

“Building Bridges Over Great Divides? Social Inequalities and Social Movement Strategies”  
Thematic Workshop Notes Thursday August 9, 2007

Jesse Diaz on the Immigrant Rights Movement

After introductions, Jesse Diaz discussed the immigrant rights movement, and the new transnational La Hermanidad Mexicana (sp?). Founded in 1951, this group has an all female leadership team. It's goal is full amnesty for all undocumented immigrants.

Jesse interviewed Gloria Saucedo, who indicated that the marches were effective in stopping racists, but that currently, the SMO is transforming itself due to a lack of resources usually contributed by unions and churches. This undermines the strategies that are necessary to push the agenda forward.

Challenges:

SEIU and Church lines are hard to bridge—both groups favor a guest worker program. This program would be problematic for Gloria and her group because of the division of families and family issues that would arise with another guest worker program.

Campaigns and actions since 9-11:

Marches

Confrontations with the Minutemen

Sensenbrenner's HR 4437 bill was defeated; but the Senate bill 2611 was also contested, and finally defeated.

Voter registration campaigns

Next Steps—Strategies:

Civil Disobedience (with Organization International Border Encuentro)

In Los Angeles, there are divisions between the movement regarding civil disobedience tactics (Churches are against, while the leftists are in favor).

Should the SMO target the Republican, Democrat, or Latino Caucus?

There also exists a critique of the multi-year march campaign among leaders in the movement. Some call this effort fruitless, and cite the Endgame.

The Endgame is the plan to rid the US of all illegal immigrants by 2012 (I am not clear on who supports this “endgame”). Jesse indicates that this effort has been successful so far.

Re: Civil disobedience, Jesse argues that activists much be prepared to be arrested in support of the cause.

Comments for Jesse

1. Sobering that there is a split with the churches. Traditionally, successful collective actions and social movements have been allied with the Church.
2. Perhaps this has something to do with the conservative Catholic Church factions. Look at the political structure at the Vatican in order to find the right space for change.

3. This conversation is relevant to the World Social Forum data. Many participants entered “very religious” at the WSF meeting. What could this mean to organizers and organizing coalitions?
4. About the May Day marches last year, a question: How do we sustain something this big? When nothing happens after the big march, there’s difficulty keeping the momentum.
5. Ellen – In welfare rights organizing after 1996, there was a surge of foundation money. But when they didn’t get a victory in the next revision, the foundations pulled their contributions. This is a big resource question. At the US Social Forum, the foundations were looking at different places to take their resources.
6. Pam – In criminal justice and racial inequality movement, the problem has gotten worse. Often, with very complex issues with multiple players, deciding about which strategies to move towards is complicated.
7. Jim – Typically, we’re very social movement-focused. We tend to lose perspective on the other strategic players on a strategic field. We should be questioning the boundary between a social movement and the “outside” of the social movement.

### Ellen Reese on Social Inequalities and Movement Participation

Ellen’s presentation focused on efforts to organize child care workers as workers because funding sources (federal?) for childcare have declined.

ACORN started by organizing child care workers, focusing on winning healthcare benefits and higher wages (in Southern California/LA/Inland). This program was so popular that ACORN received lots of calls. Because of this, SEIU and AFSCME wanted to take over the campaign, and ACORN agreed to this, in exchange for some unspecified fee.

So, the SEIU and AFSCME, along with ACORN, organized joint campaigns to:

1. Prevent cutbacks
2. Provide Universal Preschool

Currently in California, the SIEU and AFSCME divided the state by county, but now they have a joint union in this case. Previously, the relationship was strained, but has now improved.

Outcomes:

1. Improved payment system for workers
2. Cutbacks have been prevented.

There are ongoing struggles for collective bargaining rights, health care, and universal preschool. Legally, all childcare workers are independent contractors, and this makes organizing more difficult.

This campaign has involved Black and Latina child care providers. SEIU/AFSCME are not putting much money into the effort, employing only one organizer for Los Angeles and the Inland Empire. The organizers are mostly Spanish-speaking, in addition to English. This campaign is community-based—the workers go to the capitol with the kids, and they sell this trip

as a learning activity for the kids. Because the union is multi-racial and multi-lingual, there are sometimes joint, translated conference calls. Also, sometimes there are separate conference calls for both Spanish and English speakers.

ACORN emphasizes balanced African American and Latina leadership. Organizing is based on the devalued status of their work as women and as low wage earners.

So, how do larger social inequalities effect the inclusiveness of social movements?

Comments:

1. United Students against Sweatshops (USAS) dealt with these issues. The organizers were often white women. At the national level, there are caucus groups to diversify the organization.
2. Another issue in USAS was that members were coming from different backgrounds—it was difficult to start discussions without a basic understanding of the issues.
3. David – Brings up the question of which groups should be integrated. In the practical case, coalitions could help with this. So we could think about difference by creating coalitions, each member would be independent, but they could work in concert.
4. Jerry – In some SMs, like labor, if you touch the abortion issue, they'll split. So the contextual issue is how to avoid factionalism within a SM.
5. Pam – People often have different interests. So, you could be allies, but crossing race and class lines can be complicated. White-dominated groups think that Blacks should just “join us” instead of going to join the Blacks and then be a minority for a meeting.
6. Zekiya— on organizing Black women of color on reproductive health issues, often, Black women would not express their negative experiences regarding race.
7. Is there a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Saul Alinsky who will write a list of Do's that's longer than a list of Don'ts?
8. Jim—It's “The Broker's Dilemma”. There is often one person who can be the bridge of labor and the environment. Often, it's the original group that trusts the bridge person less. They don't represent their group as well.
9. David – Often, bridge building does not lend itself to being/becoming a leader in the organization.
10. Richard – Saul Alinsky said that we should use conflict constructively.

### Toi Carter on Social Inequalities Within Movements

Toi discussed the campaign to save the South Central Farm in Los Angeles, Spring 2006.

The South Central Farm is a 14-acre community garden in south central. 350 Latino families farmed the land, and in 2003, the city sold the land. Farmers were already organized, and they launched a campaign to save the land.

Farmers started to camp on the land for one year, while they had an injunction. Most of the farmers are undocumented. They rallied community support in 2006, calling for an encampment on the land, and the people who showed up to camp ranged from a dozen to hundreds.

The encampment was thrilling, with lots of energy—and lots of difference.

There were entertainment people, UC Riverside people, and locals from south central and other working class people in LA.

There was debate about the types of civil disobedience that would be practiced. Toi did 16 interviews with farmers, all 16 were second-generation. There was not a lot of support for the encampment by the undocumented, and there was a large language barrier between the farmers and many of their supporters.

However, these differences were not really dealt with. There was an east-west side divide. The west side is the home of the entertainment folks, who were asking for coffee.

There were some difficulties for Toi as a woman, as it was difficult to get credibility as a woman amongst men and masculinist women.

There was no real planning that went into the encampment. Some meetings were held toward the end, but these were too late. Some small group discussions did take place about the meanings generated by the encampment.

Two bodies organized the action:

1. Farm leadership
2. Support committee

Unfortunately, there was little communication between the two.

Outcomes:

A raid did occur after three weeks, and those encamped were forced to leave. One outside encampment was formed after the raid occurred. This outside encampment lasted for 6-7 weeks after the inside encampment. The land was bulldozed to make way for a warehouse. Farmers did start farming again, this time in Fresno, and their goal is to bring organic vegetables back to their neighborhood.

Comments:

1. Often women have problems being in masculinist organizations. Often women social movement scholars have to deal with gender bias in the field.
2. On not addressing differences: All volunteers were down in New Orleans for one purpose, but inequalities were unaddressed.
3. Melinda—Maybe short-term goals could be ignored for a short time.
4. Tim – Sometimes the people who need help don't want a certain type of help in their community. We don't ask if we've been invited.
5. Christine – Although differences may be submerged in the short run, many short-term SMOs become more sustained movements. One issue is motivation and trust with New Orleans recovery. Continuity is key—if residents see the same faces repeatedly, or the same groups, this can help.
6. Pam—Perhaps a positive “Rules for Radicals” that trust is earned, not automatic.

Christine Petit wrapped our session up as we ran out of time