut off and my finger is cut off. A cut off finger is certainly less than a cut off arm, but it still hurts. If we don't link your hurt with my hurt but keep comparing whose injury is worse, we're not going to be able to unite the critical mass necessary to move the existing power relationships."

2) "You've got to talk as you walk. You've got to teach as you fight. You've got to learn as you lead."

Thank you for your contribution. I look forward to reading more.

Vinny

[\[Reply\]](#)[Jacob Russell](#)Nov 23, 2009,
13:21

Class is America's forbidden word, the one reality that crosses all lines. The ruling elite change, but the weapon of choice stays the same. Thanks for your fine article. Keep up the good fight.

[\[Reply\]](#)[Debanuj
DasGupta](#)Dec 19, 2009,
3:06

Dear Brother Willie (and friends at Organizing Update), your article.interview is wonderful. I especially love your clarification of power shifting vs. generating activity without fundamental shifts in power.

Building upon your analysis, in the spirit of intellectual discourse, might I ask you (and Organizing Update, given

the categories of articles for the site)how do you conceptualize multiple forms of power that bind our lives? While Capitalism/Post-Capitalism/ Neoliberalism frames our economic positions/ access to power, class positions, so does our gender (identity) and sexuality. Let me be clear, I am not speaking of bourgeois feminism/LGBT rights movement. I am speaking of the ways heterosexism (notions of family, feminine labor, masculine labor) are all embedded within systems of production.

In my work (intersections of sexuality and migration) it is evident that immigrant women labor organizers when engaging with labor organizing not only challenge “capitalist modes of profit accumulation” but also challenge sexism embedded within capitalism and the labor movement. Similarly, undocumented transgender folks, queer detainees when engaging with immigration reform are challenging “neoliberal security regimes” along with challenging heterosexism that is the building block of immigration regulations. Even when the immigrant rights movement works to create “humane immigration regimes”, without unpacking what the inherent notions of “family reunification” means will reify certain systems of oppression.

I bring this up with deep love for each of the contributors, and you. I agree we need to reflect on social movements, political philosophies, and part of that needs to be a rethinking of the “recognition” vs. “redistribution” framing of social change/social justice. What often passes as recognition (gender and sexuality recognition in law/citizenship rights) is not just recognition and open to “cultural hegemony”, rather at times are “third spaces” /sites of dangerous redefining of power. Thanks for all your lovely work.

[\[Reply\]](#)



Susan

Dec 19, 2009,
13:06

This was a great article. It really captured my beliefs about social justice. But I think it does miss two pieces. First, in discussing structures of power, it misses an important intertwined element: relationships. Bias and stereotypes because of "otherness" irrespective of power, although they may be nurtured and inflamed by power. Thus, how individuals feel about groups is an important part of the equation for why there are injustices (and steps towards justice). Second, people have different values. Although I personally focus on equity and the economy, I have come to realize that others hold other values as more important. Thus, in Willie's example, even all the oppressed poor would not necessarily be a unified group. I think the Right has done an excellent job of understanding and leveraging this. Anyhow, I would love to see a follow-up article about what this means for how organizing strategies might be different and implications for how the left is structured.

[\[Reply\]](#)

Cathy Talbott

Dec 31, 2009,
13:34

Thank-you, Willie for a most enlightened essay. It gives me much to chew up and devour. Hope you're well and that 2010 is a most productive year in the struggle.

Cathy

[\[Reply\]](#)

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