What Does It Take?

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How many years must a mountain exist, before it is washed to the sea?
How many years can some people exist, before they’re allowed to be free?
How many times can a man turn his head, and pretend he just doesn’t see?

(R. Zimmerman)

In the ten years between the Baton Rouge bus boycotts and the march on Washington victories were won and losses were recorded, but throughout the difficult struggle each battle strengthened succeeding movement centers by teaching important lessons, necessary to wash the mountain of segregation to the sea. The first and most subtle lesson passed on by the early movement was their absolute rejection of inferiority, which in turn registered in the collective and individual psyches of black Americans. In addition, the discovery and dissemination of the specific methods and conditions essential for blacks to gain the freedom they desperately sought provided later organizers with the second and most important lesson the early movement centers had to offer. Armed with ever increasing confidence that they would be free and knowledge of what is would achieve that goal, blacks struggled forward, assured that ain’t nobody gonna turn them ‘round.

Perhaps the most debilitating aspect of segregation and the “tripartite system of domination” that maintained it was the personal oppression of blacks. Furthering the denial of…human dignity and self respect” (Morris 2), inherent in segregation was its long history of institutionalization. Psychological effects springing from 350 years of this racist ideology are, “the rationalization that is necessary in order that the oppressed and oppressor may live with a system of slavery and human abasement” (Levy 68). Early on local movement centers learned that before any advances could be made against the political and economic forces that held segregation in place, a change in thinking needed to occur amongst blacks, both as individuals and collectively as a race.

Recognition that segregation meant that each time a Negro uses a “colored” facility, he testifies to his own inferiority…” (Levy 68) was the first step necessary to psychological change. Many blacks recognized their position, but were unable to take the important second step, changing their position. Bernice Reagan spoke of her situation, “I struggled within a certain context but recognized lines. across those lines were the powers that could do you in, so you just respected them
and don't cross them” (Levy 99). The second step was dramatic for blacks, involving a completely altered sense of self; no longer a “boy”, but a man; no longer an accepter of back door meals, but a demander of front door service, and by whites no less. “[Robert Moses] found on [the Greensboro protesters'] faces a certain look—’sullen, angry, determined’—that was light years away from the ‘defensive, cringing’ expression that had marked the Southern Negro” (Weisbrot 19). Dignity, courage, and the refusal to accept injustice characterized blacks with this new mindset. Without this psychological change many attempts by early movements to mobilize the masses would have been impossible. Fortunately for civil rights leaders, just as the courage of the four freshmen at North Carolina A&T sparked sit-ins across the South, psychological change fed on itself. More and more blacks began to throw off the psychological chains of segregation after seeing their brothers and sister do the same. Now the collective psyche of the black American began to change, to one where ninety-nine and a half percent wouldn’t do and risking everything wasn’t too much. Reverend Billups articulated this feeling, “Turn on your water hoses, turn loose your dogs, we will stand here till we die’” (Morris 268). The attitude of these protesters, so different from the acquiescent old man who lined the hat before he tried it on, represents how essential it was to have learned that a psychological change needs to occur before oppressed people will resist their oppressors.

Beyond psychological change, early movements taught the black community about pragmatic methods and conditions that enabled later movements to defeat the tripartite system of domination. The methods and conditions fall into five categories: enthusiasm, organization, specific methods, widespread attention, and outside support. The first of these is the least concrete, but the most integral in fostering the mindset of the determined black. Generating enthusiasm was an essential lesson taught early in the movement in places like Baton Rouge and Montgomery. Two devices served that purpose, the charismatic leader, and the mass meeting. Leaders such as T.J. Jemison, Martin Luther King, and Fred Shuttlesworth, aided by their independence from the white power structure, needed to “... personify, symbolize, and articulate the goals aspirations, and strivings of the group...” and be “... able to instill in the people a sense of mission and commitment to social change” (Morris 5-6). Charismatic leadership was not enough though, the people needed to have a sense of ownership that had been lacking in previous movements led by organizations like the NAACP. The mass meeting provided this essential element. It enabled the charismatic leader to articulate the movement’s goals directly to the people, who through singing freedom songs and discovering their own power were invigorated to a point where they felt a sense of the zeitgeist. When combined with the faith of the church culture, and mass meetings engendered the hope and fires of protest.

The second category of conditions and methods in the church culture, the development of a similar to that of the church, served the essential enthusiasm of the masses. This lesson was learned in Baton Rouge, but the specifics continued for the following ten years. Three essential organizational existed: unity, planning, and a mass base. Uniting a mass movement because fissures would over time make a collective action impossible. This was recognized by the early leaders in Baton Rouge, Montgomery, Tallahassee, and other organizations of organizations, headed by a leader identified with community divisions, and who traveled around town as to pre-empt any resentment or opposition. A contrast of the Albany and Birmingham shows the necessity of cooperation. One of the major flaws was the rivalry that formed between movement organizers, SNCC, and the better-funded SCLC. To SNCC it seemed that SCLC was usurping and they became resentful of SCLC’s tactics and alliances, which produced contributed to the movement’s decline. The unity of the Birmingham movement was responsible for the successful attack on the city. The Albany-Birmingham contrast also sheds light on the planning plays in engineering victory. In Albany, SNCC went to jail they “left no instructions, left no plans” (Morris 249). Even SNCC was unprepared. Charles Sherrod said “We just started screaming someone to scream” (Eyes on the Prize). Careful information gathering and site selection were factors. In Birmingham before any protests began, elaborate information gathering and site selection were factors. The lesson that no organization was proven most conclusively in Montgomery, where collection efforts were so ample that it was careless black community to stay off the bus.
The second step was dramatic for a newly altered sense of self; no longer a "boy", a seeker of back door meals, but a demander of whites no less. "[Robert Moses] found on [the]es a certain look—'sullen, angry, eight years away from the 'defensive, cringing' of the Southern Negro "(Weisbrot 19). Dignity accept injustice characterized blacks with this psychological change many attempts by all the masses would have been impossible. Leaders, just as the courage of the four A&T sparked sit-ins across the South, n itself. More and more blacks began to n chains of segregation after seeing their ame. Now the collective psyche of the black to one where ninety-nine and a half percent everything wasn't too much. Reverend Billups my on your water hoses, turn lose your we die"" (Morris 268). The attitude of these the acquiescent old man who lined the hat ents how essential it was to have learned that ds to occur before oppressed people will change, early movements taught the black ic methods and conditions that enabled later multipartite system of domination. The methods categories: enthusiasm, organization, nd attention, and outside support. The first of ut the most integral in fostering the mindset enering enthusiasm was a n essential lesson n places like Baton Rouge and n served that purpose, the charismatic leader, ders such as T.J. Jemison, Martin Luther King, ed by their independence from the white "... personify, symbolize, and articulate the ings of the group..." and be "... able to of mission and commitment to social matic leadership was not enough though, 1 sense of ownership that had been lacking in v organizations like the NAACP. The mess tial element. It enabled the charismatic ement's goals directly to the people, who ngs and discovering their own power were e they felt a sense of the zeitgeist. when combined with the faith of the church culture, charismatic leadership and mass meetings engaged the hope and enthusiasm that fueled the fires of protest.

The second category of conditions and methods is also deeply rooted in the church culture. The development of a strong organizational base, similar to that of the church, served the essential function of channeling the enthusiasm of the masses. This lesson was first taught by the UDL in Baton Rouge, but the specifics continued to be refined over the following ten years. Three essential organizational characteristics existed: unity, planning, and a mass base. Unity was fundamental in attempting a mass movement because fissures within the community would over time make a collective action impossible and prove to be distracting. This was recognized by the early movement centers in Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee who each formed an organization of organizations, headed by a leader not previously identified with community divisions, and which met at various sites around town so as to pre-empt any resentment and maintain wide support. A contrast of the Albany and Birmingham protests clearly shows the necessity of cooperation. One of the Albany movement's major flaws was the rivalry that formed between the younger, internal movement organizers, SNCC, and the better known, late comers, SCLC. To SNCC it seemed that SCLC was usurping their position, and thus they became resentful of SCLC's tactics and leaders. The divisiveness this produced contributed to the movement's failure, but SCLC learned the important part unity play in success. They applied this lesson in Birmingham by working closely with Fred Shuttlesworth's ACMHR, the pre-existing movement organization, and hiring James Bevel away from SNCC to internalize the power of the youth SNCC had learned to harness. The unity of the Birmingham movement in many ways was responsible for the successful attack on the city's power structure. The Albany-Birmingham contrast also sheds light on the important role planning plays in engineering victory. In Albany, when the leaders went to jail they "left no instructions, ... left nobody in charge, ... had no plans" (Morris 249). Even SNCC was under prepared in Albany. Charles Sherrod said "We just started stomping around and waiting for someone to scream" (Eyes on the Prize). Contrasting that with the elaborate information gathering and site selections of SCLC's Wyatt Walker, who counted seats, entrances, exits, and found the best targets in Birmingham before any protests began, evidences how necessary planning is in a successful protest. Another aspect of planning was financing. The lesson that no organization can run on enthusiasm alone was proven most conclusively in Montgomery, when the MIA's collection efforts were so ample that it was possible for the largely carless black community to stay off the buses indefinitely if necessary.
Likewise without money to bail protesters out of jail or support various boycotts, many movements wouldn't have gotten out of the church door. The third essential organizational characteristic presupposes the other two, because without the mass base, no amount of unity and planning will bring success. The fact that the local mass movements of the late fifties accomplished more in real terms in breaking down Jim Crow in five years than the NAACP did in the previous fifty years is the most convincing evidence that having a mass base is an important lesson about successful organization. A mass base is superior for two reasons. First, there is no way Southerners to claim “the outside agitator is riling up our niggers”. Second, mass based movements are local, thus are more responsive to local needs and situations. Movements that had learned the necessity of unity, planning, and a mass base were guaranteed that the right ingredients existed for a successful fight against segregation.

Having the ingredients was not enough though, it was also essential to learn what the best specific methods were for employing those ingredients. Emerging from the first ten years of the modern civil rights movement were three complimentary methods: nonviolence, direct action, and goal achievement. The importance of nonviolence was twofold. On one hand, because success was defined as the “beloved community” in which peace and justice reigned, nonviolence insured that means and ends were consistent. How can violence bring about peace? On the other hand nonviolence also made it possible for segregation to continue to be a moral issue as long as protesters stayed above the fray. To compliment this peaceful tactic, direct action was used to force the situation. Direct action stressed one thing, confrontation, challenging unjust laws by systematically breaking them. This dimension, added by the sit-ins, changed nonviolent protests like Montgomery, which represented a black withdrawal from society, into protests like the freedom rides, which represented a forceful, yet nonviolent entrance into society. The third essential method, goal achievement, is the most overlooked, and probably the most important to success. By the time of the Birmingham movement, three aspects of goal achievement had been learned by the black community. First, goals had to be set and they had to be specific. This provided leaders with something concrete to point at and say, “this is what we want”. It also focused demonstrations and demonstrators on specific targets. When blacks wanted lunch counters desegregated they would sit-in at them, and when blacks wanted fair hiring practices they would picket stores and/or boycott them. The first aspect led to the second, negotiations, where the specific demands were given to the white power structure and attempts were made to work out a solution. Negotiating was essential because it let both sides look for common ground. The final aspect, the splitting of power elites, made segregation. Protesters attempted to divide economic, and individual elites by appealing to politicians, blacks pointed to the supposed disruption they could cause. For businessmen their spending power. For individuals, American ideals. The Birmingham professed achievement aspects, publishing a specific plan, the power structure, and through boycotts, elites, and thus were able to break the segregation. Incorporating nonviolence and goal achievement enabled civil rights leaders to fight against oppression prevalent in America.

The fourth category of methods and movement leaders, was without attention to black and white communities, and nation at large. Segregation and attempts to overcome it were forgotten. Martin Luther King eloquently wrote in his “letter from Birmingham jail”. “We must Instead of human conscience and the air of natural cured:” (Weisbrot 70). King touches on attention, human conscience and national segregationist brutality marshaled both black and white communities. Emmett Till’s open casket and dog attack on Birmingham’s black children, was another sign of the importance of this category, the outside support that was necessary to movements that asked Dr. King to take on the fight. In addition, the media brought international attention to the civil rights movement, compelled previously indifferent people forward, whether out of indignation the embarrassment that American image were ranked with civil rights activists swelled the ranks of civil rights volunteers added to re-establish America’s image. Way attention proved to be a valuable asset to the movement.

Closely related to the attention necessary was another category, the outside support that was garnered outside the black community fell into two camps. First, support from the likes of Virginia Durr, who joined blacks in protests like the freedom rides. The hope that white America could accept the
bail protesters out of jail or support various wouldn’t have gotten out of the church organizational characteristic presupposes the mass base, no amount of unity and the fact that the local mass movements of more in real terms in breaking down Jim NAACP did in the previous fifty years is the fact having a mass base is an important phenomenon. A mass base is superior for two reasons: A mass based movement has a wide base of local needs and situations. Movements of unity, planning, and a mass base were essential for a successful fight.

As not enough though, it was also essential to methods were for employing those in the first ten years of the modern civil rights movement: nonviolence, direct action. The importance of nonviolence was that success was defined as the “beloved community” and justice reigned, nonviolence insured justice. How can violence bring about nonviolence also made it possible of a moral issue as long as protesters stayed within this peaceful tactic, direct action was direct action stressed one thing, the sit-ins, changed nonviolent protests into a black withdrawal from society, into a black community. The third essential method, goal achieved, and probably the most important aspect of the Birmingham movement, three aspects of the black community. First, goals were specific. This provided leaders with specific targets. When the black community was desegregated they would sit-in at them, and hiring practices they would picket stores. The first aspect led to the second, negotiations, were given to the white power structure. Work out a solution. Negotiating was sides look for common ground. The final aspect, the splitting of power elites, most often caused the collapse of segregation. Protesters attempted to divide and conquer the political, economic, and individual elites by appealing to each’s weakness. For politicians, blacks pointed to the support they could give or the disruption they could cause. For business men, blacks bargained with their spending power. For individuals, blacks appealed to justice, and American ideals. The Birmingham protests applied all the goal achievement aspects, publishing a specific list of goals, negotiating with the power structure, and through boycott splitting off the economic elites, and thus were able to break the segregationist stranglehold on Birmingham. Incorporating nonviolent direct action and goal achievement enabled civil rights leaders to successfully fight the oppressive segregation prevalent in America.

The fourth category of methods and conditions learned by early movement leaders, was without attention from the media, the outside black and white communities, and nations around the world, segregation and attempts to overcome it could be hidden and would be forgotten. Martin Luther King eloquently described the method in his “letter from Birmingham Jail”. “We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that’s already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with...” (Weisbrot 70). King touches on two important aspects of attention, human conscience and national opinion. Dramatizing segregationist brutality marshaled both of these powers behind the black community. Emmet Till’s open casket funeral and the police dog attack on Birmingham’s black children are prime examples of this method. Another sign of the importance of attention was the number of movements that asked Dr. King to take part because of the attention he brought. In addition, the media brought not only national, but also international attention to the civil rights movement. This attention compelled previously indifferent people, black and white, to step forward, whether out of indignation that this could happen, or embarrassment that American image was being tarnished. In turn the ranks of civil rights volunteers swelled and members of the power structure acted to re-establish America as the bastion of liberty, either way attention proved to be a valuable asset for the civil rights movement.

Closely related to the attention necessary for success, is the fifth category, the outside support that was generated. This support from outside the black community fell into two categories. First, white liberal support from the likes of Virginia Durr, and the many volunteers that joined blacks in protests like the freedom rides provided blacks with hope that white America could accept them and also served as a bridge...
to white leaders. In addition whites contributed money that helped keep protest alive. Still the most essential outside support came from the federal government. Without the Supreme Court and two administrations supporting their rights, at least from time to time, the 1950s could have been the 1890's. The evidence to support this is crystal clear. When Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy went in the army to desegregate schools in Arkansas and Mississippi, federal intervention ended state refusals to recognize the law. Corretta Scott King articulated the situation perfectly when she told how prior to Albany, her husband had always been able to fall back on the federal government when he broke unjust local laws, but when the federal injunction against protesting in Albany was handed down, Dr. King had nothing, and the movement fell apart. Likewise when President Kennedy gave Mississippi a free hand in arresting freedom riders, that movement suffered a devastating setback. Outside support of the civil rights movement was learned to be a necessary element without which even the perfect organization could wilt before the heat of Southern injustice.

In many cases, the important contribution of early movement centers was not the limited victories that were won, but instead the fact that they had proven that certain attitudes, methods, and conditions were essential in achieving success. Baton Rouge began a learning process that continued through the Birmingham protest, which exemplified the black community's accumulated knowledge of how to work toward the "beloved community" they sought. The "beloved community" did not come about in 1963, but the lessons the black community had learned provided them with the tools to break the chains of oppression that had held them in the prisons of despair.

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Time as a Tool of Power
in As You Like It

Michele...