

READING THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE FUNDED
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE WEALTH
TO BRING TO THE TABLE...

What happens when young people in a position to provide funds to social justice organizations join a book group to read The Revolution Will Not Be Funded - and blog about it?

This round up captures some threads of exchange and is intended to encourage a broader discussion among both funders and organizers thinking about how to build stronger movements in the U.S.

The Revolution Will Not Be Funded is an anthology of essays organized and edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

The contributors to this book-group blog are constituents of Resource Generation (RG) who attended Making Money Make Change (MMMC), an annual 4-day gathering for young people with wealth committed to social change.

Many have more experience with organizing than philanthropy, and many are just starting a process to move money, bringing financial resources to organizing initiatives.

What insights can we gain from veteran movement builders in The Revolution Will Not Be Funded?

Because the group did not have a process for agreeing to the release of the blog with attribution, it is released here as a compilation without names.

The purpose of sharing the exchange is to surface some of the implications and ideas considered by young people with wealth striving to find ways to constructively engage movements for social justice.

Inquiries and ideas can be sent to Dolphin.Foundation@gmail.com.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2007

Letter to book editor Andrea Smith

I wrote a letter to Andrea Smith to let her know about our reading group.

-----Original Message-----

Sent: Monday, October 08, 2007 4:14 PM

Subject: MMMC book group for The Revolution Will Not Be Funded

As you may be aware, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded" has caught the attention of young people with access to wealth striving to support movements for social justice. For several years, Resource Generation has reached out to this constituent group, helping share ways to leverage class privilege for social change.

Participating in that process, I have circulated Ruthie Gilmore & Suzanne Pharr's keynote recordings from the 2004 INCITE! conference, and nearly every constituent of Resource Generation attending the U.S. Social Forum attended INCITE!'s session on "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded." Some have since contributed to an email exchange on a group listserve... and yet, there is still a restless need for a solid form and format to support a more thorough discussion.

Two days ago at the Making Money Make Change gathering, more than 30 of the participants signed up to join a reading group together. We want first to read and understand the articles in "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded", and then to discuss our own experiences both participating in and challenging the philanthropic sector while trying to move money to the movements we often also support as organizers.

In the process of this reading, we hope participants will write personal reflections and responses that could be useful for engaging further discussion outside the group: What implications do the ideas in the book have for young people with access to wealth trying to answer calls to bring more resources to movements for social justice? Like the authors in your collection, participants in the reading group may not agree with each other entirely, but we all agree that it is important to step up to the conversation – especially if it helps inform paths to action.

As one of the organizers for the book group, I am writing you and INCITE! this letter to say:

- (a) thank you for the book!,
- (b) as individuals, we are wrestling with some of the same problems from different vantage points,

(c) we want to specifically engage issues and ideas raised in “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded”, and
(d) our proposed pace for the calls extends through January, at which point we hope we are prepared to share some of the writing from that process.

We also welcome any input or inquiries you or other co-authors might want to pose as we get started. Thank you once again for “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded” – the conference, the book, and all the many exchanges it is still stirring.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2007

Can the revolution be partly funded? What is "the revolution" and other questions prompted by the Introduction

So, I have only gotten through the introduction and it touched off so many conflicting feelings, thoughts, and responses that I ended up re-reading it about 4 times and whipping out my highlighter and pen (yes, I'm type A...you should just see what the pages look like now!). Rather than saving up my thoughts until I get through section one, I thought I'd throw out a post with 5 questions from these first 17 pages and hopefully get some discussion started (sorry for the LONG and somewhat rambling post)... here goes:

1. Can the revolution be partly funded and what is "the revolution"?
2. Do social justice organizations really become 501(c)(3)s to get foundation grants?
3. Is the "problem" really the 501(c)(3) structure or the uses this structure has been put to?
4. Is working in a paid, full-time position in a social justice organization appropriate?
5. Is there an appropriate role for nonprofit organizations in social justice movements?

Can the revolution be partly funded and what is "the revolution"?

Yes, I realize that the title is partially meant as a provocative statement to get conversation started rather than a literal statement...but I'm still a bit troubled by it. My questioning comes in two parts. First, despite the assertion that the Non-Profit Industrial Complex "functions as an alibi that allows government to make war, expand punishment, and proliferate market economies under the veil of partnership between the public and private sectors" (9), towards the end of the introduction the authors offer that there may be ways to think about the role of the nonprofit in social movements differently. If we can conceive of possibilities when the nonprofit sector can serve as effective allies in social change movements, is it then fair to use such far reaching and condemning language of them in the first place? Might there be a way to conceive of "the revolution" being partly funded, of at least a part of it working to change rather than completely overthrow the system we live in?

This brings me to the second part of this question - what in fact is "the revolution?" This to me is a more troubling and far reaching question that I think often plagues those of us on "the left." What issues do we all hold in common (if any) and where are the points of disagreement? Does organizing for disarmament, queer rights, environmental justice, or an overthrow of capitalism (as four sample "revolutions" among many we could list) mean we are organizing for and automatically believe in the other three+ issues as well? Might we each have our own view of what type of revolution is needed? And might some of these revolutionary views possibly work as system reform rather than system overthrow - or is that counter to the very idea of revolution?

Do social justice organizations really become 501(c)(3)s to get foundation grants?

This may be a more technical concern, but one that I find troubling nonetheless. I believe it is important to ensure that as you build an argument, particularly one as provocative as that raised in this book, that you make sure all your foundational facts and assumptions are correct. The authors state that "since the late 1970s, social justice organizations within the US have operated largely within the 501(c)(3) non-profit model, in which donations made to an organization are tax deductible, in order to avail themselves of foundation grants." (2) What I find problematic is laying the blame for the nonprofit system at the feet of foundations. Yes, they are powerful, they control \$550 billion in assets, they give away over \$35 billion a year, and I agree whole-heartedly that their giving is largely to nonprofit institutions that largely sustain or seek only minor reforms of the status quo. But I question whether they are in fact as powerful as we think they are, especially when you consider that foundations are only responsible for 12% of charitable giving each year (that's \$35B out of ~\$275B). Given that most contributions come from individuals, couldn't we argue that most social justice organizations become nonprofits to offer donors a tax write off? And if that is the case, would eliminating the (c)(3) structure actually free social justice movements from the influence of foundations or would it hurt them by making it more difficult to raise broad-based individual financial support? Or would it achieve both freedom and difficulty? And this brings me to my third question...

Is the "problem" really the 501(c)(3) structure or the uses the structure has been put to?

I wonder if the critique of the nonprofit sector isn't more properly directed at the current system than the explicit laws on the books? Nonprofits can actually do a great amount in

terms of political activity contrary to most beliefs about the limits imposed by (c)(3) status. And while I absolutely believe that we need more non-(c)(3) activity that is directly and explicitly political, aimed at passing legislation and electing progressive leaders, I also think there is a valuable place for (c)(3) activity. Additionally, the problems raised about professionalization and hierarchical leadership seem to me more organizational problems than tax law issues. The same could be argued about the challenges of bureaucracies that form when organizing mass movements. So I'm left asking - is it an inevitability that large scale organizing becomes formalized? How can we retain flexible and shared leadership of large groups of people and can that be done within a (c)(3) environment or does the tax code make this more difficult?

Is working in a paid, full-time position in a social justice organization appropriate?

A fourth, smaller point that I took issue with was the assertion the "careerist model" of the NPIC defeats mass movement organizing. While I agree that as we push for large-scale social change around environmental justice, queer rights, and other critical issues we need thousands or even millions of people involved, but I also believe there is a place for full time organizing. We need leaders who can dedicate their time to helping coordinate and support this type of mass-movement activism and I think that if we can structure movements that support these organizers while they support us, then we are building power rather than diminishing it. I would argue that the danger is when professionalization and careerism elevates paid staff above volunteer leadership and that as we organize we have to pay close attention to these power dynamics rather than eliminating paid-employment of organizers from movement building altogether.

Is there an appropriate role for nonprofit organizations in social justice movements?

All of this brings me to my final question from the introduction, which I hope and expect will be delved into more throughout the book and in our book discussion - is there a role for nonprofits in movement building?

I look forward to more questions, answers, suggestions, disagreements, corrections, additions, and more!

5 comments:

Comment 1

1. What is “the Revolution”?

To me it means dismantling systems of privilege/oppression based on race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, language, disability, age, and more and creating democratic, ecologically sustainable, accountable, egalitarian communities that have collective control over their land and resources.

To me it means self-determination, that is, communities get to decide collectively for themselves what it all looks like.

I think there can be reforms on the way to revolution, just so long as they are not reforms that strengthen the status quo.

4. I think the critique of the careerist model is important. I think you’re quite right, we have to be careful about power dynamics, that is, power differentials between paid organizers who have more power and unpaid organizers.

I think that the ultimate challenge is to build movements where everyone is a leader and participant. Where each person is empowered. Rather than the leader/follower dynamic which can be problematic in terms of power differentials. I think as people with privilege, it is essential that we try to understand how our privilege plays into those power differentials and how what we do may end up disempowering people.

But I still have a lot of questions about leadership/hierarchy/elitism, etc.

The other thing about leadership is that I believe that movements should be led by people from communities most impacted by oppression. People have the right to take part in decisions that affect them. As the Jubilee slogan goes, “Nothing about us without us.”

Comment 2

I you think you raise some good points. I also think you have set the standards high with your highlighting and rereading. A type B person like myself can hardly keep up. But I decided to comment regardless and will deal with whatever I happen to blurt out. I reserve the right to take it all back and change my mind at any time. These issues are mostly new to me and I trying to education myself as I go.

I also took issue with the portrayal of the careerist model. Although I don't think being a full time advocate and activist requires a degree, I do think it requires certain skills and a time commitment. I have participated in protests, canvassing, etc but I do not feel I have the skills needed to lead a movement. I appreciate that there are people in these leadership positions getting things organized. Do they have to be paid to be effective? No, but I think they deserve to be. The author says, "...through this careerist model we are essentially asking a few people to work more than full time to do the work that needs to be done by millions." I'm not sure what point she is raising here. I feel the real issue is not if those few people are getting paid but what has happened to those millions? Why have people become less involved?

In *The Shadow of the Shadow State*, it says that "Both reformist and radical black groups had become increasingly dependent on foundation gifts over membership dues." Why is that? Is it because membership was dwindling and they were forced to seek foundation grants or did they start focusing on grant writing to the detriment of gaining new membership?

Also as for the revolution being partly funded, I didn't much like nonprofits being compared to the PIC and the MIC. Those systems seem built with the intention of harm and punishment, and I don't feel the Nonprofit structure - seriously flawed and all - deserves to be lumped together in that bunch. But then again I'm a social worker and I am reading this book because I have had some of the same concerns about my work and funding systems. Still it is challenging me, and I find myself feeling defensive on some points.

Lastly, I do feel there is a role for nonprofits in building social movements. I think the book makes a valid point that the left and many former activists have transferred their energy into direct service to the harm of building social movements. Why have people abandoned the movements for direct service? Is it because of the funding structure alone? Does it have to be direct service or activism? Or can it be both?

Comment 3

o.k. so i have experience with and thoughts about some of what you ask. one is this: i think it has been very luring for new groups to incorporate as 501c3s due to the myth or hope of all the foundation grants available. non-profit research libraries promote foundation files; business centers and successful allied groups reference them. I have known several groups to go the 501c3 route because of this. My own experience included, wanting to make that pitch or sell that my dance company's niche would fit their mission, determined to make a conquest. the truth is it's not that easy and it takes years for certain foundations to look at you, so there's a false sense of hope that lures groups to apply. In Chicago, i have friends who have incorporated just so they can get funds from a few foundations that they know will fund small theater and dance companies. Grants are automatic bait; attracting individual donors is a bit more sophisticated an activity and not so easy a nut to crack. I think foundations put off a false air of transparency and open appeal, which can be fatal to small non-profits.

Also, in starting a fund, I specifically wanted to work with Crossroads because they would give to groups with bank accounts as well as non-profits or groups with fiscal agents. Now... once we got down to it and we asked for guidance around opening a bank account for collective groups wanting to go about it this way, we found out that dba accounts are no longer an option, so an individual has to sign bank/state papers in order to open up an account. This isn't such a big deal for a business or an entrepreneur, but for a collective body or collaborative project with no single voice, it is impossible to open up an account as a project name anymore without one or two persons having to be accountable, much like a board of directors. Also, Crossroads conceded that even though they are able to give grants to groups

with bank accounts, the vast majority of groups they fund are 501c3s. It has become commonplace for social justice groups to incorporate, and it didn't used to be that way, evidently twenty years ago. And i think it is partly because of this mythic foundation grant \$ lure and because of the bigger system at play which most of the authors in this book are trying to raise.

adding to question # 4. i'm through Section III and in Eric Tang's article on pg. 239 he writes

"Because the vast majority of [baby boomer i.e. family foundations] foundations can only give grants to group with NP status, the past 20 years has seen the rapid proliferation of non-profits among politically progressive to radical sectors. Between 1975 and 1988 the total number of philanthropic foundations in the US grew from 21,887 to 30,388. By 2000, that number had jumped to 56,582. (citing Foundation Yearbook as source for data).

author reply

I absolutely agree that there has been a massive proliferation of nonprofits and that they have replaced much of the voluntary, non-corporate, movement based groups of 30+ years ago. But what I still question is whether the presence/growth of foundations caused this or the tax code - probably a bit of both and some other issues as well...but where does the burden lie? When tax-exemption was instituted as an incentive I believe that drove people to create their groups as nonprofits to get tax-exempt donations from individuals and foundations. Considering that foundations give less than 20% of all gifts it seems individual deductions are a key point. But of course...we cannot know what the sector would have been like without the presence of 501(c)(3) status or whether there would be a "sector" at all in the professional sense of the word...so maybe I should look to the future instead of the past! :)

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2007

How can we fund the revolution?

There is an issue I have personally been struggling with that is raised in the intro that I would like some ideas about.

"To retain the support of benefactors, groups must compete with each other for funding by promoting only their own work, whether or not their organizing strategies are successful. In addition, after being forced to frame everything as a 'success' we become struck in having to repeat the same strategies because we insisted to funders they were successful, even if they were not."

I am not affiliated with any foundation and have only seen this issue from the grant writer's side. But I have been very disturbed by how nonprofits will hide and cover their failures and the interesting techniques they use to highlight their "successes." I personally want to know that what we are doing at this nonprofit is working, and if not, let's stop doing it and try something else. But because everything needs to be framed as a success in a grant application, no one wants to truly evaluate what is working. And no one wants to go out of business even if the agency next door is doing it better.

So I assume being on a foundation that is looking at grants, you want to fund something that is working as well. Then these grant requirements are set up to show if a group is doing successful work. It seems like a bad cycle and I am wondering how funders and nonprofits can break out of it to become more honest and open.

I was patting myself on the back because as an individual donor I give without restriction to nonprofits that I personally know are doing great work, and I have the inside information as a worker in the business. Until I read ahead to how movements and nonprofits shouldn't have to pander to elite white donors and make the right connections with the rich to get funded.

So I ask you- what are we suppose to do as funders who want to support good work? I feel damned if I do damned if I don't right now. Do rich white people have any place in supporting these movements?

3 comments:

Comment 1

I hear you on this one, what are we supposed to do as people with money who want to support social justice movements? I hope we can have some good discussion on this blog about this.

About the role of rich white people, I think Dylan Rodríguez's piece is important as it brings up a lot about white supremacy as it relates to the NPIC.

There's no easy answers though.

Comment 2

In my experience on the grant-raising side, I have actually seen remarkable success if you are willing to be candid and say X worked, Y, didn't so next year we will be continuing X and trying out Z. It takes a willingness to be honest and take a risk to admit failure, but we've actually had several funders that have told us they were impressed by our honesty and are either increasing their contribution or sharing our work with others because of it. I wonder if this might not be a myth that only success sells? In my experience, honesty and qualified success is even more powerful.

Comment 3

i agree, but i'm someone who wishes we could do away with grant proposals all together and just hand people money through trusts or the check fairy. i generally think grant narratives are phony and truthfully, someone could write anything they wish, really - fabricate numbers, claim outcomes. In my foundation consulting experience, it was all about reading btw the lines and writing up reports stating statistics and what transpired last year programmatically for the organization. Financials meant just as much as the work itself, which is also very problematic for me, which confirms some of the arguments Gilmore states in her chapter about the shadow state. It is eerie how much non-profits resemble corporate business practices. I err on

the side of stating truth *always* regardless whether the truth is not always so positive.

PS. I went through social work school myself and it does not surprise me now, after reading this book, why many of us in our 1st year internships would moan over how mismanaged or unorganized or beaurcratic our placements were. we're part of the 'system' that keeps social agencies accountable to gov grants, to gov beaurocracies, to the funders and donors that look to this work as their charity or 'do good' work. We still have homeless people, poor and hungry people, people who need legal counsel and financial literacy. It's all part of the bigger system that survives because of these ills - and i think some of the authors of this book are just trying to wake us readers up to this analysis.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2007

Evading the Collective Tax Base

After leaving MMMC all jazzed up about the need for economic justice education work, Christine Ahn's chapter *democratizing american philanthropy* really struck a chord with me. What do others think? Does anybody know or understand to what extent the role that charitable giving plays on the declining tax base (p. 65) and that what we need is a paradigm shift to recognize that foundation money, often the result of exploited wealth, is public money (p. 74)?

Ahn quotes from *American Foundations: An Investigative History* (2002) that 45 percent of the \$500 billion foundations hold in their coffers belong to the American public. I'm curious how widely - or shallowly - this concern is voiced or held? I know Chuck Collins and his contemporaries weave this into their policy concerns, but how believable is this argument? It does seem odd that the required payout percentage of foundations is 5% when conservative percentage yield on dividend income is around 8%. I witnessed this increase first hand as a board member for a progressive foundation whose assets increased steadily each year over and above what we were generously granting which was 5.5 to 6% instead of the standard 5%. This seems to me like a really valid tactic, one that I hope social change philanthropists advocate for, but it still seems like a rather dormant strategy. Thoughts?

This section also made me want to look up Pablo Eisenberg, quoted as "the nation's leading critic of philanthropy" and read more about his assertions, whether they're far fetched or if people listen.

2 comments:

Comment 1

There is a great collection of Eisenberg's essays, articles, speeches, etc - *Challenges for Nonprofits and Philanthropy: The Courage to Change* - published in 2005 by Tufts University Press.

Comment 2

As Andrea Smith noted at the US Social Forum, foundation money is really our money (the people's money). 100% of the money held by foundations belongs to the people. It was made through profit - the exploitation of people - and not paid to taxes, which is supposed to be a form of collectively held money (though people don't really have control over it). Ruth Wilson Gilmore notes that "foundations are the repositories of twice-stolen wealth - (a) profit sheltered from (b) taxes..." (46)

We should also bear in mind that because of the global nature of the US imperial exploitation, the money doesn't just belong only to the "American public" but to the global public.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2007

What Does This Mean For Us?

Given Dylan Rodríguez's argument that the NPIC has facilitated and continues to facilitate the violent repression of Black and Third World liberation struggles, does this mean that if we give money to non-profits we are just strengthening the relations of dominance instead of challenging them? Are we constricting the space for radical social change? Are we actually unwittingly contributing to violence and oppression?

I do think there are non-profits doing great work (for example, South End Press, that published this book), so that complicates things.

So do we or do we not give money to non-profits? Do we give less? Do we give none? Do we give the same amount and try to change our relationships to non-profits? Do we try to give outside the non-profit system as much as possible?

Or maybe that's not the exact right way to think about it. Because if we are deciding on our own whether or not to give to non-profits, aren't we just replicating the dynamic of the funder/wealthy people deciding what is real activist work? Aren't we acting like foundations, which, as Rodríguez says "may, at times, almost unilaterally determine whether certain activist commitments and practices are appropriate to their consensus vision of American 'democracy.'"? (27)

So we can't just decide by ourselves.

I guess these are practical questions about formulating and implementing a giving plan that I would love to talk to people about.

2 comments:

Comment 1

that's why i'm into the idea of a 'commons or people's trust', one that we as wealthy folks could contribute to and then redistribute as one member, one share - or something of the equivalent. a real big vision, large-scale giving

plan that would benefit a whole slew of organizers and groups working in and outside the NPIC. The problem with just plain giving is that there are so many awesome groups and individuals, how do you choose among them? If a ton of radical wealthy folks pooled their money in some sort of trust, it could be up to a certain sector of self-identified/allied organizers or grassroots groups to decide how it got divided up. That's the kind of power-shift solution to the NPIC i see.. peter barnes in Capitalism 3.0 talks about similar concepts for universal health care or education - why not for grassroots activism? And i don't see it being an either/or, but a Yes/And kind of a thing.. foundations aren't going away anytime some. people will continue to give to Non-profits, which they should definitely keep doing. This is strategizing around a new way of giving for radical social change.

Comment 2

I think I'm missing something. What's the difference between the People's Common Fund that you're describing and the activist-advised funds run by FEX, Tides, Third Wave, Southern Partners Fund, North Star, etc?

As for the question about who/when/where we should give our money, I just want to share something that was instructive for me. I was paralyzed for years by a fear that I would screw up by giving my money away in an "unstrategic" way at best and a harmful way at worst. Finally, I got over that fear when my middle-class partner stopped accepting my "giving money away is complicated" line. Basically, she said "get over it! you're giving yourself and your money way too much importance. Unless you are intentionally tying strings to the money (like foundations do), you aren't going to be harmful. And as long as you give it to groups that are challenging oppressive relations of power, it isn't going to be unstrategic. Meanwhile, your money isn't doing anything strategic at Merrill Lynch other than funding companies that do harm."

That really took the pressure off me by helping me get perspective on the whole situation. When I saw it like that, I realized I was stressing about whether I was going to be a good donor or the best donor.

Anyway, not sure if that was entirely relevant, but hopefully it will help someone.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2007

Funding Vs. Organizing

This book reminds me that there are different roles we can play in promoting social change. One way is to *fund* social movements, and another way is to *join* social movements.

As someone with a wealthy background, I don't see my role in social change movement building just as a funder. I want to get involved in social change movements, not just give money to them. I think this personal involvement in working for change, and being clear about why as wealthy people we want to work for economic equality, and work in coalition with communities who have experienced the destructive impacts of our system, is just as important as being funders. Some groups I have been involved with are Responsible Wealth (<http://www.responsiblewealth.org>) and United for a Fair Economy (<http://www.faireconomy.org>), but I know this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The other role we play is as funders. I have the opportunity right now to serve on the board of a family foundation. A lot of what this book has to say is true, in my experience. It is great to have it all so carefully laid out.

I can say, the family foundation I am part of has absolutely no interest in funding the revolution, or even thinking about the revolution. So where does that leave me as a board member?

For me, at this moment in time, I see it as my work to try to change the way the foundation operates. You could call this rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, and in some ways it is. But what are the alternatives? Don't serve on the foundation board because politically its focus is so different from my own? Or try to engage with a group of people with some fairly conservative values who have control over a significant amount of resources? It has been incredibly interesting and challenging to try to bring about institutional change at the foundation I have access to. It has also really informed my thinking about what kinds of spaces I can participate in as an activist. Right now, I am thinking of participating in this foundation board as a form of organizing in my own community, which is what activists I have worked with over the years have often challenged me to do.

The challenge that the book raises is how to be sure that I'm not just one more privileged white person engaged in philanthropy, essentially promoting the status quo no matter what I tell myself about how this is a way to make change.

1 comments:

Comment 1

I'm so with you! I didn't get a chance to read all the posts before making my own post just now, but I wish I had. You already said a lot of what I was thinking. We need some support in figuring out how to go beyond being funders in our activism as young people with class privilege. Fortunately, RG does have a pretty great conference devoted to organizing within/around family foundations but, unfortunately, the power dynamics aren't set up well for such things (go figure!). I admire you for trying anyway. My dad told me he didn't want me anywhere near my parents' foundation (even though I'm technically on the board) and I haven't really challenged him on it. I'm just less interested in the money than I am in him as a person. I think he really suffers a lot around money. As does my mom. I think if I can figure out how to get at that it will help with the defensiveness. One strategy I've developed for that is just sharing with my parents how much meaning I'm getting out of my own giving to social justice organizations. Would love to hear what other strategies folks have come up with for being activists within the fam.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2007

Thoughts About Giving

I started writing this as a response to "What Does This Mean for Us?", but it got long:

I think the question of "should we or should we not give to nonprofits?" misses the point a little bit. It isn't like nonprofits are some monolithic entity all related in the same way to the analysis put forth in this book. There are many nonprofits doing great work, and to suddenly cease funding to nonprofits would be catastrophic to the social justice movements that currently exist.

That said, it can be hard (for me at least) not to kind of obsess over this or related questions when considering how to redistribute my inherited wealth. The thing about *The Revolution Will Not be Funded* is that it's clearly not written to owning class funders, but to grassroots activists and movement leaders - hence the usefulness of this blog for those of us trying to figure out how the lessons in the book apply to our own choices as people with substantial resources to give away.

But the book presents a broader question that to me is more connected to how movements are structured than how they are funded. I said this in a fishbowl at MMMC, but the rallying cry of the book is not, "Tear down the nonprofit industrial complex!" It's more like (Paula Rojas put it this way at the USSF), "How can we think outside the box of capitalism when we envision how to build movements?" How can we avoid creating a network of social justice organizations that are dependent on/complicit with the "shadow state"? How can we create a movement that is self-sustaining, isn't reliant on elite funders, and supports broad-based participation? How can we create social-justice-oriented communities in which we support each other, foster interdependency, and model equitable, supportive relationships?

I think these questions are incredibly useful to ponder as an activist. An organization I'm a part of, partially in response to the analysis discussed in *TRWNBF*, chose to abandon an effort to get a foundation grant (from RESIST, with the help of a fiscal sponsor) in order to focus more on our grassroots fundraising. We also chose to become a dues-paying organization (on a sliding-scale basis), and both of these choices helped us remember 1)

how important it is to remain accountable to our constituency and 2) how effective grassroots fundraising can be as an organizing tool.

In my position as a rich kid, I think these questions have to be considered from a different angle. Our role in responding to this book isn't to take the challenges posed by the various authors and re-vision, as funders, how a social justice movement should be structured. That would be the exact wrong reaction. On the other side, I think it can be easy (but bad!) to get caught up in guilt, start to despair that our money is dirty and evil no matter what we do, and question whether we have any role in funding movements led by people who are more oppressed than us.

So, in terms of actually implementing a giving plan, I have a few thoughts:

After a brief initial freakout upon reading this book for the first time, I stopped worrying too much about whether or not it's "good" to give money to nonprofits. There are tons of awesome nonprofits doing amazing important work (*and* playing an instrumental role in challenging the dominance of the NPIC) to which I would feel great about giving all the money I possibly can. What's important is to break out of the paradigm that says we should *only* give money to nonprofits. But as it is, nonprofits exist and are a major vehicle for a lot of social justice work that happens right now. When giving money to individual organizations whose leadership I respect and trust, I'm happy to let them assess for themselves whether having 501(c)3 status is more useful for their work than it is limiting.

2) In preparing myself to create my first giving plan, I did a lot of research trying to figure out where to give money in a way that both redistributed the decision-making power and didn't support the nonprofit industrial complex. The best models I found for redistributing power were in foundations, which horrified me at first because I was basically convinced that foundations were an evil tool of capitalism. I still mostly think that, but I've also learned enough to be confident that there are a few foundations that are a) led by or accountable to grassroots activists, b) actively anti-racist, c) regularly give to groups that aren't 501(c)3s, and d) have a critique of the NPIC and work to challenge problematic power dynamics in grantmaking. They're still limited by the fact that they exist in and are influenced by capitalism, but so is everything. Being an individual with great inherited wealth is a position that comes with inherent, unavoidable fucked-up power dynamics. I find it's useful to embrace nuance and contradiction in trying to deal with that position. I think it makes sense to give to foundations like this, especially when giving large sums

that couldn't easily be divided between a few organizations with small budgets. In a flawed system, I actually think community-based social justice foundations are one of the best models we have for redistributing owning class power and wealth.

3) The definition of grassroots funding is that organizations get funded by a broad base of constituents. There's nothing stopping us from being a part of this! We should give to things that we're constituents of - not like, the opera and fancy private schools and country clubs, but social justice organizations that support us and that we believe in. For me this means organizations like RG and the Catalyst Project that support my growth as an anti-racist/capitalist/classist activist, organizations working for queer and trans liberation, radical arts and media outlets that I get information and inspiration from, local organizations I'm a part of, etc. Let's work on checking our own privilege and being good allies, but (like someone else already said) let's also conceptualize ourselves as *part* of movements, not disconnected funders standing outside.

4) Our personal giving plans won't bring on the revolution, even if we have millions or billions of dollars. Money doesn't cause social change, activism and organizing do. In the same vein, not giving our money away "perfectly" (as though the possibility exists) isn't going to stop the movement in its tracks. To avoid obsessing over just *how* I give away money, which can be useless and paralyzing, I like to think of giving my inherited wealth to social justice organizing not as a heavy responsibility laden with meaning and irreversible repercussions, but rather as a good personal choice to make because I believe in it and it's the right thing to do. I think there are always a few good general rules to keep in mind (let's *not* start our own foundations, let's not give to organizations that are primarily led by or accountable to people in positions of social power (white folks, rich folks, men...), etc.), but I think giving away money can be a simple thing that should go hand in hand with activism and good politics.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2007

Reparations

I drafted this post weeks ago and never finished it. In the spirit of just getting our thoughts on the blog rather than waiting till I have a finished product, I'm posting it now. I'll write more later.

In response to Tiffany Lethabo King and Ewuare Osayande's article, "the filth on philanthropy," in TRWNBF, I'd like to talk about reparations with folks in this group. King and Osayande argue, "the idea that family foundations should be required as a community to pay reparations has never been a part of the analysis of the white Left" (87). Instead the white Left has seen reparations as the responsibility of corporations and foundations have essentially functioned as brokers for the wealthy.

While I agree with these authors that ultimately foundations should be eliminated, I believe that there is a great need for progressive foundations (as defined by Tyrone), while we are living in a capitalist society. If foundations really do pay reparations, they won't need to exist, because money would no longer be concentrated in the hands of a few. However, we are so far from that reality. I want to know how young, progressive, philanthropists like us can do our part to build a movement for reparations.

I understand reparations as returning what has been stolen (land, resources, wages, and power to poor people and people of color). How do rich kids who value wealth redistribution see their participation in social movements AND their financial giving as contributing to reparations?

1 comments:

Comment 1

"as contributing to reparations..." I just went through a set of 60 organizations I follow and support (not all are non-profits, but even those have fiscal sponsors somewhere), and I could only identify 4 that had any explicit discussion of reparations in their organizing and political education work.

I am *sure* I have overlooked a larger number of groups explicitly campaigning for reparations, but honestly, I've really not heard explicit reparations demands raised by other groups either.

So, I wonder:

Is this because I've been involved with groups that are foundation-dependent and under always-tenuous funding concerns, literally such that they can't "afford" to raise the claim?

Or is it because it's a difficult demand to satisfy without functional structures for redistributing wealth via reparations?

If the (relatively small) sum available through my family foundation was used to pay reparations - how would that work in a way that would be widely regarded as fair?

Would use of the funds for reparations payments have the effect of limiting or eliminating support for the organizations that are trying to build movements for social change?

Given the critiques of those movement formations, would a voluntary redistribution of a tiny fraction of the nation's accumulated wealth via reparations payments result in a stronger (or weaker) potential for movement formation?

Is there a connected and valid claim for reparations due to all people exploited by the global economy? And how would / could / should any accumulated sum be divided to make those reparation payments as well?

Public activist-advised foundations are essentially pools of accumulated wealth that have voluntarily ceded control to boards of activists for disbursement. If reparations were a widely felt claim and a compelling strategy for social justice organizers, then would the activist boards of public foundations be the first place to vet a proposal for how it could work?

If there were a structure for involuntary redistribution for reparations, what else would / could / should it look like aside from (A) a steeply progressive tax structure with a public policy process that could serve as the delivery mechanism (New Deal style) or (B) asset seizure (early Zimbabwean independence mvmt)?

These are all questions that "The Filth on Philanthropy" raised for me.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2007

Notes from 11/13 conference call

As another form of engagement aside from the blog, the reading group had 4 conference calls. Though it was a challenging medium of exchange for the number of participants, the discussion typically illuminated new insights - and always more questions.

Brief notes were kept for the benefit of those who could not join the call, which is a tough job for any scribe. As a result, these notes tend to reflect snapshots of the conversation.

While the notes lack depth and detail, the range of observations and questions abbreviated by the scribe still make them an interesting read.

Everyone on the call talked a bit about why they were interested in the book and the call:

- I wonder how I can be an ally of movements as someone with money, and I am excited that we are trying to engage the book.
- I can talk about the book with anybody, but this is a unique context: the perspective of young people with wealth engaged in social change work.
- I am thinking about the ideas of common wealth and taxes.
- I think the book brilliantly describes how things actually work and I am interested in seeing how we react to the book.
- I am interested in funding unincorporated groups.
- I'm interested in the book because I want to support movements, and I think that white supremacy informs the Non-profit Industrial Complex (NPIC).
- I consider myself a radical person and this book contained radical, important ideas. I liked discussing the book with others who have a similar perspective, but it did make her feel Liberal.
- I wonder, what is wrong with reform? And how should a reformist person affect change? I think the ideas in the book are very challenging.

- The analysis is informative in how to catalyze change in my family foundation.
- I was excited when I originally heard about the book, and I've tried to bring the analysis from the book into my own work but it feels weird because I'm wealthy.
- I read the book a couple of months ago, it helped me to organize the MMMC conference. I want to connect organizing funders to organizing people.
- I haven't read the book yet but wanted to be part of the conversation so I could help influence my family foundation to do more revolutionary work.
- I am just here to listen.
- I'm thinking about power and groups and how power can be used for positive things and negative things, and I want to figure out how to make money work for progressive movements.
- I found the book exciting as a wealthy person and an activist, and I want to figure out the conflicts between those positions.
- I am excited to engage in these questions with people with resources.

Guiding questions for discussion:

The definition of the NPIC (from pg 21-22 of the book): "The NPIC is a set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning class proctorship and surveillance over public political discourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements since about the mid 70's."

What is the NPIC and what does it mean to us? Do our experiences as funders and activists match up with the authors' ideas about the NPIC and why do we work with non-profits and foundations?

- I have seen organizations lose money because of supporting radical ideas and debates taking money that has strings.
- I think the description of the NPIC is accurate but I think you can't force people to support radical causes they don't believe in.

- I see and experience the professionalization of non-profit jobs, and I think it is bad that people with privilege get organizing jobs instead of people from impacted communities; that works against our goals.
- In working with the AIDS community, I notice that now there is an industry of AIDS service providers who talk about behavior management and safe sex but core demands for better health care are not met. This limited political vision is set by rich white people with resources; radical orgs could not get funding.
- From my experience with my family foundation, bringing recipients into the room to talk about the funding process is very foreign.
- The summary of the Ahn essay on pg 9 resonated with me. The legal framework makes it so that to have foundations as a tax shelter the money must be given to 501(c)3 organizations. To remedy, would we prefer to eliminate the tax shelter and send the money to the feds, or exploit tax shelter and send to fdns?

Because we ran out of time, that was the end of the call.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

***beyond* the non-profit industrial complex**

Reading this section of the book was like coming home. Everything started to make sense.

First of all, I'll just repeat what I said on the last call, which is that I have seen in my own activism *many, many* of the ill-effects of the non-profit industrial complex that are named in the first and second parts of the book.

For all the reasons given by the authors, I do not believe that a revolutionary transition to a world with a more equitable distribution of resources and power will come about through voluntary wealth redistribution (philanthropy) or the reform of philanthropy (encouraging philanthropists to give to social justice organizations, rather than museums, schools and hospitals). Just to name a few of those reasons: big money changes accountability and ownership of organizing work; inherent contradiction of wealth accumulators funding work that challenges the right to accumulate private wealth; professionalization of organizing distances organizers from their communities; doesn't challenge oppressive power dynamics -- begging for twice stolen money.

So, why am I part of Resource Generation and MMMC if I'm not committed to "donor organizing" as a solution? Because, I want to organize alongside young people with wealth that are interested in *participating as young people with wealth* in the long and broad movement to end wealth disparity. That means: participating as vocal/visible proponents of reparations, living wages, affirmative action, universal healthcare, workers rights and unionization, and vocal/visible opponents of tax cuts for the rich, corporate personhood, borders, prisons, sweatshops, and environmental injustices (just to name a few components of the historic movement to more equitably distribute resources and power).

I realize many people in RG and who attend MMMC are committed to donor organizing and the reform of philanthropy as a strategy for bringing about social justice. That's not something I would change. [Moving no-strings-attached money to social justice organizations certainly doesn't hurt. After all, I'm giving away my inheritance - because as a young, healthy, overly educated, white male, I'm privileged enough to not be worried about sustaining myself on my earnings alone.] The only thing I would like to see is an

additional and explicit political education and *action* component to Resource Generation and MMMC. It should **not** be an expectation that constituents coming in the door go out the door as political activists, but it should be an option that is explicit and supported.

What would it mean to support young people with wealth who want to take action beyond opening their wallet? Most of the workshops at MMMC this year were focused on the personal: what's *your relationship to your money* on a personal, technical and political level. Only one or two workshops talked about roles we can play in the movement beyond redistributing our own money. The rest were focused on how we feel about our money, how we give our money and how we relate to ourselves as a class of people who have been privileged with money. That's all **really important stuff** that should not go away. But in addition to that, wouldn't it be nice if there were also workshops about how young people with wealth *as young people with wealth* can plug into and participate in the movement for reparations? Wouldn't it be nice if there were a workshop on the roles that young people with wealth can and have played in the labor movement? Wouldn't it be great if there were a space for young people with wealth to hear about ways in which other young people with wealth have participated in challenging corporate personhood? I know I'm looking for ways to take my class-based activism beyond giving money and would really like opportunities to hear and see how other young people with wealth are doing it. Others might not be, but that's why there lots of workshops from which to choose, right?

I heard Alixa and Naima and the folks from POOR Magazine say they were really "inspired" to see young people with wealth getting organized. I could be wrong, but I don't think that what got them inspired was the dollar amount of money we might move. I think they were inspired by what might happen if young people with wealth joined forces (against their parents and grandparents and teachers' best intentions) with the working poor of the world. It's not that it would be earth-shaking or turn the tide or anything. But I imagine it would be a welcome sight for many who have felt like they are always banging on the doors and not being heard on the inside.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

Call Notes from December 4th

Facilitators asked everyone to respond to these two questions:

What are alternatives to the NPIC that you have seen or imagined existing?

What has part 2 of the book stirred up for you?

- I've seen a lot of the things described myself, especially the professionalization component. It's really good to have the framework to give clarity to those experiences. I feel more empowered and excited about thinking outside the box, and I feel like doing things completely different is necessary.

In particular, I had never identified with the battered women's movement and had never even thought of them as a movement. The articles helped me understand why that was. Now I understand domestic violence as super-political whereas she had previously written it off as non-political.

- This call itself embodies one aspect of the alternative. We are all on the call not as part of our paid work but out of our personal desire to be part of change.
- Takes so much guts to do anything outside the non-profit as an activist. We need to support each other in doing the not-mainstream thing to do.
- Was thinking about student group (Students Challenging Racism and Privilege). It was challenging for me to figure out how to organize, promote leadership do political education. Now I have a non-profit job and feels really ineffective compared to before, and many of the people in my office do, too. Those same challenging things we were doing in the student group aren't happening in my workplace.
- Question: sometimes at RG we think of everyone as individuals and think about how we can help them move their money. What would it look like to think of ourselves as a group?

- I reflected on 8 years of organizing while reading the book, and one piece that was missing from that work for me was being accountable to community. As an individual activist, I wasn't accountable to anyone. Everyone put energy into what they were personally excited about. People who didn't have time to show up to tons and tons of meetings didn't have a say. Structures where we set movement priorities democratically needed.

One example of that, kind of, has been taking the initiative to get feedback from the community I serve in HIV/AIDS work. But it isn't about a community mobilizing together.

- Feeling the accountability piece. Trying to figure out how to be more accountable to communities that are struggling against oppression. Realize my class privilege has allowed me to jump from one thing to the next (palestinian rights, anti-prison organizing, etc...). Also am really focused on trying to develop better relationships with people (especially locally in Boston). Still part of a pretty elitist activist community. Not part of a strong enough base to challenge any major power.

Thinking about reparations and challenging white supremacy. How would reparations actually work? Would probably need to be a massive restructuring of the whole system.

In Boston, there's a lot of theorizing about oppressed communities. Rather than working with them. We should be trying to participate. It's going to be messy but we'll learn.

Examples from Boston: There's a movement called the Boston Workers Alliance. Mostly people that have been incarcerated and face employment and housing discrimination. Right in the process of applying for non-profit status right now. So is the Jericho Movement, which is trying to support political prisoners from 60s and 70s.

- The book stirred lots of issues. Including individual vs community. Been thinking a lot about how to participate as a young person of wealth. Not just as funder or fundraiser. Also, been thinking, How has my non-profit work been part of the buffer-zone strategy described by Paul Kivel? Been thinking about how I can use my

non-profit job for the bigger picture rather than for the institutional goals. Despite our analysis, still fall into professionalization trap.

- Activists and non-profits can all lack accountability. Trying to figure out how we can avoid oversimplify things. Not malign all non-profits. Been challenging myself to go in a lot of directions rather than get frustrated and drop out of non-profits altogether. I am enjoying and am motivated by work organizing young people with wealth, but wondering how I can apply this analysis to my work. How do we make accountability remain central?
- Was struck by the way the book identified things that *normalized* wealth accumulation and *normalized* non-profits as organizing. Got me thinking about something else that has been normalized: the right to meaningful paid work. How many people really get to have meaningful paid work? An example of a real world alternative: I know middle-class folks of color with children who choose to work less than 40 hours a week for wages in order to spend a lot of time doing community organizing. They live in collective housing, volunteer at the food co-op for discounts, home school their kids and are thrifty.
- (1) 2nd part of the book was more tractable. Had more practical advice for what to do, as a funder with \$1 million. Would it really be helpful if funders walked away from organizations because "the revolution will not be funded"? no. (2)The piece on reparations caused me to ask what I'm doing that looks like reparations. I was stunned to realize I didn't really have anything there. (3) Non-profit organizers in the U.S. don't really have a better place to go now. What does that mean?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2007

How do insights from TRWNBF inform my practice of making contributions?

Here's my quandry: I have access to financial resources beyond any defensible claim of possession, and I'm trying to make them available to organizers building movements for social justice, but I don't want to participate in a process that undermines movement-building either.

How could I go about this without reinforcing the non-profit industrial complex - and even encourage alternatives instead?

What I've tried so far...

I do make contributions to groups that are not incorporated non-profits, but most of them still have fiscal sponsorships that facilitate the flow of tax-exempted funds. Therefore, to maximize the amount of money I can move to groups that are mobilizing, I've used a shell of a foundation as a tax shelter. It has no endowment; it's just a stop-over account.

I've chosen to seek out organizations that are challenging relationships of power, primarily in the South, drawing on grantee lists from activist-advised public funds as a pre-qualified short list (like Resist!, Fund for Southern Communities, etc.). Though I already know in January most of where the money will be committed that year, I tend be responsive to correspondence with groups issuing calls to action and calls for support throughout the year.

I have tried to (a) make contributions that are small enough that no single organization could be influenced by the resources being there or not, and (b) make contributions to enough groups that I can still add a total of \$50k/year to the resource base available to those movement-building organizations.

What should I do differently?

Though my giving plan grows each year, some have told me that my approach (above) is

profoundly “unstrategic,” claiming it would be much better if I involved other organizers in a process of deliberation and due diligence in order to disburse money in larger chunks - like 5 grants of \$10k each with three-year commitments. The thought of all that preoccupied effort and administrivia actually makes me feel sick.

So, I’ve stuck with the smaller contributions, but *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* raises more questions.

(1) Should I stop using a tax shelter?

Let’s say I’ve committed \$500 to an unincorporated group of change-makers with a powerful political analysis across the board. Though they are not a non-profit, they have rigged up a cash flow from a re-granting foundation (which takes 7%) to a collective (which takes 2%) to them - classic NPIC bureaucracy! I can either route the money through the tax shelter, or through a regular checking account after deducting the amount for taxes due. I am indifferent, and the money is essentially theirs, so why am I making the decision? I called them up. After some deliberation, they decided they’d prefer to have some money (\$50) go to two non-profit groups they believe in rather than have 3 times that much money go to the federal government, which they don’t trust.

Other groups might have answered that question a different way for different reasons. One group preferred that I pay the taxes because they were having trouble raising money from sources that didn’t need the tax deduction. They were a political campaign organization literally cornered inside the non-profit sector by their progressive patrons.

Because I’ve already committed contributions to about 40 organizations, I’m thinking about writing to each one to inquire, “Would you prefer me to go ahead and pay the taxes?” If yes, the group would effectively receive 30% less than if I used the tax shelter - but that might enable them to get more than 30% additional value out of the money since it would not be restricted from activities that lobby government officials and endorse political candidates.

(2) Am I indulging / driving a vast waste of human effort by responding to newsletters and request for financial support throughout the year?

While I've heard some fellow organizers complain about mailings (e-mail, snail mail, voice mail, etc), reducing their purpose to pandering to donors, I've observed that the fastest way to shrink a volunteer pool (the more valuable form of support through participation!) is to assume the people they want to be involved already know what's going on and forgo effort to put out the word.

I've heard - and experienced - that it is gratifying to receive a contribution in the mail after sending out a newsletter update on victories, setbacks, and a lot of hard work. Some organizers tell me the note of appreciation and encouragement I send with each check is worth more than the money. But I know that realistically, I probably wouldn't be writing those notes unless I was also trying to get a check out the door to send more fuel for the fire.

(3) Should I use an activist-advised public foundation instead?

Maybe that's more principled because it ostensibly shifts decision-making power from me alone to a more credible and responsive set of movement-building decision-makers. However, I continue to hear from organizers (and agree from my own experience), that a steady, reliable pattern of smaller, unrestricted contributions to multiple allied organizations that already receive support from the activist-advised public foundations is more helpful than loading up another grant through the counter-productive "bake-off" practices that even public foundations have adopted.

(4) Am I a free-rider on the work of public foundations organizing activists who serve as guiding lights in progressive philanthropy?

Yes. Even though I'm frustrated with some of the presumptions and practices of progressive philanthropy, it's absolutely true that I take cues from long-time organizers who are making decisions about the use of limited movement resources to address changing priorities and opportunities in each new political moment. That's why I kick in about 10% of my giving plan every year to folks rallying for progressive philanthropy.

(5) Now that I've read TRWNBF, should I stop aiding and abetting progressive philanthropic organizations?

Again, I don't think I'm moving enough money to matter, but the question is driving me up the wall.

(6) Should I scrap the giving plan idea and just start an installment plan for paying reparations instead?

Recognizing the persistent state of economic apartheid that has framed the experience of my life, reparations make political and philosophical sense to me. However, I admit to being a bit confounded about how to practically pay (voluntary) reparations in a way that is any better than sending money to an outfit like People's Hurricane Relief Fund, which is essentially organizing for (involuntary) reparations in New Orleans.

(7) Should I stop giving to non-profit organizations?

I understand (through the book and through personal experience) that non-profit corporations are structures that dampen the revolutionary potential of vibrant and visionary movements for social justice - and I'd like to avoid reinforcing that system. I'm not keen on a de-funding response to the problems. The book raised an alternate kind of question: should community-based groups mobilizing to confront unjust hierarchies of power stop accepting contributions from foundations or people who want tax deductions? I'll keep listening for that answer.

Even though *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* raised in my mind these questions (and more), the book authors argue well the point that "the revolution" does not depend on how I (or other people with wealth) answer them. Nevertheless, I don't think young progressive people with wealth are entirely inconsequential, and I am looking forward to being influenced by the thoughts and ideas of others who have also read this book.

4 comments:

Comment 1

interesting post. i'm curious. what do you think an "installment plan for paying reparations" would look like? would it be through some sort of trust or fund? to your knowledge, does one exist other than your reference to people's hurricane relief fund?

also...

"7) Should I stop giving to non-profit organizations?

The book raised an alternate kind of question: should community-based groups mobilizing to confront unjust hierarchies of power stop accepting contributions from foundations or people who want tax deductions?"

I know that in the last section, Rojas et al makes a point to say "We are not of the belief that 501c3s are bad. In our view, the problem is a lack of balance." And Tang wants to make us aware that NPIC has risen to the center of the movement, which is also unbalanced. I don't think they are suggesting that groups stop taking foundation or tax sheltered money [curious. in which section was that apparant for you?] but rather they expose the mechanisms through which our donations work, which is something new for us to think about and potentially strategize around.

I think they are putting out this call for help, new visioning that's really kind of exciting to me, for us wealthy progressive folks to think about. There are no instructions because they don't have the answers! But together I think we could forge some new models. What if we started documenting gifts to individuals as gifts to autonomous movement builders? Those are tax deductible up to \$10,000 a year (for those concerned still about tax exemption). There might be loopholes, but it would be worth investigating. Or, create a reparations fund for the South that could operate like a trust. The trustees could be allies chosen by grassroots groups themselves and then money could flow to groups both incorporated and not, once criteria is set.

do you think this is all too idealistic?

Comment 2

I don't think you're idealistic, and in fact, I'm inspired by your industrious thinking! At the risk of mis-using comment space to bend the thread, I want to pick up a couple of your ideas:

Reparations - I don't know a structure for this. There are certainly activist-advised funds in the South and elsewhere - and we could contribute to and fund-raise for them as a reparations claim, but I'm not aware that any are explicitly 'reparations' funds - so would the impact/effect be any different than the progressive philanthropy profile? Actually, I'm not sure I'm aware of active structures for reparations payments. A good question to pose to a broader group, I think.

And, wow, I'm curious about using the individual gifts route... I think it would be a good experiment, so I read up on it a bit:

"There are no income tax consequences to the recipient of the gift. The donor pays no tax for each gift under \$11,000 a year, and does not receive any income tax deduction for the amount of the gift given (unless made to a qualified charity). However, if gifts exceed \$11,000 per recipient per year, the donor is subject to the gift tax rules."

To clarify: I think this means that I would pay all the taxes on the money, and the recipient would not.

So, the additional "cost" of this path compared to the regular tax-deductible contribution route would be about 10%, by my rough calculation and assumptions. (Key assumption, contributor is *not* pocketing income tax deductions but recycling them to a giving plan instead.)

In other words, instead of contributing to a non-profit corporation that reports salaries for employees, I gift (using the specific IRS term & meaning) the same amount directly to an individual who would not have to pay income taxes on the money received - because I would have effectively paid those

taxes for them. The net money received by the government is about 10% more, but the recipient is spared the 501(c)3 baggage, which might be worth the 10% reduction in net receipts.

Two caveats:

(1) This idea is clearly not appropriate for non-profit career people, most of whom need benefits for their families, etc. But for the autonomous formations discussed in TRWNBF, it could be a supplemental form of support to cover basic expenses, etc.

(2) As a gift, "no goods or services would be delivered" - so it is not a substitute for a paycheck. If so, I would essentially be contracting a person for a certain scope of work, and the IRS would want a 1099 Form to collect taxes from the recipient.

Is there a gotcha? Limit to number of \$11k contributions in a year? or a lifetime?

Comment 1 addendum

I think it's up to 11K that is tax-free for someone to gift. After that, you or I or John Doe would pay the taxes on the amount of money we donated. So essentially, we could give whatever amount of money we wanted away since there is no tax exemption after the 11K, which is why it probably doesn't excite too many people.

But as an option for funding autonomous movement makers, I think it could be a possible angle for progressive donors like us. I'd like to talk to an accountant and do more research with you. I'd also really be interested in co-authoring a piece with you and other RG and non-RG folks if interested about new models or angles that are possible. Reforming the capitalist economy to a socialist state is not currently possible, but talking about how trusts are created, citing examples benefiting the public good as ideas for a

potential new reparations funding outlet to benefit grassroots groups, may be possible.

Or even highlighting worker-owned cooperative business models or collectively directed 501c3s as positive examples of ways non-profits and other socially conscious entrepreneurial businesses are challenging the system, within the system - we could so use hearing from their stories, their models! William Greider talks about this strategy in his chapter, Building a Moral Economy, in Inequality Matters. It could be interesting for a working group to take on some of this research. What if there was an essay/paper that uncovered examples of groups working in horizontal ways, backing/agreeing with INCITE! authors about the NPIC becoming too dominant and the need to revisit ways to support autonomous movement makers (in addition to 501c3s) and possible avenues to help support them, i.e. individual gifts and other alt big-picture ideas.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2007

Notes on December 18th Call

The Revolution Will Not Be Funded

Conference Call on Part 3 of the Book

Questions: What did Part 3 stir up for you? What was your emotional response?

- Got it finally, what they were saying throughout the book. Examples were Latin American movements; I've studied them a lot and have an affinity for them. If the Zapatistas were paid, would the movement be as revolutionary?, then cut off funding, replicate state structures, form/substance, they're able to innovate outside state/ngo structure. This was salient, brought to focus for me. Other revolutionary movements fail because they replicate state structure. It's bigger than non-profits. NPs replace corporate structures.
Doubts: more related to part 2... donor organizing, not really good. The question of what can we do? A lot of movements cited, left me seeking further instructions.
- I identify with that - waiting for more instructions. My own sense of insecurity. I must be doing it all wrong, not just organizing. How many initiatives are anti-NP or non-NP that I am involved with?
Giving practice: to what extent am I an enabler? Not engaging creative dissent. Trying to fill in all blanks should I do it this way, that way?
- A lot of foundation work is result driven, outcomes, several authors talk about radical work about process - tried to make that part of donor circle in Chicago, but a struggle - what does look like? How can we structure decision-making to be risky when working with others?
Emotional: The intimate, personal nature, linked to how live daily lives, both, pulling selves into it - the relations in ourselves, between people, our relationships with groups.
Sat on that a lot, try to integrate it.
- Need for feelings, intimacy. My organizing work moved me around a lot. In Florida in 2000, then with labor union to Omaha, Nebraska; prevented from establishing myself with meaning, working as effectively, burnout effect - not want to move.

- It's been a long time since I read book, so I flipped back through. Extricate lessons to be learned as activist, and person with funds, different ways to approach book from different perspectives.

Emotional - Freak out: as organizer of MMMC, minor crises, what are we doing? No, no this is important. So many questions come up related to MMMC. As individual person giving money, point arrived at, not important. How to make perfect giving plan that is radical, not in NPIC, but then the power dynamics of giving, avoiding fucked up power dynamics. Many ways to give strategically, not up to me to decide, wielding power. Even though I think about it all the time, I discover more and more things I was not aware of that come up in work I do.
- 2 things: Eric Tang cites César Chávez - farmworkers have to pay for their union because they have to own it. So simple: whoever pays for an organization owns the organization, what does that mean when some people give more money?

Also Paula Rojas puts it all together, brings in lessons from all over, horizontal sharing of knowledge and models.

Emotional: all kinds of emotions: excited at having deeper knowledge, confusion about what is our role and what do we do now?
- Part 2 - what is my role in contributing to movements? As years went by, pushed into role of donor, lost idea of being activist. This book is reminding me - being a donor not the point, even if we got so many people with wealth to give way money to great organizations, it wouldn't really change that much. It's only a little of the work, rethink again, for 100th time, taking lessons. Not have our only role be around money.
- Part 3 Very moving - a couple essays by friends, about projects I am really invested in. Moved by Paula Rojas' piece on cop in head and hearts; decolonization so deeply needed. In so many projects, NP never really talked about. Scope of what is considered social change by what is fundable, broke open for me in beautiful ways, seeing how much is at stake, what means to yearn, to fight, bigger than money - a bigger vision and strategy than any NP.
- If you do start living and breathing the movement, if it's all the time, what's driving you in the world. So much fear of isolation, separation from family, friends, regular people. How much of life can really dedicate to that, how different can you be? How important it is to make a leap from being involved in

NPs to radical social movement, need lots support, I could use more, lots people could really use more. For a lot of people, families don't support involvement in radical social justice movements.

- Inherited money through rapid serious of deaths. Death of father traumatic, fucked up like one and a half years, relationships built - support. These relationships were outside NPs. But didn't build strong enough community. Integrate politics into daily fabric of life. If wasn't able to perform and deliver as organizer, people not interested in engaging in same ways.
- Kept referring to Latin America. But these groups are coming together in different social climate than in US: worse inequality, landless people, more impoverished than lower classes in america, similar example to mass organizing in the 60s in the US. Chicken or egg - did NPIC destroy '60s movements, or did people go to form NPIC because 60's movements were being destroyed?
- Eric Tang talked about the rise of baby boomers - start foundations, groups incorporate to get money, perspective interesting, mirroring the state, as previous authors talk about. NPIC becomes center of movement, problematic.
- All of us coming together through NP - RG basically a NP or part of NP/progrssive foundations. Thinking about how RG has developed - mobilizing people with wealth, need to have non wealthy be on board, in power in org and in decision making roles - accountability. In our org, the guidance we get is connected to foundations, but then I wouldn't think of starting new group of young people with wealth that isn't a NP.
- Shifted thinking. Internalized capitalism. We had dinner on internalized classism. Help to think what internalized capitalism means, foundations, how our society wants to think on an individual level. As young person leaving college I went to NPs, that feels so limited. So important that NP accountable to movements. For us, it's so much more about how do we shift ownership and power? Create power among people who don't have it?
- The book is an open letter to other organizers. See it as person trying to be supportive. Where does MMMC fit into picture? How can we recognize this? How can we act as allies, support movement building work rather than corrupting it?

- Threads - how do we live politics of wealth redistribution on day-to-day basis, anti-capitalist politics? Us as individuals, small scale decisions, affects surroundings. The way that things get normalized in communities is broader expression of that. How do we think outside box of capitalism we often don't realize that were in? MMMC - what are we doing? 'Situating ourselves outside of movements as funders, inhabit the role of funders, and don't plan to *not* inhabit that space,' it's a power dynamic, doesn't really change it. I'm rich, always gonna be rich, give away a little, always inhabit position as funder. Can't change class background, class privilege, even when you give, you still continue to have money, power to give away, personal choice, dynamic. Not living anti-capitalist politics. Playing a role in system, so activists set up to rely on funders.
- On MMMC core, thrust into it, all these conflicts. MMMC really bogged down by embedded in NPIC. How much voluntary wealth redistribution, how much money we move. leaves out so much, what is fighting for non-voluntary wealth redistribution, actually building systems, people unable to amass and hold wealth. Estate tax, etc. Cultural and interpersonal decolonization. MMMC powerful place to grapple with NPIC, in cross-class space, some ways we do, some ways we don't step up to do that. Structural changes. more emphasis on people struggling with relationships with movements.
- Really feel you. Conflicted. They (authors) don't have power to change system. What role can we play? Economic elite, new venture forms, our class culture. A new way of working this stuff. Exciting, hard task. What if MMMC was place to make a trust? The idea of changing system is gonna be on us, in conjunction with others.
- Not sure I agree. The incredible organizing is still gonna happen no matter what we do. It's not driven by money. Money up in air - sometimes helps, sometimes it does. Our role has to be bigger than money. Substantive grassroots. More of ourselves on the line.
- Economic shift, new system to created. We make place to get allies there. For example, a political mutual fund. Invest mechanism, not really investment, but sounds like it. Anyone see that? New ways to think about supporting movement. Financial people is one piece. Bring ourselves. In California,

newprogressivecoalition.com? Invest in victory 2008. Political mutual fund, investing, supporting autonomous stuff on the ground. But it's not really a mutual fund, just a vehicle to give money away. Economic prospects of ways to shift ways funding happens are there. Into idea of how build involuntary funding.

- Socialism. An economic system without private wealth.
- Our role. Fine on a personal level, fine coming together as young people with wealth to talk about that. Okay with that being base of conversation. Talk about estate tax, etc. I'm a white heterosexual male, not in oppressed group, Jewish but not oppressed since 1948. Solution espoused in part 3, oppressed people uniting and forming power around that. What am I to do? Explicitly excluded from those forms? Could come in as ally?
- Good question Lou. Though we always will have class privilege, but you could not have money. If gave it all away, could be struggling with everyone else. One way to be part of it.
- Autonomous Latin American movements do work with NPs, and these NPs do need funding. Zapatistas draw on NP for tech support, but when decisions need to get made, NPs step out. That is one model for people to work with NP to not let them set agenda.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2008

Book discussion - January 16th

- How can we support movements constructively? I have been working with a public foundation that has tried several different things, including setting up a bank account with no incorporated status at all and is used to be responsive without all the structure and overhead effort.
- I read the book and it lifted so many veils. I had thought that “all is not well” in progressive philanthropy, and this gave me a really concrete way to think about it. This book is a gift; really candid feedback.
- Thinking about Part III as solutions for organizers; what would ‘solutions’ look like for people who control accumulated wealth?

The public foundation I’m involved with funded a lot of scholarships to the Social Forum; prioritizing how people can come together to have the conversations they need to have. We have also funded some things that came out of the Social Forum.

I think we are headed toward tumultuous financial times - like the dollar crashing. Foundations are part of financial markets, and they are investment machines, and they are going to be turned upside down. So we are looking at local food systems, local currencies, organizing models that can be sustained through volunteers.

How do we think about community organizing when the foundations themselves go into crisis and not know what to do?

- Some people say that it will improve our prospects for revolutionary social change...
- The vast majority of non-profits are not revolutionary organizations, and a lot of that money pays for direct services. So if the foundations lose most of their corpus, their principal investment, what happens then?

At some point, you may really need alternative currencies, so it is important to be thinking about those alternative structures now. A lot of those experiments are

occurring outside the U.S. now. That goes back to people creating right livelihood in their own communities so that they are not dependent on a non-profit job.

- I think there is a long-standing campaign to increase the pay-out rate of foundations.
- National Network of Grantmakers tried that, and it didn't get a lot of traction - even among that network of the most progressive foundations. Increasing the pay-out rate moves more money, but doesn't change the way it is moving or really where it's going...
- By increasing the pay-out rate, the foundation might reduce its pile of wealth (which is a central problem of power in society itself) - but it wouldn't change the modes of accumulation that create these piles of wealth.
- And the foundations pride themselves on how much bigger they get! At one foundation, they are allowed to make 3-5% in program-related investments, and they don't even do that. Most of the progressive philanthropy world is still totally invested in traditional vehicles of wealth accumulation.
- If we got a President open to revising the tax policy to address the aggressive accumulation of the top 1%, would we get anywhere? Or are we talking about dismantling global capitalism?
- I'm not holding out hope for Congress to revamp the tax code on its primary patrons. In any case, global capitalism is already in crisis around the world.
- If someone comes to you and says, I've inherited \$20 million, and I'd like to dedicate all this money to challenging global capitalism and housing it in some place that is socially responsible. What would you say?
- ... For progressive philanthropy that's the bottom line question. Hm. Well, we do have a lot of experiments and anecdotes to consider. The groups that have best inoculated themselves against the interferences of funders may have the best prospects as a formation, and yet these are exactly the ones that are hardest to fund because they haven't made funders core to their process.

- There's a small group of us forming a giving circle who are ready to take on a conversation about supporting community control of resources. We look forward to sharing the insights of that experience.
- I'd be really interested in learning more about the discourse.

Things we could stay curious about between now and our next step wherever it may lead...?

- I'd like to stay plugged into this conversation because it's really frustrating to not be in touch with others who are running into the same challenges.
- Is there a shorter article that we could circulate to funders that we wouldn't be able to get to read the whole book? Is there a way we could summarize the insights from the blog for funders?