

White anti-racist organizers in working class communities of color: an interview with B Loewe of the Latino Union of Chicago

1) How did you get involved in social justice activism? What have been pivotal moments in our political development?

I used to answer this question by talking about punk music, my influential older sister Kate, and a group I started in high school with a friend, Students for Social Change. But that's the world that welcomed me into politics, not the world that sent me there. I think, similarly, to others who come from white or middle class backgrounds, as I developed a deeper political understanding, I couldn't cope with the reality that the community I came from greatly benefits from the injustices I learned about. I rejected community and set off to live as righteously as I could, as a moral individual, a vegan, a thrift store shopper, even a dumpster diver for food. That's why for so long, I gave credit to an adopted "activist community" for my political involvement. But really, it was growing up reading at church masses that taught me my voice was powerful. It was the childhood lessons our parents taught that, if we hold on to them when we're older, make us radicals.

As a kid, I was told, "Share," and "Treat others as you'd like to be treated." Playing baseball in my backyard with my dad when I was younger, we heard someone in the neighborhood scream. I was up at bat and had ghost runners on second and third so I told him to pitch the ball. He said, "No, when you hear someone scream, you stop and see if you can help." We walked around the neighborhood and returned to the game without finding anyone, but that rubbed off on me. These days both our ears as well as our lungs are wore out from hearing others' cries and from screaming ourselves. By being politically active, I get to walk the road with others as we find what we can do about it.

2) As a white anti-racist left organizer, what have been key lessons for you working at the Latino Union? How have you overcome challenges? In particular, how has your understanding of anti-racist left politics evolved?

Sofia Montenegro, a Sandinista newspaper editor, said, "In order to make change, you have to swim amongst the people, not in a separate pool made only for yourself." Having grown up in modern segregation, the idea of anti-racism meaning working exclusively on consciousness-raising with other white people really appealed to me, but I encountered shortcomings with it.

When I lived the San Francisco Bay Area for several months I was part of an anti-patriarchy men's group. Upon returning to DC, I was riding the metro when the man sitting directly across from me began hitting on two women in an increasingly aggressive and escalating way. As I watched this develop, I rallied all my recent training to figure out how I should intervene. As his comments turned to yelling, I sat thinking, "How can I get him to see he's being patriarchal in his

approach and if he wants them to like him, he should be more respectful?" Meanwhile, he began slapping the women and while I was still sitting, dumbfounded, the women screamed and ran off the train.

When this happened, I had been participating in "anti-sexist men's work" for more than five years. While it had improved how I behaved in meetings, it had done nothing to prepare me to intervene in a situation of violence against women. Five years after my first men's circle, I identified as a well-developed feminist, but how women and gender variant people directly benefited, how their lives were concretely improved by my process was completely unclear. Obscuring it further, I situated myself in a community of activist peers that celebrated and congratulated my feminist stance (or posturing) in meeting and social spaces.

More dangerously though, while I was frozen on that train, trying to think of the most incisive question I could ask this man, another question was running through my head. "What happens if he turns and attacks me instead?" I was slowed by a lack of strategy but I was paralyzed by a refusal to give up my safety as someone not targeted by his come-ons. Since I didn't get directly hit on, I didn't have to sacrifice my security to stop it. Since I participated in a constructed community of consciousness, I could feel feminist without actually supporting women attacked in public.

That is the danger with white anti-racism. As it develops generationally, it stops being an answer to the demands for accountability and solidarity from organizers of color and begins to become something else entirely. It can be fetishized as "A.R. work" and can lose any connection to people of color and their struggles. As it becomes recentered on white people, it can lose a systemic or institutional analysis. It becomes whitened in form and content, usually focusing on things like improving individual consciousness and learning vocabulary. Action steps often revolve around calling out other white people who haven't read the book and say 'the wrong thing.' It equips 18 year olds, like me when I was first introduced to the concepts, with an agenda for a six hour workshop (and the arrogance to feel ready to carry it out) to bring back to their area again, without linking with their elders and without engaging the ongoing struggles of communities of color that surround them.

That cannot be our shared understanding of anti-racism, but it is too often, or at least too visibly, the common practice. Sharon Martinas would begin her fifteen week Challenging White Supremacy workshops by reading Marge Piercy's poem, "To be of Use" to drive the point home that we are in this to be useful. That has become my guiding framework for this work; find people whose work you respect and ask them, "How can I be useful?" In order to answer that, we need to first know who we are; position ourselves in the web of privileges and oppressions we experience so that we can fight effectively from that location. That seems to be the goal of the workshops that get associated with the title, white anti-racism.

"White anti-racism" at its best, for me, is an orientation for young or new participants in social justice that teaches white people who we are and where we come from so that we don't enter

into communities of color looking to consume their cultures. Chuck D said that “white people always look to people of color to be the spice in their otherwise bland existence.” A solid orientation avoids that dynamic by rooting white people in their own personal history. It also acts as a warning for participants unaccustomed to operating in multiracial spaces. It can be a basic, “Here’s the top ten ways white people tend to screw up when working toward social change. And here’s some inspirational models like Laura Whitehorn, Linda Evans, Florence Scala, or Suzanne Pharr, to hold up.” And finally, it acts as an infrastructure for when we do screw up, because we’re bound to do so. A body of trusted allies directly accountable to organizers of color can take our mistakes and make them teachable moments so that organizers of color don’t need to spend their energy teaching white ‘allies’ how to do better. The problem is that when we hold up this orientation/education process as the most visible form of white anti-racism, many of us get stuck there. What’s meant to be an entry point can become the sum of our political activity.

Being anti-racist however, is not a title or a state of being, definitely not one that white people can grant to each other. It means being in a state of struggle against white supremacy, to be organizing for racial justice. We are ‘anti-racist’ to the extent which we participate in struggles to end racism. That doesn’t mean we all need to become official organizers. It means we need anti-racist teachers, nurses, engineers, all pushing their politic from within their sector. Whether we say the wrong thing along the way matters less than our participation in actual communities working toward concrete change. For me, I had to become less concerned with being right and more focused on getting beyond the white-on-white.

3) You’ve been working at the Latino Union of Chicago since 2003. Can you outline the vision, strategy, and practice of the organization? What about the organization inspires you?

The Latino Union collaborates with low-income immigrant workers to develop the tools necessary to collectively improve social and economic conditions. Women working in temporary agencies and men who seek work at street corner hiring sites founded the organization along with a former day laborer turned organizer as a way for them to lead struggles around their issues themselves. There’s this age old dynamic where people act as the voice for the voiceless instead of opening spaces for marginalized voices to be heard. William Lloyd Garrison, the white abolitionist, would invite Frederick Douglass to tell his story and give his testimony of what it was to be a slave. However, he wanted Douglass to leave the strategy of how to end slavery to the white abolitionists like himself. The Latino Union was founded to interrupt that still existent dynamic, to place the people directly affected by an issue directly at the forefront of efforts to change it. Oppressed communities don’t need advocates, they need solidarity from people who will support them on their own terms. Too often, people who aren’t directly affected by an issue take up leadership roles with good intentions that end up limiting the input of the people targeted by specific policies or systems and control the terms of any resolution in ways that actually exclude their voices. As Paolo Friere wrote about, poor people can be experts on their own situation, given the proper tools, they’ll resolve their issues themselves.

The Latino Union approaches this through a mix of popular education, advocacy, and community organizing among corner day laborers and residents near the public hiring sites where day laborers find work. For us, we agree with the group People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER) that the role of an organizer is threefold:

1. Open people to understanding that their personal problems aren't their fault, they're common and are the result of systemic issues
2. Support the belief that things actually can be different and better, that change is possible and;
3. Motivate people to believe that they can make that change happen themselves

The Latino Union does this through chats at the temporary worker hiring sites. Its first campaigns led to a strike that shut down 75 temporary agencies and culminated in a hunger strike that led to the first pro-day labor legislation in the country. When I joined the organization in 2003, they had taken over a city-owned abandoned bus turn-around and transformed it into an alternative hiring site to the street corner where they wouldn't obstruct traffic and where workers could have greater control over the hiring process. Through twice daily press conferences and weekly marches, the organization held the land while demanding a permanent Workers' Center in defiance of a city eviction order for three months. Since then, the organization opened the first Workers' Center for corner day laborers in the Midwest, defeated a Home Depot initiative to displace a suburban corner day laborer hiring site through mass on-going arrests, and participated in organizing the largest marches in Chicago's history as part of the immigrant rights upsurge of 2006.

Through all of this, the Latino Union opens space for the leadership of low-income, immigrant workers in contingent labor economies, the marginal of already marginalized communities. Day laborers have become the public face of immigration. As a result, they're both the first targeted by right-wing hate groups and one of the first sacrificed by immigrant advocates in any reform compromise. Therefore, developing strong leadership from within the ranks of day laborers is urgent; both to be prepared to defend against vigilante attacks and to be able to force our inclusion on our allies' agendas. As a transitory community in a unstable search for work, this can't mean finding a few well-spoken members and putting them out front. And as an organization with paid staff and voluntarily participating members, it doesn't mean following the orders of the director. It means creating open and democratic structures that are easy for people to participate in regardless of literacy or formal education. By sharing in the decision-making, we all share in the responsibility for those decisions' successes or failures. Ella Baker said "a leader is someone who develops the leadership of others." That leadership development process happens in multiple ways, whether its exposing people to experiences that open up our analysis, providing 'each one, teach one' mentorship, incorporating reflection into all our organizing activities, or having formal political education sessions.

As members get experience participating in mini campaigns that directly relate to their situation such as building support among neighboring businesses for the day labor hiring site or organizing

against contractors who steal their wages, they gain the skills to plan strategy, speak in public, and analyze their situation more deeply so that they're prepared to participate in broader campaigns. We enact that broader strategy with our base in three focus areas:

1. Defense against civil, labor, and human rights abuses: Related to the immediate conditions which day laborers experience, we organize campaigns against unscrupulous contractors who steal people's wages as well as organize against police harassment that defends people right to look for work in public.
2. Promote policy and community changes that improve members' lives: Here we demand responsiveness to our members' issues. We've participated in a 200 member coalition for the past two years to mobilize May Day marches for legalization and a moratorium to raids and deportations. Through public education and advocacy we move government agencies to address the specific conditions of contingent labor. We're beginning dialogues and pilot projects through the National Day Laborer Organizing Network that will open up unions to include our members. Beyond winning external demands, organizing also includes transforming ourselves and taking a collective responsibility for our lives. Accompanying the community work, workers also setup internal campaigns to increase discipline and unity at the street corners as a necessary component of the broader campaigns.
3. Develop alternatives to the conditions we face: Readers may be most familiar with this as the concept of 'dual power.' For example, by opening the Workers' Center and implementing a written contract, instead of crowding a car window, workers get connected to contractors through an orderly list. By creating accountability methods, the Workers' Center eliminates the theft of wages that guys experience on the street corner. This third strategy seeks to establish our own institutions that intervene in things as they are and shift power to the hands of workers; from hyper-competition on the street corner to cooperation at the Workers' Center.

4) What led you to prioritize community organizing in working class communities of color?

I want to win. I want to live in a world where we produce what we need together and share in the responsibility of ensuring those needs are met. I want to live in a world drastically different than the one that exists and I see this work as a key piece of getting us there. Before I get involved in anything, I ask three questions that act as criteria for me.

- 1) Is it led by people directly affected by the problems being confronted?
- 2) Is it part of something on-going or is it a flash in the pan?
- 3) How/Does it build power among oppressed people?

Power is a key concept for us to understand. In English we get confused about its meaning but,

in Spanish, the word is *Poder* translates as “to be able to.” That’s the clearest definition I’ve seen, power is the ability to be able to do what you want; to enact your agenda. When we build our campaigns, we can’t just ask, “How do we win X demands?” we also have to consider, “How does this build our power in the long run?” There’s people who go into campaigns with some tactics already precluded from their planning process. Some people romanticize Malcolm X’s saying the “ballot or the bullet” as a call to arms but in saying so, he didn’t exclude the ballot from his strategy. James Tracy from the San Francisco Coalition for the Homeless explains that the extent to which you can refrain from voting as part of your strategy is not necessarily a reflection of ideology or tactics. It’s a reflection of the distance one has from being affected by the results of legislators’ actions. When you aren’t targeted by state policies you can afford not to involve yourself in influencing them.

I first got involved in politics through the global justice movement. The protests against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in DC in 2000 took place my senior year of high school. That’s where I first got trained in facilitation, street tactics, first aid, and talking to the press. I learned tons and was enthralled with the intense days of opposition and confrontation. Surrounded by like-minded people, I felt a (false) sense of community that contrasted greatly with my community of origin. But it was temporary, most folks left town afterwards and left behind a strengthened police force with all sorts of new toys to be used against locals.

From there, I moved to Cincinnati where I was a campus organizer against private prisons and pressured the school to support the cafeteria workers’ union organizing campaign. In the Spring of 2001, the Cincinnati police killed Timothy Thomas, a 19 year old black man wanted for outstanding warrants for not wearing his seat belt. The murder sparked a weeklong uprising that looted stores and landed more than 1,000 people in jail from neighborhoods placed under curfew. It threw race unavoidably into everyone’s mouths and in both the cafeteria organizing campaign, and the coalition that formed in the wake of the riots, I found myself doing support work for communities demanding policy changes for racial and economic justice.

When we won our campus campaigns, I moved to the Victory Gardens Project in Maine which was started by environmental activists and Black Panther political prisoners. In rural Maine, in the absence of immediate power structures, community organizing meant assessing common needs and finding common solutions ourselves. It wasn’t based on high falutin’ theory or spurred by targeting politicians. It was built on the idea that ‘things are better when we work with, instead of against each other’ and on continuing the legacy of the Panthers’ survival programs. They believed that if we’re ever going to live without capitalism, we actually have to be able to live with out it. We’ll need the real skills to provide for each other. That’s where I learned two things; as Audre Lorde said “we are the ones we’ve been waiting for” and as Toni Morrison wrote, “you can’t talk to unlettered people like you got books in your jaws.” There was no government to petition and no visible villain to defeat so, based on simple concepts of banding together to take care of each other needs, the Victory Gardens worked toward building self-sufficiency in their own community and connected that effort to materially supporting urban

groups doing organizing inspired by the Panthers.

I prioritize working with groups like the Latino Union because it synthesizes my political development; a community group that uses direct action and protest to achieve concrete policy improvements while building toward longer lasting alternative institutions.

Just like I wouldn't trust a group of straight people to take the lead for my own liberation against heterosexism, people of color can't trust white people to end racism. When you're not the target of something, when you don't experience it on the daily, you're gonna be blind to ways it manifests. Beyond these blind spots, white activists also have the continued temptation of returning to the fold and receiving material benefits for their loyalty to the current system that separates their interests from the communities they're working in solidarity with. (Reading *Reluctant Reformers* or *Settlers* explains that in much deeper and disturbing terms.)

But just cause you're an ally in a struggle doesn't mean the only thing you have to contribute is a moist tongue to lick envelopes. It means you contribute what's asked of you and you learn to lead, as Bernardine Dohrn says, by getting out of the way. Everyone's got to do their share of the non-sexy work, what Ella Baker called 'the shovel work that makes organizations run.' For that reason, my primary role at the Latino Union is as a fundraiser and financial manager. But that's not the only thing I do. After a long humble period of learning and asking questions to learn the how and why of the organization, I am now invited to contribute to the strategy and trainings. When the Home Depot began arresting our members, all our organizers were enmeshed in other campaigns. As a result, I took on a role I never expected and became the lead organizer in the successful campaign to end the arrests, drop the charges, and reestablish the hiring site. Recognizing that I've had the luxury of traveling and getting exposed to multiple models when I was young, I bring that learning as a resource to the work I do now. Not sharing those models would be like not sharing contacts with potential funders I have because I come from a middle class background. It would be a disservice to the organization. Doing so isn't about taking charge. To be of use means to develop concrete skills that we can offer to strengthen the capacity of any group with which we work.

5) Evaluating the strategies used by the Latino Union, what has been successful and what has not? What lessons have you drawn from these experiences?

Martin Luther King Jr. described organizing here as boxing a pillow. Chicago is a rock tumbler of a city that will take the biggest baddest stone and spin it on around till it comes out a smooth and shining gem made in the machine's own image. The political scene is openly corrupt, floating with patronage jobs, and the Daley machine exudes invincibility. Organizing here is done amongst the influence of the mafia, sophisticated gangs, local political thugs, and a police force that still carries out political assassinations. They're famous for killing Fred Hampton, then chairman of the Black Panther Party, in his sleep in 1969, but it was only in 2005 that they murdered May Molina Ortiz, a member of Families of the Wrongfully Accused, in a jail cell.

The political machine knows how to absorb blows and punish opponents. Housing activists have been fighting for affordable housing set asides to stem the wave of gentrification. Instead of meeting their demands, Mayor Daley trotted out his own, significantly watered down proposal, and passed the resolution to the fanfare of keeping Chicago “the city that works.” With a string of police abuse becoming public news, activists pressed for accountability but instead Daley again created a new office of investigations that takes the wind out of their sails with no actual change being made.

I start with this not to make Chicago organizing scary or impossible but to explain that that we can only evaluate strategy and experiences in relation to the local conditions that inform them. The nature of Chicago politics shapes and informs how social justice organizing gets enacted here. The conditions we respond to that create or limit the possibilities are different than the potential that does or does not exist in other locales. Similarly, race and whiteness differ by location. The Chicago Democratic machine was originally built on an alliance of Catholics (Irish, Italians, Polish, and Mexicans), a sub-machine of Blacks, and Jews. That makes for a very different racial power structure than many places. Like Butch Lee explains in *Night Vision*, structures of power and race have changed and evolved but the Left keeps on going without updating our analysis along with them. Too often we organize from a place of universalized theories or strategies without assessing current actual dynamics on the ground where we work.

The organization, POWER, in its book, *Toward Land, Work, and Power*, explain that history contains certain windows of opportunity where there is a great potential for making change and that organizing is the process of preparing our people to jump through those windows when they open. Max Toth, an organizer recently focusing in student and labor sectors, adds that “sometimes you have to recognize when there is no window to open and you’re facing a brick wall. In that case, it’s your task to get out the sledgehammer and make the opening yourself.” So in that context, what’s been possible in Chicago immigrant worker organizing and what has the Latino Union achieved? There are four things I want to focus on:

From Corners to Center: Seven years ago the City of Chicago was making a concerted effort to end the practice of corner day labor. With little resources and few allies other than groups like the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, workers began to organize among themselves to protect their means of providing for their families and stop the variety of abuses they face in the industry. Unfortunately their initiative was originally opposed not just by the City but also by local businesses that saw the public gatherings of working-class Latino, Caribbean, and Mongolian men as a nuisance. Even some other community organizations who couldn’t gain control over the workers’ cause either acted as obstacles or attempted to take credit for their efforts. By building an organization that answered to their issues and acted as a vehicle for their own leadership, day laborers asserted their struggle as both immigrants *and* workers as central to broader social movements in Chicago.

As a group existing on the corners of their community, they persistently moved forward to

amplify their voice and win allies. In 2004, the Latino Union held a rally of 25 people to denounce President Bush's initial immigration proposal. In 2006, the Latino Union acted as the press coordinator for the May Day march for immigration reform. By having a presence of low-wage and temporary immigrant workers at the table, the march rejected proposals that granted pathways to citizenship for some and adopted a 'legalization for all' platform.

Seven years after starting their initiative and two years after its 25 person response to Bush's immigration plan, corner day laborers were marching with 750,000 demanding a platform that had inclusion of temporary workers as part of its center. Responding to the immigrant upsurge of the past two years, the traditional labor formation, the AFL-CIO, moved to begin supporting our national network. Where corner day labor sites have at times served as the focus of union protests as 'scabs' lowering working conditions for 'American' workers, the head of American labor has now declared that an attack on day laborers is an attack on labor. Over the past decade, corner day laborers have moved their struggle from corner to center.

Winning Hearts and Minds: Corner day laborers going from an invisible community to the public face of immigrant labor doesn't mean that they've been welcomed with open arms. There is a right-wing reactionary force led by the false populism of pundits like Lou Dobbs and Bill O'Reilly that actively organizes against us. In January of 2006, the Minutemen, a vigilante group, declared their first national protest, a "stop the invasion day" that targeted day laborer hiring sites. Situated between these two poles are the neighboring residents, shop owners, and community members that have the potential to be swayed in either direction. While worker organizing is our primary activity, it cannot be done without also organizing the surrounding community to neutralize anti-immigrant/anti-worker sentiments and build support for day labor issues by humanizing our community. By doing this, we're also strategically organizing among the constituents of local officials who control whether police focus on wage-stealing contractors or target workers at hiring sites.

As part of our national network, we share lessons and best practices from across the country. Learning from Austin, Texas, where the opening of a Workers' Center prompted anti-day laborer protests from neighbors, we spent five months focusing on outreach and education to residents and businesses in the area where we would open the first Workers' Center for corner day laborers in the Midwest. As a result, we were able to move neighborhood improvement and homeowner associations to join a Community Solidarity Committee that volunteered to support the day laborers by getting their churches and community news outlets to promote the Center as a place to contract 'local artisans and craftsmen,' a far cry from the public image that the Right promotes.

Coalitions for Survival: While organizing among homeowners and 'Middle America' to either win their support, counter their opposition, and influence legislators that view them as their constituency is important, building strong coalitions of other oppressed workers and communities of color is key to our long-term success. Bernice Johnson Reagon said that coalitions aren't where we go to feel good. We have our home organizations for that. Coalition

work makes us feel like we're going to die, but we do it because we know it's the only way we'll survive.

Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. with a strong emphasis on distinct neighborhoods. When public housing began to concentrate Blacks near the first Mayor Daley's Bridgeport neighborhood, he built a highway between the two. When that same public housing located low-income Blacks too close for comfort for downtown businessmen, Daley built a university to act as a buffer between the two. As a result, community organizing in Chicago also tends to focus on neighborhood associations that lead to a feeling of ownership over one's block among residents but also leads to many distinct geographic domains with their own sense of turf that don't necessarily lend themselves to overlapping or coordinated efforts.

By performing cross-city organizing, the Latino Union bucks this trend. Additionally, by having a woman with little ego as a director, the competition and posturing that often accompanies men in leadership who want to have the biggest...ahem... *voice* at the table is less of an issue. As a result, we've been able to bury previous beef among groups and work to pull groups together to coordinate our efforts. This has been easier to do among our immediate allies. But it's still a challenge to do the deeper work of connecting across communities even when they have shared issues like common experiences of police brutality. With other immigrant or low-wage worker organizations, we've created several formations to promote immigrant and low-wage worker issues on the local and state level and create community infrastructure that prepare for and respond to immigration raids in our communities.

Humility and Experimentation: As an organization with a relatively young staff, we rely on the experience of our members organizing in their countries of origin and in other U.S. cities and the lessons provided by our national network to guide our work. Bob Moses, an organizer for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and now founder of the Algebra Project, reflects on his civil-rights organizing experience by saying that 'we didn't know what to do. We were up against centuries of racism and entrenched Jim Crow. So we broke off a piece of that system we felt we could address and saw where it took us from there.'

Similarly, David Gilbert, a political prisoner serving a 75 year to life sentence since 1981 for his support of the Black Liberation movement, says that 'we have to admit that we don't know what works and thus, we have to be ready to try everything. The international models that inspired us when I was organizing haven't withstood the test of time for the most part so we have to be willing to try something new.' It's with that spirit of humbly making the road by walking that the Latino Union moves forward; with a strict dedication to our values of worker leadership and long-term building toward a world that respects human, civil, and labor rights but also with a flexibility of strategy and tactics that will get us there.

6. What do you feel grateful for in your development as an organizer?

I feel lucky because I've had dedicated and patient mentors pick me up and dust me off when I

got disheartened and smack me around when I needed to look at myself. There's probably some people angry at me somewhere who will tell you I didn't get here flawlessly.

When I moved to Cincinnati I was a brash new organizer burning bridges before I crossed them. During the cafeteria organizing campaign, the union organizer had to spend three days playing chess with one worker to get him back on board with the campaign after I accidentally soured his view of the union by being off message while doing outreach. We learn by throwing ourselves into community work and encountering what comes up. It's by facing obstacles that we become more capable of getting beyond the hard times.

I am indebted to the global justice movement and even the punk scene for being a training ground and entry point for my participation. They were the counterpoint that I needed as I emerged from a childhood in modern segregation, middle class suburbia. But as I became a participant in actual communities in struggle, the invented and insular activist community began to feel less necessary. In fact, my purposeful self-alienation from my community of origin now alienated me from people I hoped to support.

As I began to participate in organizing, I realized that it's in our efforts to transform society that we transform ourselves. Too often we get focused on needing to change ourselves before we can participate effectively in change, when it's sometimes the other way around. As Catherine Jones writes, "I really do think it's supremely important to have consciousness about what we do as activists and organizers... I just think it's more ok for us to make mistakes... white supremacy will only go away if we organize, not 'cause some white guy finally held his tongue at a meeting.'"

None of this is easy work and as we start taking steps, we all need something to hold on to so that we keep walking. We need mentors and elders to know that we are continuing work that came before us, connection to younger people to know this work will continue, and peers to share our journey. Internally, we need a sense of spirit and values to keep us grounded. For me, what keeps me in this are the words of Ancestor Nuh Washington, a Black Panther political prisoner who was killed by the prison's medical neglect. He said it best when he said, 'victory isn't necessarily about bringing your enemy to his knees, though we always wanted to see that. It's about building stronger ground for those who come after us, asking the hard questions to pass the lessons on from one generation to the next.' He said, 'we're the ones without power. We're the ones who need help. Our ability to survive under those conditions is a sure sign of our inevitable victory.'