BENDING THE BOW
How Ordinary People Spark Visionary Social Movements

By

CHRISTINE MARIE MASON
To John Shiva and his work for the Earth.

Thank you for the countless ways you show your love and devotion.
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4 months into writing this book, I had a near death experience and was saved by the team of emergency room doctors and staff at Lenox Hill Hospital. During the recovery months, I had several transcendent moments which gave me a felt and prolonged experience of unity consciousness—not just a mental concept of it. We really are emergent beings, coming from a unified energy field, wholly interdependent with the earth and the atmosphere, to which we are perfectly adapted. Mark Whitwell, a conduit of true yoga, taught me that idea many years ago, and with this experience, I finally understood it in my body. A similar
connection to all-that-is came through Madhukar in this time period, who made me laugh from my feet, told me there was nothing to prove, and in deep silence offered a taste of freedom and bliss.

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It’s been an honor to get to know these people in our collective history who have held a better vision for the world. I remain in awe of each of them.

One Love,
Christine
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Introduction

For the last two decades, I’ve been investigating the question of how our inner lives relate to our material circumstances and our cultural systems. I’ve worked on multiple projects in this direction, including *Indivisible* (which looks at disconnection and violent systems), *The Invitation* (which looked at women’s intimate body shame and social structures based on devaluing the feminine), and *52 Churches* (how what we hear in our deep receptive worship state shows up in our politics).

Between these projects and my personal practices in consciousness, I’d concluded that all separation is a lie. Moreover, it seemed inevitable that humanity would stay on this trajectory toward sovereignty and self-determination for all beings—justice was our inevitable arc as a species. In 2016, however, while *Indivisible* was hitting the shelves, the political and cultural reality that was concurrently showing up in the United States (and the world over) seemed to be recursive. In the US, political discourse was full of “pussy grabbing” and neo-nazi rallies and the reinvigoration of white supremacy. This created an immense dissonance for many people, including me. I heard myself saying: Are the forces of domination and oppression going to rise again right here? Can’t we just forego the suffering of innocents? Let’s just skip it this time, and remember that we’re all connected. Let’s just leapfrog to that time in the future when the full potential of each person is magnified, regardless of the conditions of their birth. To a time when we no longer put up structural impediments to each person’s potential. We know we are going there eventually, anyway.

I thought, then, about all the times that have come before, when we were in much worse places with regard to human justice, and how someone went first... how someone stepped out to abolish slavery, or get women the vote, or invite civil rights for gay people. I decided to look at some of the great social justice movements, and investigate their commonalities to see if there is a blueprint that we can use to sustain ourselves in our own missions. With this in mind, I chose eight movements, two of which are still in their infancy, and selected one person in each movement to
investigate. I was interested specifically in the people who, 20 to 30 years before a movement became mainstream, began to speak out and move the needle in the direction of a cultural policy shift. The people that brought a conversation about injustice out of the shadows of dinner table rumblings or covert micro-rebellions— who were they? I also wanted to look at the pod that surrounded them. Not all of the profiles follow this model, but most of them do.

In each movement, there were often concurrent other pods, many times not known to one another in the early days, doing similar things, but to take away a personal learning, it seemed best to focus on one group at a time. Who were the people who could see a vision of a future that wanted to be born, what was at work in their inner life, and who did they surround themselves with?

In some cases, the subjects I chose were part of the oppressed class, standing up for themselves, and in other cases, there were people who were part of the dominant class but acted for justice. I was wary of “savior complex” people, who got their worth from being seen as doing good, masking an imperial colonizer attitude, rather than knowing themselves as worthy inherently and then acting from a heart of what’s right and what’s needed.

But, even though I tell the stories of the individuals, which are quite inspiring, it’s more to illustrate the point on the commonalities between them.

Bending the Bow doesn’t give a full history of any social justice movement. Each of the movements featured here has inspired many books about their original inception and evolution.

For example, while Harry Hay was a pioneer in the gay rights movement on the West Coast of the US, surrounded by an exceptional pod of allies, he was not responsible for many other victories of the nationwide and international gay rights movements—including the advances for lesbian, trans, or other sexual orientation rights. We might also have profiled Del Martin and Phulilis Lyon who did so much for lesbians and women. I chose Hay because he was an excellent example of how one person and
the pod around them coalesced, and how their inner life and external circumstances came together to make that happen. Each major movement developed not from the work of a single pod in one location, but on many groups—often operating concurrently, sometimes with little knowledge of what the others were doing.

Each of these people invites us to co create a new future. They aren’t just inviting us to tolerance, to diversity, to civil justice and an equal playing field. They are inviting us to a love story!

They are inviting us to fall in love with the possibility in all creation, the potential in each being, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. They are inviting us to place ourselves in a long arc of positive change, whether we are visible to the public or crunching numbers or mapping strategy. They are inviting us to break the trance of separation and tribalism that lead to domination and destruction. To remember that the pulse of positive change is always present, all the time, throughout history, and that it lives in each of us. To remind us to keep going.

These movements started with a few people in a barn or a classroom or office or salon- regular people just like us.

When ordinary work together with the inner belief that life is sacred, that we are all interconnected, they become extraordinary: they make a world that supports the unfolding of each person’s potential regardless of the conditions of their birth or embodiment.

This is the idea in *Bending the Bow*: Each of us makes a difference. We create the world. We can continue to create it in the arc of more love and more justice.
Chapter 1

Uncommon Possibility

Do you marvel at those who are capable of resilience and bravery in the face of trauma, violence, or injustice? At people who display wisdom and calm when others bluster aggressively? At those who show discipline, conviction, self control, and non-reactivity amidst the general chaos of change and upheaval? I do.

Such committed and clear-thinking people often seem few and far between, especially when it comes to issues of social justice. Many humans just crumple, go numb, or abdicate to someone who brings more overt energy to an issue: They ignore a social problem, and hope it goes away. People who are making out okay under an existing dominance structure can keep their noses down, remain silent, and just go about their business- without experiencing any overt, direct personal consequences. Another, perhaps more empathic group, experiences consequences, at least internally, and wants to see a more just world. However that can't decide what to do. They are aligned with a cause in their minds and hearts, and often feel powerless. A few become outspoken advocates for change, and draw others out of the shadows.

The very idea that all beings are equal, that they deserve universal freedom, is relatively new. During the Enlightenment- beginning in the late 1600s and coming of age in the mid 1700s, we saw the infant concept emerge that all men should be free of subjection and be, effectively, on the same level. No matter one's condition of birth, each being is entitled to the full development of their human capacities and human identity- which requires the end of domination, oppression and stigma. No one, enlightenment thinkers said, had the right to rule another without their explicit consent. John Locke, in the late 1600s, wrote, “All mankind…being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.” If this statement sounds familiar, it's because it
made its way, in modified form, into the US Declaration of Independence. Since the Enlightenment, humankind, despite the oppressions of the moment, has been directing its vision toward universal justice: freedom and happiness for all beings.

Realizing this vision, though, is a lot more difficult than it would seem. Throughout human history, entire populations have gotten caught up in a hunger to dominate, demonize, and separate. These forces of domination often appear in pulses. They can manifest as an instinct to overtake others in the name of a temporarily unifying idea, such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, religious discrimination, or social bigotry.

A mood of sorts comes over people: an aggression stemming perhaps from their own unhappiness, or a perception of economic scarcity or loss of identity. In my experience, happy, connected people are generally not willful oppressors.

The dominance mindset may also come from a fixed belief system that has a hard time or feels threatened by change. It looks for someone to blame: a scapegoat. Someone to control, abuse, or manipulate. That someone is usually the stranger, the Other: someone who can be separated from the herd and preyed upon. Historically, the Other is defined by some visible, external cue: skin color, religion, gender, sex, age, class.

But at the same time, while the domination forces are activated, there are always good guys, too: people who are coherent, who sense what’s wrong and needs tending to in a society. When dark forces are brewing—and even when they are in control—we must attend to the concurrent voices of those who fight for social justice, equity, and kindness. These are individuals and communities who, in every important social movement, have held the line or pushed it forward. Someone said “No!” to slavery. Someone got women the vote. Someone ended the era when children worked 12 hours a day in factories. Someone stepped up to defend gay marriage. Someone ended the Vietnam war.
These were all bitterly contested advances.

What I wanted to learn in writing this book was: Where did these people get their resilience? Their conviction? And how did they manage to build movements and gather steam? What battles did they fight, and what resources did they bring to bear? How did they do it? How do people become coherent, where their words, actions and heart and mind and body are all of a piece?

Many people who wake up to injustice can’t stay passive. There is a whisper in their hearts: “This situation isn’t right, it isn’t just, it is not in alignment with my core values.” That whisper becomes a statement, then a shout: “This isn’t right. This ISN’T RIGHT!” until they can’t hold the contradiction any longer.

The Arc of Awakening

In case after case, over hundreds of years of narratives (drawn from abolitionists, despot-fighters, sexuality activists, indigenous people, tax protestors—you name it) a similar arc is evident.

When a person’s conscience becomes invested in an issue, they often begin with a quiet action. Perhaps they say something to their neighbors. They write a letter to the paper, or stand up for a stranger in public. They circumvent an unjust law, or fly a banner.

But if they hit a hot button issue—especially at a time when a change is imminent, but has not yet been accepted by the dominant culture—there is often a strong adverse reaction: a backlash. Those who have something to lose from the coming change may threaten and pressure the activist in an attempt to silence, deactivate, discredit, or defuse any further action.

At this point, the person of conscience is faced with a choice. They can recant and slink away—with only minor suffering or retribution—or they
can double down on their stand.

For some people, the first option isn’t a viable choice. To recant would be to lose all self-respect and agency, all semblance of individual sovereignty. Recanting would force them to live as shadows of themselves.

As for the second choice—standing up for your beliefs—well, buckle up. The ride will be rough. The opposition, representing the status quo, has a long list of ways to abuse and intimidate. These include insults, sarcasm, shame, ostracization, slander, exile, shunning, fines, imprisonment, physical harm, the threat of harm, financial or legal harassment, bounties, and cruelty… for a start.

Sometimes, though, a strange thing happens: The pushback itself radicalizes a person.

The activists profiled in Bending the Bow were middle-of-the-road people before they faced the intense reaction of their communities. A milquetoast daughter of the plantation; a bureaucrat tired of being pushed around; a quiet man of faith; a starving adolescent. All of these people, as you will see, became stronger through the force of adversity. The pressure transformed them, made them as hard and brilliant as diamonds. Something changed within them—and in this ownership of their beliefs they became a man or a woman in full, and persisted in acting their conscience.

Most of the people profiled in Bending the Bow were quite young when they found their calling and stepped into the fray. Angelina Grimke was in her 20s when she delivered her first public statements against slavery; Sophie Scholl was 22 at the time of her martyrdom by the Nazis. Clyde Bellecourt was 26 when he joined the American Indian Movement, and Leonard Peltier was 21. Harry Hay was 21 when he conceived the Gay Rights movement (but well into his late 30s before acting on it). Elizabeth Cady Stanton was 25 when she began campaigning for women’s rights, while Florence Kelley was 28 when she started the children’s rights movement. Steven Wise launched his lifetime campaign for animal rights at
I believe that youth matters. It is a time of life when several circumstances align. The first is a fearlessness born of inexperience, a still-pure conscience, and a level of intention that has yet to be cowed or co-opted by the conviction that “this is the way things are.” Another benefit of youth is the lack of indebtedness: a burden that often saddles and tames the activist spirit. In short, young people are still relatively free. But regardless of the age of a person seeking change, the qualities above are well worth cultivating by any agent of change.

If opposition intensifies, and the activist begins to feel that his or her life is in danger, something else can occur. He or she might experience transcendence: an awareness of and acceptance of their own possible death. The night before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. said: “Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now.” Sophie Scholl, the Nazi resister, said, “How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?” And here is Angelina Grimke, in the 1830s, as a pro-slavery mob threatened her with violence: “What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the leveling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting and commit violence upon our persons -- would this be anything compared with what the slaves endure?”

You will read a variation on this theme in every story in this book: Great leaders come to terms with the possibility of death in service to their cause. They live as if death could come at any moment.

With the acceptance that death comes sooner or later, activists begin to emphasize transmission. They choose to touch, enlighten, and enliven so
many others that, should they themselves be killed, thousands more will rise up to carry the torch. These leaders work on building alliances and networks that propagate their beliefs into the world. They seek out and often join with others dedicated to the same cause.

**The Evolution of Shared Beliefs**

While researching the stories of people (and pods of people) who sustainably fight for meaningful change, we found that they share a range of powerful worldviews and attributes. Throughout this book, you will see many overlaps between their stories. These commonalities form a blueprint for how to become a successful change agent yourself.

The inner arc of belief flows in similar ways for all who wake up and activate for change. It goes something like this:

*I see clearly that a certain thing is causing suffering to other beings. I know that it must change. I am a sovereign being with my own agency. Opposition makes me stronger. The cause is bigger than me, and therefore there is nothing to lose that really matters. I accept my own death should it come early, thus my allies must be many and strong. I will build alliances and networks that*
will outlive me should that happen.

There is also a superset of shared beliefs and personal characteristics. These include:

**Profound Self Respect:** “My freedom —and your freedom—are worth the fight.”

**Firm Values:** “I know what I stand for and what I believe.”

**Strong Faith:** “I tap into a higher source of unifying power or energy.”

**Inner Freedom and Peace:** “My state of mind is not dependent on the world around me.”

**Personal Independence:** “It is difficult to harm, threaten, or compromise me.”

**Bravery:** “Even when I am afraid, I act.”

**Resilience:** “I bounce back after setbacks.”

**Identity Beyond the Body:** “I have come to terms with death. I think beyond the immediate or even generational outcome.”

**COMMON BELIEFS**

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These mindsets are not granted through grace to a special few: they are
achieved through practice and effort. Effective change agents learn how to sustain and build upon such mindsets on a daily basis, over their whole lives. The mechanism is not a myth or a mystery. It can be modeled and copied.

It’s Not the Charismatic Individual—It’s the Pod

While great movements often do have a charismatic leader, they are shaped by a vast network of hands and talents and thinkers. The common myth of “The Power of One” actually masks the reality, which is the “Power of the Pod.” The idolatry of the One makes the great activists among us seem to be a special breed, different from the rest of us, and makes their work seem an impossible achievement—when in fact it is not.

One example of this is the work of Martin Luther King Jr. Initially, I wanted to include his story in *Bending the Bow*. He was, after all, the giant of the mid-20th century American Civil Rights movement. But King has been extensively covered. How could I offer something new? It seemed trite to revisit his work. In the process of researching his life, a full picture of the breadth of his allies emerged. So many people were involved in Dr. King’s circle, and the archives on the Civil Rights movement are so rich, that we were able to dive into the network around King, to find out what it really takes to build a great movement.

When I started to look at the network of people framing King, I learned something both obvious and fascinating: The movement didn’t happen by magic. Yes, King’s charisma and presence were a unique and beautiful gift to the civil rights movement. His internal fortitude and clear vision were necessary galvanizers. But the movement was a distributed, group-centric phenomenon. King wasn’t a lone, heroic figure.

Reading the accounts of the many other people who made the movement happen didn’t diminish my respect for King, but it diminished my iconization of him. And it made me understand how the hagiography of the solo leader can actually discourage everyday people who want to make
change: by putting this change-making gift exclusively in the realm of “special” people. What’s more, I found it exciting to think of the civil rights movement as a network. After all, an individual is a unique creation—it’s impossible to replicate that kind of magic—but teams and organizations, planning and strategies? These can be reproduced.

Ella Josephine Baker, a member of King’s inner circle, said that it was the distributed grassroots leadership in the civil rights movement itself that made its success and longevity possible. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr filled a role that was calling to be filled. Baker said, “The movement made Martin rather than Martin making the movement. This is not a discredit to him. This is, to me, as it should be.” In her eyes, a great cause wells up from the bottom, and draws its leaders in.

By mapping the network behind the civil rights movement, I was able to get a strong sense of how many aligned, strong hearts and spirits it took to carry that incredible moment in history to fruition. It fit the model we were seeing across other historical “pods”, or effective small teams working for change. A pod usually consists of a close group of five to eight people, each of whom fills one or more an archetypal roles:

– **The Inspiration.** Living or dead, gives spiritual and intellectual succor.
– **The Guardian.** Protects, establishes boundaries, looks for threats, takes physical and emotional care.
– **The Blood Bond.** The brother, sister, spouse, or cousin who is on the front lines daily.
– **The Strategist.** The thinker, often in the background, who understands the big constituencies at play.
– **The Organizer.** Actualizes real, detailed plans.
– **The Ally.** This person is equally interested in advancing the cause, and can propel thinking with agreement, argument, curiosity. This person keeps the eye on the prize, challenges the group’s thinking, and helps keep the energy high and moving.
– **The Resourcer.** Raises and manages money. Provides housing and
—The Amplifier. Builds and maintains alliances. There are often many of these as a movement builds, and could include the press and other media. There are some subclasses of amplifiers: The Celebrity or The Storyteller.

—The Moderator. Works at the perimeter, builds bridges, softens positions, understands the human capacity for change.

I hope that these roles will come alive for you as you read the profiles and stories of these changemakers.

If you yourself are in the middle of creating something, I hope the above will become a checklist as you create and build your own pod or team.

Starting with a Stable Base

With few exceptions, the leadership in all of the social justice movements in this book exhibited very high levels of character development. This is defined by knowing what they are about, and standing in their own center. These activists were united in their commitment to improving lives and reducing suffering. Their own private lives were generally aligned and in
order; whole families would often be in service to the movement. For the most part, the leaders of change indulged in few personal shenanigans. They acted from a base of a stable home, stable income, and limited vices.

This is what every real movement needs: serious individuals who can show up clear eyed, who can stick around for the long haul, and who can join with others. In the case of the civil rights movement, many grassroots leaders went on to found lasting organizations, hold public office, and develop businesses. And they stayed on the front lines, fighting for justice long after Dr. King himself was assassinated.

Therein, ultimately, lies the test of success for a movement: Does it survive the loss of its foreground leader? Has the tree seeded new fruit and, in turn, more trees?

**Being Heroic:**
Seven Movements, Countless Stories

I was going through my notes and found this scribbled in the margin: “We are mostly not heroic; we want to be. So, we watch people and ask: How did they do it? How do I do it?” I wanted to know more. I wanted models that I could draw from when I felt weak or alone or shallow in my convictions.

In the chapters ahead, we’re going to look at seven profound movements and seven charismatic leaders. We’re going to learn what (and who) made these individuals able to stand and deliver—and what makes the movements themselves work. In each of these stories, there’s an essence or a blueprint that can inform our own work today. Here they are:

– I am more than my race: Angelina Grimke and the Early Abolitionists
– I am more than my gender: Lucretia Mott and the Early Women’s Movement
– I am more than my age: Florence Kelley and the onset of the
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Children’s Rights Movement
– **I am more than my sexuality:** Harry Hay and the Sexual Choice movement
– **I am more than my ethnicity:** Clyde Bellecourt, Dennis Banks, Russell Means and the American Indian Movement
– **I am more than my religion:** Sophie Scholl and the Nazi resistance
– **I am more than my species:** Steven Wise and the onset of the Animal Rights Movement
– **I am more than my capacities:** Ed Roberts and the Disability Rights Movement

Every chapter begins with a bit of background on the movement, a short biography about its leader (a person far ahead of the general population in their ability to sense a needed change) and an exposition of the people or pod that surrounded this very visible “front person.”

As you read about the many personalities in *Bending the Bow*, I hope you keep some of these questions in mind, and relate them to your own life:

- What was the underlying world view or belief system of the change makers? What are my core beliefs?
- What environmental context (parents, etc) crafted each person’s worldview? What crafted my own beliefs
- What was the spark and arc of awakening? What milestones were present in each person’s life? What about in my life?
- What personal and social traits enabled each person to thrive under pressure? Do I share these traits? Are there any that I would like to develop?
- What kind of company did these people keep? Who are my own allies? Who’s in my pod?
The Recursive Spiral: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

In retrospect, historic achievements in social justice might appear as a natural progression toward freedom. In their moment of inception, though, they are often soaked with anxiety and bathed in blood. History smooths the line, like a mathematical function that takes out the noise. In any given current political era, it may feel like a major regression is overwhelming all progress—but it is all part of a longer game.

I would like you to gain an appreciation for the intense struggle that animates every new movement. As feminism gained ground as a social movement, for example, a wave of anti-feminism arose. With each stride women made toward civil rights, a new round of counter-efforts intensified.

The first wave of response is, in retrospect, humorously illogical—but reflects real positions at the time they occurred, for example: In *Sex in Education: or, a Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873), Harvard professor Edward Clarke predicted that if women went to college, their brains would grow bigger and heavier, and their wombs would atrophy. When feminist progress wasn’t halted by such tactics, the emphasis was changed from women’s biological capacity for self-determination to social issues. “It’s not about women’s freedom,” the argument then went, “it’s about destroying the family.” In about 1870, the Divorce Reform League arose, later rebranding itself as the “pro-family movement”. It remains the basis for a lot of the anti-feminist arguments still at work today. With each wave of advancement, there is a counter force.

Big changes take time, and they follow a similar path. In the first wave of change, the “outsider” is recognized by one or more people as a person in full, deserving of rights and responsibilities. In the second wave, the outsider is enfranchised. The third wave brings some civil rights. The fourth wave brings economic rights, more parity, and often apologies or restitution. With economic success, the subsequent generations refine the
civil, social, and economic improvements until, by the seventh generation, there should be more or less parity. If you find yourself in the middle of a third or fourth or fifth generation battle, this should give you the hope you need to keep going.

In all things, we stand on the shoulders of others, and we provide the shoulders that others will stand on.

The Economics of Rejecting Justice

At this point I’d like to speak directly to the cold, hard numbers of social injustice.

Very often, the degree of resistance to a social justice movement comes from the magnitude of potential economic disruption, should the movement succeed. This economic bias is sometimes masked as a social or religious objection, but these are often very intertwined with the economy. When a class is oppressed, this essentially means they are being paid less to work (if they are paid anything at all). Giving these people equal power in an economic system will move cash from one group to another.

When the women’s movement started, it had the potential to destabilize 50% of economic ownership. If women had equal marital rights to property, the ability to divorce, and the right to own property, who knows what might happen? Where would they direct those resources? At the time of the first conventions on women’s rights, newspapers couldn’t even fathom the transition. The Advocate, a newspaper in Albany, NY, published this in response to women asking for property rights and the vote: “This is all wrong... Society would have to be radically remodeled in order to accommodate itself to so great a change.” In the same way, slaves—who represented one sixth of the population of the United States at the time—would be able to work as freemen. This had the potential to disrupt the labor market, and reallocate a large amount of wealth from capital to labor. Similarly, eliminating child labor would force hundreds of thousands of low-wage
hours to higher wages.

When someone is fighting against a just change, follow the money. Even now, the Non-human Rights Movement, for example, has the potential to change the economics of dozens of industries: farming, agriculture, animal-based medical research and medical products, zoos, entertainment, pets, and the production of clothing, shoes, accessories, and upholstery. And if ecosystems like rivers and forests are given rights (as they have been in some countries), this has the potential to disrupt the economies of mining, forestry, road-building, and many other environmentally disruptive, extractive industries.

**How do you, as an activist, mitigate this resistance to change?**

One could trust the status quo to evolve economically in response to market changes—but look how long that is taking with the shift from fossil fuels to clean energy.

Change can be accelerated with a counter-plan: a path forward for the families and individuals who make their living within the old model. As an activist, you can anticipate who will be harmed economically, and by how much, from a proposed social change. You might even include other kinds of non-economic harm: insult to identity, or loss of status, for example. By anticipating this, we can smooth the way.

Economically speaking, when people in these value chains resist and lobby against change, it is often because they need a migratory path: a way to keep themselves financially secure and psychologically whole. We co-create a path forward that has no losers. This often means using the carrot strategy (e.g., supporting the transition path with legislation and funding), and a stick strategy (e.g., forcing the issue with punitive damages such as boycotts) as a last resort.
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The New Story of Life

I believe that the deeper story of us is a longing to belong, to matter, to be held in the sanctuary of other humans and in community. To love, and to feel empathy. We can bring people together, and talk about the very real experience of being alive in a human body: the possibilities of adventure, discovery, and wonder. We can celebrate the mad joy of human diversity, the beautiful possibility of it all.

As I said at the beginning of this section, the pulse of positive change is always present, all the time, throughout history. It lives in the people who keep alive the steady heartbeat of kindness, compassion, connection, play, and curiosity. The antidote to a suffering world is clear interpersonal communication—You matter, you belong. I see you, I recognize you, I value you—and building cultures and systems that reflect that worldview.

This might be called love-based activism. Like a parent or a sibling that cares fiercely for their family, warriors with love in their hearts are not weak. They are strong and supple. They can work without hate, othering or animosity. They love the example of how they want the world to be, and thus are an attractive force that has the potential to bring more people along.

You may be inspired, incensed, even horrified by some of these stories. But I believe you will be convinced of one truth, best expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I hope this book will give you the inspiration you need to draw back your own bow, targeting a vision of a more just, equitable world.

It is also hoped and expected that you, dear reader—a person who has an interest in making change happen—will borrow some of these organizing lessons and bold strategies to help address the ongoing justice challenges of our day.
I Am More Than My Race

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

- Frederick Douglass

“We first crush people to the earth, and then claim the right of trampling on them forever, because they are prostrate.”

- Lydia Maria Childs
Chapter 2

I Am More Than My Race

Angelina Grimke and the Early Abolitionists

Transcending Privilege

On a gray morning in December, far down an internet rathole on abolitionism, I came across an archived news article about Angelina Grimke, the first woman to address a state legislature in America. I was pulled into her story.
Grimke was the daughter of a plantation owner, in the heart of the South, surrounded by reinforcing reminders of her elite social position. Yet in the middle of all this, she had the clarity and moral compass to be an anti-slavery activist—a good 30 years before that mindset became common. I was also impressed that the strength of her conviction transcended her gender conditioning. She was speaking in front of crowds of men at a time when women didn’t even enter public halls, much less ascend the podium. How did she wake up?

This is a big question for those who seek social justice and need allies on the inside: *How does the fish know it’s wet? How does someone on the inside of a system of privilege recognize privilege? How is a privileged person activated to change the very systems from which they benefit, have perhaps benefited for centuries?*

In many of the other stories in this book, the activists I profile were actually part of an oppressed class, fighting to be heard. In these situations, it seems obvious why a person would bear the cost of fighting for change, as they are directly impacted. They do it for themselves, for their own family, or for their affinity group.

This was, of course, the case in abolitionism: enslaved people obviously wanted their own freedom. The first-hand detailed account by Frederick Douglass, telling the story of his own experience as a former American slave—began circulating in 1845. This was about a decade after Angelina and her sister Sarah started speaking publicly about ending slavery, from the perspective of the slave-owning class. While there had been other first-hand accounts of slave life recorded before Douglass, they didn’t reach the same level of circulation and traction.

As slave narratives gained traction and made their way through America, people were naturally outraged. Yet many didn’t take action, even if their hearts were sympathetic, either from fear, or because their privilege and position allowed them to be complacent bystanders.
The combination of first-hand testimony from both the oppressed and the privileged laid the groundwork for a shift in public opinion. This eventually resulted in the Emancipation Proclamation, the American Civil War, and the ongoing and incomplete unfolding of true equity and justice for black people in the United States today.

A decade before Frederick Douglass would light up public forums with his antislavery orations, Angelina and Sarah bore witness to the negative firsthand experience of slave-owning: a vital and rare perspective at the time. They wrote and spoke with conviction against slavery, calling it an evil system “degrading to both masters and slaves.”

The sisters Grimke didn’t limit the targets of their activism to the South: they spoke of slavery as an American problem, in which all were complicit. Yes, it was a Southern institution, they averred, but it was financed by the North. Products were bought in the North, Northern citizens and politicians supported and benefited from it. They were unequivocal: All residents of the still-young United States were guilty of the evils of slavery, and all must be engaged in eliminating it.

The price the sisters paid for this act was no less than exile from their home state of South Carolina, and exile from the places and people they held dear. A warrant was issued for their arrest, and the threat of prosecution if they were to return. They were not alone; In order to stem the threat of abolitionism to the South Carolina’s economy, no one holding an anti-slavery viewpoint was allowed in the state.

The early abolitionists stepped into a burning cauldron of economic and humanitarian conflict, at great personal risk and expense, and set the tone for a massive moral shift around slavery.

In 1838, Angelina Grimke became the first woman in the U.S. to address a political body in the very young United States. Here’s how the scene played out:
Angelina speaks in Philadelphia, 1838

Angelina could hear the mob outside. They'd progressed from threats and shouts to throwing bricks and stones, rattling the windows and doors of the assembly hall. The crowd inside wasn't physically hostile, at least not yet, but still very agitated. Many of the men (and they were almost all men) in attendance were in vehement opposition to what she was about to say. This was to be expected, she supposed. There was much at stake.

Angelina looked down at her simple Quaker gown and gloved hands, loosely clasping a sheaf of papers in her lap. For a moment, she imagined that time had stopped, and she was dressed in the brocades and fine slippers she'd worn as a young woman in Charleston, holding perfumed letters instead of the text to her controversial address. The sharp slap of the gavel brought her back from that reverie.

Angelina rose gracefully, with fluid movements, a small but reserved smile, her head held high atop the straightest of spines. She walked to the podium like the aristocratic daughter of the plantation that she was.

The room grumbled louder, hisses and shouts erupting from various corners. “Go home!” “Women don’t speak in public!” “She must not take the stage! Stand at the secretary’s desk!” Unsure of how to proceed, Angelina went to the smaller table at first; and took a moment to construct a podium of her own styling, using a top-hat to prop up her notes. Quickly, though, the embarrassed chairman reclaimed order and ushered her up the steps to a spot where she could be fully seen and heard, and be granted the dignity deserving of the topic at hand.

She stood at the full height of her womanhood. She not only looked serene, she felt it inside, such was her certainty. Her gaze was direct. Her voice was strong. Even those attempting to drown out her anti-slavery message with shouts and insults and bullying found themselves compelled to listen.

“I come to you as a Southerner, exiled from the land of my birth,” Angelina
I Am More Than My Race

began. “Exiled,” she continues, “by the sound of the lash, and the piteous cry of the slave. I stand before you as a repentant slaveholder. I stand before you as a moral being, endowed with precious and inalienable rights, which are correlative with solemn duties and high responsibilities; and as a moral being I feel that owe it to the suffering slave, and to the deluded master, to my country and the world, to do all that I can to overturn a system of complicated crimes, built up upon the broken hearts and prostrate bodies of my countrymen in chains, and cemented by the blood and sweat and tears of my sisters in bonds.”

The crowd outside continued with their furies. Angelina, through her many appearances, had become a masterful and compelling speaker: she had learned to flow with the reality of what was happening. Insofar as the assembly seemed to be bothered by the mob, she addressed it head on: “What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the leveling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting and commit violence upon our persons -- would this be anything compared with what the slaves endure?”

Her staunch internal fortitude, her bravery in the face of such high emotions, calmed those present. If this woman could hold her ground, they could do so as well.

The day after Grimke’s speech, the mob burned the building to the ground.

Meet Angelina and Sarah Grimke

Sarah Moore Grimke, the sixth child of John and Mary Grimke, was born in Charleston, South Carolina on November 26th, 1792. She was raised with her siblings, and spent her childhood moving between her parents’ large country estate and their property in Charleston. When Sarah was two years old Eli Whitney filed his patent for the cotton gin, which revolutionized the plantations of the South. As she aged, she watched her father’s
properties, wealth, and host of slaves grow exponentially.

Growing up in a wealthy Southern household amongst five brothers and four sisters, Sarah observed the disparity in gender roles and hierarchies. She attended the all-but-mandatory “schools for ladies’ etiquette” in Charleston, where she learned the skills required to exist in her privileged society. Ever the curious child, she would often tap into the studies of her older brother. Thomas S. Grimke was the family’s second child, and went on to become a prominent lawyer. Sarah read his lessons and textbooks after finishing her needlework, essentially following his entire curriculum. When Thomas began studying Latin, though, their father drew the line: There was only so much learning needed by a woman.

Her father, John Grimke was the patriarch of his large family. Although he held to a strict understanding and practice of his community’s gender and social roles, he allowed Sarah to participate in seminar-style discussions with her male siblings (all of whom were all studying law). John Grimke also ensured that his children understood basic skills, even if they might never need them. Sarah learned how to sew, mend, and cook—despite the fact that these services were almost always performed by slaves.

Sarah witnessed the injustices that surrounded her. At first she felt she had no influence over them, and thus submitted to her circumstances.

When Sarah was 12, her brother Thomas left to study at Yale. For Sarah, this was a defining moment: She was left behind while her brother went out into the world. Thomas would study law and ministry while Sarah entered South Carolina society—a dichotomy she couldn’t quite reconcile.

When Angelina was born in 1805, the 13-year-old Sarah begged her parents to be appointed her baby sister’s godmother. Her father agreed, and so Sarah was deeply invested in Angelina’s upbringing—to the point where Angelina took to calling her ‘mother.’ Like her older siblings, Angelina, grew up in the depths of Southern slavery, between her father’s plantation and the family manor in Charleston.
In 1819, John Grimke fell ill. He became so sick that he traveled north to Philadelphia to board with a large Quaker family, and consult a doctor there. Sarah accompanied her father, and attended to his every need. Eventually, as his sickness worsened, the doctor suggested John move, for a cure, to the seaside. Sarah took her ailing father to Long Branch, New Jersey, where she cared for him. Still, he died a few months later. Sarah oversaw his burial, alone in the North, and traveled home by sea along the Atlantic coast.

While aboard the ship she became further acquainted with the Quaker religion, and met a man named Israel Morris. Morris, a successful and seemingly happy Quaker, became a friend; He gave her many writings to take back to her home in South Carolina. They would share a correspondence well after the voyage ended. Returning home, Sarah found herself wholly disenfranchised with her Southern environment. She continued writing letters to Morris, and read the works of John Woolman.

Woolman was very much about connecting faith to action. He wrote, for example, “To say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by His life or by life derived from Him, is a contradiction in itself.” And “To Turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives.”

He also urged people to root out their own hypocrisies, and connect their material wealth to the suffering of others, writing, for example: “May we look upon our treasure, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try to discover whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.”

Sarah began to extract herself from “proper” society, and joined the Quaker congregation in Charleston. Her loyalties to her home quickly waned. At 19 she moved north, to Philadelphia. She lived with Morris’s sister Catherine, sometimes staying with Israel and his family at their country house. She spent seven years: adopting and living within the Quaker faith.
On one occasion, she returned to North Carolina for a visit. Her sister Angelina was moved and impressed by Sarah’s Quaker sensibilities, and began reading Quaker literature on her own.

**Coming into Consciousness**

While Sarah was in Philadelphia, Angelina lived with a few of her siblings in their mother’s house on the plantation. Angelina routinely witnessed the abuses inflicted upon slaves, and was especially horrified by the behavior of one of her brothers. She saw him growing more and more cruel towards the slaves, and was unable to keep him from inflicting brutal punishments. At that point Angelina began reading anti-slavery literature, and attending abolitionist lectures on her own, in secret.

Sarah was equally disturbed by the cruelty she witnessed. During one visit home she stayed for a time on the estate of her Uncle, the Governor of North Carolina. She remarked in her diary: “A slave, whose head was white with age, was lying in the corner of the hovel; he had under his head a few filthy rags, but the boards were his only bed, it was the depth of winter … As he removed the rags that covered [a] sore, I found that it extended half round the body and was shockingly neglected …”

**The Defining Moment**

In 1835 Angelina, now 30, wrote a letter to William Garrison: editor of *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper. She was reacting to a recent pro-slavery riot in Boston. Her letter opens: “Respected Friend, It seems as if I was compelled at this time to address thee, notwithstanding all my reasonings against intruding on thy valuable time, and the uselessness of so insignificant a person as myself offering thee the sentiments of sympathy at this alarming crisis.”

After reading the letter, Garrison was so impressed that he published it
under her name in the newspaper.

**Feeling the Fury**

After the publication of her letter to *The Liberator*, Angelina was shunned by the Quaker community. Disillusioned, she turned her sights away from her faith. The community, despite its professed humanitarianism, could not bring itself to take a strong, unambiguous position on the rights of all human beings.

Asserting her independence, Angelina published *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*. She stepped decisively into a leadership role—and Sarah began following her. The sisters lived together in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, and shared the spotlight of the abolitionist movement.

Theodore Weld, Angelina’s eventual husband, describes her decision to commit herself to the cause in this way:

> “That year ended as it began. She [Angelina] had done what she could. What had she done? Just this: She had convinced herself that it was impossible for one in the midst of slavery to act effectually against it. The problem was solved. To live among its horrors; to see it year by year wax stronger and more horrible, and yet to be helpless to mitigate its horrors; to know that deliverance must be forever hopeless, except from without — would be to her a living death. Should she stay there, thus dying by piecemeal? How gladly would she do it, if that would help to bring rescue! But now, clear as noon, she saw it, that, if she could do anything anywhere, it must be elsewhere than in the slave States. But what could she do anywhere? She had no plan, no thought. She stood at the parting of the ways, pondered long, and waited for light. At last it came. Eagerly she seized it. Life there was but death misnamed. Exile was the sole alternative; and, though that she knew was the straining of her heartstrings to breaking, she broke them, and
the struggle was over. Then all darkness fled, and daylight streamed.”

No Turning Back

Angelina quickly became a keynote figure against slavery, giving talks and leading rallies across the country. She and Sarah supported each other through a constant storm of criticism and public rebuke. Relying on their few allies, they forged a dedicated group of abolitionists. These included people such as Sarah Douglass (and her mother Grace Douglass), and Theodore Weld.

Leaning into Each Other

In November of 1829, the two sisters moved into the Morris household. Sarah and Angelina attended lectures, spoke, and wrote. In October of 1836 they traveled to New York for the ‘Agents Convention of American Anti-Slavery’ conference, in preparation for the founding of their own Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.

Inspired by the workshop, the sisters took their game to new level, blossoming into tireless abolitionists and civil rights activists. They published and lectured on the cruelties of slavery, seeking out as well for women’s rights. This led to Angelina’s correspondence with Catherine Beecher, the older sister of Harriet Beecher, concerning the woman’s role in the abolitionist cause. They continued in this way for a decade.

Angelina, Sarah, and Theodore withdrew from the public spotlight and settled down in the early 1840s. Sarah died in 1873, Angelina in 1879, and Theodore in 1895. All three lived to see the end of the American Civil War—which had been, in part, incited by their work.
Sarah Douglass: Guardian and Ally

Sarah was an outlier in 1800s America. She was an African-American Quaker and teacher. Her Grandfather, Cyrus Bustill, owned the family’s bakery, while her mother, Grace Douglass, ran a millinery store next door. Sarah was educated by a private tutor. She began teaching in New York, but moved back to Philadelphia where she worked at a private school for African American women. In September of 1831, Sarah became the first secretary for the newly founded Female Literary Association for Free Black Women.

Sarah first met the Grimke sisters in 1836, during the formation of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. She and her mother Grace became close friends with Sarah and Angelina, and shared frequent correspondence. The Douglasses also played a key role in the Grimke’s movement away from the Quaker church. Angelina was astonished by Grace’s accounts of Quaker meetings in which Ms. Douglass was disrespected and sometimes even refused admittance. At one point, Sarah took a trip to New York for a Quaker meeting, in which the only person to speak to her asked if she was there to clean the floors. In 1837, she attended the Anti-Slavery Convention for American Women in New York After Angelina and Sarah Grimke convinced her to do so. There she served on the 10-person committee producing the convention.
Sarah Douglass provided intense moral support for Angelina during her abolitionist activities. They were lifelong friends, and wrote each other consistently. The closest Sarah Douglass and Angelina came to conflict was a brief argument in which Angelina was disappointed that Sarah had not stayed at her house longer for a visit. Afterwards Sarah came more often, and for longer periods.

In 1853 Sarah became a supervisor at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, specifically managing the girl’s preparatory department. She also attended the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, and then the Pennsylvania Medical University where she studied women’s health. She lectured regularly on the subject at the Banneker Institute. In 1855 she married William Douglass. William was an African American Episcopal Clergyman and a widower, with nine adult children. Sarah was famously unhappy in her marriage. After her husband died in 1861, she recalled marriage as “that school of bitter discipline.”

**Theodore Dwight Weld: Strategist and Guardian**

Theodore Weld was raised on his family’s comfortable estate near Hartford, Connecticut. At 14 he took over the 100-acre farm, and began studying at Phillips Academy in Andover. After a time his eyes began to fail, and he was forced to discontinue his studies at 19. A doctor recommended travel for his health, and so began Weld’s first speaking series. He traveled the United States lecturing on mnemonics: the study of improving memory. His talks took him through the whole of the Eastern seaboard—including the deep South, where he witnessed slavery firsthand.

In 1823 Weld and his family moved to New York, where he resumed his studies, this time at Hamilton College. There he worked closely with the noted Evangelist minister Charles Finney, and began a new, two-year lecture tour about the importance of manual labor and moral reform.
In 1833, Weld enrolled as a student at the Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati. There, he began his crusade against slavery, becoming one of the “Lane Rebels”: a group of students who persisted in discussing abolitionism, even after the faculty banned the subject. Weld participated in an 18-day discussion, until Lane’s Board of Directors intervened. In protest, 80% of the student body left Lane. Weld then moved back to New York, where he joined the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Theodore Weld claims to have fallen in love with Angelina Grimke upon his first reading of her letter to William Garrison, published in *The Liberator* in 1835. He later wrote to her of its impact on him: “Your letter to W. Lloyd Garrison formed an era in my feelings, and a crisis in my history, that drew my spirit towards yours by irrepressible affinities.”

They first met in 1836, at an anti-slavery convention in New York. Angelina was intensely impressed by Weld, and attended each of his speeches with excitement. She wrote to her friend Jane Smith, detailing her infatuation: “I never heard so grand and beautiful an exposition of the dignity and nobility of man in my life,” Theodore quickly became a close friend to the Grimke sisters, and was a frequent visitor at their home. Author Robert H. Abzug writes this about Weld: “He took on the familiar part of advisor and guide. The Grimkes were Southerners in New York, women playing roles usually reserved for men, strong but vulnerable individuals who needed the support of friends and comrades. Weld was always there.”

By 1836, Weld was beginning to lose his voice from the continuous speaking tours that dominated his life. On his most successful tour Weld spoke at an incredible 236 venues, during a journey of 4,577 miles. As his voice began to fade — just as his eyes had suffered from intense book study—he settled into a more literary role within the abolitionist circles.

Weld and Angelina fell into a highly romantic relationship. Both despised the social norms regarding traditional courtship and marriage, and so they seemed to fit together perfectly. For two years they shared playful
and caring correspondence, while Weld supported the sisters in their speaking engagements. They sometimes quarreled regarding the question of women’s rights and slavery, debating which one must be addressed first. While Weld was a firm supporter of women’s rights, he was far more passionate and dedicated to the abolitionist movement. Although this caused the occasional rift, he and Angelina found themselves completely in love with each other.

The letters from the period just before their marriage are heartwarming, and a wonderful insight to their energetic characters:

Angelina writes, “I feel my Theodore that we are two halves of one whole, a twain one, two bodies animated by one soul and that the Lord has given us each other.”

To which he replies, “My heart is full! That letter found me four days ago! I tried to answer it immediately but I could not, and again the next day but could not write a word! And again yesterday but in vain!”

They were married at a friend’s home on May 14th, 1838, without a minister. The ceremony drew prominent abolitionists from all around the North.

Theodore, Angelina, and Sarah worked together to produce what would become a famous piece of abolitionist literature: *American Slavery as it is: A Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. The writing is considered one of the most important publications of its time, heavily influencing Harriet Beecher’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

The same year, Angelina gave birth to their son Charles. Angelina and Sarah still made occasional speaking trips to Philadelphia and New York, while Weld, his voice failing, stayed at home and tended his fields. Their marriage marked a turning point for the couple. They began to slide out of the public eye, settle down, and live quietly. They moved to the country, purchasing a plot of land where they lived as farmers. By this time they were a family of six: Angelina and Theodore had three children, and Sarah
lived with them. They remained there for the rest of their lives, Sarah dying first in 1873, followed by Angelina in 1879. After Angelina’s death, Theodore composed a book of the speeches given at her funeral, as well as a collection of his own thoughts regarding his late wife. He published *In Memory* in 1880. Weld himself would die 15 years later, in 1895.

**Catharine Beecher: Ally**

Angelina and Catharine Beecher challenged each other’s beliefs and methods, and helped each other hone their thinking. Through correspondence, they elevated each other’s thinking on how to bring people around to an abolitionist point of view. Their collected letters were published in essay form. Catharine helped Angelina grow in her thinking and framework. Catharine was born to a family that was both politically active and deeply religious, Catharine Beecher was one of the first to proclaim that women can, in some respects, “have it all.” She strongly believed that women are entitled to a full, well-rounded education, and that their roles as mothers and wives did not preclude them from having rich vocational and intellectual lives. Beecher herself, born in East Hampton, NY, in 1800, was a great example of this. A published poet while in her teens, she went on to champion the cause of women’s education—not just intellectually, but through physical fitness as well. In 1823, she and her sister opened the Hartford Female Seminary. She authored five books and, though conservative in maintaining male/female gender roles (she opposed women’s suffrage, for example), promoted the then-radical notion that education and child-rearing are not mutually exclusive. In 1852, Beecher left the East Coast and founded the American Women’s Educational Association, recruiting teachers to the growing country’s Western frontier.

**Israel Morris: Resourcer**

Israel Morris is best known for the important role he played in the life of Sarah Moore Grimke, a passionate abolitionist and promoter of women’s
suffrage. Grimke met Morris on a ship, shortly after her father’s death in 1819. He introduced her to Quakerism, which became a key part of her spiritual life. She and Morris shared a deep admiration for the writings of John Woolman—a Quaker preacher, journalist, and one of the earliest and most vocal abolitionists.

Lessons from the Grimke Sisters

Rely on Direct Experience: Let Your Stomach Be Turned
Feeling the pain and discomfort of others allows us to ground our work in direct, empathetic experience, and not to be swayed by the rhetoric of others. Feeling what’s happening to people who are being disadvantaged—and not being numbed out to it—isn’t about getting pulled into the suffering, but about developing a revolutionary compassion to feed your conviction about the work.

The Limits of Faith-Based Activism: Vanguards and Sheep
Religious people are joiners. They come together unified by a cosmology and worldview around faith—but that often masks a wide array of socio-political leanings, economic beliefs, prejudices, and internal constraints. Church bodies are the median representation of their congregation. For deeply rooted change agents, even the churches may be slow to come into consciousness.

The Importance of Correspondence and Connection: Lean Into Others on the Path
Like many of the charismatic leaders in this book, Angelina leaned into her allies—including her sister, Sarah Douglass, Catherine Beecher, and Theodore Weld. We all need to be dialoguing, debating, getting encouragement, and working out the fine points of our views and positions along with each other. The work is never done alone, and our thinking must evolve.
Resistance Can Make You Stronger
Would Angelina ever have left home and taken a stand had North Caro-
lina not exiled her? If a warrant had not been issued for her arrest? Not
necessarily. She may well have just continued to write letters to the editor,
and led a relatively placid Quaker life in Charleston. The challenges can
forge us, and make us who we are.
I Am More Than My Gender

“The female will always come up less than when measured by a male yardstick.”
- Andy Bernay-Roman

“It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.”
- Charlotte Bronte

“Visionary feminism is a wise and loving politics. It is rooted in the love of male and female being, refusing to privilege one over the other. The soul of feminist politics is the commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys. Love cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination and coercion. Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules. When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasizes the value of mutual growth and self-actualization in all relationships, their emotional well-being will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving.”
-bell hooks
Chapter 3

I am More Than My Gender

*Lucretia Mott and the Onset of the Women’s Rights Movement*

**Valuing The Female**

I grew up in a family that was gender divided. My lovely mother, despite her accomplishments, such as speaking many languages and playing several musical instruments, was considered “flaky”. She left when I was eight—and was later killed in a violent crime. As a result, I was raised by
my father during my coming-of-age years. He was an introverted, brilliant, competent, and analytical man. From his tutelage, I learned that the linear, logical world of the “masculine” was the preferred way to be—while the lateral, interconnected way of the “feminine” was less desirable.

He explicitly told me: Working in an office or a factory or a lab was more worthy of respect than working in the home or in one’s community. Furthermore, a hard, numbers-based career was better than a soft, artistic career. I should take care, he told me, to gain credentials and personal habits that would allow me to thrive in a man’s world. Yet, at school, I was discouraged from math and the sciences, dismissed for leadership roles, and rewarded for being cute and/or sexual. It wasn’t until I entered the Army ROTC at 18 that I understood my true potential, irrespective of my biological gender.

By then, I had learned to act more like a “man”. This has remained a semi-successful strategy for navigating life: I have skills that are rewarded, I am paid well for them. My kids have never gone hungry. I know that my ability to do this can’t be taken for granted: The fact that I can earn money and buy property, travel the world alone, rent a car, get a loan, have sex with whomever I choose, and control my reproductive capacity. This is due to the women and men who stepped out for justice and championed women’s rights during the last five generations.

Women are still in the process of coming into true parity—economically, politically, professionally. Today, our share of the public voice remains non-representative. Often, when women do attain power, they mimic the patriarchal leadership style. Recently I’ve been struck by how many gun-toting loner female action heroes are appearing in movies—when did being a brutal and life-destroying avenger become an aspirational role for the female?

I predict that in the coming decades, we will see new models of economies and enterprises that are built on a more intergenerational, interconnected
model of thriving: a more lateral model, rather than a dominance hierarchy. This kind of system will no longer be considered “soft” or “less than” the male system. Both approaches will be valued.

If this comes to pass it will have been made possible, in a very real sense, by the work of Lucretia Mott, and the other people, starting in the 1800s, who championed women’s rights.

Meet Lucretia Coffin Mott

London, 1840: Imagine living in a place where you are a minister in your church, educated and respected, and a tireless advocate against slavery. You, your husband, and a number of your friends, all committed to the cause of freeing the slaves, cross the Atlantic on a ship to attend an anti-slavery convention in London. You walk into the convention hall and are met with a group of British clergymen. They wave the Bible in your face, and declare that you are not permitted to speak. Moreover, you are not even allowed to leave the convention and speak with British women interested in abolitionism—because you might talk about other issues as well, threatening the Kingdom’s status quo.

This is what happened to Lucretia Mott. And it was at this moment she realized that, without the vote, women could not be impactful in the great social justice causes they believed in. This was the spark that turned Lucretia Mott into a powerhouse for social activism, abolitionism, and women’s rights.

The Back Story

Lucretia was raised in the Quaker faith. Her seaman father and shopkeeper mother sent her to a Quaker school, the Nine Partners school, where she stayed at the adjacent Quaker boarding house. As she progressed from student to teacher’s aid, Mott was struck by how “the charge for the education of girls was the same as that for boys, but that when they became
teachers, women received but half as much as men for their services… The injustice of this was so apparent.”

Mott also observed how her mother supported the family during her father’s long absences. While he was away at sea, Lucretia’s mother worked as a shopkeeper, imprinting in Lucretia a broad understanding of what a woman could accomplish in the world. Thomas Coffin was a merchant seaman until 1802, when his vessel was seized by a Spanish Man-of-War. When Lucretia was 20, her father left the ocean behind and invested his wealth in a nail manufacturing plant.

While at Nine Partners School Lucretia met James Mott, and he became close with Lucretia’s family. He went into business with Lucretia’s father. James and Lucretia were married, and they quickly set to work on building a family, eventually having a total of six children. Lucretia’s father died a few years after the wedding, leaving the family—including James—in a rough spot financially. Anna Coffin, Lucretia’s mother, returned to shopkeeping. Lucretia again taught school, and James sought employment with his uncle, who sold cotton and farming equipment. Lucretia also pursued religious studies, and was accredited as a minister in 1821 by her Quaker community: The Religious Society of Friends.

**Coming into Consciousness**

Before she began campaigning for women’s rights, Lucretia was well respected in the anti-Slavery movement. Her speech at the Anti-Slavery convention was remembered as “the wise, the impressive, the animating words spoken in our Convention by dear Lucretia Mott and two or three other excellent women who came to that meeting by divine appointment.” As a couple, the Motts were committed to living their beliefs. James Mott had begun divesting his wholesale business from slave labor goods as early as 1821, and by 1830 dealt strictly in wool, rather than cotton. He sold no goods produced by slave labor—and the family moved forward, arm in arm, in this way. But it was when the couple traveled together to
England in 1840, planning to attend the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention, that Lucretia's entire focus changed.

**The Defining Moment**

Lucretia and her female delegate colleagues attempted to entered the London convention, but were silenced by the English clergymen present. The rejection was a painful and world-changing insult for Lucretia. In her Quaker community she always had a strong voice, and had by this time been preaching in churches for years. On that day, in London, Lucretia began her historic campaign for women’s rights.

James Mott later wrote a book titled *Three Months in Great Britain*, detailing their time spent across the Atlantic. “No man can fathom the depths of rebellion in woman’s soul when insult is heaped upon her sex, and this is intensified when done under the hypocritical assumption of divine authority,” he said. In the short book he describes England’s factories—operated by children as young as 13—makes comments on English monarchical society, and describes the events of the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention, where the female delegates from America were barred from participation:

> “The subject of the admission of women was brought up on the first day of the Convention by Wendell Phillips, whose wife had been delegated by the Massachusetts Society. An animated and somewhat excited discussion ensued, which continued several hours, when it was decided in the negative by a pretty large majority. Thus one of the first acts of a Convention, assembled for the purpose of promoting the cause of liberty and freedom universally, was a vote, the spirit and object of which was a determination that the chains should not be broken, with which oppressive custom has so long bound the mind of woman. The female delegation finding themselves thus excluded, requested they might have an opportunity to confer with their sisters in England on the subject, few manifested a reluctance to granting this reasonable
request, but others appeared favorable. After it had been several times mentioned, in order that they might procure a place and fix a time, some of those who had professed to be in favor of such a meeting, said they were afraid other subjects might be introduced, though they had been told, and were again assured, that the wish to have the meeting was with no other view than to promote the emancipation of the slave, by encouraging one another in such measures as would be likely to hasten this desirable result. But their sectarian fears so overcame their anti-slavery feeling, that they were unwilling to trust the women of England to meet half a dozen from America, to confer together on the subject of slavery."

Afterwards, the English delegation attempted to distance themselves from their action of barring the female American delegates from the convention; they stated that Mott had been excluded “because she was a Quaker.” Nonetheless, the movement for women’s suffrage, in both England and America, started with this rejection. The trip to England galvanized Lucretia’s passion for women’s rights—in which James would be her faithful ally.

Another ally and amplifier would be Elizabeth Cady Stanton. James, Lucretia, and Elizabeth met in London, at a dinner surrounding the convention. Their conversation focused on the lack of female participation in the convention. It energized Elizabeth, and sparked the beginning of her joint efforts with Lucretia.

Elizabeth recalls: “When I first heard from the lips of Lucretia Mott that I had the same right to think for myself that Luther, Calvin, and John Knox had, and the same right to be guided by my own convictions, and would no doubt live a higher, happier life than if guided by theirs, I felt at once a newborn sense of dignity and freedom; it was like suddenly coming into the rays of the noon-day sun, after wandering with a rushlight in the caves of the earth.”
No Turning Back

Elizabeth and Lucretia became fast friends, and collaborated to organize the Seneca Falls convention of 1848. They published a statement in the Seneca County Courier five days prior to the convention, announcing their intention: to hold a women-only meeting on the first day, and a public meeting on the second. But so many people came to the small chapel where they were congregating that they were forced to lock the doors. During the confusion, a professor from Yale college was hoisted through an open window. He unbarred the doors, admitting the large congregation of both men and women outside. Thus the women-only convention was soon peppered with various men who were also allied to the cause.

Elizabeth had worked with Lucretia to rework the 1776 Declaration of Independence into what is known today as the Declaration of Sentiments.

“When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.” - From the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

When the two women led the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, theirs were the first names on the document. James, who was also present, signed his name below Lucretia’s.

Feeling the Fury

The convention spurred a flurry of acerbic press—as a consequence, the story of Seneca Falls traveled across the country and throughout the world.

In her autobiography, Eighty Years and More, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote: “No words could express our astonishment on finding, a few days
afterward, that what seemed to us so timely, so rational, and so sacred, should be a subject for sarcasm and ridicule... so pronounced was the popular voice against us that most of the ladies who had attended the convention and signed the declaration, one by one, withdrew their names and influence and joined our persecutors. Our friends gave us the cold shoulder and felt themselves disgraced by the whole proceeding.”

Accepting Personal Risk and Endangerment

As the anti-slavery and women’s movements became intertwined and began to gather steam, enormous crowds gathered to protest the now allied movements. On some occasions, tens of thousands of people would gather to demonstrate against reform, and for the preservation of the status quo. Factory workers, for example, concerned that freed slaves would increase competition for labor and undercut their already paltry wages, often showed up as pro-slavery and anti-feminist—sometimes, violently.

As a threatened public hunted for someone to revile, Lucretia Mott became a choice target. She lived increasingly under the threat of violence. On one occasion a mob approached her home, intending to burn it down. But they were misdirected, and instead burned down a black church and an orphanage in their anger. Although the threats against her were real and dire, Lucretia later reported that in her hour of danger, she had felt herself “strengthened and uplifted.”

The Pod around Lucretia Mott

James Mott: The Blood Bond and The Guardian *covered extensively above*
Elizabeth Cady Stanton: The Amplifier
Susan B. Anthony: The Strategist
Lucy Stone: The Ally
William Lloyd Garrison: The Amplifier
Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Amplifier

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born November 12th, 1815, in upstate New York. She was homeschooled, and lived under the constant pressure of her father, Daniel Cady—who made it clear that he had been hoping for a son. Cady was a US congressman, and later became a Justice on the Supreme Court. Elizabeth studied vigorously, graduating first from the Johnstown Academy, then the Troy Female Seminary in 1832. Afterwards she studied law in her father’s offices, where she learned of the gross inequalities facing women in the law. She also kept company with her liberal cousin, Gerrit Smith, who sparked her passion for the abolition movement. Gerrit soon also introduced Elizabeth to her future husband: Henry Brewster Stanton, a lawyer and a well-known abolitionist. In 1840, against the wishes of her parents, Elizabeth eloped.

In Elizabeth, Lucretia found the perfect amplifier. She was energetic about the cause, extremely driven, well spoken, and looked up to Lucretia as an ideal agent for women’s justice, saying: “Amid all the differences, dissentions, and personal antagonisms, through the years we have labored together in the Women’s Rights movement, I can not recall one word or occasion in which Mrs. Mott’s influence has not been for harmony, goodwill, and the broadest charity. She endured too much persecution herself ever to join in persecuting others. In every reform she stood in the forefront of the battle. Wherever there was a trying emergency to be met, there you could rely on Lucretia Mott.”

While Lucretia moved toward retirement, Elizabeth continued to work at women’s suffrage, and would do so for another 50 years. She worked closely with Susan B. Anthony; together they were a stunning team: Susan the strategist, and Elizabeth the orator. Lucretia often offered advice on their publications; both Elizabeth and Susan wanted to attack the system, and Lucretia convinced them to tone their words down.
Lucretia explained to Elizabeth and Susan that men belonging to legal bodies would pay no mind to animated addresses, they might be more inclined to accept something written in legal language. In 1854 Elizabeth addressed the New York State legislature. She championed the right to vote and the right to divorce. She also served as President for the National Women’s Suffrage Society from 1869 through 1890, touring the country and delivering speeches on women’s rights. Later in her life she co-authored the first three of six volumes of *A History of Women’s Suffrage* (1881) with Susan B. Anthony. In 1895 she published *The Women’s Bible*, which sparked widespread controversy among religious leaders. Elizabeth Cady Stanton died on October 26th, 1902.

**Susan B Anthony: Strategist**

As a young woman, already committed to human rights, Susan B Anthony quickly realized that women’s social agendas—whether they be the temperance movement, or abolition—would never come to fruition without the right to vote. Susan B. Anthony is remembered today as both a committed human rights worker and a champion of women’s rights.

Susan worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton for most of her suffrage career. “We little dreamed that when we began this contest,” wrote Susan, “that half a century later we would be compelled to leave the finish of the battle to another generation of women. But our hearts are filled with joy to know that they enter this task equipped with a college education, with business experience, with the freely admitted right to speak in public - all of which were denied to women fifty years ago.”

**Lucy Stone: Ally**

Lucy Stone was born on a small farm in Massachusetts. She was the eighth of nine children, and her family labored together to maintain the farm. As a child, she noticed that her father controlled all of the household
finances; her mother would have to sneak coins from her own produce sales in order to buy the things she wanted. The sting of this inequality stuck with Lucy as she began teaching in local schools at the age of sixteen. She was paid one dollar a day, while her brother—who worked alongside her—made nearly twice that. On one occasion, while substituting for her brother, she was paid less than his wage—even though she had taught all of his classes. When Lucy complained to the faculty they dismissed her completely, telling her that she could only ever earn a “woman’s pay.”

As a child, Lucy had read in the Bible, Genesis 3:16: “and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” Lucy was distraught that the Bible sanctioned the outright subjugation of married women. She resolved never to marry so she could maintain control of her own finances and life choices. She had seen first-hand the demeaning effects of the dominant male marital institution: Her aunt Sally lived with the family on their farm; she was broke and without prospects, as her husband had abandoned her, taking control over her finances with him. Lucy refused to suffer such a fate, and rose to the highest levels of education she could. If she learned Greek and Hebrew, she reasoned, she could discover the true translations of those misogynistic Bible verses.

In 1839 Lucy began a term at Mt. Holyoke Seminary School. But her father would not pay for her college education, so she left the school for four years to teach and save money. In 1843 she began attending Oberlin College in Ohio. While Oberlin was known for its liberal policies, which included mixed racial admissions, it was still a male-centric establishment.

Lucy was passionate about public speaking, yet the school would not allow her to pursue a degree in the field of oratory. She graduated in 1847: the first woman to earn a college degree in Massachusetts. She was instrumental in the women’s rights convention of 1850, where her speeches moved hundreds of people. As she toured the country, speaking on women’s rights and abolitionism, her posters were often torn down, and, according to letters from the time, she was “pelted with rotten fruit,
ice water, and prayer books” by people who didn’t want a women speaking in public. Despite her previous convictions against marriage, Lucy wed Henry Blackwell in 1855. The marriage was one of equality, mutual respect, and tireless civil rights efforts. But Lucy retained her family name—a break from convention was hugely controversial at the time.

Lucy continued advocating for women’s rights, and was active into her old age, even while raising her daughter. In 1890 she again teamed up with Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Lucy died on October 18th, 1893, thirty years before women would gain the right to vote nationally. She was cremated - the first person in Massachusetts to be cremated in a newly-completed crematorium. Her ashes remain at Forest Hills in Boston.

**William Lloyd Garrison: Amplifier**

William Lloyd Garrison was a renowned abolitionist, newspaper editor, advocate of women’s rights, and long time friend of the Mott family. Born December 10th, 1805 in Newbury, Mass, he was raised primarily by his mother after his father ran out on the family. William began his newspaper career at the age of 13, enrolling as an apprenticeship with the *Newburyport Herald*. He worked there until he was 20 years old. At that point he borrowed money from his employer to start his own newspaper. The publication quickly went under, and Garrison moved first to Boston, where he began worked with a publisher named Benjamin Lundy.

Lucretia and William met in June of 1830. William, then 24 years old, had just been released from a Baltimore prison, where he had served 41 days for libel. This occurred when Garrison had been working at an abolitionist newspaper called *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, run by Lundy. Garrison had written an article which detailed the practice of a Massachusetts shipowner - one Francis Todd - who was transporting slaves for a Baltimore-based merchant named Austin Woolfolk. The two businessmen—in an effort to save their reputations, conceal the truth, and punish an investigative reporter—brought a libel case against Garrison,
who lost and was sentenced to six months in jail.

After his experience in Baltimore, on the recommendation of Lundy, Garrison sought out the Motts. By then James Mott had begun his free trade wool business, in which he boycotted the use or distribution of goods produced with slave labor. Garrison and the Motts immediately became friends, and Lucretia arranged a meeting for William to speak publicly. But though Garrison was a passionate writer he was a failure at public speaking, and took lessons at this art from Lucretia—who spoke among her community as a Quaker minister. After William returned to Boston he began the publication of an abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, with the first issue dropping on January 1st, 1891. This was the same paper which would publish Angelina Grimke's letter, sparking her spotlight in the abolition movement.

William helped the Motts found the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832, and the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. On September 4th of the following year, Garrison married Helena Benson, the daughter of an abolitionist merchant. The couple had seven children. William traveled with the Mott family to England for the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. He made a strong impression on all the attending delegates by initiating a silent protest after the female delegates were barred from attendance, demonstrating his allyship. This was the moment where Garrison became as avid a suffragist as he was an abolitionist. He would continue to support the suffrage movement, and the Motts, for the rest of his life.

Through the 1850s, Garrison became increasingly radical with both his writing and (much improved) public addresses. At an 1854 abolitionist rally in Framingham, Mass, he created widespread controversy by publicly burning a copy of the US Constitution. He continued to publish *The Liberator*, and wrote frequently about watershed events like the Dred Scott Decision (No black could claim US citizenship), John Brown's military actions (Armed slave revolt at Harper's Ferry), and other subjects related to civil rights. When the Civil War broke out, Garrison firmly supported
Lincoln and the Union through his newspaper.

Garrison published the final edition of *The Liberator* in 1865, after the Civil War came to an end. He had edited each and every one of the issues—a total of 1,820 since 1831. Garrison continued to advocate for women's suffrage, and remained close friends with the Motts until his death on May 24th, 1879.

**Lesson from Lucretia Mott and the Early Women’s Movement**

**Hypocrisy or Inconsistency in Activist Circles**
Don’t expect coherence between presumably linked ideologies. People move at the pace they can move. This was especially evident in the early 1800s, when people were prepared to discuss the rights of slaves, but not of women. Keep going anyway.

**Liberation Theologies Often Co-Exist**
The corollary and opposite to the first lesson is that often, when you do wake up to the sovereignty of all beings, you often begin to see related movements as inseparable.

**The Ballot is Foundational to other Social Concerns**
For both the civil rights movement, the gender rights movements, and other movements we will look at, the right to vote comes first. You must have representation to have influence. Get the vote, then work on the subjects that are symptoms and systems of oppression. This includes voter suppression, gerrymandering, and other ongoing attempts—even after formal enfranchisement—to deny representation.

**Speak the Language of the Dominant Class until you Have Power—then Change the Language**
In the women's movement, activists first spoke the then-language of men: law, finance, legislation, economics, biblical and literary scholarship, linear
organizations and power structures, committees, etc. The movement took its notes from prior movements. It would take many more generations to truly bring feminine styles into leadership.

**Mentorship and Handoffs Between Generations**
In the Women’s movement, there were clear alliances and handoffs so that embedded knowledge wasn’t lost. We see some attempts at this in other movements. Lucretia Mott at the end of her tenure as a leader in the movement, said it this way, “Weep not for me. Rather let your tears flow for the sorrows of the multitude. My work is done. Like a ripe fruit I admit the gathering. Death has no terrors for it is a wise law of nature. I am ready whenever the summons may come.”

**Polarity: The Power of Partnerships**
In the civil rights work, when blacks and whites allied, magic happened. In gay rights, it was a defining night when straight people joined embattled homosexuals to shame the police. Here, it was the male/female polarity. People need allies outside of the threatened class to activate and advocate. Don’t go it alone.

**Plant Seeds that Will Bear Fruit Long After You Die**
Don’t worry about seeing the outcome. Just do the work. If it makes the world more free and beautiful, do it in full faith.

**It Doesn’t MOVE Until You Get Political and Strategic**
Good ideas and well-meaning opinions are nice. But it takes committees, organization, collective work, and influential pods with strategic intent and political energy and will to make a movement. Make sure that you are working with intent and direction.

**Let Benefactors Benefact: Accepting Help**
The more you can allow others to help you, the more you can focus on the critical work at hand- whether money, housing, or basic life support.
I Am More Than My Sexuality

“It takes no compromise to give people their rights. It takes no money to respect the individual. It takes no political deal to give people freedom. It takes no survey to remove repression.”
- Harvey Milk

“Amazing how eye and skin color come in many shades yet many think sexuality is just gay or straight.”
- DaShanne Stokes

“At some point in our lifetime, gay marriage won’t be an issue, and everyone who stood against this civil right will look as outdated as George Wallace standing on the school steps keeping James Hood from entering the University of Alabama because he was black.”
- George Clooney
Chapter 4

I Am More Than My Sexuality

Harry Hay and the Gay Rights Movement

To Live and Love in Secrecy

Have you ever felt the longing of deep love? Have you ever been so in love that you wanted to shout it from the rooftops? To compose songs and poems, make love unfettered, and then write stories about it? Are you in love in this moment?
Now imagine that the person you love is of the “wrong” gender. And that this love will have to be kept secret all of your days, under threat of ostracization or even death. Imagine that you have to create an entirely false front, even to the extent of marrying and having children, to make it appear as though your sexual identity conforms to the norm. Your very self, your true nature, will never be known. Your life will be a lie.

None us would want this for ourselves. And it wasn’t just hiding their love: Prior to the gay rights movement, gay men were regularly beaten, denied employment, harassed, arrested, rounded up en masse by police, extorted and more.

Harry Hay, when asked about what is was like to “come out” in the 1930’s said, “In that time, you aren’t a gay person, you aren’t a homosexual person, you’re a degenerate. And what you were suffering from was what was known as ostracism. Ostracism means you don’t exist at all. And that’s a very difficult situation to live with. As gay people, we had been chasing ostracism by that point for probably 300 years. You just knew that you should have dropped into your black hole.”

The word “homosexual” wasn’t even allowed in the dictionary until 1938. As recently as the 1970s in the United States, and in many parts of the world today, the fate of the homosexual is to lie or die.

And I mean literally die. Either by direct attack from enforcers of a straight-biased culture, or from medical ignorance and malfeasance. One of the most underreported genocides in the world has actually been a “gendercide.” The unwillingness to care for gay men led to marginalization of the AIDS epidemic. In its early years men were dying by the thousands, yet the crisis was largely ignored by an indifferent government. By 1990, twice as many American men had died from AIDS as in the Vietnam war; by 2005, more than 500,000 people had died of AIDS in the US alone.

Any movement toward civil rights regardless of sexuality (such as lesbian,
bisexual, transgendered, nonbinary, asexuality movements), stand on the shoulders of Harry Hay, one of the earliest public and vocal activists for gay rights.

Meet Harry Hay

Henry “Harry” Hay was one of the first people to speak out and change our national mindset around homophobia. He not only saw it as acceptable, but also a valuable alternative culture that should be celebrated. Hay was a civil rights activist known for his part in the founding of America’s Gay Rights movement. He initially “came out” in 1932, on the Stanford Campus, but went back underground shortly thereafter. He later married a woman, adopting the appearance of a heterosexual life. He eventually had to “come out” again. His contribution to equal rights regardless of sexual orientation cannot be overestimated. With quiet persistence Hay launched the Mattachine society, NACHO, the first PRIDE parade, and the Radical Faeries. He was also instrumental in persuading the Department of Defense to change its policies about gay service members.

Harry Hay: The Back Story

Harry Hay was the son of rich parents: an international industrialist father and an artistically-inclined, Bohemian mother. He grew up in a life of great privilege, which helped him develop a mindset that nothing—not even creating radical social change—was out of his reach.

Both Harry’s maternal and paternal grandfathers were mining engineers. The Hays had located in South Africa under the influence of English investor Cecil Rhodes, at the start of his lucrative mining career. Hay’s father, Harry Sr., spent 10 years in Johannesburg before meeting his future wife Margaret Neall. Born in 1886, in what was then part of the Arizona territory, she came from a military family and had followed her father to South Africa at the turn of the century.
Harry Sr. courted Margaret primarily through social events hosted by the Martha Washington Club for American Women in South Africa, and she eventually accepted his proposal. They were married in 1911. Shortly afterward Harry Sr. was offered a job administering a gold mine in the Tarkwa wilderness on the Gold Coast of West Africa, a British colony until modern-day Ghana declared independence in 1957). The newlyweds lived in luxury; when the Tarkwa bay became too shallow for watercraft, they were carried to and from shore on the backs of their servants. When Margaret was eight months pregnant with Harry Jr. she sailed to England, while Harry Sr. remained in South Africa.

Margaret spent three years raising Harry in the UK. During that time she was a member of high society, a favorite at social gatherings, and a frequent theatergoer. Harry Sr., meanwhile, took a job running a copper mine in Northern Chile. He traveled from Africa to New York and on to Chile. Margaret gave birth to Harry’s younger sister, “Peggy” Margaret Caroline Hay, in February of 1914. World War I began that year, and Henry Sr. instructed Margaret to move the family to Chile. She packed the family’s estate, but could not leave England due to air raids and submarine blockades. After a long delay the family managed to board a transport ship bound for the Americas, and eventually joined Harry Sr. in the Andes.

As in Africa, the Hays lived in utmost luxury during their time in Chile. Harry Sr. was paid an annual salary of $50,000 - which translates to roughly $1.2 million today - thus Harry Jr began his life as a privileged child. This included the full-time care of a nanny, Ms. Pittock. “Harry was presented to his father for one hour in the afternoons, and he spent little more time than that with his mother… On treasured rare occasions, he was allowed to spend an entire morning with [Margaret], watching her have breakfast in bed, then play the piano.”

In 1916 Harry Sr. suffered an accident at the mine, and lost his right leg below the knee. Although the Chilean hospital was able to treat his injury, he was unable to continue working. The family moved to Southern
I Am More Than My Sexuality

California, where Harry Sr. took up farming. Money tightened, but not to an uncomfortable degree.

Harry lived under the sharp and judgmental eye of his father, who regularly scorned him for being “a sissy” - Harry would rather direct his friends in plays than play sports. Harry Sr. seemed to grow increasingly irritated with his son’s daily behavior, and beat him over his ears repeatedly; the abuse left permanent hearing damage. Bullied on the playground as well, he took to his books—testing as one of the nation’s first ‘gifted’ children.

The Great Depression evaporated Harry Sr’s wealth. The Hays made by on their orange orchards, but Margaret was forced to sell off her silver and rare book collection. Even after the depression ended, the family would never recover the wealth they’d lost.

Coming into Consciousness

Graduating high school a year early, Harry began his studies at Stanford University in 1930. His father insisted that he study law or medicine, but Harry took mainly history and drama courses. Growing up in privilege had, despite his trials, given him a strong sense of confidence, and in his third year at the University he came out as gay: an extraordinary thing to do in 1932. This led to his dropping out of Stanford, and pursuing a career in acting. Harry Sr. hated the fact that his son had chosen to pursue a career on stage, which drove the wedge further between them. But the more broad-minded Margaret, a fan of the theater and a lifelong supporter of her son, said nothing against Harry’s decisions.

In 1933, during a stage production of The Ticket of Leave Man, Harry met the American actor and political activist Will Geer. Though the two avoided each other for the first six weeks, a hiking trip to White’s Canyon brought them together as lovers.

It was Geer who ignited Hay’s passion as an activist. In 1933, Will sent Harry to a demonstration in LA’s Bunker Hill district. The protest, The
Milk Strike, was a nationwide effort to raise the price of milk paid to dairy farmers. The gathering became riotous, and Harry struck a policeman with a rock; the officer fell from his horse and into the crowd. Sympathizers guarded Harry, shepherding him out of harm’s way.

After the strike, Geer invited Hay to play a larger part in his own political activities. Together, they composed political theater sketches. They performed these from the back of Geer’s van, appearing at demonstrations in “free speech zones” like Westlake Park and on Olivera street in LA. Four months into their relationship, Geer recommended a Communist education class. Hay attended. The discussions and challenging material inspired him, and he quickly aligned himself with the Communist Party in Los Angeles.

Through this first adult relationship, Harry learned what it meant to be a political activist. It was during that time Hay began thinking about banding together with other homosexuals, and starting a mutually supportive community. Geer was Hay’s lover—but not all of Hay’s lovers, Geer included, would be on track with his personal vision. Though Geer shared Hay’s trials as a gay man, he did not support Harry’s idea of a homosexual utopia. He eventually split with Harry, and married a woman: not an unusual course for homosexuals compelled to “fit in.” Having a relationship with a female foil—a “beard,” as the slang expression goes—has been and remains a common practice for gay men who wish to (or must) conceal their true orientation.

Harry’s father suffered two strokes in the late 1930s; the second left most of his body paralyzed. Margaret had by then deferred all of the medical choices to Harry Jr., who by this time had moved back to Southern California. Harry Sr., bedridden and delusional, somehow convinced himself that Margaret was trying to poison him, and would not allow her to come near him. Instead he insisted that Harry Jr. care for him. “As Big Harry conceded to despair, he seemed, in his misery, to be reaching out to the son he had so completely rejected.”
In 1938—under advice from a therapist and trying to salvage his relationship with the Communist Party—Harry grew his own “beard” and married his friend and comrade Anita Patky, “a tall, boyish looking Jewish woman.” Margaret was torn between excitement over her eldest son’s marriage and horror that he was marrying a Jew. But she came to befriend Anita, who became an integral part of her life.

One week into his son’s honeymoon, Harry Sr, passed away. Margaret liquidated most of her husband’s remaining assets, and moved into a smaller house close to the newly married couple.

Harry and Anita adopted two children, and until 1951 sustained a seemingly uncomplicated, if fundamentally false, relationship; Anita knew nothing of her husband’s true sexual orientation. Both were active communist party members, and Harry taught history and music theory classes at the communist school. They also enjoyed the support of Harry’s mother—who, as she grew older, took a more active role in her son’s life, even attending occasional rallies.

**Defining Moments**

On July 8th, 1950, while waiting for his adopted daughter Hannah to finish her dance lessons, Harry met fashion designer Rudi Gernreich. After 11 years of suppressing his homosexuality, Harry fell into a passionate relationship with Rudi. They met twice a week, in secret, through the following year. The two became infatuated with each other, and shared the idea of a nationwide homosexual movement. It was during this time that they laid the groundwork for the Mattachine Society: the United States’ first step towards a gay rights movement.

When Harry had first broached the topic of his homosexual initiative to Gernreich, showing him his drafted prospectus, he received an answer the polar opposite of Geer’s reply eight years earlier. “It’s the most dangerous thing I’ve ever seen,” Gernreich said, “and I’m with you one hundred
percent.” Its purpose was to unify, educate and politically lead the gay male community to a new level of integration, freedom and civil rights. They desired to “rouse the homosexuals… one of the largest minorities in America today… to take the action necessary to elevate themselves from the social ostracism an unsympathetic culture has perpetrated upon them.”

The two began to scout for potential recruits, showing them a manifesto Harry had written: a proclamation calling for “gay rights at any cost.” At one point the two men visited the nude beaches of Malibu and the Pacific Coast, where they collected over 500 signatures on the petition they were circulating—though few seemed interested in attending a meeting of the society. Finally, Harry and Rudi met two like-minded supporters: Robert Hull and Charles Rowland. When the four men came together for a meeting, the Mattachine Society began to take shape. The name Mattachine was derived from a historical French secret society, and it’s etymology is from an old Arabic word “mutawajjihin” or mask-wearer.

As the Mattachine Society grew into the country’s first national homosexual community, Hay broke the truth about his orientation to his wife, Anita. He told her in April of 1951; they were divorced that September. Hay then informed the communist party of his homosexuality. He was relieved of his position with distinction, and given honors for his years as a Marxist teacher. With these two momentous decisions, Harry was free of all outside obligations. He turned his full attention to Rudi and their nascent society. And for a few months, the organization flourished under their joint enthusiasm. But Rudi, meanwhile, was ambitiously, and successfully, pursuing his career in fashion. In 1952 their relationship ended—but its legacy, at least temporarily, was Mattachine.

One of the major contributions of the Mattachine was the start of the homophile movement, which eventually led to the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychological Association list of disorders.

By 1953, though, the group was experiencing further splits. Its unity began
to degrade. Harry, along with the other original members, abandoned the project.

It was at this juncture that James Kepner—Harry’s close friend and an original Mattachine attendee—began working on *ONE*, the nation’s first Gay and Lesbian magazine. Harry wrote articles for the publication, and worked closely with Kepner until falling into an unhealthy relationship with a hat maker named Jorn Kamgren.

The decade Harry lived with Jorn is sometimes called his “dark years.” It witnessed little progress toward Hay’s dream of a gay rights movement. Though none of his friends liked Kamgren, Hay’s mother did; he, Jorn, and Margaret ate dinner together twice a week. Margaret also invested $25,000 in Jorn’s hat business. When Harry approached his mother to confide his relationship problems, Margaret counseled that he stay with Jorn—in part, perhaps, because of her large investment.

Harry Hay’s “dark years” ended in 1962, when he and Kepner initiated a romance. Their tryst was brief, but it served to sever the relationship with Jorn and place Harry back in the gay activism spotlight.

One year later, with Jorn’s spell fully broken, Harry met the man who would become his ultimate ally: John Burnside.

Harry first met Burnside at a series of seminars hosted by the prominent British historian and anthropologist Gerald Heard, which he attended with Kepner. In September 1963 Harry took his idea for a gay square dancing league to the *ONE* offices, where he again encountered Burnside. The two resolved to meet again and, after a single date, began their relationship. Burnside, born in Seattle in 1916, was primarily an inventor. He had studied physics and math, graduating from UCLA in 1945, and had worked briefly as an engineer in the aircraft industry before turning to his own inventions for income. John founded his own kaleidoscope company in 1959, and patented a new optical design which he called the “Teleidoscope”. Unlike traditional kaleidoscopes, Burnside’s invention
CHAPTER 4

featured a lens set within an open tube: It displayed patterns from things seen outside the scope, rather than from the objects tumbling inside. The product proved popular, and for more than a decade the sale and manufacturing of Teleidoscopes served as John’s (and later Harry’s) primary source of income.

Harry’s relationship with John was a critical turning point in his life. After meeting and falling in love, Harry fully embraced the ‘superiorities’ of gay culture about which publisher James Kepner had written. While assimilation into heterosexual culture was a valid step, assimilation overall wasn’t the goal; Hay and Burnside hoped for an actual celebration of gay music, fashion, language. Later, author Daniel Dirito would write: “the world is large enough for every cultures to exist...and the world ought to be educated and enlightened such that acceptance equates with the ability...no, the desire and the demand to embrace and celebrate them all. If society is akin to the palette of an artist, then it is essential that all the colors remain...lest we become a canvas absent contrast...imbued with the blandness born of banality. America may be the proverbial melting pot but our greatness results from the soup we serve from that pot...a complex soup that maintains an array of distinct flavors...all perfectly blended such that each maintains its identity and each is enhanced by the presence of the others...not overwhelmed or masked such that the independent flavors are indistinguishable.”

Yet John Burnside, unlike Harry, was still mired in a hetero marriage. Though he had known from an early age that he was homosexual, he repressed himself. Burnside had married Edith Sinclair when he was 23, and though they never had children they were business partners, together running the Cal Kal (California Kaleidoscope) company, which flourished through John’s patents.

For Harry, trying to negotiate a relationship with John around the edges of a heterosexual marriage was painfully reminiscent of his own marriage, which had ended 12 years earlier. For the first two months that they saw
each other, Harry would come to John’s house on the weekends. Edith enjoyed Harry’s company, and thought him an entertaining, cultured friend of her husband. Harry slept in the guest room, and John would occasionally sneak in and join him. Ultimately Harry helped John negotiate a way out of his marriage. During their bitter divorce, however, Edith’s lawyers successfully stripped John of Cal Kal—until, years later, a clever gambit allowed him to reclaim his patent and take back the company. It was not until 1965 that Harry and John had financial stability once again. From that point on he and Hay ran the kaleidoscope factory together, while continuing to speak out in support of homosexuality and publish pieces in ONE magazine.

Earlier that same year, Hay and Burnside founded the Circle of Loving Companions: a political discussion and action group. Its base fluctuated over the years. Sometimes Harry and John were the only members. Then—in the spring of 1965—a split occurred within the ONE office. Overnight, a single disgruntled employee moved roughly half of the press’s archives and collection to his private property. This sparked months of court proceedings, and a total division of ONE magazine. For Harry and John this was a heartbreaking turn of events, and distanced them from organizational activism. But it provided them with the time and drive to focus on broader issues.

NACHO - the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations – was formed in February 1966. Its initial focus was ending discrimination against homosexuals within the U.S. Department of Defense. The group selected Armed Services Day to stage their demonstration. Harry and John worked intensely to prepare for the protest. They held biweekly meetings for two months, and plastered gay bars with leaflets, route information, and appeals for involvement. John designed the floats and signs for cars. On May 21st 1966, the first gay motorcade, made up of 13 cars, rolled through the streets of San Francisco.

Harry and John lived together in California until 1971. During those years
they cultivated a safe work space for homosexuals at their Los Angeles teleidoscope factory, performed countless acts of social activism, and participated in the founding of the Southern California Gay Liberation Front. Harry was elected the group’s first chairman; he and John sometimes offered their factory as a meeting place.

The couple left L.A. in 1971, and moved to a property outside San Juan Pueblo, a small village in northern New Mexico. They established good relations with the neighboring Native Americans, and relocated their factory onto reservation land. But on July 7th, 1973, their factory caught fire and burned to the ground. Because they were operating on reservation land, their insurance claim was denied. Penniless again, they began collecting social security, and settled into their post-industrial lives.

The couple’s hiatus in New Mexico represented a stark change from their activist days in California. While they still participated in the gay liberation movement throughout the state, the culture was not as evolved as it had been in either Los Angeles or San Francisco. A New Mexico neighbor remembers their impact: “Harry and John stood out with their passionate views and active life, [though] Harry’s radical views and confrontational stance just didn’t go over. But he did kick up some shit.”

During that time they focused on local issues, occasionally traveling back and forth to Los Angeles. Harry continued to correspond with James Kepner, though their work now focused primarily on The Circle of Loving Companions. This organization gradually evolved, transforming into a grass-roots movement still known as the Radical Faeries. Together with colleagues John Kilhefner and Mitchell L. Walker, Harry planned the first Faerie gathering in 1979. The event was a resounding success, drawing more than 200 people. Burnside and Hay then returned in triumph to Los Angeles, where they established ‘Faerie Central’ at their home.

Though the Radical Faeries first “Spiritual Conference” was held in 1979, the movement spread quickly across the United States and inspired the
creation of “Faery Circles” around the world. One of the first gay movements to openly challenge “hetero-imitation” behavior, the Faeries began to create an alternative: segregated Faerie communities that lived close to the land, and placed a high value on pagan belief systems and spiritual practice. Today—with their strong emphasis on sustainability and self-reliance—the Faeries attract people from all sexual orientations and genders. They even publish their own magazine—RFD.

Burnside was concerned that Hay was not receiving adequate care in Los Angeles for his mounting health problems, which included lung cancer and pneumonia. In 1999 the two returned to San Francisco. They remained life partners—fueling each other’s passions, personal and political—until Harry’s death in October 2002. Harry and John worked with the Radical Faeries for the rest of their lives.

Even after Hay’s death, the Faeries continued to have a profound impact. The well-known “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” grew as a spin-off from their initial conference. The Faeries still have an especially large presence in the San Francisco area, but their members and communes are scattered across the country. In a New York Times Sunday Magazine feature in 2015, Alex Halberstadt wrote about his experience at a Faerie community in Middle Tennessee: “Unlike many queer enclaves, the place seemed to stipulate no demands; the usual hierarchies — of gender and race, age and attractiveness, money and power — seemed, for those several days, if not suspended, then magically indistinct.”

In many ways, the Radical Faeries were the seeds of the Gay Pride movement (which began in 1969), and that of all the outspoken and socially active members of the sex-positive LGBTQ and straight communities that have come since. Attitudes and laws directed at queers have been changing rapidly, in large part because of people who identify closely with the Radical Faeries.

Though only a small percentage of such people live on “official” Faerie farms or communes, Faeries can be found everywhere—and it’s easy to
join their communities. In 2019 alone at least 50 major Faeries events are scheduled to occur across the globe, from China to New Zealand.

The Pod Around Harry Hay

Will Geer: The Ally
Rudi Gernreich: The Guardian and The Moderator
James Kepner: The Amplifier
John Burnside: The Strategist and Ally
Margaret Neall: The Blood Bond and Resourcer

Will Geer: Ally

William “Bill” Geer was an American actor and political activist. Born March 9th, 1902 in Indiana, he obtained a Masters Degree in botany from the University of Chicago. He had his Broadway debut in 1928, and moved to Los Angeles shortly after to pursue a career on screen. Will worked with the John Reed Experimental Theater to put on fundraising events, solidifying his reputation as a radical leftist. The Mountain View hotel, on Hollywood Boulevard, afforded him free accommodation in exchange for weekly performances. Geer staged short political sketches in the hotel’s parlor, satirizing the government. The titles of these productions included 1000 Armed Reds March on Raspberry Fields, and Today We Fascist. Harry was Will’s co-star in these performances, and they rehearsed together nightly.

While Hay’s communist education was underway, he and Geer began to drift apart. In part, Hay attributed this to Geer’s “total immersion” policy in regard to communist recruiting. He admitted to initially feeling alienated within the groups. He was criticized as reactionary, and couldn’t draw connections between the theories taught and his own world understanding. Nevertheless, Hay stuck with the programs out of his love for Bill, eventually adopting the communist teachings. In July of 1934, Geer and Hay participated in the general strikes sweeping Los Angeles. Geer was invited to speak at numerous locations, and Harry acted as his secretary.
The pair traveled the state distributing food to the strikers. While in San Francisco, Hay and Geer saw the violence that occurred when the Governor called in the state militia. In the rioting that followed, two were killed by militia gunfire.

Harry remarked on the profound impact this had on him: “You couldn’t have been a part of that and not have your life completely changed.”

Following the San Francisco episode, Harry and Geer dove headfirst into the communist party. Unfortunately for them both, the party maintained a strict policy against homosexuality. Under a familiar oppression within his new family, Hay began proposing the idea of a “team of brothers” to Geer. He suggested that they should form a society of “just us,” but Will would not hear of it. Geer claimed that such a community already existed in the theater, and that Harry’s ideas were impractical.

Once, while arguing over the subject, the famous pianist Maud Allen interjected. She told Harry that “this [idea] was possible but you might have to start it yourself.” Harry began to understand this more fully as his time with Geer wore on, and soon their relationship ended. Geer married actress Herta Ware later in 1934, and the couple had three children before divorcing in 1954. Will Geer died on April 22nd, 1978.

**Rudi Gernreich: Guardian and Moderator**

Rudi Gernreich was born in Austria on August 8th, 1922. In 1938, during Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria, he and his mother—both Jewish refugees—emigrated to the United States, where they made their home in Los Angeles.

Publically Gernreich was a hallmark of modern fashion, working actively against the sexualization and shaming of the human body. Privately he was the co-founder of Hay’s Mattachine society, and his partner for several years. Their relationship was not to last. As Rudi became increasingly visible in the fashion community, he took ever greater pains to protect
his public identity. Rudi also began to see other men, and Harry’s adopted children became a burden to their relationship. In July 1952 the pair separated. After leaving Mattachine, Rudi became a world famous fashion designer. In 1953 he met his life partner, Oreste Pucciani, and the two lived together for the rest of Rudi’s life. Harry kept Rudi’s identity as co-founder of Mattachine a secret—only identifying him as “X” in interviews—until Gernreich’s death in 1985.

James Kepner: Amplifier

James Kepner began life as an abandoned infant in Galveston, Texas, and was adopted by James Kepner Sr. and his wife, Mary. He graduated high school in Galveston and worked in Texas until 1942, when he moved to San Francisco. Kepner was an influential writer within the Gay and Lesbian communities, chiefly responsible for the magazine ONE — the nation’s first Gay and Lesbian serial publication. Kepner was also responsible for collecting and cataloging troves of gay literature, and remains one of history’s most significant gay archivists. His collection remains intact, and is today known as the International Gay and Lesbian Archives.

Living in LA, James became a member of the original Mattachine society in December of 1952. One year later, as the society began to split politically, James left the group. Kepner was an active member of the Communist Party along with Hay, and continued to work with Harry after leaving Mattachine. Kepner began working with ONE in that same year, and became its editor and chief staff writer. As the first of its kind in the United States, the magazine generated enormous discussion.

Kepner’s articles in ONE were controversial in and around Los Angeles. In October of 1954 the region’s postmaster, refusing to distribute “lewd material,” seized all of the copies meant for mailing. This led to a Supreme Court case in 1958, at which the ban on the October issue was quickly lifted. “By winning the right to mail their material, the movement not
only helped facilitate its own survival, but also helped quell fears that sex-research materials would be censored.”

At *ONE* Kepner wrote under a number of pen names. This was not out of fear of publishing his real name—which he did alongside his other identities—but to make it seem as if there were more people writing for *ONE*. Harry and James maintained a friendship during the *ONE* years, sharing an ongoing correspondence. Harry regularly submitted pieces for Kepner to edit, which Kepner found “full of bad typing, worse handwriting, and very interesting ideas; for me it was an enormously pleasant job.” Kepner quit *ONE* in 1960 after a falling out with another prominent writer and member of organization—Dorr Legg—and began driving taxi cabs while he attended city college.

During that time Harry was embroiled in his stifling relationship with Jorn Kamgren, in which Jorn had prevented Harry from attending political talks or meetings. But Hay and Kepner continued meeting regularly, and in 1962 began a secret romantic relationship. Harry used Kepner as a catalyst to remove himself from the destructive relationship with Kamgren.

Hay and Kepner moved into James’s house on Baxter Street, and shared a brief relationship. Although they were not compatible as life partners, they would remain close friends. During their time together as lovers, however, James pulled Harry back into the world of gay activism. Kepner took Hay to a series of seminars in the summer of 1963 hosted by Gerald Heard, a prominent British historian and anthropologist. Heard had become known throughout Europe and the United States for his philosophy and mysticism. Hay and Kepner attended five seminars hosted by Gerald, where Harry met John Burnside.

Kepner went on to co-found the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front in 1969. A year later he co-founded the Los Angeles Pride Parade. In 1994 Kepner marched beside Harry Hay and John Burnside to protest the commercialization of the Stonewall anniversary. Kepner is considered
one of the most important Gay and Lesbian historians, and his archives—containing more than two million entries—can be found at the University of Southern California.

**John Burnside: Strategist and Ally**

Born in Seattle to a poor family, John Lyon Burnside III would become both an important gay rights activist and an optical engineer of worldwide renown. It was Burnside who rediscovered, developed, and patented the internal physics of the kaleidoscope: a distinction that brought him considerable and reliable wealth.

Burnside was Harry’s longtime companion and true love. As discussed above, their relationship was a turning point for Hay. He found an ally for his life’s work, as well as a companion. Stuart Timmons remarks on the beginning of their relationship: “Burnside was at once an attentive listener and as discursive as Harry, the perfect partner for Harry’s ongoing dialog about gays.” The two men took a Christmas vacation through Baja, Southern California, and New Mexico, during which time they completely affirmed their love for one another.

On December 9th, John arrived at Harry’s apartment and the two abruptly moved in together. This was not a seamless transition for Burnside, who was in a hetero marriage with Edith Sinclair. Returning from their “honey-moon” trip, Hay and Burnside were astounded to learn that, in their absence, Edith—along with her lawyer and John’s mother—had voted John out of Cal Kal: the kaleidoscope company that John had founded and co-ran with his wife. John and Harry were barred from the factory grounds, and banished from the business.

Despite these challenges, the two succeeded in establishing many of the premier organizations of the Gay Rights Movement together, including the Radical Faeries.
Margaret Neall Hay: Blood Bond and Resourcer

Margaret Hay’s house was the first registered gay address in the state of California, and she hosted Mattachine members at her home. She opened a bank account for the Mattachine Society’s finances, and agreed to become the president of its board of directors. The newspapers publicly identified her with the gay rights movement. The FBI even created a file for her, shelved right beside her son’s. “Harry never pretended that his mother completely understood or endorsed a gay organization, but he honored her participation.”

Margaret eventually became seriously affected with arthritis, which confined her to a wheelchair. Still, in 1965 she managed a visit to the ONE offices with Harry, where she was honored for her participation in the original Mattachine society. Ten years later, while Harry was campaigning for water rights in New Mexico, Margaret died. Harry was unable to attend her funeral service.

Lessons from Harry Hay

For Smaller Minorities, Getting to Critical Mass Means Converting Allies

Unlike the women’s movement, where 50% of the human population stands to benefit, some activist groups—e.g., homosexuals—account for a much smaller demographic. Until recently, because of the stigma attached to non-traditional sexual orientation, many people did not talk about their homosexuality. As a result, affinity groups were harder to build and to find. Yet coalescing with like-minded allies is a critical step in unwinding...
the plight of the demonized Other. If you find yourself in such a minority, working and building the movement can be difficult. Finding allies at a scale large enough to disrupt the social bias took longer with gay rights than with some other movements.

Organizing in Secret
In some movements, as in this one, the cost of being “outed” can include loss of employment, imprisonment, even death. There’s no social media meet ups, no flash mob protests or parades available at the early stages of change. Activism begins with secret clubs, at private homes, and with coded messages. This elongates timelines and requires deep trust networks. Friendships and allies become even more important in this situation.

The Collateral Damage of Forcing People to Live a Lie
We are emerging from a time in which psychotherapists may have told gay men or women to “fake it” and/or get married in a traditional ceremony. This was not only a fundamental devaluing of that person’s authentic self, but a devaluing and disrespect to all of the people involved in the farce.

Staying for the Long Arc
Harry Hay lived to the age of 90. For 70 of those years—from 1932 until his death in 2002—he kept the hope alive for a world that was safe and normalized for people of any sexual orientation. He remained committed to his progressive philosophy throughout his life, and lived to see the gay community reach a point where its own unique voice could be heard.

It Takes Just a Few to Act: Ideas are Contagious
The image of Harry Hay and Rudi Gernreich canvassing the Pacific Beaches, soliciting signatures at a time when there was no gay rights movement, stays with me. Just two guys, planting the seed of an idea: Imagine a time when you won’t have to hide. Believe in the power of such moments: They add up, they take hold. We are each other’s spark and kindling.
Using the Courts
In 1954, When the Post Office wouldn’t deliver ONE’s membership news or magazines, the publication sued the US post office—and won. The legislative and judicial battles would be accretive over the next seven decades, until very real civil rights were granted to the gay community. Public opinion about a cause is not enough, again, legislation and legal decisions must be actioned in parallel.
**I Am More Than My Age**

“Every generation of children offers mankind the possibility of rebuilding his ruin of a world.”

- Eglantyne Jebb

“Woman. Ask the she-bears, and every she-monster, and they will tell you what the rights of every species of young are. They will tell you, in resolute language and actions too, that their rights extend to a full participation of the fruits of the earth. They will tell you, and vindicate it likewise by deeds, that mothers have a right, at the peril of all opposers, to provide from the elements the proper nourishments of their young. And seeing this, shall we be asked what the Rights of Infants are? As if they had no rights? As if they were excrescences and abortions of nature? As if they had not a right to the milk of our breasts? Nor we a right to any food to make milk of? As if they had not a right to good nursing, to cleanliness, to comfortable cloathing and lodging?”

- Thomas Spence - The Rights of Infants, 1795

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense.”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

“A child is not a Christian child, not a Muslim child, but a child of Christian parents or a child of Muslim parents. This latter nomenclature, by the way, would be an excellent piece of consciousness-raising for the children themselves. A child who is told she is a ‘child of Muslim parents’ will immediately realize that religion is something for her to choose -or reject- when she becomes old enough to do so.”

- Richard Dawkins
Chapter 5

I Am More Than My Age

Florence Kelley and the Children’s Right Movement

It is not my age, but my beingness that determines my rights.

I remember sitting in my bedroom in the heat of a July summer afternoon, the gauze curtains barely moving in the breeze, gazing at my newborn
son: the pure potential within him, the joy of life arising where there had been none. Wondering who he would become. I had many dreams for him—that he would love and be loved, that he would inhabit the fullness of his gifts and talents, that he would find meaning and happiness. At no point in welcoming this child into the world did I imagine a life wherein he would be enslaved, or forced to labor at menial tasks for the majority of his life. I had a limited conception, while I was beginning my research, of just how bad things could be for children only a century ago. Even today, many people don’t think of children as humans in full, but as manipulable creatures, free labor, or chattel.

Some give lip service to the idea that children have rights, but go on to minimize certain groups of children - like poor children or minority children or “foreign” children - because of their origin in an already unprotected class. These children are then trafficked for work and sex. They are often uneducated, and physically abused.

To enslave children seems to me to be the ultimate example of greed and self-abnegation: a denial of the genetic and social pyramid that suggests ongoing improvements through each generation. Yet, that is what we do, collectively: Pass on our traumas, instead of our hope and invitation.

As recently as the 1780s, a child in European society was the property of his or her parents: a tertiary kind of person, and not a very valuable person at that. Judith Ennew, at Cultural Survival, states, “According to Blackstone’s 1758 legal commentaries in England, for instance, child abduction was not theft in the legal sense unless the child happened to be dressed. The thief was regarded as having stolen the clothes. Apart from that, child theft was tantamount to stealing a corpse. In the case of both a dead body and a live child, no legal person was involved.”

In the west, we still have a relatively minor sense of children being part of the collective. We educate them publicly, if unequally, and attempt to offer care for the hungriest and most abused. Yet, for the most part, children
today have little voice in their own care and representation. In this blind spot of “Under 18”, a child’s reality is barely visible to the outsider.

Even if a child’s environment is *visibly unpleasant*, unless the situation involves criminal negligence (and often not even then), neither the state nor neighbors intervene. In this twilight space, parents inflict every manner of emotional and psychological damage and transgenerational entrainment on their children, often passing on the patterns of what was done to them. Whether unconsciously or willingly—citing custom, values, discipline or control—adults frequently usurp a child’s bodily sovereignty through corporal punishment, physical restraint, forced feeding, denied feeding, even genital mutilation for both boys (circumcision) and girls (clitorectomies). In extreme cases, this physical domination extends to sexual abuse, child trafficking, forced labor, and more. Adults have murdered, maimed, and traumatized children in warfare (whether the war is at the nation-state level, or a class, race or gender war—e.g., the war on black boys in America). More subtly, some adults speak to their children in ways that diminish and shame—behavior that has been shown to cauterize the developing brain’s linguistic processing centers. The Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t allow kids to sing! The Baptists don’t allow dancing! And there are indirect violations as well: Adults as a whole are burdening younger generations with crushing debts: from environmental degradation to massive government financial obligations to species extinction. The list goes on.

Today, I contend, we are just at the outset of the Children’s Rights Movement—a movement that began in the late 1800s, saw its first victory with the child labor laws in the 1920s, and continues to strengthen. The Children’s Rights Movement, like the other movements in this book, has been a gradual awakening to the power, wonder, beauty, and awe of *all* life. It represents a worldview that propels us forward to justice and peace for all.

In keeping with our theme, we are going to look at what propelled the earliest change agents in this movement forward, and learn about the
individuals who worked to shape human history for the better. After reading this, if you’d like to see where we are today, I encourage you to read the work of later and current figures in the world of children’s rights, such as Eglantyne Jebb, Janusz Korczak, Professor Adam Lopatka, and Jo Boyden. You can also read the U.N. Declaration of Children’s Rights, as well as the work of politically active children who are self-advocating in areas where “the adults have failed us”. In this regard, I reference Greta Thunberg and climate change, or the students of Parkland High School and the Freedom from Gun Violence movement in the United States.

As a mother, as a person who believes in self determination, and as a citizen of Earth, I imagine a world where children are treated as the ultimate fruits of our own lives. They represent evolution of life on this planet, and deserve to be treated as humans in full, with well-defined rights and fully-endowed futures.

**Meet Florence Kelley**

Florence Kelley was one of the first people to activate fully around this question. Here is an excerpt from one of her speeches. She portrays the child labor situation in the 1800s as an enslavement of the disenfranchised, the weak, and the young.

“In Georgia there is no restriction whatever! A girl of six or seven years, just tall enough to reach the bobbins, may work eleven hours by day or by night. And they will do so tonight, while we sleep. Nor is it only in the South that these things occur. Alabama does better than New Jersey. For Alabama limits the children’s work at night to eight hours, while New Jersey permits it all night long….

*Until the mothers in the great industrial states are enfranchised, we shall none of us be able to free our consciences from participation in this great evil. No one in this room tonight can feel free from such participation.*
The children make our shoes in the shoe factories; they knit our stockings, our knitted underwear in the knitting factories. They spin and weave our cotton underwear in the cotton mills. Children braid straw for our hats, they spin and weave the silk and velvet wherewith we trim our hats. They stamp buckles and metal ornaments of all kinds, as well as pins and hat-pins. Under the sweating system, tiny children make artificial flowers and neckwear for us to buy. They carry bundles of garments from the factories to the tenements, little beasts of burden, robbed of school life that they may work for us. We do not wish this. We prefer to have our work done by adult men and women. But we are almost powerless. Not wholly powerless, however, are citizens who enjoy the right of petition. For myself, I shall use this power in every possible way until the right to the ballot is granted, and then I shall continue to use both.

The first wave of reform for children arrived in the area of child labor practices. Similar to other attempts to end exploitative practices—situations where one group of people builds wealth on the backs of others—child labor reform was met with strong opposition. It took 40 years of high-energy activism and public relations efforts to create enough awareness to shift opinions of social justice in the direction that “children deserve to have a childhood.”

While every movement has its champions and charismatic leaders, the child labor movement in particular brought together a cross section of activists aiming towards the same goal. In the United States, the movement was centered in and around a group of women at the Hull House, in Chicago. Hull House was founded as a sanctuary for women and their children—a place where women could live and develop their ideas, and work for the betterment of all. This was before women had the vote. The women worked with needlepoint focus on industrial regulation and national legislation to protect children. The majority of these activists operated without husbands. They came together to strive for child labor laws and fair divorce, leaving any notion of their institutionalized positions as second class citizens behind them. They were ready to forge ahead, and
provided each other with the sanctuary and resources needed to effect social change. The men who became allies to their cause did so out of morality, recognizing the powerful potential of these women. This created an interconnected web, rather than a traditional hierarchy.

Florence Kelley played a key role in this charge. Born in Philadelphia, she was highly educated. She began attending Cornell University in 1882. She taught classes for women in Philadelphia for a year before moving to Zurich, Switzerland, to attend the University there. In Europe, Kelley was exposed to socialism, and made a name for herself by translating Frederick Engel’s work *The Condition of the Working Class in England* into English.

**Coming into Consciousness**

In 1886 Kelley relocated to the United States with her husband, and in 1889 published a pamphlet called “Our Toiling Children”. Her husband was no help in any realm: Florence found no sanctuary or resources in him. On the contrary, he was an abusive alcoholic, and tried to steal her inheritance. Separating from her husband in 1891, she took her children and sought refuge at Hull House. She would live there for years, building a network of alliances for social reform. In order to pay her boarding dues, Florence Kelley began to study law, attending classes at night.

It was at Hull House that Kelley became energized about social justice, especially in the areas of child labor and women’s rights. In 1893, largely due to her efforts and findings, Illinois passed the country’s first labor rights law, limiting hours in workshops and barring child labor. On the heels of this success she entered law school at Northwestern University, and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1894.

Kelley became Chicago’s first female factory inspector. Already familiar with industry, versed in law, and ready to make a difference, she was the perfect candidate to bring focused attention to this issue. After she had established a reputation for thorough factory inspections, the head of
the US Department of Labor - Carroll Wright - commissioned Kelley to conduct a report of Chicago’s 19th ward. Her findings were instrumental to the passing of factory inspection legislation.

Kelley intensified her work for children, and engaged in additional high profile public opinion campaigns. In 1899, for example, Kelley—along with the National Consumers League—introduced the “White Label” campaign. This label, on an article of clothing, certified that it had not been manufactured, processed, or transported by children under 14.

Five years later Kelley founded the National Child Labor Committee, which first assembled in 1904. The committee worked to change public opinion on child labor, and introduced legislation that would instill labor regulations. The movement won a major victory in 1916 with the Keating-Owen Act. Named for it’s chief sponsors (Edward Keating and Robert Owen were both fierce allies of the push for child labor regulation), the bill prohibited children under the age of 14 from working in factories, and children under 16 from working in mines. It limited a child’s work day to eight hours, and prohibited child labor-produced goods from being transported across state lines.

Through the work of the women at Hull House, “Congress passed such an amendment [a child labor law] in 1924, but the conservative political climate of the 1920s, together with opposition from some church groups and farm organizations that feared a possible increase of federal power in areas related to children, prevented many states from ratifying it.”

Though the bill was ultimately signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson, it was ruled unconstitutional nine months after it was passed, on the grounds of overstepping the regulation of interstate commerce. Big industry had fought against the amendment under the guise of resisting federal control over state rights. After the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, efforts for the Child Labor Amendment ratification ended nationwide. To this day the amendment introduced by Kelley
remains unconfirmed in Texas and Florida, and has not come into effect. After the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, efforts for the Child Labor Amendment ratification ended nationwide.

Kelley’s longest-held position was that of General Secretary to the National Consumers League. Her published works include *Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation* (1905), and *Modern Industry* (1913). Later in her life she went on to help organize the founding of the NAACP.

**The Pod Around the Person**

William Darrah Kelley: The Blood Bond  
Sarah Pugh: The Resourcer  
Jane Addams: The Amplifier and Resourcer  
Helen Campbell: The Celebrity Amplifier  
Lewis Hine: The Amplifier

Florence, like any other committed activist, wasn’t born like Venus on the half shell, fully formed. She arose in the context of a strong imprint from her father, William Darrah Kelley, and inspiration, alliances, amplification from a variety of influential people. These included Sarah Pughs, Jane Addams, Helen Campbell, and Lewis Hine.

To better understand how Florence found her footing, devotion, and commitment, let’s look at the constellation around her. You’ll notice a lot of similarities with other great activists.

**William Darrah Kelley: Blood Bond**

William “Pig Iron” Kelley was a United States congressman from Pennsylvania, an abolitionist, and the father of Florence Kelley.

William Kelley was only two years old when his family fell into bankruptcy. His father was a watchmaker, but his business suffered greatly
during the war of 1812. Later he cosigned on a loan for his brother-in-law, who defaulted. When William's father died from the stress—literally collapsing in the street—the sheriff’s office auctioned off all of their belongings (except for some of his father’s watchmaking tools, which had been well-hidden) to settle the debt. William’s mother opened a boarding house in Philadelphia, and raised her four children there.

William started working at the age of eleven—first at a lottery office, then at a bookstore (where he learned how to read), then at the Philadelphia Inquirer. He was paid one dollar a week: the modern-day equivalent of $22.75. At 13 he enrolled in a six-year apprenticeship as a jeweler, using his father’s tools.

William took part in the nation’s first general labor strike in 1834, calling for a 10-hour limit on the work day. Along with Andrew Jackson, he spoke out against the founding of the First National Bank. It was feared that such a central institution (which would later become the Federal Reserve) would be susceptible to corruption, and too large to control. In so doing, Kelley ostracized himself from the Philadelphia political communities. He then moved to Boston, where he made many well-to-do friends and continued to self-educate.

Eventually William made his return to Philadelphia, where he read law in the office of Colonel James Page. This inspired his career, and he was admitted to the bar in 1841. By 1845 he was the prosecutor for public pleas, and in 1846 became a judge. As a judge, he acted as an abolitionist. In multiple instances he had local abolitionists—as well as female members of his own family—escort runaway slaves from the custody of the underground railroad directly to his courthouse, so that he could grant them freedom and safe passage.

In 1854, furious over the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska bill that extended slavery to those territories, William quit the Democratic party. He ran for office first as an Independent, then helped found the Republican
party—and with Lincoln’s election, he was quickly made Congressman. He represented the 4th district of Pennsylvania, which was fueled by the industries of iron and pork—earning him the nickname “Pig Iron” Kelley.

William had a deep appreciation for the lower classes and fought doggedly on their behalf. Between his liberal leanings as a judge, his abolitionist friends, and his personal story of rising up from poverty, he had a very strong influence on young Florence. He taught her to read at the age of seven, and brought her on midnight tours of factories where child laborers worked in appalling conditions. This left a lasting impression on Florence, who wrote as a young woman: “We that are strong, let us bear the infirmities of the weak.”

In one particular instance, William returned from a business trip to California to find Florence sitting on the floor of his study, reading “The Resources of California.” Florence herself describes it this way: “I began then, at the age of ten years and wholly without guidance, to read father’s library through, starting at the ceiling of the southwest corner of the study and continuing the process whenever we were at home, until, at the age of seventeen, I entered Cornell University.” By the time Florence was ready to make her mark on the stage of national politics, she was prepared to infiltrate and overhaul the male-centric political system to the fullest extent.

When William died of cancer in 1890, he left behind an estate of some $30,000 (the equivalent of $800K in 2017). Florence and her husband were financially troubled at the time, and there were some family quarrels in New York over the inheritance. Florence eventually left her husband behind, took a healthy share of her father’s estate - which would fund her activism for a time - and moved with her children to the Hull House in Chicago.

**Sarah Pugh: Resourcer**

Sarah was Florence Kelley’s aunt and mentor growing up, and set an
example for Florence as a strong woman dedicated to the good of others. Sarah was a Garrisonian Abolitionist, the most radical network in women's public culture, with very evolved positions on race and gender equality. She nurtured Florence and imparted her commitment to freedom for all.

Sarah Pugh was born in Virginia, and moved to Philadelphia at the age of three when her father died. Her mother raised both Sarah and her brother Isaac, who was one year older. She was part of the original founding of the Philadelphia Female Anti Slavery Society in 1833, alongside Lucretia Mott. As an abolitionist Quaker, Pugh adamantly refused to deal in goods touched by the slave trade. In 1838, when Pennsylvania Hall was burned by a mob protesting the abolitionist movement, Sarah was one of those who escaped. White and black women ran off together in pairs, which stalled the mob from attacking the black women. In 1840, Sarah traveled to London with fellow delegates Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton for the World’s Anti Slavery Convention.

Sarah was a prominent a women’s rights advocate as Susan B Anthony. Through the 1850s the two often traveled together, to conferences and speaking engagements across the country. In 1851 Pugh traveled to England for 17 months to lecture on the anti-slavery movement. She supported the Union war effort during the Civil War, and afterwards campaigned for the African American right to vote. After this was accomplished in 1870 with the ratification of the 15th Amendment, denying no privileges on the base of “race, color or prior condition of servitude” the Philadelphia Female Anti Slavery Society was disbanded.

Florence Kelley spent much time around Sarah when she was growing up. While Florence’s father was a constant and liberal influence, her Aunt Sarah was the embodiment of what she herself could accomplish. Here was a woman who had spent her life standing against the injustice of seeming social norms, demonstrating to Florence that she, too, could make a serious difference in the world. Though Florence was only 11 years old when the 15th Amendment was ratified, this proved that change was possible.
And the understanding that her Aunt Sarah had applied herself to this cause years before, and now saw that cause realized, was likely a strong inspiration for Florence, who was already regarded as an exceptionally bright and charismatic child.

After the war, Sarah opened a series of schools for freed black children. She also worked with the Pennsylvania Women’s Suffrage Association, and advocated for women’s rights. In 1876, she was one of the women who signed their names to the Declaration of Rights for Women in Philadelphia.

**Jane Addams and the Women at Hull House: Amplifiers**

Jane Addams was an influential American social activist, and worked closely with Florence Kelley for many years. Jane was born in Cedarville, Illinois, in 1860. She was the youngest of eight children, and her mother died when she was two years old. Her father - John H Addams - was a merchantman and a politician, serving on the Illinois State Senate from 1854 to 1870. He had a great deal of influence on Jane—similar to the relationship between Florence and her father.

As a child, Jane suffered from spinal tuberculosis, which made her unable to run and play with other children. Yet she wanted to make a difference in the world, and saw a much bigger picture than others of her age. Here, she recalls how she was affected when hearing of Lincoln’s assassination: “Although I was but four and a half years old when Lincoln died, I distinctly remember the day when I found on our two white gate posts American flags companioned with black. I tumbled down on the harsh gravel walk in my eager rush into the house to inquire what they were ‘there for.’ To my amazement I found my father in tears, something that I had never seen before, having assumed, as all children do, that grown-up people never cried.”
In 1877 Jane enrolled in the Rockford Female Seminary, where she met her lifelong friend Ellen Starr. Ellen was forced for financial reasons to leave the school, and began teaching with her aunt in Chicago. Jane, however published her first essay - *Plated Ware* - in 1878, and in 1879 became the literary editor for the Rockford Seminary Magazine. Jane graduated from Rockford in 1881 as class valedictorian.

After her father’s death in 1881, Jane enrolled with her sister in the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania. While she initially did well with the medical coursework—which included a human dissection—her own health began to decline, specifically her spine. She was forced to leave medical school and return to Cedarville with her stepmother in 1882. Jane had spinal surgery, and was bedridden for nearly six months, during which time she read voraciously. After she recovered, she prepared for what would be a life-changing visit to Europe.

Addams’ two year tour of Europe—the first of her two trans-Atlantic journeys—gave her a passionate sense of purpose. She was intensely affected by seeing starving Irish children begging for food, by the slums of East London, and by the poor conditions of forgotten farms as droves of people moved to the cities and factories during Europe’s industrial revolution.

All this came to a head, however, when Jane witnessed a bullfight in Spain. Her words are so moving that they are worth reproducing entirely:

“We had been to see a bullfight rendered in the most magnificent Spanish style, where greatly to my surprise and horror, I found that I had seen, with comparative indifference, five bulls and many more horses killed. The sense that this was the last survival of all the glories of the amphitheater, the illusion that the riders on the caparisoned horses might have been knights of a tournament, or the matador a slightly armed gladiator facing his martyrdom, and all the rest of the obscure yet vivid associations of an historic survival, had carried me beyond the...
endurance of any of the rest of the party. I finally met them in the foyer, stern and pale with disapproval of my brutal endurance, and but partially recovered from the faintness and disgust which the spectacle itself had produced upon them. I had no defense to offer to their reproaches save that I had not thought much about the bloodshed; but in the evening the natural and inevitable reaction came, and in deep chagrin I felt myself tried and condemned, not only by this disgusting experience but by the entire moral situation which it revealed. It was suddenly made quite clear to me that I was lulling my conscience by a dreamer’s scheme, that a mere paper reform had become a defense for continued idleness, and that I was making it a raison d’être for going on indefinitely with study and travel. It is easy to become the dupe of a deferred purpose, of the promise the future the moral reaction following the experience at a bullfight had been able to reveal to me that so far from following in the wake of a chariot of philanthropic fire, I had been tied to the tail of the veriest ox-cart of self-seeking.”

Returning to Chicago, Jane became socially active. She participated in charities, helped found (and was elected president of) the Cedarville Women’s Temperance Union, and was baptized in the Presbyterian church.

Jane Addams and Ellen Starr founded the Hull House in 1889. The residence was a brick mansion on the west side of Chicago, paid for by a network of benefactors and allies and furnished with European art. It stood as a sanctuary of forward thought for free-thinking women. The residents lived on the property, attended classes and seminars, and put on theatrical performances. The Hull House took in all kinds of people who needed sanctuary—from homeless children to people fleeing racial prejudice and women escaping abusive husbands.

In 1891 Florence Kelley arrived at the Hull House with her three children, having left her husband behind. By this time Kelley was already a
social activist, working on the behalf of children and labor laws—but her arrival at the Hull House began a second chapter in her work for social justice. With so many like minds in one place, the Hull House became the national headquarters for child labor and workers’ rights laws. Addams worked closely with Kelley to see landmark legislation passed, including the Federal Child Labor Law of 1916. The community that Jane had helped engineer became an integral influence on, and aid to, Florence Kelley’s work.

Later in her life Jane Addams became a peace activist. She strongly opposed US involvement in World War I—an opinion that saw her expelled from the aristocratic Daughters of the American Revolution. She worked during the war to provide aid and relief for women and children who were displaced by the fighting.

Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. She lived and worked in the Hull House until her death in 1935.

Helen Campbell: Amplifier and Celebrity

Helen Campbell was a political reformer, a popular lecturer, an early home economist, an author, and a close friend to Florence Kelley. Born on July 4th, 1839 in Lockport, New York, she began attending school at the age of 11 in Rhode Island. She would go on to graduate from Mrs. Cook’s Seminary in New Jersey in 1858, when she was nineteen. In 1861, she married a surgeon in the US army named Grenville Weeks; they would divorce ten years later. Originally born Helen Campbell Stuart, she took Week’s name with marriage, and after her divorce took her mother’s maiden name - thus becoming Helen Stuart Campbell, the name by which she is remembered today.

Helen began her literary career writing books for children. She published stories in magazines like Riverside Magazine, Our Young Folks, and St. Nicholas. Her works became very popular, and were reprinted in England.
CHAPTER 5

After her divorce, Helen entered the field of home economics. She took lessons from the popular economist Juliet Corson, and by 1878 had obtained a teaching position at the Raleigh Cooking School of North Carolina. In 1881, during her time at Raleigh she published *The Easiest Way in Home Housekeeping and Cooking*. In Washington DC she opened a specialized diet kitchen, and served as the editor for the short lived magazine *Our Content* from 1882 to 1884. By 1882, however, Helen had begun to swing her area of interest towards social justice. That year she published *The Problem With the Poor*. The book detailed the effects of poverty on New York City, followed the work of a particular mission with which she was associated, and closely examined the impact of low wages on women within the complex economic forces that keep poverty entrenched. Following this major publication, she wrote a column for Good Housekeeping magazine titled “Woman's Work and Wages.” The New York Times then commissioned her to conduct an ongoing report on the condition of women workers in the needle and department store fields. Her weekly articles, which started in 1886, were compiled into the book *Prisoners of Poverty*, released the same year. Following an extended tour of Europe, Helen wrote a sequel—*Prisoners of Poverty Abroad*—which she self-published in 1889.

In 1891 Campbell received an award from the American Economic Association for her work *Women Wage Earners*. This was a comprehensive study reviewing the conditions of working women across much of America and Europe. In its conclusion, the book stressed the importance of trade and labor unions. The complete compilation was published in 1893 with support from the AEA and an introduction from the liberal economist Richard T Ely. In 1895, Ely convinced the University of Wisconsin to host Helen for a series of two lectures: “Household Science” and “Social Science.” She had hoped the lectures would lead to permanent employment, with the university, but this did not come to pass. Undeterred, Campbell published *Household Economics* in 1897. For Helen, the subject of household economics was “the connecting link between the physical economics of the self and the social economics of the state.” After this achievement
she was appointed lead home economics professor at the Kansas State Agricultural College. The following year, however, she was forced to resign her position due to health reasons, and returned to freelance writing.

“Helen Campbell’s impact on her contemporaries is hard to measure,” wrote Kathlyn Sklar in 1997. “More obvious was the effect of consumers’ leagues that rewarded manufacturers who produced goods under safe and non exploitive conditions.” Helen Campbell was a close friend to Florence Kelley, with a platform Florence could build upon. She was a key figure in the struggle for fair labor laws. Florence Kelley described Helen Campbell as “good and warm-hearted and gets at everything from the side of strongly human feeling.”

**Lewis Hine: Amplifier (Photographer)**

Lewis Hine, an American photographer, taught at the New York Ethics Culture School, where he began to experiment with documentary photography as a tool for social justice. He was responsible for some of the most influential and iconic images related to welfare, industry, and child labor in the United States.

As a teacher in New York in the early 1900s, Lewis took his classes to Ellis Island. There, he photographed the thousands of immigrants arriving from overseas. These images of Ellis Island are considered extremely important to the photo documentation of American history, and are still widely popular and often reprinted. Hines’ photography work led to a job at the Russell Sage Foundation, where he photographed industrial conditions in the rapidly growing Pittsburgh area. He became the official photographer of the National Conference on Child Labor in 1908, and his documentary photographs played a huge role in swaying popular opinion against child labor.

Up until Hines’ time, most Americans did not give much thought to child labor as an issue. Prior to any sort of protective legislation, it was
customary for children, to begin an apprenticeship as young as the age of ten—learning a trade such as blacksmith, weaver, or dockhand. Through most of human history, this strategy had proved an effective way to sustain a workforce and produce ample commodities. But the western industrial economy changed forever with Europe’s discovery of coal and steam power. Working conditions for underage workers became universally horrendous, from London to Chicago. Through his photographs, Lewis illustrated the plight of child laborers with an immediacy that shocked middle- and upper-class America, and finally brought about a moral shift among many of them.

Lessons from the Children’s Rights Movement

Willingness to Leave Old Associations
As your awareness on an issue grows, there may come a point when your beliefs distance you from the friends you have known. You no longer fit in, and can’t hold the contradiction any longer. This is the moment to step into the unknown, relying on your own strength of character while waiting for the new pod or community to coalesce. Trust this process: Those people will come.

The Importance of Vision
For people to meet you in this new place, you have to provide them with a portrait of what the future might look like: In this instance, a world where children have rights, and are no longer exploited and endangered.

Holding People to Their Highest Selves
This movement in particular was able to work with the natural and empathetic connection between adults and children. Everyone, after all, was a child once. Its advocates urged people to rise into a world where children represent the future, and to treat that next generation with respect.

Embedding in Existing Systems
As movements progress, as with the Gay Rights movement, activists
simultaneously pursued public opinion changes, applied pressure with economic boycotts, and worked in the courts and legislatures. System changes take longer than culture changes; in other words, public opinion often evolves long before laws do. Working within the legislative and judicial systems needs to begin early in the movement.

**Get the Shot**
In many places you really DO have to “see it to believe it.” Lewis Hines’ imagery was crucial to this movement, just as firsthand slave accounts were powerful tools for abolitionists. If we are to change systems, it’s often helpful to show what the human experience was like under the old order.

**Finding and Embedding in a Community**
Notice how much stronger Florence became once living and working in the context of Hull House. Its central effect was to focus her activism. The moral and networking support provided by that community helped her develop what sociologist Mark Granovetter calls “strong” and “weak” ties—both kind of associations that are needed to build trust and make movements happen.
I Am More Than My Ethnicity

“We Natives have existed in the memory field of this place now called “America” long before colonization. The years of discovery are a millisecond in the immense time wave of eternity. These years are drenched with suffering, with loss, and yet lit with our peoples’ tremendous love for these lands, for good stories, for good food and company. Those years have come and gone in a field that exists even before the memory of stones. We will be here long after America.”
- Joy Harjo

“You must understand…. I am ordinary. Painfully ordinary. This isn’t modesty. This is fact. Maybe you’re ordinary, too. If so, I honor your ordinariness, your humanness, your spirituality. I hope you will honor mine. That ordinariness is our bond, you and I. We are ordinary. We are human. The Creator made us this way. Imperfect. Inadequate. Ordinary. Be thankful you weren’t cursed with perfection. If you were perfect, there’d be nothing for you to achieve with your life. Imperfection is the source of every action. This is both our curse and our blessing as human beings. Our very imperfection makes a holy life possible. We’re not supposed to be perfect. We’re supposed to be useful.”
- Leonard Peltier
Chapter 6

I Am More Than My Ethnicity

The Pod of AIM and the North American Indigenous Movement

Being Sovereign

Imagine if everything about you and your history was defined as less than, inferior, third rate. Imagine being unable to speak your language or practice your religion. Imagine being pulled out of your family and community and inculcated into a “superior” dominant culture. This
narrative runs throughout the stories of the founders of the American Indian Movement (AIM).

For generations, North American indigenous people have been denied their cultural identity. Traditional practices such as rice harvesting, purification rituals, coming of age rites, and ceremonies of nature were outlawed. Children were stolen from their families and put into boarding schools run by missionaries, who doled out corporal punishment for any show of Indian culture. In the United States, it was illegal (up until 1973!) for indigenous people to practice their own religion or speak their native language. This was also true for Hawai‘i’s indigenous population, and for many Alaskan peoples as well.

For those of us who believe that diversity of expression, in all of its forms, is a wonderment; that free speech is a human right; that thought control and social manipulation are denials of life’s most creative forces, and even of life itself—this cannot stand.

The Back Story

Ever since Europeans first arrived in the Americas, the Indigenous populations have been subject to extermination and colonization by English, French, Spanish, and American settlers and governments attempting to take over their ancestral lands.

In the power struggles for territory, wealth, and dominant values, white Europeans killed, tortured, and stole from native peoples all around the world. This was equally true in the genocide of the Indigenous nations of North America. The mindset of those genocidal killers is articulated in letters from the time:

“I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God’s heaven to kill Indians. ... Kill and scalp all, big and little; nits make lice.”— Col. John Milton Chivington,
Serious institutional political oppression of Native Americans began in 1824, with the formation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This was followed in 1830 by the passage of the Indian Removal Act. Between 1832 and 1877, a huge number of armed conflicts were fought against Indigenous Peoples across what would ultimately become the United States. All of these wars, including the Sioux and Dakota wars, resulted in ethnic cleansing and relocation of the local populations. Accounts of the atrocities committed against natives during these campaigns turn the stomach. The roles of three great native chiefs (Sitting Bull, who united the Sioux; Crazy Horse of the Oglala Lakota; and Geronimo, the Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches) have managed to endure in our otherwise whitewashed history books. Their military resistance to the invading armies proved ineffective, and all three leaders ultimately surrendered to the US military after years of war: Crazy Horse in 1877, Sitting Bull in 1881, and Geronimo in 1886. The Dawes Act—which allowed the President of the United States to divide and allot First Nation land—was put into effect the following year.

Crazy Horse was murdered almost immediately after his surrender, but Sitting Bull and Geronimo continued to live as prisoners of war. Sitting Bull was held for two years, then released onto the Standing Rock reservation. He traveled for one season with a Wild West show, and after his stereotyped performances he would address the crowd about equality. Upon his return to the reservation he became involved with the Ghost Dance movement, which focused on the revival of fading tribal practices.
and advocated for the return of the bison. This created a rift with the US authorities, and in 1890 Sitting Bull was murdered by police.

Geronimo spent the remainder of his life in captivity, working hard labor on the railroad. He was sometimes permitted to attend Wild West shows and state fairs as an attraction. Geronimo published his autobiography in 1906. It detailed abuses by the United States, and described his peoples’ resistance to this foreign invasion. The book became enormously popular around the country. He died in 1909, too soon to see the onset of the indigenous social justice movement.

There were 9.5 million natives physically murdered by the Euro-American colonialist expansion. The loss of life, and the loss of transgenerational wisdom, is staggering.

Let that sink in. This is the ancestry of our current culture.

In 1910, the few remaining native peoples (238,000 out of an estimated 10 million prior to the 1600s) posed less of a threat to the nation’s colonial expansion. At this point, the prescribed course of action for the native population was to assimilate and disappear. Today, more than a century later, a resurgence in the identity and capacity of these nations, which had lived in harmony with the land for thousands of years, is underway. The American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in the 1960s, was core to this reemergence.

To step back into power, and self-as-nature, requires a belief that transcends the culture of oppression and domination. To engage fully one must believe that “I am more than my Ethnicity. I am more than a historic conquest. I am more than a stereotype. I am Sovereign.”

The Pod of AIM

We focus our portrait here on AIM, and on the actions of a group of
men who galvanized the Native American community in the late 1960s and 1970s. Under the leadership of Dennis Banks, Russell Means, Clyde Bellecourt, Leonard Peltier, Leonard Crow Dog and others, AIM spread its message across the country—not from the “top” of society, but the “bottom.” Rather than with a public speaking tour, a glorifying testimony from major newspapers, or an introduction from socially established allies, AIM’s activism began humbly: with beat-up cars, spray painted red, that cruised around the Twin Cities in Minnesota to monitor and intervene in oppressive police activity. AIM was born out of desperation, anger, and—most importantly—hope for a better future. Its leaders, with scant resources, galvanized a population and permanently changed our national awareness of the Native American plight.

The Pod of AIM

Dennis Banks
Russell Means: The Strategist
Clyde Bellecourt
Leonard Peltier: The Strategist and Amplifier
William Kunstler: The Guardian and Resourcer
Marlon Brando: The Resourcer and Celebrity Amplifier

The life of a young Native boy in the mid-20th century in the land currently known as the United States was not enviable. He was likely to have been removed from his family, and forced to attend religious institutions and/or boarding schools. His native name would be deleted and anglicized, and his native religion and native language literally outlawed. Once he completed his education—if he did at all—he was subject to extreme prejudice, as well as ongoing police harassment, frequent jailing, and more. Yet even in this environment, something was sparked to life. Dennis Banks and the Pod of AIM are a shining example of this story arc. Despite everything that happened to Banks, he never quit. He was never shamed.
into inaction. For Banks and his colleagues, threats actually seemed to make them more daring and creative.

**Meet Dennis Banks**

Dennis Banks was born April 12th, 1937 on the Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota. He was sent to Pipestone boarding school, in the southern part of the state, when he was five. There, he was subjected to the systematic destruction of Native American culture. Banks would often escape, but was inevitably caught and returned. He was released from Pipestone at 17, and returned to his people. But life on the reservation was hard, poor, and without opportunity. So Banks enlisted in the Air Force when he was 19, and was stationed in Japan.

In Japan, Banks fell in love with a woman named Machiko. The two were married in traditional Japanese fashion, and had a daughter. When the military did not recognize his marriage, and denied him the application after the two had already been married. He went AWOL in Japan—but after a short time he was found, and court martialed. He attempted an escape during his transfer back to the United States, but was again caught. Dennis Banks returned to America in chains, stripped of the family he had forged with Machiko. He would never see his Japanese wife or child again.

Upon his return to the US, Banks fell into a state of alcoholism. He could barely scrape together enough money to live, let alone travel back to Japan. He spent much of his time in the bars along Fourth Avenue in Minneapolis, where natives would gather and socialize. All fell prey to frequent arrests, victims of the police department’s ‘dragnet quota busts’: The police would arrest Native Americans en masse on a regular basis at bars, charge them with disorderly conduct, and hold them for a few days so they could be used as unpaid labor. Banks estimates, in his memoir, that he was arrested in this manner over 25 times.

Banks’ second wife, Jeannette, had four children from a previous marriage.
and four with Dennis. In 1966 Banks, was convicted of ‘burglarizing’ a grocery store. Though he stated that he was stealing groceries to support his family, he was sentenced to five years. His accomplice—a white man named Bill—received two years probation, and was released after the trial. Because of his refusal to work, Banks spent nine months of his two-and-a-half plus years in prison in solitary confinement. During that time he educated himself about the world, including about the history of the native people and his own identity. He resolved to have an impact on the treatment of Native Americans after he was released. Banks was paroled in 1968, and swiftly set about founding the American Indian Movement (AIM).

On July 28th, 1968, the first meeting of what would become AIM took place in the basement of a church in Minneapolis. At that meeting Banks met Clyde Bellecourt, and the two galvanized the crowd into action. AIM had officially begun. Banks later met Russell Means, in 1969, at an education conference in Minneapolis. Means asked Banks to host an AIM meeting at the independent Indian center he had founded in Cleveland. Both recall the moment in exactly the same way: Russell Means asked Dennis, “What can I do to join AIM?” to which he replied “You just did!” The two worked together during the years to come, organizing guerrilla resistance actions.

Their resistance went public in November 1972, at their occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in Washington DC. The group holed up in the offices for a week, winning national attention. Russell Means, Dennis Banks, and Clyde Bellecourt led the occupation, speaking frequently and with gravitas about the mishandling of Indian Affairs by white administrators.

Not long afterward, AIM turned its attention to South Dakota: a place they felt harbored some of the strongest anti-Indian racism in the country. The group worked in Rapid City for two months. They helped the community recover from a recent flood, and shut down some local businesses
CHAPTER 6

in protest of blatant racism. This led to a makeshift division of the town, and the temporary creation of a “demilitarized zone.”

As a result of these actions, racial tension in the surrounding area rose. A Native American was stabbed to death in front of a bar by a white man. The subsequent AIM demonstration in front of the courthouse in Custer—where the defendant was charged with manslaughter—became a riot, and the Custer town hall was burned down. Afterwards, Means sent for Banks to join him at a meeting in Calico, South Dakota.

1973 was a watershed year for AIM. The inspiration to occupy Wounded Knee, in South Dakota, arose out of fear of malevolent action on Pine Ridge reservation land. Pine Ridge was then under the control of Dicky Wilson, a government-backed Native American official who operated with impunity. He presided over a private militia of armed GOONs: “Guardians of the Oglala Nation.” Wilson declared martial law on the reservation in the 1970s, stripping the Native American residents of Pine Ridge of their constitutional rights. He also dabbled in election fraud, and ordered more than 60 murders during his time in power.

The community of Native people that had come together in Calico needed a space to protest free from the threat of Wilson’s GOONs. They found it in Wounded Knee. To quote Dennis Banks: “Russell Means was there … and Clyde Bellecourt. All of the people we needed were in Calico.”

The armed occupation lasted 71 days, during which time the federal government surrounded the site and laid siege. During the occupation, Banks was essential to the organization. Both he and Russell Means were instrumental to AIM, but Means seemed to offer more emotional action than Banks. It was actions like Wounded Knee—when Russell relied upon Bank’s strategic mind—that kept AIM alive.

After the occupation ended on May 8th 1973, Banks and Means—along with several others—faced a multitude of felony charges. Several nationally renowned lawyers hurried to the defense of AIM’s leadership, including
William Kunstler, already famous for his defense of the Chicago Seven (allegedly for inciting riots during the 1968 Democratic Convention). Although the group was eventually acquitted, the trial lasted for months. It would go down in history as another of Bill Kunstler’s landmark civil rights cases.

The violent riot that had taken place at Custer caught up with Banks after the Wounded Knee trials. In 1974, he was convicted of rioting and assault. Facing up to 15 years in prison, Banks failed to appear at his sentencing hearing, instigating a nationwide manhunt. Actor Marlon Brando provided Dennis with a mobile home, and $10,000 cash. Banks went underground. This marked the beginning of the end for AIM. After three years, Banks finally found sanctuary in California, where governor Edmund Brown refused to extradite him to South Dakota for his prison sentence. In 1982, when Brown decided not to run for reelection, Banks’ sanctuary ended. He moved his family to Iroquois territory, where he was granted protection. AIM leaders such as Russell Banks and Ted Means came to visit him, along with Clyde Bellecourt. Eventually, Banks could not stand to be confined to the reservation, and felt he must face his prison sentence. After lengthy negotiations with Bill Kunstler, Banks surrendered to South Dakota authorities. He served a total of 14 months.

Emerging from prison in 1985, Dennis Banks disassociated himself from AIM and Russell Means. He turned his attention to his family, coaching cross country running, and minor acts of political activism across the country. He moved to Kentucky, where he organized spiritual runs and other demonstrations. In 1999 Banks returned to his home reservation of Leech Lake, Minnesota, where he died on October 29th, 2017.

Meet Clyde Bellecourt

Clyde Bellecourt was born on May 8th, 1936 to the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota. He grew up combating systemic racism, as did
Russell Means and Dennis Banks. Forced to attend religious institutions from a young age, Clyde cultivated an early resentment of cultural oppression. At 25, he landed in prison for burglary. Clyde became an influential inmate; because of his attempts to unify the other prisoners, he was often placed in solitary confinement. Clyde formed an organization called the Indian American Folklore Group, and led weekly meetings with other Native American prisoners. During these meetings they shared culture, history, and music. He remembers this as the first Native American studies course offered in the country.

After his release from prison in 1964, Clyde moved to the Twin Cities area with the intention of helping the local Native American community. He attended the first meeting of AIM in Minneapolis, and witnessed how Dennis Banks energized the crowd. Bellecourt joined Banks on the stage, and further charged the environment. Their original plan was to begin protesting the following morning—but Clyde inspired the crowd into immediate action.

AIM’s first act of protest and solidarity, taken that very night, was to paint cars red and patrol the Native American bars in Minneapolis—gathering places where police routinely made mass arrests. AIM found its footing during that first night of action, and Clyde became the organization’s first chairman. Shortly after, at an education conference, Clyde Bellecourt met Russell Means. Means gave a stirring speech, after which he was approached by Clyde and Dennis. When Means invited them to visit his own Indian Center, in Cleveland, their alliance was born.

Bellecourt, like Banks, offered AIM the diplomatic and strategic edge it required. Comparing Russell Means’ and Dennis Banks’ autobiographies, a pattern begins to emerge. All three of the AIM leaders were militant and energized. They formed a triangle of political activism, each supporting the other. What became clear over time is that while Clyde and Dennis worked largely at the level of organization and strategy, Russell—although not isolated from such decisions—was the most dramatic and emotional.
There was no direct hierarchy between the three; they worked communally to bring social justice. But without the strength of each other’s support, it is unlikely that AIM would have had the impact it had.

Bellecourt was instrumental in every major AIM activation. It was Clyde Bellecourt who convinced Dennis Banks to join the occupation at Alcatraz, which lasted from November 20, 1969, to June 11, 1971. It was Bellecourt who first reached out and spoke with Leonard Crow Dog, who became a chief spiritual advisor to AIM, and initiated the adaptation of spiritual components into AIM’s structure. It was Bellecourt who climbed the mast of the Mayflower II and tore down the flag and then, along with Means, buried Plymouth Rock in sand. It was Bellecourt who suggested going down to the BIA building after they had completed the Trail of Broken Treaties in November of 1972. On that march, Clyde was in charge of logistics. During the occupation of the BIA building in DC, Bellecourt was a chief negotiator; making the proclamation: “We have now declared war on the United States of America!”

In 1973, at Wounded Knee, Bellecourt was the appointed spokesperson for the American Indian Movement, while Means spoke specifically for the Oglala nation. During the siege at Wounded Knee, Bellecourt and Means were arrested while trying to leave. They had meant to gather more food and supplies. After posting his bail, Bellecourt decided not to return to the encampment. Banks attributes his continued absence as a tactical decision. That way, the AIM leadership was not confined to Wounded Knee. Bellecourt began touring the country on a fundraising campaign for the protesters who remained at Wounded Knee.

After the Wounded Knee trials, at which Bellecourt was acquitted, he began speaking at and hosting seminars across the country. He moved away from guerilla, militant tactics, and centered his actions around a method of discussion. In 1986 he was arrested for selling LSD to an undercover FBI agent, and sentenced to five years in prison. He served less than two. After prison Bellecourt continued to support AIM, although he split from
the group due to controversy surrounding his drug use and his fallings out with other group members.

Clyde Bellecourt went on to become the head of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media, and a contributor to AIM’s cultural center in Minneapolis. Still politically active, he was arrested on Christmas Eve 2012 for participation in the Idle No More protest, a Canadian grassroots response to a variety of new legislation concerning the tribes. As of this writing he lives in the Twin Cities area, and still participates in the regular ‘AIM patrols’, providing security for Minneapolis Native Americans — a community-based action recalling the red car patrols that he and Banks began in the late 1960s.

On May 8th, 2019—Clyde’s 83rd birthday—he was honored with a declaration by the governor’s office that the eighth of May would now be honored as “Clyde Bellecourt Day” in the state of Minnesota. The Minneapolis Chief of Police, who has great personal respect for Clyde, presented him with the award.

**Russell Means: Strategist**

Russell Means was a controversial and passionate Native American activist, operating from 1964 through his death, at age 72, in 2012. He was born to the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota on November 10th, 1939. His father, Walter “Hank” Means, had grown up in one of many government ‘boarding schools’. It was here that Russell’s great grandfather lost his original Sioux name, which roughly translated to “Trains His Horses Well”. At the boarding school, this name became “Mean to Horses” and then simply “Means”. Hank and Theodora Means had four children, Russell being the oldest. Dace Means came second, in 1941. During Russell’s early childhood the family lived in San Francisco, where Hank worked as a welder in the shipyards during the Second World War. He grew up in the midst of a racially charged environment, living under the supervision of his alcoholic father and strict, abusive mother.
Following the end of the war, the Means family returned to South Dakota, where Means began to notice the blatant racism surrounding him. In 1946 his twin brothers were born, and the family moved back to the Bay Area in search of more lucrative work. Hank was rehired at the shipyards, welding submarine hulls. Russell attended public school, often getting into fights; his father, meanwhile, would be absent for days at a time on alcoholic binges. Russell also began drinking and abusing drugs during those years, and fell into a life of crime. He spent a number of years floating between the Dakotas and California, taking on work or committing robberies. Disqualified from the draft after his elbow was severely broken in a bar fight, he dropped out of multiple colleges and was involved with a heroin distribution ring. But when many of his friends were arrested in a sting operation, he resolved to quit drugs. He moved to Los Angeles, where he went to school during the day, but hustled and robbed by night. But Means stuck with his education throughout this tumultuous period, and finally completed his training as an accountant and computer operator.

Means married his first wife, Twila Smith, in 1961. Their son was born the following year. But the marriage deteriorated, and they separated soon after their child’s birth. After a spell of homelessness in LA, Means moved back to San Francisco to live with his younger brother, Dace. There, scraping by on unemployment and petty scams, Russell began dating Betty Sinquah. The two moved into an apartment together in 1964, and Betty became pregnant. That March, Russell’s father, although they still a somewhat contentious relationship, invited Russell to join in the occupation of Alcatraz. Walter Means, his father, was an instrumental part of the initial 1964 occupation, the event that inspired the work Russell would do for the rest of his life.

After the occupation of Alcatraz ended, Russell began performing traditional Native American dances at county fairs for work. Here he was confronted brutally by the anti-Indian racism that he was already aware of, but on a level to which he had never been fully exposed. For the next few years Russell danced and drank. His father died in 1967, and during that same year Russell suffered a severe ear infection, which left him deaf.
in his left ear. He and Betty decided to move to Cleveland, where he might better control his drinking. There, he dedicated himself to political activism. In April of 1969 Russell laid the groundwork for an Indian Center, as Cleveland did not have one at the time. Initially, Means hoped to work with the BIA, or Bureau of Indian Affairs. But he instead came into contact with AIM, where he met Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt. Under their combined influence, he abandoned the BIA and dedicated his life to AIM.

Russell became the first national director of AIM in 1970. He was completely committed to his cause, giving up alcohol - although he would struggle with this addiction his entire life - and leaving his marriage. That same year he led a prayer vigil atop Mt. Rushmore, and stormed a replica of the Mayflower on Thanksgiving. AIM became known for such guerilla activist tactics, and Means evolved into a renowned political activist. In 1972 he led the occupation of the BIA headquarters in Washington DC. The following year he spearheaded the famous occupation of Wounded Knee, which would become AIM’s signature exploit.

During the years that followed, AIM suffered internal turmoil as the relationships between Means, Banks, and Bellecourt broke down. Means ran for president in 1987, and retired from AIM in 1988. He survived multiple assassination attempts, and was jailed numerous times. In 1992—at the age of 53—Means began an entirely new career as an actor. Featured in many films and TV shows (including Curb Your Enthusiasm), he is best known for his role as Chingachgook in The Last of the Mohicans.

Russell Means would marry and divorce twice more before his final marriage to Pearl Daniels, in 1999. He died of esophageal cancer on October 22nd, 2012.

**Leonard Peltier:**

“We are not statistics. We are the people from whom you took this land by force and blood and lies. We are the people to whom you promised to pay, in
recompense for all this vast continent you stole, some small pitiful pittance to assure at least our bare survival. And we are the people from whom you now snatch away even that pittance, abandoning us and your own honor without a qualm, even launching military attacks on our women and children and Elders, and targeting — illegally even by your own self-serving laws — those of us, our remaining warriors, who would dare to stand up and try to defend them. You practice crimes against humanity at the same time that you piously speak to the rest of the world of human rights! America, when will you live up to your own principles?” - Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance by Leonard Peltier

Leonard Peltier is a Native American activist currently imprisoned for a double murder that evidence suggests he did not commit. Leonard was born to the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, one of 13 children. At nine years old he was sent to one of the BIA boarding schools. He remained in the boarding school system until the ninth grade, when he dropped out to return to his home on the reservation. At Turtle Mountain, Peltier was able to witness and feel the full impact of institutionalized “termination”: the process of withdrawing federal food and aid in an attempt to force Native Americans to leave their reservations and assimilate into mainstream American culture.

Peltier moved to Seattle, Washington, in 1965. There he began to go out of his way to help other struggling Native Americans. He became part owner of an automotive body shop where he employed Native Americans, gave others discount repairs, and helped found a halfway house specifically for Native American offenders.

In a 2017 interview, Peltier describes his introduction to AIM: “I first started hearing about Dennis Banks in the late 1960s, while being involved in the fishing and hunting struggle at Frank’s Landing in Washington State [Another standoff, this one ver fishing rights]. After returning to my home at the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Nation in North Dakota, I was aware of the occupation at Alcatraz in California [1969]. I also started hearing Dennis speaking out on TV and radio. I became involved in a struggle
involving Native issues in Arizona and while there, I was invited to an annual AIM convention at Leech Lake, Minnesota. I met with Dennis and was impressed with the public commitment he made on the Chunupa, to never use alcohol or drugs and to never refuse a call for help from Native people. I became a member of the American Indian Movement and worked out the of AIM Chapter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.”

Peltier was a key participant in the Trail of Broken Treaties action, organized by AIM in 1972. When this cross-country caravan arrived in Washington DC, the Nixon administration refused to meet with the protesters. In response, they occupied the national BIA headquarters. In the wake of this action, the groundwork was laid for the monumental occupation of Wounded Knee. By that time Peltier had established himself as a significant AIM leader, though he spent the majority of the Wounded Knee occupation in a jail cell. He was on his way to the site with food and supplies when the siege ended. Following the 71 day occupation, Peltier and other AIM activists spent time on the Pine Ridge reservation, which was still under the militant control of Richard Wilson, the corrupt, FBI-appointed tribal chairman.

In 1975, Leonard and a number of AIM leaders were encamped on Jumping Bull Ranch, on South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation. Two FBI agents - Jack Coler and Robert Williams - drove onto the ranch, allegedly to arrest a man named Jimmy Eagle for burglary. The two agents claimed they had seen Eagle’s car, and were following it. What followed is still unclear—but after an exchange of gunfire between the occupants of the two cars and the residents of the ranch (their identities still unknown) both FBI agents were dead from gunshots to their heads. One AIM activist, Joe Stuntz, had been killed.

Peltier and two others were accused of the agents’ deaths. Peltier fled to Canada, correctly fearing he would receive an unfair trial in the United States. Both other men were cleared of the murder charges, due to a lack of forensic evidence tying them to the lethal bullets. The United States prosecution had more time to prepare for Peltier, however. By the time
he was arrested by Canadian police and extradited to the United States, the FBI had a witness ready. The testimony of Myrtle Poor Bear - a Native American woman who was threatened and coerced by the FBI - was largely responsible for Peltier’s conviction. Convicted to two counts of first degree murder, Leonard Peltier was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. Since that time, Myrtle Poor Bear has recanted her testimony several times. Even during the trial itself, her testimony was shown to have been coerced by the FBI. The following section of the court transcript, from Peltier’s trial in Fargo, was recorded when Poor Bear was called as a witness for the defense (instead of the prosecution). The Jury was not present during this line of questioning, and the judge ruled it irrelevant.

“Q: (by Mr. Crooks) Why were you signing these affidavits?
A: I don’t know.
Q: Well, did [FBI agent] Bill Wood threaten to harm you or hurt you if you didn’t sign?
A: (No response.)
Q: Can you answer that question?
Mr. Taikeff (For the defense): Your Honor, I’d like the record to reflect a 45-second pause measured by the courtroom clock between the last question and the following question.
Q: (By Mr. Crooks) Can you answer the question, Myrtle?
A: I was forced to sign both of these papers.
Q: By whom?
A: They said one of my family members was going to be hurt if I didn’t do it. By [FBI agents] Dave Price and Bill Wood …”

Leonard Peltier, now in his 70s, remains a political prisoner to this day. His multiple legal appeals have amounted to nothing. He briefly escaped prison in 1979, fearing for his personal safety, but was apprehended several days later. An additional seven years were added to his double life sentences, but have since been dismissed. President Bill Clinton failed to act on a petition to grant Peltier clemency, President Bush denied it in 2009, as did President Obama in 2016. Peltier’s lawsuit against the FBI was dismissed.
in 2004 on procedural grounds, with the court unwilling to find the FBI at fault.

**William Kunstler: Guardian and Resourcer**

William Kunstler was a famous civil rights advocate and attorney. After growing up in New York, he graduated from Yale. He then served in World War II, and was discharged with the rank of Major. After the war he earned a law degree, and established his own practice with his brother Michael: Kunstler and Kunstler. He lived in New York until 1960, when he became active in the Civil Rights Movement. Kunstler represented the founding members of the NAACP. Following his stand against discrimination, the ACLU invited him to Mississippi, where he witnessed actions and arrests. There, he became an avid activist against discrimination.

Kunstler went on to form a close association with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During the 1960s, he traveled with King's desegregation campaign across the South. Afterwards he represented the defendants in many landmark cases of American history. These included the “Chicago Eight” and the “Catonsville Nine” in 1968, as well as the inmates that occupied New York’s infamous Attica prison in 1971. During the trial of the “Eight” Kunstler—due in large part to his volatile and persistent nature- accrued a litany of contempt of court charges. He became known nationwide as a talented and bold civil rights lawyer.

When AIM occupied Wounded Knee in 1973, the group attracted national headlines. Kunstler was one of a team of lawyers that dropped everything and came to their defense. Kunstler represented Russell Means at his trial for the Wounded Knee occupation without charging a fee. During the trial, which lasted for months, Kunstler held public speeches on a daily basis to fundraise for AIM. He used the trial to showcase government discrimination. Means and his co-conspirators were finally acquitted after Kunstler demonstrated the outrageous lengths to which the FBI had gone to entrap them—including tampering with evidence, providing false
Kunstler took another AIM case in 1976. Heading a five lawyer team, he represented Robert Robideau and Darelle Butler, who were accused of killing two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975. Kunstler asserted that not only were these men innocent, but that the FBI was mis-administering justice. By that time the Pine Ridge reservation was already the site of more than 200 unsolved murders as a result of Wilson’s brutal regime. Kunstler argued that the evidence connecting the accused to the agents was loose at best; that the case was being unfairly prioritized; and that it pursued the defendants to an illegal degree. Robideau and Butler were acquitted, but witness Myrtle Poor Bear stated that she had seen Leonard Peltier shoot the agents—and so an order of extradition from Canada was filed. She later recanted, claiming she was threatened and coerced by the FBI, Peltier was ultimately charged with and convicted of both murders.

Kunstler was a vocal supporter of both AIM and Russell Means. He continued to offer Means and Dennis Banks legal advice after the major trials of the 1970s. When Russell Means was stabbed in prison, Kunstler was one of many to come to the prison and speak on Mean's behalf. He spoke publicly wherever he went, drumming up both social and financial support from local communities. Kunstler went on to represent many other controversial defendants in American history, including one of the “Central Park Five”: five black teenagers who were falsely convicted of battery and rape. William Kunstler died on September 4th, 1995.

**Marlon Brando: Resourcer and Amplifier**

Marlon Brando, while best remembered as an iconic actor, was also an influential member of the Hollywood community and a political activist. Brando rose to fame on Broadway, then made his way to California. He became internationally known in the 1950s, with memorable roles in films like *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Wild One*. But in the 1960s
his popularity declined, due in part to the films in which he chose to appear. But with the release of The Godfather in 1972, he again became one of America's most successful actors.

This role won Brando the Best Actor award at the 1973 Oscars, but he did not appear at the Oscars to receive it. Instead—in protest of how American Indians were portrayed on screen, and to show his support for the then-ongoing occupation of Wounded Knee—Brando boycotted the ceremony. In his place he sent an Apache actress named Sacheen Littlefeather, who took the stage dressed in full ceremonial garb. She originally intended to read the 15 page speech that Brando had prepared—but threatened with arrest, she improvised. The complete speech was published by The New York Times shortly afterward. But Littlefeather's career was attacked. The FBI made her unhirable, and her entire life, she still faced public slander.

Brando wrote: “The motion picture community has been as responsible as any for degrading the Indian and making a mockery of his character, describing his as savage, hostile, and evil. It’s hard enough for children to grow up in this world. When Indian children ... see their race depicted as they are in films, their minds become injured in ways we can never know.”

Marlon Brando is an example of an amplifier: a subcategory we might call “celebrity support system.” Social justice agents benefit when someone can use their celebrity to popularize their cause. The number of faces recognized by the average American has increased with the expansion of television and cinema. In the world of social justice, this has become a powerful new source of amplification and financial support. But it was during the era of movements such as AIM and Civil Rights that celebrity support first became a powerful tool. Brando was one of the most prominent celebrity supporters of AIM, and stood alongside fellow performers like Johnny Cash, who also contributed money and amplification. But even with these significant supporters, AIM operated on a low budget.

Brando donated to many civil rights groups and actions. In the 1960s he
gave thousands of dollars to the NAACP and the Black Panther Party. He participated in Dr. King’s March on Washington, and committed himself publically to civil rights after King’s assassination. During the Wounded Knee occupation, Brando provided funds to help AIM activists receive food and other supplies. At the commencement of the trials he traveled to South Dakota, where he spoke publicly in defense of Russell Means, Dennis Banks, and others involved with AIM. He also helped William Kunstler raise funds.

Russell Means and Dennis Banks maintained a certain level of familiarity with Brando. They went to his home, shared meals, and gave speeches with him at venues across the country. In 1974, when Banks was on the run with Leonard Peltier, the men went to Brando’s house. Marlon asked Banks who Peltier was, and when Banks told him. Marlon laughed. “Goddamn,” he said. “You’ve got some nerve!” He offered them legal counsel, but they insisted they had to flee. Brando gave them $10,000 and a mobile home, and off they went. Banks and Peltier would be separated by an incident with the police a short while later, during which the mobile home was destroyed.

Marlon Brando was also one of the people who came to Russell Means’s aide, along with William Kunstler, after a prison assassination attempt in 1978. Present as well was actor and civil rights champion Harry Belafonte. Brando was at the press conference only a few hours after Means was stabbed. In July of that year, Brando participated and supported The Longest Walk, an AIM-organized hike from California to Washington, D.C. Upon arriving, the protestors established a camp in the capital and remained there for several days while protesting legislation in process. Brando appeared with Russell Means on NBC’s Today Show. During the short interview Brando spoke in defense of AIM, and attacked the Dawes Act. Means, in turn, spoke out against the government’s secret sterilization projects targeting Native American women.

After Russell Means resigned from AIM, he became an actor under
Brendo’s tutelage. He received acting lessons from Brando’s personal coach, and had his acting debut in 1992 with *The Last of the Mohicans*. Marlon Brando died on July 1st, 2004.

**Lessons from the American Indian Movement**

**Find a Point of Entry**
AIM started with a simple initiative: combatting mass arrests and forced labor through direct action. Ask yourself: What small win can be achieved?

**Build a Distributed Network**
More so than in prior movements, this one was distributed from the beginning. This is due in part to Native American culture, which prizes the group over the individual. The more collaboration and cooperation that exists, the greater mutual support is available, the greater a movement's traction. Having multiple people and entities working in different locations accelerates message distribution and activation.

**There is No Shame in Being an Outlaw**
Tom Robbins wrote,”If you’re honest, you sooner or later have to confront your values. Then you’re forced to separate what is right from what is merely legal.” When you have no standing in the dominant society, what do you care for their rules and customs? Jail, slander, loss of employment? What’s that in the long arc of change?

**Be Undeterred**
When one initiative came to an end, the AIM activists cooked up another. They were persistent and surprising, but always pointed in the same direction. Stay in the public eye.

**Work For the People, Not Just Against Something**
AIM not only fought for equal treatment under the law, they simultaneously worked on job training, housing, healthcare, and other positive programs for the advancement of the tribes. Hold a vision for where
things are going, not just against an oppressor. This is common to many successful movements.

**Engage Legally**
Finding legal support to help pursue change from within the court systems helps to neutralize outsider resistance. Wherever possible, use the courts and the justice systems available to you.

**Leverage Celebrity**
Whether it’s Marlon Brando or Johnny Cash, beloved celebrities have reach, and can lend enormous popular credibility.

**Breakthrough the Noise**
If you don’t have money or can’t scale, find a way to engage the public -- through public action, radio, television, and of course social media. Find a way to make your voice heard.

**Anoint the next generation**
In this case, we learn from what AIM did *not* do. The intergenerational handoff was weak, and AIM lost ground in the 1980s. Attention turned to other initiatives, including arguments against exploitative symbolism (i.e., sports team mascots), and economic opportunity (one example is the casino movement). But these were not initiated by AIM.
I Am More Than My Religion

“The fundamentalists of every faith remain blind to the truth that the “sigh within the prayer is the same in the heart of the Christian, the Muslim, and the Jew.” I have seen this unity with my eyes, heard it with my ears, felt it with all my being.”

-David James Duncan

“The real damage is done by those millions who want to ‘survive.’ The honest men who just want to be left in peace. Those who don’t want their little lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves. Those with no sides and no causes. Those who won’t take measure of their own strength, for fear of antagonizing their own weakness. Those who don’t like to make waves—or enemies. Those for whom freedom, honour, truth, and principles are only literature. Those who live small, mate small, die small. It’s the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you’ll keep it under control. If you don’t make any noise, the bogeyman won’t find you. But it’s all an illusion, because they die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe?! From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does.”

- Sophie Scholl
Chapter 7

I Am More Than My Religion

Sophie Scholl and the Nazi Resistance

At what point do you stand up for the “Other”? 

So many of us like to say that if it was us during the Nazi regime, we would have stood up and said, “No! This abuse and murder ends with me.” But is that really the case? Nazi scholars have observed that 10% of the population will always be compassionate, and 10% will always be
evil—but the 80% in the middle can be swayed either way.

The Nazis persecuted anyone that didn’t reflect the Aryan ideal. These undesirables included communists, gypsies, the feeble-minded and disabled, and homosexuals. There were five million non-Jews killed by the Reich, and more than six million Jews were murdered in gas chambers and concentration camps, starting with those who couldn’t perform as slave laborers. As the situation worsened, ordinary German citizens who spoke out against the killings were also targeted—yet some continued to protest.

I include this story of Sophie Scholl, a young Christian activist who stood up to the Nazis, to prompt the question: What would it take for us to stand up for a Jew or a Muslim who was under threat in our own nations? Would we be willing to put our own life on the line for the rights of others to live as they wish to live, as some Germans did?

**Sophie Scholl: The Back Story**

Sophie Scholl was a non-violent activist during the Nazi Regime. She, along with her brother, was a champion of the White Rose: a literature-fueled resistance movement based out of the University of Munich. The White Rose distributed a total of seven leaflets, all filled with strong anti-Nazi sentiments. The majority of the organization’s members were executed in 1943, after the ‘White Rose Trials’. Both Sophie and her brother were guillotined and martyred on February 22nd, 1943.

Sophie was born in the town of Forchtenberg, Germany, on May 9th, 1921. She was the daughter of Robert Scholl—who was the mayor of Forchtenberg at the time—and Magdalena Müller. Both of her parents were politically active, and spoke out against the growing nationalist sentiments surrounding them. Sophie was the fourth of six children. Her siblings, along with her parents, were among her most important influences.

Initially, Sophie was on the wrong side of history. She joined the Union of
German Girls (a pro-Nazi nationalist youth group) at the age of 12, under pressure from her oldest sister, Inge Scholl. Her brother Hans joined the Hitler Youth simultaneously, at age 15. Though Scholls’ parents counseled their children against Hitler’s movement, this did not prevent them from joining.

**Coming into Consciousness**

Over time, both Sophie and Hans became disenfranchised with the Nazi regime. The arrest of her entire family in 1937 on account of her brother’s actions (accounted for later in this chapter), spurred Sophie further away from the Party. That was also the year she met Fritz Hartnagel, then a soldier in the German army. The two would become lovers and friends, sharing ongoing correspondence throughout the upcoming war. He would contribute money and his own eyewitness accounts of both the holocaust and the Russian front to her cause. For example, he wrote to her from Amsterdam, on February 28, 1941: *Amsterdam civilians just demonstrated against recent Jewish arrests. Street cars and many shops went on strike. The SS shot at a group of protestors. They supposedly killed twenty. The people are extremely angry.* These accounts fueled her inspiration to act. Between Sophie’s guidance and his own experiences, Hartnagel too would become a fierce opponent of the Nazi regime.

**The Defining Moment**

In 1942, Sophie was a student at the University of Munich. Along with her brother, Hans, working with his friend Alexander Schmorell, published four pamphlets denouncing Hitler’s government. This was the founding of the White Rose. Both men were sent to the Russian front for the latter half of that year, where they served as medics. Upon their return in November, Sophie worked with Hans, Alexander, and two others to strategize the White Rose’s expansion. They recruited members over Christmas—and by the end of January 1943, the group had distributed more than 10,000
anti-Nazi leaflets across Germany.

The leaflets were a progressively more acute indictment of the Nazi Regime and a call to arms for Germans. As they evolved their case, the White Rose called out apathy and summoned each citizen to rouse themselves from their stupor. In leaflet three, for example, they say, “But our present State is a dictatorship of Evil. “We’ve known that for a long time,” I can hear you say, “and it is not necessary for you to remind us of it once again.” So I ask you: If you are aware of this, why do you not stir yourselves? Why do you permit this autocrat to rob you of one sphere of your rights after another, little by little, both overtly and in secret? One day there will be nothing left, nothing at all, except for a mechanized national engine that has been commandeered by criminals and drunks.”

Later leaflets offered instruction in how to fight the regime by simple acts such as slowing one’s work. It was leaflet 7, the direct call to reject and bring down Hitler, that led to their beheading. “Today, all of Germany is encircled just as Stalingrad was. All Germans shall be sacrificed to the emissaries of hate and extermination. Sacrificed to him who tormented the Jews, eradicated half of the Poles, and who wishes to destroy Russia. Sacrificed to him who took from you freedom, peace, domestic happiness, hope, and gaiety, and gave you inflationary money. That shall not, that may not come to pass! Hitler and his regime must fall so that Germany may live.”

The students worked closely with Falk Harnack, an accomplished filmmaker and writer who also stood against the Nazi Regime. Harnack’s brother, Arvid, was executed on December 22nd 1942, for spearheading another resistance movement: the so-called “Red Orchestra.” During the Nazi regime, numerous groups of resistance fighters throughout Europe and the USSR plotted independently to depose, or even assassinate, Adolf Hitler. The resistance movement was called “The Red Orchestra” by the Gestapo. Each member of these groups—a loose affiliation of perhaps 125 individuals—was assigned a musical term, depending on their position. Leaders, for example, were known as “conductors.” The “red” falsely tied
their cause to Communist Russia.

The White Rose group also worked under the influence of Dr. Kurt Huber, a faculty member at the University of Munich and a mentor to both Hans and Sophie. In the early months of 1943 they published three more pamphlets, one of which was written by Dr. Huber himself. Sophie and Hans traveled to different cities in efforts to confuse the Gestapo; they enlisted the help of “degenerate artists” like Wilhelm Geyer, and plastered Berlin’s walls with anti-Hitler graffiti. Using the studios of like-minded artists as venues, they hosted illegal readings of philosophers and thinkers. These underground events often drew groups of 30 or more.

The Ultimate Solution: The Murder Execution of the Scholls

On February 18th, 1943, Sophie and Hans plastered the University of Munich with leaflets. Just as classes were letting out, Sophie let fly her remaining papers from the third floor balcony, showering the students below with the papers.

Unfortunately, not all were sympathetic to her cause. The siblings were seen, and arrested. Both were interrogated, and their trial took place four days later. After a trial that lasted only hours, they were executed by guillotine. Kurt Huber was later arrested for his own participation with the White Rose, and executed.

The Pod Around Sophie Scholl

Robert Scholl/Magdalena Müller: The Blood Bond and Sanctuary
Hans Scholl: The Strategist
St. Alexander Schmorell: The Resourcer and Amplifier
Fritz Hartnagel: The Resourcer and Amplifier
Dr. Kurt Huber: The Moderator
Falk Harnack: The Network Builder and Amplifier
Sophie’s father, Robert Scholl was a politician and political activist, vocal against the rise of German nationalism and the Nazi regime. During World War I Scholl had refused to carry a weapon, and served as a medical officer. He was discharged from the military before the end of the war, and met his future wife, Magdalena Müller, in a military hospital at Ludwigsburg. Magdalena, born in 1881, served as a nurse during the first World War. In November of 1916 they married, and their first child, Inge, was born in 1917. At the time the family lived in Ingersheim, where Robert was appointed interim mayor. In the election that followed, Scholl won by a landslide. He governed as a liberal, democratic mayor until being run out of office in 1919 on accusations of ‘immoral behavior’—specifically, infidelity. Reports of Robert’s extramarital affairs surfaced repeatedly; this was likely the reason for the Scholls’ relocation.

Hans Scholl was born to Magdalena and Robert in 1918. The following year the family moved to the village of Forchtenberg. Robert became mayor there as well, and the family lived in comfortable rooms at City Hall. While in Forchtenberg, the Scholl family had four more children. Elizabeth came in 1920, Sophie in 1921, Werner in 1922, and Thilde in 1925.

Robert was considered a liberal and progressive mayor. During his 10 years in office he oversaw construction of a warehouse and community distribution cooperative; he instituted a public rail transit system, and bus service to the nearby village of Ohringen. Scholl also built a telephone exchange and medical clinic for the community.

But Robert’s social advancements were too rapid for the small village of Forchtenberg, and in 1927 he ran for mayor of the nearby (and much larger) town of Kunzelsau. He lost. This failed run, coupled with the growing anxiety of Forchtenberg’s residents, contributed to his defeat when he ran for reelection in 1929. Shortly after he was again accused of ‘immoral
behavior', and several members of the town filed legal action against him. The family of eight moved to Ludwigsburg for two years, and finally to the city of Ulm. There, Robert started a business as a finance advisor and rented a large apartment on Cathedral Square.

The Scholl parents worked to influence and steer their children away from the rising pro-nationalist rhetoric. But in 1933—under pressure from their oldest sibling Inge—both Sophie and Hans enlisted in the Hitler Youth. A few months later, participation was made mandatory. Though Robert and Magdalena did not prevent their children from joining, they spoke with them at length about politics and morals, hoping that their children would change their way of thinking. Elisabeth Scholl remembers her mother: “She was quite the force in the family. Sophie and my mother, both of them had a very large heart and thick skin. My mother hated the Nazis, but nevertheless she sewed pants for Jungvolk (the Hitler Youth). [She was] very pious. She was the one constant factor in the family.”

According to author Richard Hanser, “[The children] could say whatever they wished, and they all had opinions. This was far from customary practice in German households, where, by long tradition, the authority of the father was seldom questioned or his statements challenged. His aversion to mindless nationalism was not only unchanged but stronger than before. In his dinner-table discussions with his children, he could interpret events for them with an insight unblurred by current prejudices or official pronouncements.”

While Sophie and Hans’s moral shift cannot be attributed entirely to their parents influence, there is no doubt that Robert and Magdalena helped steer them from the Nazi mindset. Robert and Magdalena repeatedly spoke out against the tyranny of the Nazi Regime and in defense of democracy. He is recorded telling his children: “This is war. War in the midst of peace and within our own people. War against the defenseless individual. War against human happiness and the freedom of its children. It is a frightful crime.”
By 1942 the holocaust was at full throttle. Sophie and Hans had become wholly disillusioned with their previous alliances. Both attended the University of Munich, where they formed the White Rose. At that time, Robert was also speaking out against the government; That February he compared Hitler to Attila the Hun, claiming the war had long been lost. He was informed upon and testified against by his 21 year old secretary, Inge Wilke. His last words to her before his arrest by the Gestapo were, “So now you can destroy me, because these days when someone says something like this, they are shot.”

Robert Scholl’s trial was on August 11th, and brought controversy to the Nazi courts. While a known liberal and democratic sympathiser, Robert had also enrolled in three Nationalist-Socialist organizations, showcasing his allegiance to party principles. When delivering the verdict, the judge stated: “Nothing is known about the political engagement of the defendant. He is deemed politically unreliable, but during his employment in Forchtenberg, he was valued as a useful civil servant with a social attitude. However, even at that time, his eccentric character and unrealistic idealism were noticeable.” Scholl was sentenced to four months in prison.

Meanwhile, the White Rose continued to operate. Sophie worked to develop the organization, while Hans was deployed to the Russian front. There, like his father, he served as a medic. Hans returned in November, close to the date Robert was released, and the family spent their final Christmas together.

Early in 1943, Sophie and Hans were arrested for their activities with the White Rose. At his children's sentencing Robert began shouting, and was ushered out of the courtroom. The Scholl family went to the District Attorney’s office immediately after the trial to file an appeal, but were stalled by the Nazi bureaucracy. Robert worked the rest of the day in hopes of saving Sophie and Hans from the guillotine, but to no avail.

After the execution and funeral of Hans and Sophie, Inge Scholl reports that her father lamented: “Shouldn’t we all simply slit our jugulars and
join them? Show them that we won’t take this?” In August, 1943, Robert and his family were tried for their own involvement with the White Rose. Inge and Elizabeth Scholl were found innocent, along with their mother. Robert was sentenced to two years in prison.

When the Allied forces arrived in Germany, Robert was released from prison and appointed mayor of Ulm. In 1952 he co-founded the pacifist left-wing political group known as All-German People’s Party. Magdalena died in 1958; Robert Scholl on October 25th, 1973.

**Hans Scholl: Strategist**

Hans Scholl was born on September 22nd, 1918, at the onset of Hitler’s rise to power, and came of age in the shadow of his father’s political career. Hans struggled in school until he joined the Hitler Youth at 15. He invested himself in the rising nationalist movement, applying himself rigorously to the Hitler Youth doctrine. While Hans rose quickly within the ranks, he also joined a separate youth group named d.j.1.11. As this group read banned books, it was not officially sanctioned by Hitler Youth. In 1935, under the leadership of Max Von Neubeck, Hans was placed in charge of 150 boys belonging to d.j.1.11. This promotion solidified Hans’s reputation in Ulm as a party-aligned young adult (he was 17 at the time) who held a position of power and a promising future. This was not to last, however. After his promotion, Hans molded the group into what was virtually his own private organization. Neubeck would later break from d.j.1.11. in order to more closely adhere with Hitler’s principals.

Not long into his appointment, Hans began sexually assaulting one of his troop members. In the meticulous records of the Gestapo, a 1937 interrogation of Hans Scholl revealed the details of his sexual assaults. The victim used the alias “Robert.” Later that year, at a Party Day Rally in Nuremberg, Hans learned the Reich’s draconian view on homosexuality. This event, Inge Scholl later recalled, transformed Hans permanently; he turned away from the Nazi Regime. But this did not stop Hans from
molesting ‘Robert’. He continued doing so until 1937, when he was arrested by the Gestapo for homosexual and treasonous activities.

By 1937 d.j.1.11. was illegal. In April of that year, Hans joined the Reich Labor Service, and removed himself from any involvement with Hitler Youth. But he did not stop leading activities with the members of what had become, in essence, his private youth group. On December 28, 1936, Hans led his troops into the mountains for a winter encampment. Along the way he met a man in plain clothes, and told him of his troop’s plans. But the man was in fact a member of the Gestapo, and alerted the authorities to Hans’s continued involvement with d.j.1.11.

Upon his release from the Reich Labor Service in September 1937, Hans was drafted into the military. He loved horses, and volunteered for the cavalry. That November, the Gestapo accused and questioned Hans regarding his repeated sexual assaults of “Robert”. They also interrogated him about his youth group’s anti-nationalistic activities. Although initially protected by his commanding officer, Hans was arrested in December. His siblings were arrested as well, and the Scholl home was searched for evidence of treasonous materials.

Inge Scholl fails to mention her brother’s sex crimes in her account Students Against Anarchy, and portrays the arrest solely in regards to Hans’ unauthorized connection with d.j.1.11. As things turned out, the prosecution never proved that Hans or his ‘group mates’ participated in treasonous activity. During the trial Hans did freely admit to habitual, aggressive sexual relations with “Robert,” for which he was convicted of ‘homosexual activity’. Due to his fine military record, however, and testimony from his commanding officers, Hans was sentenced only to a substantial fine and time already served, after which he was able to rejoin his cavalry corp. His arrest and experience in jail, as well as the arrest of his siblings, impacted both Hans and Sophie profoundly. From then on, the siblings grew increasingly distant from the Nazi Regime.
In 1940, Hans took part in the German invasion of France. During the French campaign Hans saw very little actual fighting. He was stationed in the town of Saint-Quentin, where he performed basic surgery and amputations. Hans was exposed to *pervitin*; a methamphetamine prescribed by the German army for its soldiers. Hans became addicted to the drug, and used it habitually until his death.

Upon his return from the military, Hans resumed medical studies at the University of Munich. There he met a number of politically like-minded medical students, including Alexander Schmorell and Willi Graf. This circle of friendship would soon evolve into The White Rose movement.

In 1942, Sophie joined her brother at the university. After the execution of 12 resistance members in the spring, the siblings and their friends took action. Sophie, Hans, and Alexander Schmorell acquired printing equipment. By June, they had published the first of the White Rose leaflets. Hans and Alexander met with Falk Harnack, an avid resistance member who became an important part of their efforts. The siblings also enlisted the help of their esteemed professor, Dr. Kurt Huber. Thanks to the support of these highly published individuals, the White Rose received strong academic support, and their credibility grew exponentially.

After publication of their fourth leaflet, Hans and his friends were sent to the Russian front, again as medical officers. This was a stark change from their former military service; Germany was driving deep into Russia, sustaining heavy casualties, and indiscriminately murdering local Jewish populations. Hans witnessed the atrocities of the holocaust firsthand, and understood that Germany was fighting a losing war. This simmered so strongly within him that, when he returned from the military in November of 1942, his passion for resistance was heightened even further.

Hans and Sophie worked closely with Schmorell and Huber to produce another leaflet. The siblings printed and distributed more than 10,000 copies, infuriating the Nazi authorities. After a brief incident of civil
resistance at the University of Munich, the siblings decided to distribute an additional 1,300 leaflets. On February 18th, Hans and Sophie were arrested while distributing these leaflets on campus. Hans was interrogated, tried, sentenced, and executed with mechanical efficiency. At 5:02 p.m., on February 22nd, 1943, as his neck was being placed on the guillotine’s block, Hans Scholl shouted his last words: “Long live liberty!”

St. Alexander Schmorell: Resourcer, Amplifier

Alexander Schmorell was born in the city of Orenburg, Russia, on September 16th, 1917, to a Russian mother and a German father. After his mother died of typhus during the Russian civil war, his father moved them to Munich. In 1920, Dr. Hugo Schmorell remarried a German woman named Elisabeth Hoffman. They had two children of their own: Erich and Natalie. In 1924 Alexander was sent to a private school in Geiselgesteig, and in 1928 to a public high school in Munich, graduating in the spring of 1937. That November, he volunteered for the Reich Labor Service, where he served for the summer. Immediately afterwards, he volunteered for the 7th artillery corps.

Alexander stated in his 1943 interrogation with the Gestapo that he became intensely dissatisfied serving in the German military. He identified strongly with his Russian mother, and Germany had not won his allegiance. He had brought these concerns to his commanding officer within the first month of his enlistment. Said Alexander: “I had no success with the public announcement of my political sentiments and my request for discharge from the army. They attributed my request to my formative years or even to a nervous breakdown.” The military even enlisted the help of his father, who had no success in changing his son’s loyalties.

After a year of military service, Alexander began field medical training. He was given leave from the military to pursue his studies, and enrolled at the University of Hamburg in 1939. After a single semester, he moved back to his father’s house and transferred to the University of Munich that
fall—but was soon drafted into active duty as a medical officer. He served on the western front until the autumn of 1940 when he was given leave to attend university. Once he was officially discharged from the military, he joined the Second Student Medical Company—where he met Hans Scholl.

Schmorell and Scholl became friends, and bonded over their disillusionment with the Nazi Regime. Later, under interrogation, Hans claimed that he had initiated the action, and that he alone wrote that first leaflet. Schmorell, however, stated that they resolved to write the leaflet together, and that each contributed half of the text. Whatever the truth of this, both agreed that the second and third were joint efforts. They worked in Alexander’s room, in secret, on the third floor of his father’s house in Munich. They used a typewriter Alexander borrowed from Michael Potzel, returning it after each leaflet was published. In 14 days they published five pamphlets, all denouncing the war and the Nazi Regime.

During summer vacation from University that year, Schmorell and Hans were drafted from the Student Medical Company to serve on the eastern front. Alexander’s fear of being forced to fight the Russians had been realized. He was stationed at a military hospital known as Blankenhorn, where he spoke often with wounded Russian officers. He later stated: “If as a soldier I had had to take up arms against the Bolshevists, before carrying out such an order, I would have had to advise my military C.O. that I could not do so. In my position as a medical officer, I was spared such an order.”

After returning from the front in November of 1942, Alexander and Hans spent much time together. Alexander often visited the Scholl household, where Hans hosted conversations criticizing the Nazi Regime. It was there that Alexander met Sophie. Sometime in mid-January, work began on a fifth leaflet. Schmorell used his healthy allowance to purchase an industrial copying machine, which enabled the organization to print and distribute some 10,000 leaflets. Schmorell denied involvement of any parties other than himself and Hans in production of this, the fifth leaflet. He describes
traveling to Vienna, where he alone distributed several hundred additional copies. He did admit that Sophie accompanied him to Augsburg, where they distributed the inflammatory literature together.

Schmorell went into hiding as soon as he heard of the Scholls’ arrest, but was informed upon by an ostensible friend. He was arrested in February, tried alongside the other members of the White Rose in April, 1943, and executed on July 13th. For his anti-Nazi sacrifices, Alexander Schmorell was declared a “New Martyr” on February 5th, 2012, and canonized as a saint within the Russian Orthodox Church.

**Fritz Hartnagel: Resourcer, Amplifier**

Fritz Hartnagel was born in the city of Ulm, February 5th, 1917. His family ran a small business and lived modestly. Graduating high school a year early, Fritz volunteered for a military career in 1936. He had previously been a part of the Hitler Youth, where he showed great enthusiasm for the nationalist cause and quickly rose through the juvenile ranks. In 1937, while an ensign in the German army, Fritz met Sophie Scholl at a dance event. The two fell into a complicated friendship, and shared constant correspondence until Sophie’s death in 1943.

Fritz was a firm ally of the Nazi Regime; a career officer in the German military, and a promising engineer. But even as they were drifting apart politically, Sophie and Fritz began a romantic relationship that was strained under her political activism. Later, after becoming a captain in the Air Force, Hartnagel was deployed to the western front. He and Sophie communicated through letters—the majority of which still survive, offering a unique window into their lives. In 2005 Thomas Hartnagel, (the son of Fritz Hartnagel and Elisabeth Scholl), published a volume encompassing 313 of those letters between them.

What is clear is that Sophie and Fritz influenced each other during her short life. Fritz imparted to Sophie an accurate depiction of his life on
the front, and she shared her ideological development. In their letters from 1939, they argue over the invasion of Poland. Sophie presses Fritz, challenging him to take a stand against the Reich and look critically at what he was taking part in. Fritz resisted her influence initially, defending his role as a soldier, but over time his opinion changed. In his Christmas letter to her that year he states, “Use of force only breeds opposition and destroys trust.” Over time, Fritz shifted towards Sophie’s way of thinking. She dominated his thoughts and feelings, as is evident in their letters, and Fritz devoted himself to pleasing her.

Unlike Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, Fritz Hartnagel was not a student and received no academic leave. He remained an active member of the military throughout the duration of World War Two. While on the eastern front, Fritz was attached to the sixth German army in Stalingrad. During the battle he suffered injuries and was airlifted to a field hospital, where he remained for some time. He wrote to Sophie, detailing the horrors of the war and his desire to see it to end. To quote historian Ruth Sachs: “It became increasingly clear to me that much of what Sophie knew and believed about war came not from her father, as Inge would have us believe, and definitely not from Hans, who remained starry-eyed about a military career until his death. Rather, most of what Sophie knew and believed about war came from Fritz Hartnagel’s thoughtful and dreadfully honest letters from the front lines.”

Fritz routinely sent Sophie money, which she used to finance White Rose activities. In May of 1942 he gave her 200 marks (roughly $1,600) for no particular identified expense, and in July another 100 marks. Sophie used this money, in conjunction with Alexander Schmorell, to purchase a duplicating machine, stamps, parchment, and train tickets. During her interrogation Sophie admitted the money came from Fritz, but denied he knew what it was spent on. After her execution Fritz was called before a military tribunal, where he also denied willing participation. He was released, and never charged again in relation to the White Rose. In a 1995 interview, Fritz recounted his final exchange with Sophie. It occurred during a short furlough in May of 1942, during which she asked for his
help procuring a duplicating machine.

“When I questioned her further about that—-because I could not understand why they suddenly needed a duplicating machine for *Storm Lantern* (a magazine that Sophie published)—she finally admitted that the apparatus was intended for use with the leaflets. This shook me up terribly. I asked her if she didn’t know that that could cost her her head. She said that she knew that, and that she was ready to pay the price.”

After the war, Fritz’s life took an unexpected turn. He returned to Ulm, where he cultivated the company of Sophie’s younger sister, Elisabeth. The two fell in love, married in October of 1945, and had four children. The oldest, Thomas, would go on to publish the anthology of letters mentioned above. Fritz himself developed into a firm opponent of nuclear weapons, and a left-leaning judge. He and Elizabeth joined Germany’s Social
Democratic Party, and continued to be activists; they were arrested at a 1983 anti-nuclear rally. Fritz Hartnagel died on April 21st, 2001, at 84.

Dr. Kurt Huber: Moderator

Dr. Kurt Huber was born in Switzerland in 1893. He suffered from rickets and diphtheria as a child, which left him with slight paralysis in his joints and face. As a result, he developed a speech impediment. His family moved first to Stuttgart, Germany, where he attended high school, and then to Munich after his father’s death. Since his physical disabilities prevented him from joining the military, Huber focused on a musicology and philosophy, with a focus on reviving Bavarian folk songs. In January of 1921 he qualified to lecture at the University of Munich, and in 1926 became an associate professor there. By the time of his arrest in 1943 he was an adjunct professor, at the same university, on contract to teach philosophy and musical psychology.

Huber is still renowned for his studies of German folk music. He worked closely with Paul Kiem to publish multiple volumes of thoroughly researched Bavarian and German folk songs in 1930 and 1934. In 1936, he represented Germany at the International Congress for Folk Music in Barcelona, and in 1937 was appointed department head of the National Institute for German Music Research in Berlin. He moved to Berlin, spending two years there before his request for a permanent transfer was denied by the Reich bureaucracy. He returned to Munich in 1939, where he resumed his position at the University.

Huber held liberal views under the Nazi Regime, and was classified in his indictment as a ‘National Liberal’. Initially he had supported the Nazi party, in hopes that they would shield Germany from the Russian communist wave. By the late 1930’s he began to abandon those sentiments. Publically, Huber maintained the image of a citizen loyal to Hitler’s regime—he joined the Nazi party in 1940 and often wrote for the right wing journal Deutsche Musikkultur.
At the University of Munich, however, Huber found an outlet for his liberal ideals. In the safety of his classroom he hosted seminars and lectures on a wide range of political and philosophical topics. He often hosted nine or more lectures a week, drawing students who were not even enrolled in his classes. The room was always full when Huber was lecturing—and Sophie Scholl was always in attendance.

When examining Huber as a ‘resistance’ figure, it is important to understand his political views. Huber was a strong proponent of National Socialism, a fierce enemy of Bolshevism, and an anti-Semite. Huber’s problems with the Third Reich came from the stripping of free speech and thought from churches and professors, not with Hitler’s pursuit of Aryan supremacy.

Hans Scholl met Huber at a social gathering in the summer of 1942. By then, Huber had been declining in academic popularity. Although he still traveled on lecture circuits between universities, he had been stripped of his campus office and demoted to a part-time position at the University of Munich due to his political views. Hans and Huber got along well during their initial meeting, and Hans began attending Huber’s lectures.

In July 1942, Huber attended a going away party for Hans and his fellow medical students being deployed for Russia. There he joined a lengthy conversation about politics, involving Sophie and Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and other members of the White Rose movement. Huber also received letters from Hans while the students were on the eastern front, gaining knowledge and inspiration just as Sophie had from Fritz. When the medical students returned that winter, Hans and Schmorell shared with Huber that they had been the authors of the initial White Rose leaflets. Huber agreed to help their cause, providing he had no involvement with the actual production and distribution of the leaflets.

Huber wrote the sixth leaflet, inspired by the devastating German defeat at Stalingrad and the first-hand accounts of the mass executions of German
soldiers. This was by far the most successful of the leaflets, and the German prose is artfully comprised. Huber also gave Hans Scholl a student directory for the purpose of leaflet distribution.

On February 9th, 1942, Huber was present at a meeting of the White Rose in Hans Scholl’s apartment. There, he disagreed with Falk Harnack, another of Sophie’s mentors, citing Harnack’s pro-communist views. To quote Huber: “[Harnack] stated that the Russian form of socialization could be exemplary. I sharply refuted that statement. I cannot shake my impression that Harnack must somehow be connected to the Communist wave in Germany.” But Huber also forcefully refuted Schmorell’s political opinions—an error which would ultimately lead to his own undoing. For while Alexander protected Hans and Sophie in his interrogation, he named Huber outright.

Dr. Kurt Huber was arrested on February 27th, 1943. Under interrogation, he confessed to participation in the White Rose. On April 19th he faced a short, ruthless trial along with other White Rose members. He was executed by guillotine on July 13th, 1943 beside Alexander Schmorell. Concluding his interrogation, Huber stated: “I know that my conduct is illegitimate. But it is precisely as illegitimate as the conduct of a long line of brave National Socialists who brought about the overthrow of the democratic government through their courage.”

**Falk Harnack: Amplifier**

Falk Harnack was born on March 2nd, 1913, in Stuttgart, Germany. When he was one year old his father committed suicide, and Falk was raised primarily by his mother, Clara Harnack. She supported the family through her career as a painter, and publically aligned herself with the Reich Cultural Chamber. Falk’s cousins and brothers were opponents of the Nazi Regime, and he grew up under their influence. Initially, he followed his older brother Arvid’s study of economics, but soon turned his attention to the arts—specifically, the theater. At age 16, Falk moved
It was there, in 1929, that Falk met Lilo Ramdohr. Her family held status and power in Germany prior to Hitler's regime. During Hitler's rise to power, Lilo's father resigned his position within the government out of protest. He died when Lilo was two years old, and her mother remarried a man with several children of his own. Her stepfather and step siblings, as opposed to Falk's, were strongly aligned with the Nazi movement. At 16, Lilo moved to Weimar to finish her education. She and Falk became close friends, and Lilo later introduced Falk to Hans Scholl.

Following his education in Weimar, Falk enrolled at the University of Munich. There, he chose a curriculum revolving around theater and German culture. He put on volunteer plays for the campus, and became a highly acclaimed part of the local arts scene. In 1934—following Lilo, who had transferred to Stuttgart to pursue gymnastics—Falk moved to Munich, where he received his PhD and was appointed to the German National Theater.

Falk tried to remain apolitical, but his years at the German National Theater sparked his transformation into a political activist. After Hitler's racial purity laws were passed, excluding Jews from the theater industry, Falk was tasked with gathering purely Aryan actors. Though Falk objected to these laws, he was compelled to travel between Hitler Youth organizations, recruiting young performers for the Nationalist Socialist theater. In 1938 the Gestapo arrested Falk's mother, Clara, allegedly for making anti-Nazi statements. Her arrest struck Falk strongly—much as Sophie Scholl had been affected by her own family's arrest in 1937.

In 1940, with the war well underway, Falk was drafted—but in late 1941 he became severely ill, and was relieved of active duty. After his recovery Falk and Lilo took a trip to Berlin, where they visited Falk's brother, Arvid. Arvid Harnack was then a well-known economist working out of Berlin, and a leading member of the Red Orchestra: a collective of Nazi
resistance fighters, spread across Europe. Arvid led the Berlin chapter, and worked tirelessly to rid Germany of the Nazi Regime. He even traveled to the United States, in 1937 and again in 1939, hoping to enlist the help of Americans. Tragically, both Arvid and his wife were arrested and executed, along with a number of other Red Orchestra members.

Falk deeply felt that the Nazi government must be excised, and that it was the responsibility of the youth to act. He held a broad vision of the resistance, and helped to connect the White Rose in Munich with various resistance groups in Berlin. He advised the White Rose that their leaflets were too academic, and was influential in shifting their language (from the 5th leaflet on) to a more populist tone. Falk helped connect the Scholls’ efforts with the larger movement, in part by getting the White Rose leaflets distributed through other arms of the resistance.

Harnack was arrested with the rest of the White Rose group that April. Inexplicably, he was released; some theorize that the Nazis meant to use him as a “Judas goat,” and observe his activities in hopes of uncovering more members of the Red Orchestra underground.

By that time, however, the Red Orchestra had been largely dismantled, and nothing came of Falk’s release by way of Gestapo surveillance. Falk was again drafted into the military, and this time sent to Greece. But he soon defected, became a resistance fighter based in Greece, and fought the Nazis until the end of the war. He ultimately returned to his first love—the theater—becoming a well-known filmmaker. Falk directed 32 films, including *The Plot to Assassinate Hitler*. He died in 1991, at age 78: one of the very few members of his political circles to reach an advanced age.

**Lessons from Sophie Scholl**

**The Importance of Joining**

Sophie leaned in to the others in her pod. She was a reliable partner for the group, and supported their actions in every way. She says in her
journals, “It is impossible to lay the groundwork for the overthrow of this “government,” much less to effect its overthrow as soon as possible, if one opposes it alone in the manner of embittered loners. This can only be accomplished through the cooperative efforts of many unshakable, energetic people – people who are unified regarding the means necessary to achieve their goal. There are not a great many choices we have regarding the means to use; one and only one is at our disposal – passive resistance.”

**Leaning into Faith**

Sophie lived her life as a mystic, sensing the vastness beyond the human life, the longer story of creation. She wrote, “Isn’t it a riddle . . . and awe-inspiring, that everything is so beautiful? Despite the horror. Lately I’ve noticed something grand and mysterious peering through my sheer joy in all that is beautiful, a sense of its creator . . . Only man can be truly ugly, because he has the free will to estrange himself from this song of praise. . . . It often seems that he’ll manage to drown out this hymn with his cannon thunder, curses and blasphemy. But during this past spring it has dawned upon me that he won’t be able to do this. And so I want to try and throw myself on the side of the victor.”

**Strength of Conviction**

Sophie was in her early teens when she realized that the Nazi regime was evil. Even as a young person, her clarity and strength of conviction were broad and sweeping. She clearly saw that the instinct for self-preservation was the enemy of change. From her writings: “The real damage is done by those millions who want to ‘survive.’ The honest men who just want to be left in peace. Those who don’t want their little lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves. Those with no sides and no causes. Those who won’t take measure of their own strength, for fear of antagonizing their own weakness. Those who don’t like to make waves — or enemies. Those for whom freedom, honor, truth, and principles are only literature. Those who live small, mate small, die small. It’s the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you’ll keep it under control. If you don’t make any noise, the bogeyman won’t find you. But it’s all an illusion, because they
die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe?! From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does. I choose my own way to burn.”

**Subtlety: The Person who Appears Nonthreatening may be the Biggest Threat**

Sophie was initially ignored by the authorities because she was young, female, pious, and appeared, at first glance, to be a conformist. By being quiet and unassuming, she was able to move through the highly charged world of the Third Reich without significant consequence—until she was caught redhanded distributing anti-Nazi literature. By exploiting the expectations of the status quo, we can “disappear” into their biases and be less detectable—therefore more effective.

**Blowback Theory in Action**

Notice how in these stories, and in so many others, how much the unfair arrest of parents or siblings or friends alienates the people around them. This is a vital thing for oppressors and dominators to note: every unjust action generates exponential numbers of enemies.
I Am More Than My Capacities

“Not only do physically disabled people have experiences which are not available to the able-bodied, they are in a better position to transcend cultural mythologies about the body, because they cannot do things the able-bodied feel they must do in order to be happy, ‘normal,’ and sane.... If disabled people were truly heard, an explosion of knowledge of the human body and psyche would take place.”

- Susan Wendell

“Congress acknowledged that society’s accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment.”

- William J. Brennan, Jr.

“In America access is always about architecture and never about human beings. Among Israelis and Palestinians, access was rarely about anything but people. While in the U.S. a wheelchair stands out as an explicitly separate experience from the mainstream, in the Israel and Arab worlds it is just another thing that can go wrong in a place where things go wrong all the time.”

- John Hockenberry

“Part of the problem with the word ‘disabilities’ is that it immediately suggests an inability to see or hear or walk or do other things that many of us take for granted. But what of people who can’t feel? Or talk about their feelings? Or manage their feelings in constructive ways? What of people who aren’t able to form close and strong relationships? And people who cannot find fulfillment in their lives, or those who have lost hope, who live in disappointment and bitterness and find in life no joy, no love? These, it seems to me, are the real disabilities.”

- Fred Rogers
Chapter 8

I Am More Than My Capacities

Ed Roberts, Judith Heumann and the Independent Living Movement

Introduction

At the time of this writing, I have full vision and full hearing and the use of all my limbs and organs, I’m mentally competent and in the middle of my productive life. No one in my immediate family has physical disabilities; only one has chronic illness. Up until recently, I have had infinitesimal exposure to the experience of a person who is significantly limited in their capacities. Everything in the chapter was new to me, it was like entering an invisible world that was right there all the time, an ambient presence that I gave little or no thought to.

In the process of researching civil justice and how the culture recognizes a whole person, and at the urging of my editor, Jeff Greenwald (who himself was in the middle of a dealing with a difficult and long term injury which impaired his mobility), I began to look at how we do or don’t see a person with disabilities as a whole being. As the research unfolded, I reflected
back on the contexts within which I encountered people with disabilities, other than in passing.

For example, in 2011, I met Amanda Boxtel, a skier who was paralyzed from the waist down after an accident. She is a frequent public speaker and educator, and collaborates on the development of exoskeletons which enable paraplegics to walk—essentially becoming bionic. When I first met Amanda, she was coming to an event at our house in San Francisco, and she called in advance to find out if it was wheelchair accessible. Embarrassingly, the answer was no—we would have a group of people lift her up the stairs. She was the first person to talk with me directly about the importance of being at eye-level with other people, and living with purpose and conviction no matter what life throws at you. Amanda spoke at an event I produced in California, and she, along with Eythor Bender, helped the audience frame some of the issues at play for people with mobility disorders. I also met (and we later interviewed) MIT’s Hugh Herr, an engineer who lost his leg in a climbing accident and has since made pioneering advances in prosthetics that have improved the mobility of thousands of severely wounded people.

But it wasn’t until I started walking a hilly campus in Northern California with a classmate of mine with Muscular Dystrophy, a woman who self-propels in a wheelchair, that I began to understand first hand what is must be like to consistently have to adapt your life to an environment that simply assumes everyone can walk. This person, Katherine Pocoe-Enders, is a healer, committed to transforming transgenerational trauma. Her heritage is Comanche and Irish, and she carries both ancestries with pride. As she goes about her work in the world, I see how much more goes into simply living for her. How much it takes. To go to class, we leave 15 minutes earlier than others. When we get to the “ramp”, the grade is so high that in order to descend, she reclines her chair flat, and slows down so much so she won’t tip over, and rolls down the hill, without the capacity to see where she is going. When we get to the bottom, we stop again and she moves her chair upright. When we have dance breaks, she dances in
her chair. She asks for what she needs, and she is in a community that responds to those needs. She educated us: everything, from dressing to sex, requires a workaround. That’s what the early accessibility activists did: they asked to be seen, to be treated fairly, and to have the world work for them. The outcome?

By making the world work for those with limited capacities, it works better for everyone, as you will read in the essays below.

After being in Katharine’s company, I started to walk around with new eyes, and to change simple things in the way I work and live. At our properties, we made our cabin wheelchair accessible, by putting in ramps and grade the shower lip. We started to take people’s capacities into account in our thinking and planning on events we produce in the cities. More importantly, I started to look at people with limitations intentionally, and get over my own awkwardness of meeting their gaze.

By turning attention to a thing, it lights up in polychromatic drama and beauty. We begin to get a small inkling of understanding. “Disability” can only exist against a backdrop of a standardized spectrum of ability: a range of what the majority consider “normal.” When people use the term “disabled”, they are usually speaking about mobility impairments, a loss of sight or hearing, or some visible, obvious physical or mental disability. And while the universal sign for “handicapped” is a small line drawing of a person in a wheelchair, that’s merely symbolic!

We all know that the government grants disabled placards to many people who don’t use wheelchairs. Permits might be granted for acute sensitivity to sunlight, lung disease, heart disease, and partial sightedness, as well as impaired mobility or loss of limbs. Then there are sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, and mental impairments. Even within mobility impairments, there’s an immense range: mobility issues might be caused by paralysis, birth defects, or advanced arthritis.

We live within a wide range of capacities.
One out of seven people in the United States operate without a “normal” range of function in some capacity. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 56 Million Americans are living with a disability of some kind. But our built environment and cultural frameworks don’t seem to accommodate that reality. Even today, people with impairments need to invest a lot of time and energy just to function at a basic level in the world.

Granted, things are much better now than they have been in previous eras. Prior to the 1960s, accessibility was a non-conversation for most of the population. People with disabilities have had to battle against biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations of Americans with disabilities, and like many other oppressed minorities, left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries.

In the 1800s, people with disabilities were considered tragic, pitiful individuals unfit and unable to contribute to society, except to serve as ridiculed objects of entertainment in circuses and exhibitions. They were assumed to be abnormal and feeble-minded. In the US, 33 states had laws requiring people with disabilities to undergo sterilization. People with disabilities were also forced to enter institutions and asylums, where many spent their entire lives. The “purification” and segregation of persons with disability were considered merciful actions, but ultimately served to keep people with disabilities invisible and hidden from a fearful and biased society.

“From the mid-1700s until the 1970s, countries and individual cities had unsightly beggar ordinances known colloquially as ugly laws, or “unsightly beggar ordinances.” In the United States, the first ugly law was issued by the City of San Francisco in 1867. These laws deemed it illegal for “any person, who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or deformed in any way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, to expose himself or herself to public view.”[1] Exceptions to public exposure were acceptable only if the people were subjects of demonstration, to illustrate the separation of
disabled from nondisabled and their need for reformation.[2]”

Chicago’s ordinance of 1881 read as follows: “Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person is not to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places in the city, shall not therein or thereon expose himself or herself to public view, under the penalty of a fine.” This extended to poverty and homelessness, which were also considered ugly. The State of Pennsylvania, in 1891, passed a law that was even broader - it contained language applying to cognitive as well as physical disability. These laws were rarely enforced, but when they were, they sent people to workhouses or poorhouses or to jail. It was a tool used to control the use of public spaces by people with disabilities. The last of these laws was repealed in 1974.

A gradual awakening to how society treated people with differing capacities begin in the mid-1800s, initially with a call for the state to support the care of the indigent insane, a mental health reform. The first wave of reform was simple humanitarianism. Healthcare pioneer Dorothy Dix was one of the first social activists for the indigent insane, presenting the case for the mentally handicapped to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1843, she said, “I come to present the strong claims of suffering humanity. I come to place...the condition of the miserable, the desolate, the outcast. I come as the advocate of helpless, forgotten, insane, and idiotic men and women.” Her work was instrumental in establishing the first residential care facilities, which at the time, were considered a significant improvement over living in the streets. There were other humanitarian advocates around the world (such as The Guild of the Brave Poor Things), but they were focused on mercy, not rights or access.

After World War I, veterans with disabilities expected that the US government provide rehabilitation in exchange for their service to the nation, and began to shift both laws and public opinion. One of the first disabilities rights organizations was formed in 1930, in response to a Works Progress
Administration (WPA) restriction that discriminated against hiring the physically handicapped. This group, the League of the Physically Handicapped, staged a sit-in in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) offices, resulting in 1,500 WPA jobs in NY for people with disabilities. And in 1931, no less of a figure than President Franklin D. Roosevelt—who would eventually use a wheelchair himself—delivered an economic argument for a four-point plan that would help integrate “cripples” into American society. Roosevelt, as the first president with a disability, was a great advocate for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities, but still operated under the notion that a disability was an abnormal, shameful condition, and should be medically cured or fixed.

Historian Lindsey Patterson told us in a 2019 interview that, “Before Roosevelt, before World War II, the disability movement was a collection of movements based on disability-specific elements. Blind folks went out and lobbied and campaigned for rights just for blind folks. And deaf folks had their own organizations and big leaders that pushed Teddy Roosevelt to sign an order so they could work for civil service, like the post office and things like that, because it was illegal for them to. So each group had their own little organizations and would advocate for things for their own groups. We don’t really see a coalition of different types of disabilities and things like that going for a larger movement until the ’50s and ’60s.”

In the 1940s and 1950s, disabled World War II veterans placed increasing pressure on the government to provide them with rehabilitation and vocational training. World War II veterans made disability issues more visible to a country of thankful citizens who were concerned for the long-term welfare of young men who sacrificed their minds and bodies to secure the safety of the United States.

Despite these initial advancements made towards independence and self-reliance, coming into the 1960s, people with disabilities still did not have access to public transportation, telephones, bathrooms and stores. Office buildings and worksites with stairs offered no entry for people with
disabilities who sought employment, and employer attitudes created even worse barriers. Otherwise talented and eligible people with disabilities were locked out of opportunities for meaningful work.

As the civil rights movement began to take shape in the early 60s, disability advocates saw the opportunity to join forces alongside other minority groups to demand equal treatment, equal access and equal opportunity for people with disabilities. The struggle for disability rights has followed a similar pattern to many other civil rights movements—challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes, rallying for political and institutional change, and lobbying for the self-determination of a minority community. Organizer Kitty Cone says that it was only in the 1960s that “disability really was looked at as an issue of civil rights rather than an issue of charity and rehabilitation at best, pity at worst.” It’s in the 1960s that we meet Ed Roberts, one of the subjects of this chapter.

Many different impairments qualitatively change the experience of living. Some exist from birth (whether inherited through genetics or caused by gene damage in utero through, for example, toxins), or from disease (e.g., polio) or as the result of an accident. Disability can arise through aging, as well; such impairments can include arthritic decay, stenosis, or loss of sight or hearing.

I point this out because the terms “disabled” or “abled”, like so many other things, do not point to a binary state. Abilities change over the span of a lifetime—which is why the “disabled” have taken to calling people with apparent full abilities the “temporarily abled”.

We know that life in a human body is subject to the vagaries of entropy and gravity. Soft tissues and complex systems make us biologically vulnerable. We know that, at some point, most of us will have an injury or illness. Many, if not most, of us will age and lose capacities we have enjoyed earlier.

Nonetheless, even today, to lack full capacity means to be shamed and/or marginalized. An entire civil justice movement has arisen to say “no”
to this pattern, and to guarantee that limited capacity doesn’t further compromise one’s life due to society’s thoughtlessness or lack of accommodation. This movement demands that each person be considered. If you’re going to build sidewalks, then build them with ramps; if you’re going to create a concert hall, add resources for the hearing impaired; if you have a hotel, design rooms that have bathroom access.

“Nothing about us without us”: The Launch of the Independent Living Movement

In this chapter, we explore the leaders in the disabilities rights movement—people whose voices led to the groundbreaking ADA legislation in the 1990s requiring access improvements, and the wide variety of changes in our perception that have occurred since then, and ensured the equal treatment and equal access of people with disabilities to employment opportunities and public accommodations. The ADA was designed to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in: employment, services rendered by state and local governments, places of public accommodation, transportation, and telecommunications services.

Under the ADA, businesses were mandated to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities (such as restructuring jobs or modifying work equipment), public services could no longer deny access and full use to people with disabilities (such as public transportation systems), all public accommodations were expected to have modifications made to be accessible to people with disabilities, and all telecommunications services were mandated to offer adaptive services to people with disabilities. With this piece of legislation, the US government identified the full participation, inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in all levels of society.

Disability rights activists mobilized on the local level demanding national initiatives to address the physical and social barriers facing the disability
community. Parent advocates were at the forefront, demanding that their children be taken out of institutions and asylums, and placed into schools where their children could have the opportunity to engage in society just like currently-abled children who were not disabled.

All told, the United States Congress passed more than 50 pieces of legislation between the 1960s and the passage of the ADA in 1990.

One of the most moving moments of this struggle was captured on film: in 1990, citizens anxiously waiting for the ADA to be voted on (and passed!) gathered at the US Capitol building, with its decidedly inaccessible grand, broad staircase. The ADA was stuck due to opposition by the public transit lobby. In response, more than one thousand individuals with disabilities headed for the Capitol. Many tossed aside their wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches and ascended the steps. One of the youngest, 8 year old Jennifer Keelan, of Denver, CO, paralyzed from Cerebral Palsy, launched herself stair to stair, with only the power of her upper limbs and unbelievable determination. With TV cameras stuck in her face, she declared, “I will climb all night if I have to.”

This event has since become known as the “Capitol Crawl.” By dragging themselves up the stairs, these protesters expressed their daily struggles due to physical barriers. In so doing, they highlighted the need for accessibility. Iconic images of this event spread across the country.

The Americans with Disabilities Act ultimately passed in July of 1990 and was signed by President George H.W. Bush.

While the signing of the ADA placed immediate legislative demands to ensure equal access and equal treatment of people with disabilities, deep-rooted assumptions and stereotypical biases were not instantly transformed with the stroke of a pen. People with disabilities still face prejudice and bias with the stereotypical portrayal of people with disabilities in the movies and in the media, physical barriers to schools, housing and to voting stations, and lack of affordable health care. The promise of the ADA is
yet to be fully realized, but the disability rights movement continues to make great strides towards the empowerment and self-determination of Americans with disabilities.

Many Americans with disabilities lead independent, self-affirming lives and who define themselves according to their personhood—their ideas, beliefs, hopes and dreams—above and beyond their disability. Since the mid 1900s, people with disabilities have pushed for the recognition of disability as an aspect of identity that influences the experiences of an individual, not as the sole-defining feature of a person.

Because the disabilities rights movement is so current, and so many individuals are involved, this chapter’s format differs from the other chapters in *Bending the Bow*. We are going to profile 2 activists, Ed Roberts, and Judith Heumann. Both of these individuals, working separately and together from the 1960s onward, relentlessly championed individual rights for the differently abled. We strongly suggest you take the time to listen to the superbly researched and deeply impactful podcast, linked to below. We will start with an individual who, undaunted by seemingly insurmountable odds, inspired a sea change in the way we now perceive persons with disabilities.

**Meet Ed Roberts: The Father of the Independent Living Movement**

“Ed Roberts was the Martin Luther King Jr. of the disability rights movement.” So said Mike Boyd, one of his longtime friends, after Roberts’ death in 1995. Roberts was paralyzed from the neck down by polio at the age of 14, and dependent on a respirator. Nonetheless he attended the University of California at Berkeley where he earned both a BA and an MA. Roberts pioneered independent living for people with disabilities in all domains. According to Smithsonian, “Roberts himself was a model—a joyful, positive model—of independence: He married, fathered a son, and
divorced; he once swam with dolphins, rafted down the Stanislaus River in California, and studied karate.”

During the process of researching this chapter, we were introduced to a 99% Invisible podcast called “Curb Cuts,” written by reporter Cynthia Gorney. The podcast brilliantly describes Ed Roberts, his allies, and the disabilities rights movement. It is so powerful that, with Ms. Gorney’s permission, we have excerpted it here. (You can listen to the podcast itself at this link.)

**An excerpt from “Curb Cuts”- Courtesy of Cynthia Gorney and the 99% Invisible podcast. (Edited for print)**

Ed Roberts grew up in Burlingame, near San Francisco. He was the oldest of four boys and he loved to play baseball. But one day, when he was 14 years old, he got really sick, with a fever, with polio. Within a few days he was in the hospital with an iron lung just to stay alive.

Iron lungs aren’t made anymore, but back then they were these full-body respirators that encased polio survivors in metal up to the neck and pulled air in and out of their lungs.

Ed’s polio wrecked a lot more than his breathing. It left him paralyzed below the neck. He could move two fingers on his left hand and that was it. His paralysis was permanent.

In order to escape his iron lung once in a while, Ed taught himself -- on his own-- a technique called “frog breathing.” That’s a deep sea divers’ trick where you gulp oxygen into your lungs, the way a frog does. For polio survivors, whose weakened breathing muscles weren’t strong enough to inhale that needed oxygen, “frog-breathing” meant a person could get out of the iron lung for short stretches of time.

In a “60 Minutes” interview from 1989, Ed Roberts said,”There are very few
people -- even with the most severe disabilities -- who can't take control of their own lives. The problem is that people around us don't expect us to. Think about your own life. If you had people taking care of you, making all your decisions, what is there to life, really?"

Ed was tenacious, but everything was hard. He needed the iron lung while he was asleep, but the frog-breathing let him leave it for a while during the day. So he stayed in school, going to campus once a week. When Ed did leave the house, his family ran the maneuvers. They were helping him navigate a world that wasn’t built for a person in a wheelchair.

Ed’s brothers or his dad would help lift him into his chair, drag the chair out of the house, and then lift the chair over curbs and up and down stairs—if his mother was alone with him, she would wrangle strangers to assist.

Ed graduated from high school, then from a local community college. But when he wanted to go on to Berkeley, in 1962, the university at first said no. He was just too disabled. And where could he safely live? The iron lung -- which he still used every night -- wouldn't fit in a dorm room.

Finally somebody suggested housing him at the campus hospital. A patient’s room remade into a living space for Ed, and all his equipment. Ed did so much studying and reading, that the mouth-wand he used to turn the pages of books started pushing his teeth out of shape. So campus officials saw this experiment was working. Newspapers wrote stories about Ed. His mother still likes making fun of the headlines, saying “‘Helpless Cripple Goes to College.” That’s one we all love.”

Then a second quadriplegic student moved into Ed’s makeshift hospital dorm—a young man who’d been paralyzed in a diving accident and was initially told he should just get used to life as a shut-in. Then a few more arrived, both to live in the hospital and to find lodgings off campus. The word started to spread—something unusual was going on at Berkeley.

This was the 1960s. Steve Brown is the cofounder of the Institute on
Disability Culture.

He has a genetic syndrome that among other things makes his bones break easily, so he’s a sometimes wheelchair user. He points out that “Ed went to Berkeley the same year that James Meredith, a black man, went to the University of Mississippi and integrated it…So the sixties were a time of lots of protests, and lots of reform, and lots of change.” The improvised dorm in the campus hospital turned into the headquarters for an exuberant and irreverent group of organizers. Ed, along with Hale Zukas, an assertive guy with cerebral palsy who communicated with a word board and a pointer strapped to his head. They called themselves the Rolling Quads.

Like a few other coalitions of disabled young people around the country, they started using a new kind of language to talk about their needs and rights. The radical idea that people with disabilities had “civil rights” -- the right to education, to jobs, to respect, to real inclusion in public life -- this fit right into the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s and early 70s.

By the time Ed Roberts was in graduate school at Berkeley, the disabled students were….noticeably, unmistakably….part of the community. Even more so because some were zipping around in power chairs, which had been invented to help wounded veterans and were starting to be more available to the general public.

Ed got really interested in power chairs when he first watched another quadriplegic try one out. Now he had one of these new portable ventilators, that attached to his wheelchair….so even though he still used the iron lung at night, he could stay away from it a lot longer. And… there was a girl.

In a 60 minutes interview, Ed recounted,”I fell in love. Like many people do. We do that too. And it became ridiculously inconvenient for me to have my attendant pushing me around in my wheelchair with my girlfriend. It was an extra person that I didn’t need to be more intimate.
Ed continues, “I learned how to drive a power wheelchair in one day. I was so motivated. And it changed in many ways my perception about my disability, and myself. She jumped on my lap and we rode off into the sunset—or the closest motel.”

But think about this. For more than a decade you’ve been able to get around because somebody’s behind you pushing your chair, and now you’re under your own power…. you get to leave that wheelchair attendant behind, but still you have to contend with… curbs.

The power chair riders -- actually, ALL the wheelchair riders -- needed what we now call “curb cuts,” those slopes at the corners that make it easy to roll between sidewalk and street.

It would be great to be able tell you about the inventor of the curb cut. The clever person who first thought of cutting little ramps so people could roll into intersections instead of having to step off curbs. But nobody knows who that was. All we know is that they were NOT a standard feature yet at most intersections - not in Berkeley, not anywhere.

But by the late 1960s and 70s, this new wave of young disabled activists like the Rolling Quads, they weren’t going to wait around for the occasional enlightened college coach….They demanded. They were insistent.

One day in 1971, the Rolling Quads show up at the Berkeley City Council…in a posse. Ed Roberts, who by now is a poli sci grad student. Hale Zukas, the guy with the pointer and word board, who’s learned Russian and is finishing a math degree. And all their friends, disabled and not. When you picture this, remember that Berkeley’s council chambers are not very big.

Loni Hancock, who was a Berkeley city council member, and then the city’s mayor, before joining the California state legislature, says about the night,”We really were kind of stunned to see… a WHOLE LOT of people in wheelchairs, wheeling into the council meeting and saying that they
wanted to have curb cuts on every street corner in Berkeley, because they needed to get around, and they wanted to get around by themselves. We were on a stage, as I remember, and we were elevated. So the people in wheelchairs were down below. Looking up at us. And just looking into their faces, and realizing the effort that it took for them to be there--and that they were requesting something that had NEVER BEEN DONE, to our knowledge anywhere on earth...was an overwhelming sensation. But realizing it was something we could do and should do and would do.”

So they did. The world’s first widespread curb cuts program.

City council minutes, September 28, 1971…

“...Declaring it to be the policy of the City that streets and sidewalks be designed and constructed to facilitate circulation by handicapped persons within major commercial areas...that curb cuts be made immediately at fifteen specified corners...The motion carried unanimously.”

By the mid-1970s, the disability rights movement was growing and spreading. Groups with a Rolling Quads sort of attitude were multiplying around the country, and even world. And one adjective was pretty much key to the new movement over the next two decades: “Independent.”

In 1977, disability rights protesters hit federal office buildings in eleven cities at once. They were pushing the government to act on long-neglected rules protecting the disabled in all facilities taking federal money. The San Francisco protest turned into a month-long sit in, with steady news coverage of people in wheelchairs, taking care of each other and refusing to leave. The sit-in worked. And these images...of the grownup disability demonstrator, uninterested in pity....kept accumulating.

Ed Roberts--the guy U.C. Berkeley officials once thought was too crippled for their university--finished his masters degree, taught on campus, and co-founded the Center for Independent Living -- a disability service organization that became a model for hundreds of others around the
world. He also married, fathered a son, divorced, won a MacArthur genius grant, and for nearly a decade ran the whole California state Department of Rehabilitation Services. He was 56, an international name in independence for the disabled, when a heart attack killed him.

Julia Sain runs Disability Rights and Resources in Charlotte, North Carolina. It’s one of those programs based on the Center for Independent Living model. In 1995, Julia was at the annual march and meeting of the National Council for Independent Living in Washington D.C. Ed had died a few weeks earlier—and a special memorial for him was now on the schedule: They were going to put Ed’s wheelchair at the front of the march.

The marchers followed the empty wheelchair—which was being dragged along by Ed’s attendant—until they reached the Senate office building. Once inside, speakers got up to honor Ed’s life and legacy.

Sometime later, after the marchers had gone home, or back to their hotels Ed Roberts’ attendant pushed the wheelchair to the front steps of the Smithsonian, where his chair now remains on permanent display.

The Pod Around Ed Roberts

Zona Roberts: The Blood Bond

Zona was Ed’s mother. Born in Portland, Oregon in 1920, she had a chaotic childhood. Her own mother, Naida, married five times while Zona was a child. Her stepfathers were often abusive. Zona left home at 15, and came to California by herself. She attended high school in Burlingame, and worked as a live-in domestic helper during that time. Zona met Verne, Ed’s father, in high school, and they conceived Ed before graduation. They married, had four sons in total. All of the boys contracted polio simultaneously—but while the others recovered, Ed had the variant of the disease that attacked his nervous system and left him paralyzed (about 1%
of those who get polio have nervous system damage). In the beginning, Zona was indefatigable in her care and support for Ed’s independence. She would send the nurses away when Ed refused to eat so he could make some decisions on his own; pushed for him to have tech resources (e.g., a telephone and a microphone) in order to continue his schooling; and convinced the school board to shift their physical education requirements so he could graduate. Zona taught him to fight for what he wanted, and was a force in the Independent Living Movement her entire life. After Verne died, she enrolled in the College of San Mateo. While there she worked as an assistant to Professor Jean Wirth, who was running a college-readiness program for minority students. Zona herself graduated from UC Berkeley in 1969, with a BA in Psychology. She worked side by side with Ed for another 12 years. She first worked as a family therapist, eventually starting a practice as a family disabilities counselor.

Jean Wirth: The Inspiration and Ally

Jean Wirth was an Instructor at the College of San Mateo, and one of Ed’s first important teachers. She encouraged and facilitated his admission to UC Berkeley, helping to convince the administration to see beyond their objections surrounding the difficulties of housing and accommodating a student in a respirator. She also became a lifelong friend to Zona. Jean was interested in equal access to higher education, and ran a college-readiness program that became a model for federal programming. She was ultimately recruited by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and moved to Washington, D.C. She continued to support Ed and Zona’s work for the duration of her career.

Joan Leon: The Resourcer and Organizer

Joan Leon and Ed began working together when Ed was at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley. When Ed moved to Sacramento, she went to Sacramento to work with him. When they left California’s capital,
Joan—who does not have a disability—co-founded the World Institute on Disabilities with Judy Heumann and Ed. Joan was a pivotal person in the movement, working primarily in communications, and helping to secure the funding that has allowed WID to do its critical work in the areas of personal assistant services, aging and disability, and international outreach.

**Judith Heumann: The Ally and Strategist**

In 2019 we were able to interview Judith Heumann. Heumann, with Ed Roberts, is one of the most important pioneers in the disability rights movement. When we asked her about Ed, she told us the story of their meeting:

“I had set up an organization with colleagues in New York called Disabled In Action: It was a cross-disability advocacy organization. In 1973 I decided to go back to graduate school, and had been accepted to Columbia, when I got a call from this man named Ed Roberts—who I did not know. He said that there were a couple of professors at Berkeley who were interested in ensuring that disabled people were accepted into their graduate program. I ultimately went to Berkeley, and received my Master’s in Public Health.

“Ed, like me, had polio, and became disabled when he was about 14. He used a ventilator, and slept in an iron lung; we had a very similar vision about what needed to be happening for persons with disabilities.”

**Honorable Mention: Amplifiers and Allies**

Jerry Brown- The Ally, Governor of California. Brown appointed Ed the director of the California Department of Rehabilitation in 1975.

Ted Kennedy Jr. - The Amplifier and Resourcer. Ted continues to be a tremendous advocate for protections of disabled rights. The former senator from Connecticut has a mobility impairment (missing a leg), and
brings his direct experience to bear in his work as the chairperson of the American Association of People with Disabilities

**Meet Judith Heumann**

Judith was born in Philadelphia on December 18th 1947. Her parents, born in Germany, were children when they were sent out during the holocaust, and her grandparents on both sides were killed in the holocaust. Judith, who did much of her early work on the East Coast, told us her own story in an interview that Jeff Greenwald conducted with her in September 2019. Here are excerpts from that conversation:

“When I contracted polio in 1949, there were no laws which protected the rights of disabled people. Gradually, as I got older, I began to experience discrimination. I was denied the right to go to school because of my disability, and was on home instruction; a teacher came to our house 2 ½ hours a week until I was nine years old. Then I started going to public school—but in segregated classes, with disabled children.

“Those incidences were not considered discrimination. My mother and other parents were having to fight for their disabled kids to be able to go to school, to regular schools, and to get an equivalent education. I was beginning to meet other disabled people. In part in school, but also I was going to a few summer camps for disabled children—one in New Jersey, called Camp Oakhurst; and another in Hunter, New York.

“In 1970, when I applied to become a teacher in the New York City public school system, I was denied the job—in writing—because of paralysis of both lower extremities. That was a very pivotal point in my life. I had to make a decision, regarding whether or not I was going to accept the Board of Education saying I couldn’t teach because I couldn’t walk—or if I was going to try to do something to address the problem.

“I filed a lawsuit against the Board of Education. The judge was a woman
named Constance Baker Motley (1921-2005), who was the first African-American female judge in a federal court. She directed the Board of Education to review its decision. They did, and I was ultimately given my job.”

Moving Forward

Says historian Lindsey Patterson, “[Judy] tends to be one of the more captivating narratives. She challenges the status quo for people with disabilities, who are basically barred from society. She really is on the forefront when you talk about disabilities as a rights-based thing, as opposed to ‘we need a job’ — [as was the case] with The League of the Physically Handicapped and the National Association for the Deaf. All those folks focused on the fact that they should have the right to work—but none of them really challenged the way we see disability in society.”

“Much of the work that I, and other people, started to do to address these forms of discrimination,” Heumann affirmed in our interview, “was being influenced by work of the Civil Rights movement. Television and other media were enabling us to see and learn more directly about the types of discrimination that black people were experiencing in the United States. The women’s movement work that was going on; movements by other people of color; the aging community; all were getting much more publicity.

“But in the area of disability, very little was being discussed or advanced, other than looking at ways to cure disability. So you'd have the Jerry Lewis telethons [for muscular dystrophy], or the United Cerebral Palsy telethon, where people were being asked for money to find cures for disabilities. But there wasn't any work being done in a major way to look at the issues of inequality, and lack of social justice.

“Many of us had grown up at a time when people looked to the American Dream: If you worked hard, and you studied hard, if you did what was
expected of you, you would be able to benefit within the community. And people were finding that this really wasn’t true. We were being denied fundamental rights—like going to schools where we received equivalent education to not-disabled children.”

“So we slowly began to come together—particularly younger groups of disabled people who were attending colleges and universities, or knew each other from different venues. We began looking not only at the problem, but also at solutions. We really began to discuss how the inequities we felt were adversely affecting our ability to become members of our communities.”

**On Meeting Ed Roberts**

“Ed Roberts and I met when I came to Berkeley, California. We became very good friends, and worked together. Eventually I went to Washington DC, to work for a senator – and Ed went to Sacramento to become the director of the Department of Rehabilitation. That was a really unique position. I think he was in the cabinet for the California State Governor, who at that point was Jerry Brown. Ed was able to use that position to do such things as setting up ten Centers for Independent Living in California.

“When Ed went to Sacramento, he also encouraged me and paved the way for me to go back to the CIL and become its Deputy Director. So Ed and I worked closely together on advancing the rights of disabled individuals – not only in California, but also in DC – and we did some international traveling together as well.

“Because he had a significant disability, yet did so many things— including traveling, and speaking eloquently— people really looked to him as a leader. Later – Ed, Joan Leon, and I helped establish an organization called The World Institute on Disability in Oakland, California, which still exists today.”
CHAPTER 8

Judith’s Current Role

“I’m one of the major players in the United States – and I also work internationally – helping disabled people create the disability rights / independent living movement. I think people think of me as someone who has worked collaboratively with others and across disability modes. This is important because, previously, work was being done by individual organizations representing groups of similar disabilities. But I’ve been involved since the 70s—and even the 1960s—with what we call the ‘cross-disability rights movement.’ I speak my mind, and encourage others to do the same. I’ve been very involved in many different activist activities.”

“So I would say that my life has evolved and traveled along different paths that have enabled me to bring various communities together—including government, the disability community, and the non-disability community. We have been able to look at what we need to do in order to become a more unified voice for disabled individuals—allowing them to clearly express the barriers they face, and the solutions.”

Future State

We asked Judith the end state of the current work. If she is successful, what will the world look like for people with disabilities?

Judith offers this: “If we are successful, it will mean that disabled people are not adversely affected by their disability. They will be able to move about their communities, receive quality educations, get jobs where they’re not being discriminated against, and be able to participate in society as they wish. It will mean that disability is seen as a normal part of life. It’ll mean that shame and stigma will be removed, and that in looking at disability, broadly speaking, people will look at who we are—and recognize that disability is a positive component of our lives. That we’re not trying to run away from it: We’re embracing it.
“One of the other components I want to see is that racial disparities against disabled individuals are also addressed—because disability is linked to poverty. There are a disproportionate number of people of color who are from poor communities, and definitely so for disabled people. It’s a critical issue. Estimates of the unemployment rate for disabled people is something like 70%. These are people wishing to work, who don’t have jobs.

“Currently, on the national level, there’s still a lot of work going on with the implementation of Section 504, [a part of the 1973 Reabilition Act] that makes it illegal for any entity receiving money from the federal government to discriminate against disabled persons.”

Judy asked if we were aware of the Comedy Central show Drunk History. One of the sketches, she told us (Season 5, Episode 5), celebrated the 1977 San Francisco demonstration to pass Section 504. “My character,” she said with pride, “is played by Allie Stroker: the first wheelchair user to perform on Broadway.” (Stroker later won a Tony award for ‘Best New Revival’ in Oklahoma).

“I was one of the leaders of that movement,” Judy recalled. “There were activities all across the United States—and it was those efforts that resulted in these regulations being signed by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.” Even so, she said, the huge amount of work necessary to actually implement the new laws continues.

A Message to the Temporarily Abled from Judith

“If you’re in the world of work—whether you’re in management, or an employee in a non-managerial position—find out what you can be doing to ensure rights for people who have various forms of disabilities.” Heumann adds that these might include disabilities that are not immediately obvious—like depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder.
“Ask yourself,” Heumann said, “What role are you playing to ensure that disabled people are not being bullied or harassed? See what’s going on in your religious institution if you’re religious, in your workplace, in places where you’re active. Notice how disabled people are being integrated—or not. Become an activist by being informed—and by recognizing that the voices of disabled people are the voices that need to be leading the discussion.”

Others to Know:

Marca Bristo - Ally, A disability rights activist who helped create an organization called Access Living in Chicago, was involved with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and in many other areas. Says Judith, “Marca definitely was a very important influence on me. Very strong, very articulate.”

Starka Loff - Ally Judith says, “Starka had been in the Marines, and was injured. He wound up living in a nursing home because he couldn’t get the kind of services that he needed in the community. He then set up an organization called Paraquad, which is a Center for Independent Living in St. Louis. He too was a very strong leader, locally and nationally.”

Justin Dart - Strategist Dart is frequently seen as the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A victim of polio, he became disabled at the age of 20. Dart recognized the lack of equity that disabled people were experiencing, and moved to the front and center of the movement to create the ADA.

Claudia Gordon - Resourcer Claudia was the first deaf woman lawyer to be admitted to the bar in the United States. From Jamaica, she moved to New York City when she was eight years old. Judith says, “Claudia did very highly respected work in the Obama administration, and now is working with Sprint. A very forceful leader.”
Rebecca Cokley - Strategist  Rebecca is part of a group of younger disabled individuals who call themselves the “ADA Generation.” Says Judith, “They realize that while they’ve got the ADA, it has to be more effectively implemented, and they need to continue fighting for changes in laws and enforcement.”

Sandy Ho - According to Judith, Sandy has been “the driver behind a conference that happens every two years which brings together disabled people from diverse backgrounds, focusing on people of color with disabilities.”

Lessons from Ed Roberts and Judy Heumann

“Staring Doesn’t Hurt”

Chris Palames, in his book The Godfather of Independent Living, writes, “Despite Ed’s fear of people staring at him, Zona [his mother] would not be swayed. Upon experiencing the staring while being lifted out of the car at school, Ed realized staring didn’t hurt, and instead decided to think of himself as a star.”

Don’t Believe the Old Story They Tell About You

When Ed Roberts was in the hospital, and doctors were saying he would be a vegetable; or when he was being denied a high school diploma for lack of Driver’s Ed; or at any number or times in his life, Ed could have believed the old story of himself as a “pitiful thing.” But he didn’t. He knew he could live a full life within his constraints. He created a new story, and enrolled others in that story.
Humor

One of Ed’s greatest traits was his sense of humor. He was funny, sometimes outrageous, and his ability to conjoin sarcasm and enthusiasm put others at ease.

Technology

If the technology makes a new level or freedom or communication possible, lean in. Make the built environment work for you.

Turn to Each Other

Judith Heumann says, “When my energy flags, I resource and get support in many ways. It comes from within me, and from friends who have disabilities—and some non-disabled people.”

See Yourself in the Long Arc

Judith advises people “to recognize that these kinds of changes occur slowly, and it’s important for us to support each other and bolster each other, continue to educate ourselves and others, and tell stories about where we’ve been, where we are, and where we need to go.”

Celebrate the Wins

“Certainly,” says Judith, “everybody gets discouraged in this kind of work. But I really don’t hold onto it very much. It’s a part of my thinking, when I’m working with other people. We look at the progress we have made—and in areas where we haven’t made progress, another day will occur. While we may not be winning everything that we want now, we’ll continue to make progress going forward.”
I Am More Than My Capacities

Make it Intergenerational

“I guess now that I’m older myself, I continue to look for how our movement can be more intergenerational—and owned more also by older people who are acquiring their disabilities as a result of age, said Ms. Heumann. “People don’t recognize the normality of disability, and how we need to look at many things, including universal design.”

Be Interested and Attentive to People’s First Hand Stories

As with many other movements, first hand stories create changes in perception. Judith suggests, “Look at how you can begin to engage with disabled people to hear their stories, and learn what they see as barriers—what they see needs to be done.” She listed some resources for self-education. “There’s a book called No Pity that was written by Joe Shapiro; there’s also a new book called About Us. It’s a compilation; The New York Times started publishing a series where disabled people wrote on a very broad range of subjects. About Us is a compilation of many of those essays. It’s a very good book because it has many, many different voices in it. Then there are books written by disabled individuals. Simi Linton, a poet, has a number of books out that are quite good.”

Judith herself has a memoir coming out in 2020, called Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist.
I Am More Than My Species

“I have from an early age abjured the use of meat, and the time will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals as they now look upon the murder of men.”
- Leonardo da Vinci

“We need, in a special way, to work twice as hard to help people understand that the animals are fellow creatures, that we must protect them and love them as we love ourselves.”
- Cesar Chavez

“Human beings are a part of the animal kingdom, not apart from it. The separation of “us” and “them” creates a false picture and is responsible for much suffering. It is part of the in-group/out-group mentality that leads to human oppression of the weak by the strong as in ethic, religious, political, and social conflicts.”
- Mark Bekioff
I Am More Than My Species

Note: At this point in the book, we will transition into discussing justice movements that are relatively young: in their first or second generation. We begin by considering the animal rights movement. This section differs slightly from the others, as we had the opportunity to talk with Stephen Wise—the founder of the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP)—directly.
CHAPTER 9

What Species Have Value?

When I was a child, my first dog was a little terrier mutt named Fritz. As an adult, our household briefly hosted five cats, two dogs, a cockatiel, a Russian Tortoise we found abandoned in a parking lot and christened Pickup Andropov, and eight humans. Though we were pet-friendly, we weren’t exactly animal rights activists. My husband had grown up a vegetarian, so avoiding animal food choices came naturally to him. For me, this awareness and decision came later. After I started practicing yoga and meditation, I began to investigate other ways of eating—but it was only when my then-nine year old walked into the kitchen and caught sight of a turkey coming out of the oven that our whole family made the shift. My son’s moral compass was strong and intense: “I’m not eating that!” He cried. “It’s a being! You can see its legs, its wings! No way!” Our household became vegetarian that day. As People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) began shaming fur-wearers, and the animal rights movement began to document the terrible suffering of industrially farmed animals and lab animals—the absolute horrors they endure—we began to question our relationship to animals more deeply. The differentiation between pets and farmed animals hit me as the highest form of hypocrisy: We coddle our cats and dogs, while simultaneously dining on cows, pigs, and chickens (and concurrently poisoning ourselves with the hormones and antibiotics they are forced to ingest).

The story of our relationship to the animal kingdom stems from ancient domination narratives, including a misinterpretation of the first book of the Bible. When Genesis uses the word “dominion” it means care and stewardship, not extraction and dominance. That misinterpretation has been a justification for killing off entire species for short term gain. The Tule Elk in California—250,000 animals—were almost eradicated in less than a decade. The American Buffalo is another well-known example, with an estimated 2 million killed in the late 19th century. Almost every creature that has meat and skin has been slaughtered, with little or no regard to its own right to live, the ecosystem impact caused by removal of that animal,
I Am More Than My Species

or the right of future generations to enjoy a fully and diversely inhabited Earth. It’s helpful to note that extinction is part of natural changes on the earth, at a rate of one to five species annually. Yet, now, according to the Center of Biological Diversity, human activity is causing the planet to “lose species at up to 1,000 times the background rate, with literally dozens going extinct every day...with as many as 30 to 50 percent of all species possibly heading toward extinction by mid-century.” This is not our right, we must stop our violence.

Some cultures take care to respect to the spirits of animals killed for nourishment, and to take in only as much meat as they need to sustain themselves. But this is an exception. Today’s factory farming of animals—even those with whom we share large, developed brains—is often abusive, thoughtless, and utterly self-serving. In a hundred years, people will look back on this period in horror: How could we have been so disconnected from these clearly conscious beings?

When this movement is complete, what will the world look like? Here is a possible end state: a sharp uptake in global vegetarianism. We don’t farm animals. Or, we at least ensure animals that are farmed don’t suffer. This may mean, along with other advances, cage-free lives for all animals. We come to respect each species’ unique needs, including their habitats and reproductive limits. If we hunt animals in the wild, we take care to avoid depleting populations.

What will it require to get to that point? First of all, we will have to acknowledge that at least some animals deserve to be viewed as sentient beings, with the capacity to experience emotion, self-awareness, suffering, and empathy. Such a movement, though still in its early stages, is being championed by a remarkable and tenacious pod of humans. Some activists in the Animal Rights Movement have focused on the humane treatment of farm animals, and the banning of fur products, but attorney Steven Wise is taking a different tack. His organization, the Nonhuman Rights project, has chosen to concentrate on allowing highly intelligent animals
to make their own case—as persons.

Wise says, “The immediate primary goal of the NhRP is to attain legal personhood - that is the capacity for legal rights - and the fundamental common law right to bodily liberty - for one species, then for a few species. In the longer run, we want to have legal personhood extended to as many species of nonhuman animals as is appropriate, both inside and outside of the United States, however “appropriate” might be defined. In the longer run, the NhRP also seeks to expand the number of legal rights to which these nonhuman animals are entitled, not just under the common law, but through statutes and perhaps eventually under constitutions, even international treaties. There will be no end state; the civil rights struggle for nonhuman animals will never be complete, just as the civil rights struggle for human rights will never be complete.” He distinguishes his work from other animal rights organizations that have emerged, such as PETA and WWF, saying, “There are no animal protection organizations, which is what PETA and WWF are - at least in the English-speaking world, that have goals that resemble those of the NhRP. Our models instead are the 18th and 19th century abolitionist movements both in the US and the UK as well as the 20th century US civil rights movement.”

Meet Steven Wise

Steven Wise is a pioneer in what has evolved into a worldwide animal rights movement. He is the author of four books: Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals (2000), Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights (2002), Though the Heavens May Fall (2005), and his latest An American Trilogy: Death, Slavery and Dominion Along the Banks of the Cape Fear River (2009). Unlocking the Cage, an award winning HBO documentary about the legal cases of chimpanzees Tommy and Kiko, was released in 2016.
The Back Story

Steve Wise received a chemistry degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, and a law degree from Boston College. He ran a small law firm with a partner, working personal injury cases for three years, until picking up a book that would alter his life’s course.

“What initially inspired me,” Wise told us in a recent interview, “was Peter Singer’s 1975 book, Animal Liberation. That made me begin to think about how we treat nonhuman animals. I realized that there were no lawyers involved, and that the nonhuman animals of the world were naked before the power of human beings. As a lawyer, I’m used to standing between those who are powerful and those who are naked to their power. I realized that nonhuman animals needed lawyers, and I thought I would do that.”

Coming into Consciousness

Steven abruptly changed the focus of his law practice to animal rights. His specific interest is the issue of “animal personhood,” in the legal sense. He argues that if an animal is clearly self-aware of its own desires, of its intentional actions, and of its continued existence, it must qualify under the law as a legal “person”—just as corporations are legally considered persons in the United States. Under such protections, animals granted personhood could not legally be subjected to extended, inhumane imprisonment and caged conditions. Wise’s current list of animals for which he is seeking personhood includes chimpanzees, bonobos, elephants, parrots, dolphins, orangutans, and gorillas.

Wise explains, “After working in animal protection for six or seven years, I realized that all nonhuman animals are legally things—which meant they lack the capacity for any kind of legal rights. They are essentially invisible to civil courts and civil law. That led to the formation of the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP). An immense percentage of the work that we do comes from the realization that legal personhood and legal rights are the
only way to protect the fundamental interests of nonhuman animals—just as they’re the only way to protect the interest of humans.”

Steven Wise is currently the head and founder of the NhRP. Their mission statement reads: “The Nonhuman Rights Project is the only civil rights organization in the United States working through litigation, public policy advocacy, and education to secure legally recognized fundamental rights for nonhuman animals.” Their most recent landmark case, concerning granting the right of *Habeas Corpus* to two chimpanzees - Tommy and Kiko - was ruled against by the New York Supreme Court on June 8th, 2017. Steven Wise responded to the ruling: “For 2,000 years all nonhuman animals have been legal things who lack the capacity for any legal rights. This is not going to change without a struggle. That fight has begun and we remain confident that Tommy’s and Kiko’s fundamental right to bodily liberty will be recognized as a matter of justice so that they too may experience the freedom they so desperately deserve. Public opinion has begun to tilt in our favor since we started filing these lawsuits, likely as a result of them.” The NRhP intends to appeal the ruling, taking the case to New York’s highest appeals court.

### Distinguishing Personhood from Human Rights

“Personhood,” Wise says, “is the capacity for rights. And human rights—while it’s oftentimes not exactly clear what people mean by it—seem to be rights that humans have because they’re humans, or because they protect the fundamental interests of human beings.

“The Nonhuman Rights Project does not argue that any nonhuman animal should have *human* rights. We argue that chimpanzees should have chimpanzee rights, whales should have whale rights, and elephants should have elephant rights. But both the rights of humans and the rights of nonhumans depend upon the courts recognizing that they are indeed persons—which means that they have the capacity for rights.
Which Animals Deserve Personhood?

“The dichotomy between persons and things is 2,000 years old,” Wise explains, “and nonhuman animals have always been things. Of course for many centuries human beings were also things. Slaves were things. What we do is try to understand where we can establish the proposition that nonhuman animals can indeed be persons, with the capacity for rights. We then begin arguing as to what rights they should have. But before the NhRP begins litigating in any jurisdiction, we try to understand the fundamental values and principles held by the judges in that jurisdiction. We then try to frame our arguments—for the personhood and fundamental rights of nonhuman animals—in terms of those values and principles.”

He continues, “For example, we have been litigating for the last six years in jurisdictions in which it’s clear that the judges value the idea of liberty. They value the idea of equality. They believe that a very large part of their job as judges is to respect the autonomy of human beings, and to allow human beings to act in a way they wish, within rather broad parameters. So we frame our litigation in those terms. We argue that we agree with the courts: They are indeed correct in valuing ideas of autonomy, liberty, and equality. We then look for nonhuman animals who, according to scientific experts, can be considered autonomous. If the scientists agree, we ask them to draft affidavits that explain—in as much detail as possible—why and how the animals of the species we are talking about are indeed autonomous. The NhRP then presents this evidence to the court, showing that humans are not the only autonomous species; there are others, particularly our client. We argue that autonomy should be a sufficient condition for personhood, and for at least some of the fundamental rights that spring from being autonomous.”

Measuring Animal Awareness

In the world of tech, the famous “Turing Test” was an early strategy to judge
whether or not a computer had attained a human level of intelligence. One way that Wise and his colleagues determine animal autonomy is through the “Mirror Recognition Test.” Wise explains, “The Mirror Recognition Test was developed in the 1970s by a man named George Gallup, with respect to chimpanzees. He used it as a way to determine whether or not chimpanzees were not just conscious, but self-conscious: That they are conscious that they’re conscious. Which means that they are thinking in terms of ‘I’ in some way.”

First, Gallup acclimated the chimpanzees to using mirrors. Then he put them under anesthesia, and put red dots on their faces. When they woke up he handed them a mirror. He wanted to answer the question: When they look in the mirror, do the chimpanzees then touch the mirror, or do they touch their own faces? And they would oftentimes touch their own faces. “Gallup interpreted that,” says Wise, “and I think it’s a reasonable interpretation, that if they’re touching the red dot on their face, they must understand that they are looking at themselves.”

Using the Legal System to Make a Global Impact

At present the NhRP is working with lawyers in many other countries. Wise says, “we’ll probably be helping bring a lawsuit in India on behalf of either a chimpanzee or an elephant; the Supreme Court of India already ruled, in 2014, that all nonhuman animals have some basic constitutional and statutory rights. Also probably chimpanzees in Israel; and a chimpanzee in Argentina has won a writ of habeas corpus, and was transferred from a zoo to a sanctuary. We, too, are succeeding. We’ve now had two writs of habeas corpus issued, one of them on behalf of an elephant, Happy, and (the chimpanzees) Hercules and Leo. We’ve also been been dying to file a lawsuit against SeaWorld on behalf of their orcas,” he continues, “but the problem has been, unlike elephants and chimpanzees, there are no sanctuaries where we can relocate freed orcas. But there is an organization called the Whale Sanctuary Project that has been working to build an orca
sanctuary. That would free us up to sue SeaWorld, and at least be able to represent where the orcas can go if they win.”

Two of the most important aspects of Wise’s work involve public outreach, both in the media and through his personal appearances. The mission and work of the NhRP is almost always controversial, striking a strong chord in people the world over.

“Whenever we file a lawsuit there’s an immense amount of media coverage,” reflects Wise. “Over the last three or four years, we average about six or seven media mentions a day, somewhere in the world. We average 2,500 to 3,000 media mentions (a year), which includes short or long-form articles about us.

“And as I travel the world—and I travel the world constantly—I see that we are making a large difference. We present great scientific facts, and we also present great legal arguments. Judges, professors, lawyers, and others, all over the world, talk about how much they’ve been influenced by our work. When Cambridge University opened up the Cambridge Center for Animal Rights Law, we were a major influence. And Tel Aviv Law School, last year, began a clinic in Animal Rights Law that focuses or tries to do similar kind of work that we do.

“So we understand that that when were arguing in a courtroom in the woods of Upstate New York, or in the appellate court in Hartford, there are people all over the world who are watching us, trying to understand what it is we’re doing, and getting inspiration from us. All around the world, I hear the phrase: ‘You inspire us.’”

“Judges may or may not accept [our arguments],” Wise says, “but if they don’t, they risk being viewed 100 years from now the way we view judges who upheld human slavery. They can continue to rule against us—but in the long run they are going to lose, and we are going to win. It’s only a matter of time.”
The Pod Around Steven Wise

The Inpirers: Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Abraham Lincoln
The Activation Team: Elizabeth Stein, Monica Mailler, Lauren Choplin, Spencer Lowe
Christopher Green: The Network Builder, and Amplifier
Jane Goodall: The Celebrity Amplifier
Gail Price-Wise: The Blood Bond and Strategist

Peter Singer: Inspiration, Ally

Peter Singer is a philosopher. His Austrian parents fled the Nazi and moved to Australia, where Peter was born and raised. He earned his Bachelor and Masters degree from the University of Melbourne in 1969, and then entered into studies at Oxford. While there, he was impressed by a student vegetarian group, and stopped eating meat. Soon Singer began to take an interest in animal rights. He moved to the U.S. in 1973, as a visiting professor at NYU. While in New York, Singer wrote the book that would transform his own career, and inspire Steven Wise to join the animal rights movement.

Singer published *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* in 1975. The book was a first in its field, examining the abuses animals are put through in both laboratory and factory farm settings. Singer also brought the concept of *Speciesism* into popular culture. The term had been coined in 1970 by Dr. Richard Ryder, but had no standing in international communications. Singer states that if an animal has “interests” (if the animal can experience joy, suffering, etc.), the animal should be treated according to its own interests. This was the shockwave that Singer sent through philosophical communities in the mid-1970s.

When Steven Wise read Singer’s book in 1979, his career took a sharp turn. Wise completely changed his law practice—much to the surprise of his partner at the time—and began advocating for animal rights. As Wise
recalls, “I said, holy smoke, I had no idea that we were treating animals this way. When I read Peter Singer’s book I had kind of an epiphany, because I thought, well, why am I a lawyer? I’m a lawyer in order to pursue justice, to try to raise up the underdog. And I can't think of beings that are more brutalized than this, or in greater numbers. If I spend my life working on behalf of animals, I will have done more than anything I could do as a human lawyer.”

Singer continued to published philosophical works through the 1980s and 90s. He founded the Great Apes Project in 1993, which advocated strongly for the rights of primates; the organization is still active. He works primarily in the field of bioethics, advocating for humane euthanasia of severely disabled infants, stem cell research, and the far-reaching effects of Darwinism. When Wise was writing his 2014 book *Rattling the Cage*, he consulted with Singer and credits him in the acknowledgements. Singer has been a professor at Princeton University since 1999, teaching and advising on bioethics.

**Tom Regan: Inspiration**

Born in Pennsylvania, Tom Regan was a contemporary philosopher who likely had the greatest influence on Steven Wise. Regan received a PhD in philosophy in 1966 from the University of Virginia. He was a deontologist (i.e., the study of the nature of duty and obligation), and author of the 1983 book *The Case for Animal Rights*. In this book (as well as in many other studies, and the 1986 film *We Are All Noah*), Regan argues that animals are “subjects-of-a-life.” This means that they possess “sense-perceptions, beliefs, desires, motives, and memory,” as do we. And although animals (to the best of our knowledge) do not act out of a sense of responsibility, this may be said of some humans as well. Yet if society chooses to value all human beings regardless of their ability to be rational agents (infants and the severely mentally impaired, for example), we must also ascribe the same value to non-humans.
One fundamental right shared by all who possess inherent value, Regan maintained, is the right “never to be treated merely as a means to the ends of others.” This position includes the right to be treated with respect—which in turn includes the right not to be harmed. Much of the critical work of the NhRP, it follows, has been to translate Tom’s deontological theories into legal animal rights arguments.

Regan strongly believed that humans should not breed animals as laboratory subjects, or even as food. A committed vegan, he was “morally unable to use animals for meat, clothing, or any other purpose that does not respect their rights.”

Beginning in 1985, Regan and his wife Nancy Tirk co-founded and devoted much of their time to the Culture and Animals Foundation, a nonprofit “committed to fostering the growth of intellectual and artistic endeavors united by a positive concern for animals.”

Tom Regan died of pneumonia in North Carolina in February 2017.

**Abraham Lincoln: Virtual Inspiration**

Many people hold the writings, deeds, and influence of those who have come before them with the same respect they would pay a living teacher. They experience these virtual mentors as a real presence in their lives. For Wise, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin are two such mentors.

“I studied them, and I admire both their work, their minds, their ability to persist and get what they want done, done. If you come into my office, I have like 25 books on Abraham Lincoln! I’ve read them all many times. I probably have eight books on Darwin, including some very lengthy biographies. I visit their homes, read their stuff, and try to understand them.” Both, notes Wise, overcame many adversities.

“Darwin influenced me because of his persistence on many projects over
decades; his careful preparation and observations over long periods of time; his refusal to allow the prevailing mores and opinions of others to prevent his presenting what he believed was evidence-based truth; his willingness and enthusiasm for engaging in cross-disciplinary work; and his deep love for his children.”

And equally likely, his love of animals. It was Darwin who famously said, “Animals, whom we have made our slaves, we do not like to consider our equal.”

“Lincoln influenced me,” Wise continues, “because of his determination to make real and important fundamental and practical changes in the world; his willingness to intellectually evolve; his confidence in his ability to make those changes when nearly everyone else believed he could not; his use of plain and simple words to convey emotionally and intellectually complex ideas; and his sense of humor.”

One can imagine Wise thinking, in a given situation, “What would Darwin do?” or “What would Lincoln do?” and then using this exercise to stay committed and inspired. Such inspirations transcend any specific movement, and serve as pillars of personal integrity:

*I have steadily endeavoured to keep my mind free so as to give up any hypothesis, however much beloved (and I cannot resist forming one on every subject), as soon as facts are shown to be opposed to it.*

- Charles Darwin

**And character development:**

*Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.*

- Abraham Lincoln

In addition to this background of influence and resource available to Steven, his daily team and living allies are plentiful.
CHAPTER 9

The Organizers

“The inner circle are the people within the Nonhuman Rights Project—especially the ones who have been with us for the last five or ten years. These are folks who have worked together for years. We know each other very well. Most of us have been there from the beginning, so we understand how hard it was to try to figure out how to begin to do what we’re doing—how we tried to take each step, what we were expecting, how we tried to be able to gain something out of a loss. Whenever we lose, we sit back and regroup and try to figure out how we’re going to attack again.

“One of the things that makes us such a successful organization, for example, is that we’re really not hierarchical. We all have an enormous amount of respect for each other, and certainly the lawyers act by consensus. Whenever we have to make any one of dozens and dozens of decisions, if there is anything that an individual does not agree with, she or he will bring it up. We’ll talk it through, and keep talking until we reach a consensus. We all believe—and have small enough egos to believe—that if we cannot persuade those who we respect so much that we are right, well, perhaps we’re not. And maybe we should just change our minds and see what happens. So nobody seems to feel that they have to get their way. Everyone is interested in one thing: gaining legal rights for nonhuman animals.”

Christopher Green: Amplifier

Christopher Green is a mentee of Steven Wise, and the first executive director of Harvard University’s Animal Rights and Policy Program.

Steven Wise taught the very first animal rights law course at Harvard in 2000. At the time, it was the first course of its kind to be taught in the United States. The class was such a success that it became a favorite at Harvard. Today, more than 160 institutions across the continental U.S. offer similar courses.
Before attending Harvard, Green traveled the world. He worked through most of the 1990’s as a tour manager for major musicians, including some members of Metallica. He later produced a number of award winning films. Green attended Wise’s first course in 2000, and immediately became infatuated with the subject. At the first National Animal Law Competition, hosted by Harvard, Christopher took first place. He would go on to judge the competition for several years.

Wise’s teachings transformed Christopher into an ally and amplifier for the animal rights cause. After taking the course he helped publish The Future of Veterinary Malpractice Liability In The Care Of Companion Animals in 2004. He worked closely with Steven afterwards to pioneer the landmark article The Entitlement of Chimpanzees to the Common Law Writs of Habeas Corpus and de Homine Replegiando, which was published in 2007. That article defined the Nonhuman Rights Project’s efforts for the next decade.

Also in 2007, Christopher was instrumental in passing an Illinois law banning the slaughter of horses for human consumption—a ruling that shut down the last such facility in the United States. In 2013 he was the first legislative director for the Animal Legal Defense Fund, and in 2014 through 2015 chair of the American Bar Association Animal Law Committee.

**Jane Goodall: Celebrity Amplifier**

Jane Goodall was born in London in 1934. From an early age, Jane showed interest in animal behavior; she would often make detailed sketches of birds and other animals. She also read extensively, surrounding herself with books about zoology and ethology. Goodall attended private school until 18. She, then attended Oxford, where she worked first as a secretary then with a documentary film company. Doing so, she was able to save enough money for a trip to Africa.

Goodall traveled to Kenya at the invitation of a childhood friend. While
there she met the famous anthropologist Louis Leakey. Leakey hired Goodall as his personal secretary, and took her on an anthropological dig. He also sent her to an island in Lake Victoria, where she studied the vervet monkey. Leakey was convinced that an extensive study on higher primates would yield tremendous evolutionary knowledge. Particularly, he was interested in the chimpanzee. He picked Jane for the job, believing that she possessed the proper temperament to conduct long-term, isolated research in the wilderness. But some were upset by Leakey’s decision, as Goodall had no formal scientific training—or even a college degree.

In July 1960, at 26, Jane made a second trip to Africa and began her landmark study of chimpanzees. At first the chimpanzees would not go near her. After a year, though, she was able to be within 30 feet of the primates. After two years, she was hand-feeding them bananas. She was the first to record chimpanzees eating meat, and making and using tools. She also studied their language, identifying more than 20 distinct sounds. She also made notes on their complex social structure. Jane’s research helped shaped our current view of chimpanzees as highly intelligent, socially adept animals.

Five years after her study began, Jane was awarded a PhD from Cambridge University—making her one of only eight people who had earned such a degree from Cambridge without having first obtained either a B.A. or M.A.. From 1970 to 1975 she taught at Stanford University, and in 1973 was awarded an honorary professorship by a university in Tanzania. In 1977 she founded the Jane Goodall Foundation, dedicated to preserving the life and habitat of chimpanzees.

Goodall has become the world’s leading expert on chimpanzees, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Nonhuman Rights Project. She is one of several specialists who are called upon to testify on behalf of animals represented by the NhRP. Goodall’s research was critical in the project’s landmark case: freeing a pair of chimpanzees under the law of Habeas Corpus.
Gail Price-Wise: Blood Bond, Sanctuary

“My wife essentially functions as the CFO of the NhRP,” Steven adds, “in that she ensures that the accountants and bookkeeper are all doing their job in a timely way. She also focuses on teaching folks how to identify and manage their prejudices.”

Gail Price-Wise has a strong background in leadership, public speaking, and management skills. She helps her husband negotiate his legal strategies. Gail attended the Harvard School of Public health, obtaining her Master’s degree in Health Policy and Management in 1986. Her career has focused on improving communication between people of diverse cultural backgrounds. She has published a number of books—including An Intoxicating Error: Mistranslation, Medical Malpractice, and Prejudice—and the article Law Enforcement Can Learn to Manage Biases.

Gail founded the Florida Center for Cultural Competence in 2006, and has served as its president since.

Lessons from the Animal Rights Movement

Learn From Other Movements, and Expect Struggle

Steve puts it this way: “You have to understand that the struggle to gain legal rights for nonhuman animals is the most sweeping, greatest social justice movement in history. And you need, if you can, to study other social justice movements. Otherwise you’re going to go around feeling frustrated all the time. Because when something—like the legal thing-hood of nonhuman animals—has been in place for 2,000 years, there’s going to be an implicit bias against you. Everyone will have grown up thinking that a nonhuman animal could not be a person, could not have legal rights. So there are going to be a lot of people who will not understand what you’re doing, or who will not agree with what you’re doing, or it will impinge upon their own interests, so they will actively oppose you. You can’t go in thinking, “I’m a good guy. I’m on the side of right. Everybody’s going
to agree with me.” ...‘cause that ain’t happening. You have to understand how other social justice movements have won, and what sort of obstacles they had to get past.”

**Speak the Language of Scientific Fact in the Courts and in the Courts of Opinion.**

This is critical to your credibility. As Wise told us,” My advice to animal activists is, try to understand science, in order to try to understand nonhuman animals. Neither I nor The Nonhuman Rights Project ever says anything—in or out of court—that is not backed by a signed affidavit from a world-class, respected scientist who says the same thing and explains why.

“Credibility is really important. And not only is credibility important, we have to understand who our clients are. We have to understand who nonhuman animals are in order to understand what they want, and what’s best for them. As part of this, I would advise people to tone down any anthropomorphism. Nonhuman animals may or may not be in many ways like human beings, but they’re extraordinary and unique in and of themselves. We have a duty to try to understand them on their own terms.”

**Be Committed**

“You have to be intensely committed. You can’t expect to win all of a sudden. You have to be persistent, and never, ever, ever give up. You have to realize that you likely are going to lose, and that people are going to say bad things about you. They may not treat you well. But the way I view it, they’re simply wrong. They’re morally and psychologically, and philosophically, and politically, and historically, and jurisprudentially wrong.

“But that doesn’t mean that they will concede, or that society will recognize that they are in error and that you’re right. It’s going to take an enormous amount of work. And you have to be ready to extend your hands out to others, because this sort of thing is way too big for any person or any single organization. To be able to change the world in such a fundamental way, you have to be able to make coalitions, care about other people, and
make them understand. Be cheerful, and be humorous. And never, ever get discouraged—at least for more than a day or two.

**Have a Common Life**

I once heard someone say that the key to living with cancer is to live a small part of each day like you don’t have cancer. Steve describes it this way: “It’s difficult watching what happens to nonhuman animals while trying to protect them, because you end up understanding all the terrible things that are inflicted upon them. That process can really wear you down—and then you’re going to be of no use to nonhuman animals at all. What you need to do, I tell people, is to have as common a life as possible: Get married, have children, have hobbies, go on vacations, have things that you can retreat into that will help you get emotional distance from your work. Then you’ll be ready to go back in and do it again—and you must do it again.”

**Work Without a Dominance Hierarchy**

In his interviews, Steven said that “if we cannot persuade those who we respect so much that we are right, well, perhaps we’re not.” Consensus governance isn’t easy to achieve. It requires maturity, deep listening and surrendering to competence without feeling shut down. It’s slow initially, but has more longevity and road worthiness.
The Work is Seven Generations Long

A man watches his pear tree day after day, impatient for the ripening of the fruit. Let him attempt to force the process, and he may spoil both fruit and tree. But let him patiently wait, and the ripe pear at length falls into his lap.
- Abraham Lincoln

If society is akin to the palette of an artist, then it is essential that all the colors remain...lest we become a canvas absent contrast...imbued with the blandness born of banality. America may be the proverbial melting pot but our greatness results from the soup we serve from that pot...a complex soup that maintains an array of distinct flavors...all perfectly blended such that each maintains its identity and each is enhanced by the presence of the others...not overwhelmed or masked such that the independent flavors are indistinguishable.
- Daniel diRito
Chapter 10

The Work is Seven Generations Long

The Root of Equality

If it is the natural given right of each creature to live on the earth as a born-being without the constraints of domination and oppression that have been a consistent part of unenlightened human history, then these movements all point us toward that end. They point to an increasing awakening to the possibility of total equality and respect of each life form on the earth. This is an ancient notion, but it has repressed time and time again by those in power. The need for social justice would not exist without the initial repression.

The powerful almost always strive for more power. Even in cases where powerful figures support social progress, the mindset and institutions of society often stands in the way of direct, immediate results.

It’s the initial oppressions that make us require a justice movement in the first place:

- Conflict between Europeans and Native Americans did not begin until the late 15th century.
- The Atlantic slave trade began in 1442, when a Portuguese vessel brought ten slaves back from Western Africa.
- With the expansion of European powers into the Americas and Africa, and the ensuing institution of “white master slavery,” both Native Americans and African Americans were defined in Western society as lesser classes of human in relation to their white counterparts. Physical systems of oppression were implemented, embodied in plantations, in boarding schools, and on reservations.
The institutional racism spawned by these historical actions still looms over modern society.

- Homosexuality has long been a contested part of human history, its recorded roots reaching back to ancient Mesopotamia in 3500 BCE. Over time - and especially with the introduction of Christianity - homosexuality became socially unacceptable and even criminal, forcing people of non-traditional sexual identities to hide their true nature, under threat of death. This long-standing oppression forged a culture of fear, and never allowed public acknowledgement of the widespread homosexual population until present times.

- Women have endured male subjugation since the rise of military societies. They existed in the shadow of a male-dominated, militarily religious world, in which laws and cultural practices routinely subdued the rights and equal participation of women.

**But That is Changing**

Social progress continues to build in the contemporary world, with formerly disenfranchised groups gaining international recognition. We are witnessing the start of a legitimate conversation surrounding gross violations of basic human rights by oppressive factions, both civil and governmental.

**Cultural Exchange and Travel**

As the struggle for human rights and social justice played out through American history, distinct waves of social progress moved in accordance to increasing levels of cultural exchange, both at home and abroad.

Before airplanes routinely crossed the oceans, steam ships served these functions. In 1827 the first American steam ship launched from the East Coast and reached Europe in 15 days, setting a new standard for the
Atlantic crossing. Leisure travel by steamship was becoming an option for more people than ever before—and as forward thinking Americans traveled the globe they participated in the cultural exchanges that would drive social thought further. The more easily ideas are exchanged, the faster the pace of social change. The impact of the American Indian Movement and the Radical Faeries, for example, reflects the instant accessibility of information through radios and televisions. Which brings us to:

Global Social Nets

Current digital platforms, which allow ideas and values to be exchanged globally, are a phenomenon unparalleled in human civilization. The clamor for human rights is occurring simultaneously in many parts of the world; this is due primarily to the accessibility of global communication and cultural exchange. Imagine if the social network had existed when Angelina Grimke spoke in Philadelphia! She could have been seen and heard in all American cities, simultaneously and repeatedly.

The Rise of the Middle Class

During the 19th century much of the political action came from the upper classes, rarely dipping below the upper middle class. This is due in part to resource availability—one of the chief resources being free time. During America’s pre- and full industrial revolution, the common worker had very little discretionary time for organizing or executing public opinion campaigns. Activists who do not lead upper class lives often find themselves distanced from their previous lives; they dedicate themselves wholly to a new life for their cause.

Pendulums and Waves

The pendulum swings to one side, encompassing the efforts of those who
strive for equality. Then it swings back, far to the other side, where those with power and wealth seek to maintain their positions and hierarchies. The natural resting place for the pendulum is at its lowest point, anchored in place by physics.

Though equality is the natural order of human society, human interaction over time swings the pendulum in both directions. Historically, these arcs have been large. They swing from the liberation of the serfs to conscriptive oppression; from the transatlantic slave trade to the efforts of the abolitionists; from the theft of Native American lands to campaigns of resistance. Today the pendulum is closer than ever before to a resting place—but its arcs are faster, shorter, and much closer together. Across all social fronts of change, the pace of action is accelerating. The closer we, as a species, draw to that middle ground of stable equality, the more accelerated the pace of change will become.

**AN INSET:**
**What is Seven Generations Wave Analysis?**

A generation is 25 to 40 years. Examining the relationship between movements for social justice and the clawbacks by the status quo, we see a recognizable pattern: it takes about seven generations to win a modicum of social justice, and the process unfolds in predictable waves.

**Three generations to the vote:** Consciousness raising through storytelling and moral clarity leads to public opinion shifts, and eventual enfranchisement.

Four more generations to economic, social, and spiritual parity, progressing and regressing and moving forward again, in these five categories:

- Civil and Economic Rights and Activism
- Cultural Restitution, Apologies, and Broader Awakening
- Civil Justice and Economic Progressions
The Work is Seven Generations Long

- Capital Accumulation
- Political Parity

The following two examples illustrate how we might look at these waves, insofar as they are playing out in the Indigenous Rights and Gender Rights movements in the United States. The appendices include an additional movement: Civil Rights.

**EXAMPLE 1:**

Waves Applied to Indigenous Rights in the Territory

**CKA “The United States of America”**

The First Nations of the Americas have suffered for centuries under social and legal oppression. They still do—but after centuries of effort, much progress has been made. Ever since Europeans first arrived in the Americas, the Indigenous populations were treated with a policy of extermination and colonization. Military resistance came first, as the First Nations waged wars against aggressive campaigns by the English, French, Spanish, and American governments.

**GENERATION 1:**

Consciousness Raising (1910-1940)

The first national organization built by Native Americans was the Society of American Indians, founded in 1911 after a legal victory in which reservation water rights were federally protected (Winters vs. The United States). During World War I over 17,000 Native Americans served in the US armed forces, and in 1919 all veterans of the war were granted US citizenship.

The Meriam Report, published in 1928, detailed the poverty and poor living conditions on the reservations. It recommended, among other
things, the termination of boarding schools. The Indian New Deal and Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (called the Wheeler-Howard Act) created western-style constitutions for the tribal governments, as well as tribal restructuring. While this might seem like real legislative progress, the acts were written and voted on exclusively by non-Indian persons.

**GENERATION 2: Enfranchisement (1940 to 1965)**

In 1940, following the case of Trujillo v. Garley, all Native Americans were given the right to vote in U.S. elections. In 1944, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was founded to represent the tribes in negotiations with the federal government. For a moment in history—between 1930 and 1950—there was a glimpse of hope for Native Americans: hope of legislative progress, and the beginning of greater social equality.

In the 1950s, however, as the rest of the country battled for or against civil rights and integration, Native Americans again became the target of oppressive legislation. The practice of “termination,” highlighted specifically by the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, worked with unprecedented speed to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American culture, and effectively eradicate their cultural practices and communities. During this process, some 100 smaller tribes were officially “terminated” by the federal government. By decreasing federal subsidies to reservations, and at the same time offering limited financial support (by advertising training and vocational programs) to those who moved from reservations into urban areas, the United States drew thousands of Native Americans off of their reservation land and into the cities.

Most of these people remained very poor after relocating. Urban slums were created, alcoholism was subtly encouraged, and police brutality targeted Native Americans. Not only were relocated indigenous people discriminated against; they were placed within the legal jurisdiction of
The Work is Seven Generations Long

authorities that wanted to silence their culture.

GENERATION 3:
Civil Rights, Social Justice, and Economic Activism
(1965-1990)

In the 1960s, the US Congress held hearings on the status of reservations and their governments. Out of these came the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, which made the Bill of Rights applicable to all tribal governments. By now, however, institutional racism against Native Americans living off of reservations had intensified.

The American Indian Movement (AIM) rose to meet this challenge in 1968. AIM took visible political actions to dramatize the issues faced by native peoples. For example, AIM occupied Alcatraz Island in 1969 (this is further discussed later in the narrative).

AIM grew into a national movement, using public actions to create emotional reactions, and highlighting the institutional racism plaguing Native Americans.

One activist—Billy Frank Jr.—became a symbol of resistance in the Pacific Northwest, battling for his tribe's indigenous fishing rights. White fishermen, citing the regulations imposed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, protested that the Native Americans caught too many fish, and that they wouldn't be left with enough to make a living for themselves. Native Americans argued that they were not held to the DFW rules; that their treaties guaranteed them the right to fish on their reservations to their cultural capacity. This led to frequent demonstrations on both sides, which took place in both the Pacific Northwest and in the Great Lakes region. Native Americans were routinely arrested for staging “fish-ins,” while white protesters burned effigies and waved pitchforks.
The fishing question was legally addressed in 1974 with the Boldt decision. Following the historic occupation of Mt. Rushmore in 1970, the Trail of Broken Treaties March in 1972, and the 1973 occupation of the site at Wounded Knee, the federal government dispatched district judge George Boldt to the Pacific Northwest to make a decision on fishing rights. Boldt ruled in favor of the Native Americans, honoring their treaties. His decision outraged the salmon canning industry, and was immediately challenged in court. Boldt’s ruling was upheld by the US Supreme Court in 1979.

In most parts of the country, however, the federal government fought against AIM, sponsoring anti-AIM tribal governments and funding violent opposition. This created a near war zone on the Pine Ridge reservation of South Dakota. Out of these sometimes violent protests came the highly controversial double life sentence of Leonard Peltier in 1977, for the alleged murder of two FBI agents. The main evidence against him in the case has since been recanted—but Peltier remains in prison. It seems likely he will remain there until his death.

A shift in public opinion in the 1960s and early 70s led to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978. Before this act, up to 35% of all Native American children were being removed, forcibly, from reservations, and sent to live in non-native homes. The CWA shifted the authority of the federal government to remove children from reservation back to tribal governments. Almost immediately, rates of enrollment in Indian boarding schools and other programs—including one sponsored by the Mormon church—began to plummet.

Several watershed legal and economic victories followed. In 1979, the Seminole nation entered the gambling business, creating an economic engine to pull in external, non-Indian money. The strategy would later be copied by many other tribes. In 1987, California v. Cabazon went to the Supreme Court, which delivered a ruling that the state of California had no jurisdiction to prohibit reservations from operating casinos and
other gambling institutions (a decision that, within two decades, would lead to $30 billion in annual revenue to the tribes).

Also in this wave, in 1980, the Sioux won a suit against the United States for reparations, reaching a settlement of $106 million for the unjust seizure of the Black Hills.

**GENERATION 4:**  
*Cultural Restitution, Apologies, and Broader Awakening (1990 to 2018)*

In 1990, more significant acts of reinstatement and restitution were passed. These included the Native American Languages Act (which legally prevented the eradication of native languages) and the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, which requires institutions to return stolen artifacts or bones. The fact that both of these congressional acts are titled with the words “Native American,” rather than “Indian” is a testament to the success of changing overall public opinion through social activism.

Yet even now, native populations on and off the reservations are among the most impoverished communities in the nation. The percentage of people in poverty hovers just short of 30% on the reservations and 22% overall among natives, compared to 12% in the general population.

In the restitution phase, land may be repatriated and/or reparations made. This can be accomplished in many ways. Where there is economic success, some tribes are attempting to reclaim native land the old fashioned way: by buying it back. For example, the Ohlone are just purchasing back some of their native land in the Oakland and Alameda areas of Northern California.

In other cases, conscientious landowners are transferring land back to the
tribes. Here are some examples, compiled by Christina Sleeter:

- In 2015, California landowner Bill Richardson transferred 700 acres of his family ranch in Sonoma County to the Pomo Kaisha Tribe, on whose ancestral land the ranch was located.

- In 2016, Jean-Louis Goldwater Bourgeois (son of the artist Louise Bourgeois) began the process of transferring the deed of his $4 million, landmarked house in Manhattan to a nonprofit controlled by the Lenape tribe, upon whose ancestral land Manhattan was built.

- In June, 2018, Art and Helen Tanderup of Nebraska signed a deed returning ancestral land along the “Trail of Tears” to the Ponca Tribes of Nebraska and Oklahoma.

- In October, 2018, Rich Snyder voluntarily signed over the deed of ancestral land in Colorado to the Ute Tribe.

Another method of repatriation is through legal action. The Cobell settlement, for example, was a forced remediation. In 1996, the Blackfeet tribe brought a lawsuit alleging that “the government illegally withheld more than $150 billion from Indians whose lands were taken in the 1880s to lease to oil, timber, minerals and other companies for a fee.” In 2011, after an intense 14 year legal battle, a $1.9 billion settlement was reached. The settlement established a Trust Land Consolidation Fund, and a Land Buy-Back program that assists homeowners in returning their land to the tribal nations, by purchasing “fractional interests in trust or restricted lands from willing sellers at fair market value.”

In this phase of unwinding oppression, more subtle forms of cultural consciousness come into play. In the case of Native Americans, some recent examples are the fight against ethnic stereotyping in sports, and in the cultural appropriation of the Native American headdress as a fashion accessory or costume. In 1992, for example, native leaders established the National Coalition of Racism in Sports and Media, to campaign against sport mascots and symbols that “serve to mis-educate all youth by perpetuating an inaccurate history and encouraging a suspension of logic and
reason. Schools, teachers and students become culturally illiterate in the realm of Native history and culturally insensitive with respect to teaching tolerance and celebrating diversity."

In a momentous step, but largely unknown step, in the direction of healing, the United States issued an apology to Native Peoples of the United States. This apology was included in the defense appropriations act of 2009-2010, and it states that the U.S. “apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States.”

Here is an excerpt sections from the resolution:

“....commends and honors Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land; recognizes that there have been years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes; apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States; expresses its regret for the ramifications of former wrongs and its commitment to build on the positive relationships of the past and present to move toward a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled as brothers and sisters, and harmoniously steward and protect this land together; urges the President to acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land; and commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries and encourages all State governments similarly to work toward reconciling relationships with Indian tribes within their boundaries.”
There was, however, a disclaimer to the apology: it was “not intended to support any legal claims against the United States”.

**GENERATION 5:**
**Gaining Ground, Still Struggling (2018 to Present)**

Today, First Nations are still fighting for the recognition they deserve: equal standing in the world. The police brutality that occurred during the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 (commonly known as Standing Rock) highlight this. Energy Transfer Partners, a privately owned company, pushed their agenda for a transport pipeline forward with complete and utter disregard for the sovereignty and opinions of the people on that land. The pipeline leaked five times in its first six months in operation.

While Natives fight to have their land rights and are visible in their stewardship of the environment, they are also coalescing their vision for the future. In 2018, Reclaiming Native Truth completed the first study ever done on Native American stereotypes. The work offers a new story and vision for Indigenous People: “The history of Native Americans is one of great strength and revitalization. It is a story built around values that have shaped Native cultures and U.S. society: respect for family and elders, shared responsibility to care for the land, and an obligation to do right by the next generation. It is a story of resilience through great pain and injustice, from broken treaties and loss of land and language in the past to derogatory sports mascots and biased history taught in schools today. Across more than 600 sovereign Native nations and in every profession and segment of society, Native Americans carry the cultural knowledge
and wisdom that sustains Native nations and helps build a stronger future for all.” -- Reclaiming Truth

GENERATION NEXT:
What is Yet to Come? At what point will the Indigenous Peoples of North America exist on par with EuroAmericans?

This is hard to predict, but if the model holds, it will take 2.5 generations more, or 50 to 70 years, to bring First Nations people into parity. Meanwhile, we can be allies to the men and women who are striving towards native and environmental rights. Here are some leadership at work today:

- Ladonna Brave Bull Allard, Lakota
- Suzan Shown Harjo, Cheyenne, Hodulgee Muscogee
- Oren Lyons, Onondaga, Iroquois Confederacy
- Tom Goldtooth, Navajo, Dakota
- Michael Bucher, Cherokee
- Ray Halbritter, Oneida
- Winona LaDuke, Ojibwe

EXAMPLE 2:
7 Waves Applied to Women’s Rights

In 1777, just one year after the legal founding of the United States, all 13 states passed laws that forbade women the right to vote. This was the baseline for the women’s suffrage movement.

GENERATION 1:
Consciousness Raising (1840 to 1880):
The era of Lucretia Mott, et al, described above. Economic rights and basic self determination. Historically, financial control has been one of the most common methods of social oppression against women. Men have been trying, since the time of the Hellenic conquests, to limit women to the domestic sphere, where they are dependent on male financial support.

In the United States, women did not have any financial rights until the mid 19th century. Some of the first regional laws were passed in 1835, allowing women to manage property in their own names—but only in the case of their husband’s incapacitation. In 1839 the Married Women’s Property Act was passed in Mississippi, giving married women the right to own property in their own name. A married woman could own property, and her husband’s debts could not infringe upon this property—but she could not sell it without permission from her husband. In 1848, New York passed a Married Women’s Property Act of its own, declaring in Section 3: “It shall be lawful for any married female to receive, by gift, grant devise or bequest, from any person other than her husband and hold to her sole and separate use, as if she were a single female, real and personal property, and the rents, issues and profits thereof, and the same shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband, nor be liable for his debts.” This declaration created an opportunity for women to manage their money independently of men, married or otherwise.

This model spread through the United States in the 1850s. By 1861, most states had laws allowing women separate economy. The Civil War interrupted much social progress for women, but in 1868 many of the western states adopted laws granting married women trade licenses, while the southern states continued to grant married women the right to own property. By 1881, most of the 38 states allowed married women to operate trade licenses and have control over their own finances, but some states, like Florida, still limited a woman’s ownership of property to the event of her husband’s incapacity.
GENERATION 2:
*Enfranchisement (1880 to 1920)*

In 1875, responding to the case of Minor vs Happersett—in which a woman named Virginia Minor sued for her right to vote—the Supreme Court ruled that the right to vote in Federal elections was reserved for men. As a result, the women’s suffrage movement began to spread state by state, first to in Wyoming and Colorado, then Utah and Idaho by 1896. Within the next two decades, Washington, California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, and New York all granted women the right to vote.

Progress often comes, unfortunately, from violent adversity. Nine days after voting day in November 1917, suffragist prisoners being held for picketing outside the White House in Washington, D.C. were brutally beaten and tortured at the Occoquan Workhouse by command of the warden. Known as the “Night of Terror,” the incident resulted in wide support for the suffragist campaign.

In 1918 Michigan, Oklahoma, and South Dakota passed legislation giving voting rights to women. The 19th Amendment was reintroduced for ratification the following year, and was ratified by the necessary number of states for constitutional implementation. By 1920, women had won the national right to vote. But as with every advancement, of course, there are those who would push back.

In 1914, Margaret Sanger had been arrested for running a clinic that provided birth control. Sanger was also politically active, publishing columns and newsletters on sex education. She was forced to flee the country for her safety for two years, until the charges against her were dropped. Overseas Sanger toured birth control clinics, and prepared for further action. On her return she founded the first birth control clinic in...
New York, sparking another arrest. She was convicted of distributing birth control, but appealed in court and won her case—changing the law in New York forever. She went on to lay the foundations of Planned Parenthood.

Between the Great Depression and the second World War, progress on women’s rights slackened, its forward motion detoured by overwhelming economic and social upheavals. Despite the celebrated contributions of “Rosie the Riveters” and a rise in females in the armed services during the war effort, these jobs were ultimately returned to men who still, in the public mindset, were primary providers.

**GENERATION 4: Broader Awakening (1950 to 1980)**

This was the era of *The Feminine Mystique*, which describes the malaise of women in the 1950s who were confined to the domestic sphere—and as a result, often very unhappy. But a rekindled desire for individual identity and expression soon came roaring to the surface, both economically (the Equal Pay Act of 1963) and politically (Roe v Wade in 1973). The introduction of the birth control pill (so ubiquitous it was simply known as “The Pill”) in 1961 (though prescribed mainly to married women until 1972) gave women control over their reproductive choices to a degree never seen before.

In 1978, more than 100,000 people marched in Washington, D.C. in support of the Equal Rights Amendment, which had first been proposed in 1921. To date, the amendment has never been fully ratified—once coming so close that only three more states were needed for ratification before the congressional deadline. The deadline came, and multiple states withdrew their bids for ratification, leaving the amendment suspended. As recently as 2013, New Mexico’s House of Representatives passed a resolution asking that the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment be removed. It thus remains open to congressional ratification. While the resolution was accepted by the House of Representatives,
the amendment has yet to pass the Senate. Women in the workplace, despite gaining increased opportunities in middle management, continued to encounter profound difficulties with masculine culture in the workplace. They were often instructed to become more masculine, and to “dress for success” by wearing suits and floppy bit ties, and to toughen up. Though the ascension of women in corporate ranks was underway it often stalled out at top management levels, butting into what has been dubbed the “glass ceiling”, an invisible force that blocks access to boardrooms and budgets.

**GENERATION 5:**
*Gaining Ground, Still Struggling (1980 to 2015)*

Financially, this era continued to advance questions of Equal Pay for Equal Work (Lily Ledbetter bill). It witnessed the initiation of challenges to media stereotypes of women, increasing access to capital and economic empowerment, and access to what were formerly male-only institutions.

From a political representation standpoint, In 1980, the 96th US congress had 3.2% female representation; by 2015, representation was up to 19.4%.

Media challenges to objectifying women became stronger. The 2010 release of the documentary film *Miss Representation* provided physical evidence of the continuing, strengthening public opinion campaigns that serve as gnomons of social change. Much of this change was effected through grassroots movements, a natural evolution of the public speaking tours of the 19th century.

**GENERATION 6:**
*Cultural Activation, Backlash (2015 to present)*

#MeToo, campaigns against domestic Violence, Capital accumulation,
maternal healthcare, increased congressional representation, and other equal allocations in the federal budget, intersectional feminism...If the theory holds, we are 40 to 50 years from parity with Male Euro-Americans.

**Conclusion**

I urge you to do this on your own, and look at the waves in Sexual orientation, Animal Rights, and the other movements highlighted here. Take to heart the fundamental understanding that the struggle is episodic—two steps forward, one step back—and that wherever you are in it, you are nested in a long chain of unwinding power structures and internally ingrained beliefs. Be faithful and tenacious and believe in the long arc.
Mapping Your Own Pod

*If you want to go fast, travel alone. If you want to go far, travel with others.*

-Native Saying
Chapter 11
Mapping Your Own Pod

Change never happens without friction. The push and pull between hope and fear is real. Power is fundamentally a self-protection mechanism, and those who have it will often have difficulty giving it up or sharing it. They won’t do it without a struggle.

To move forward, people need to work in small, agile teams—the right teams, with the range of skills needed to make things happen. These teams need enough people to avoid bottlenecking, but not so many people that you end up with Keystone Cops or in-fighting.

As compelling as the “myth of the heroic individual” may be, you won’t make a long arc difference by going it alone. And although it is important to have allies you can trust and be yourself with, don’t limit your impact by staffing your nascent movement only with your friends—get the right skills.

As a leader drafting a team, what should you look for?

Think of the team outside the team.
Someone once asked me, “Who is on your personal board of advisors?” I loved that question then, and still do. I call on an old classmate who is financially savvy, on my spiritually grounded partner. None of these people are visible to my operating team. And not only do I myself have mentors and spiritual coaches—I serve as a mentor and spiritual coach for others.

Almost all of our profiled leaders had a mentor or spiritual counselor who was available to them personally, and could replenish the leader when the going got tough. Such a person is usually not involved in the day to day work of the movement, and is often nonpolitical. Dr. King had a Jesuit
minister. Mr. Wise had Darwin.

**Include an Insider**
A pod is also served by having a blood bond at its core. It’s not nepotism, in the dark sense, but a watchperson with a long-term perspective. A family member or an old friend of the founder or leader, someone who will be there long after this next initiative is over, who can call the leader out if necessary, speak plain truth, and honestly assess the person’s true best interests. Some examples from the text include Sophie Scholl’s brother, and Angelina Grimke’s husband.

**Find the Strategist**
The next critical role to fill is strategist—because the strategy will dictate needs.

In a strategist, look for someone who can set a long term agenda, and map out progressive actions to get there. What do I mean by that? Here is an example from the children’s rights movement:

- **Long term strategic agenda:** to protect children, our first strategy is to make using them as labor illegal.

- **Progressive, targeted actions to get there:** 1) Introduce bills into state legislatures, (2) begin a public relations campaign, e.g. “not made with child labor,” (3) engage a photographer to capture the reality of this issue.

The strategic intent will inform what kind of support you need: what flavor of guardians, amplifiers, organizers and moderators will drive the movement forward.

The strategist may also be the charismatic leader, or it may be a team of people who gather for brainstorming, but don’t carry out operational action. But it is extremely effective to have the strategist on board early and every day, to keep the arrow pointed in the right direction.
Do you have these people and skill sets?

Focusing on the pod helps us reframe the future of effective organizations. A movement, to be impactful, must have certain predictable roles filled by qualified individuals. Some people will have multiple gifts, but multiple roles can’t be overly concentrated in one person, who will then become a bottleneck.

A good team size is five to eight people, including the leader. Not too big to be congested and factioned, but big enough to have complementary skills.

As a prerequisite for a good team, everyone must believe in the mission with their whole heart and soul. This is long and hard work, and without conviction it will be tiring. The team won’t hold. There has to also be accountability, competence and execution in all spheres. Patience and kindness don’t hurt, either.

These roles offer a balance of bringing the outside in, and the inside out. Ideas in a silo or ivory tower are useless. Bringing resources in, sending messages out. Bringing moderating information in, sending ally invitations out.

If you are in an organization now, or an activist pod, or are creating one, ask yourself: Are these role covered, by whom, and is it that person’s natural skillset? Is there a weakness, or a gap? If there is a gap, where might I go to find the right people who already share the mission?

**Organizers:** Take strategies and translate them into tactical, logistical operations. This is the person capturing emails, organizing events, hiring lawyers, keeping calendars, capturing financial information. You’ll want a hyper-organized person with a fast processor who loves controlling the chaos. Or two. Or three, as you grow.

**Guardians:** These roles can take the form of legal strategy and defense, physical protection, or protection from the online and offline...
mob who will respond to (or troll) your action. The guardian will listen to plans and assess legal risks, strategic risks, safety precautions. What happens if a team member gets arrested? Who provides bail? What if someone gets hurt?

**Moderators:** One of the main ideas behind bringing the outside in is to understand and witness how the message is hitting people. Where is it scaring them, and where is it energizing them? The moderator is a person who can parse this, and listen between the lines. She or he must be in the field much of the time to do this, giving and getting information firsthand.

**Resourcers** (and celebrity resourcers): Can provide money, housing, gifts in kind, borrowed brand equity and, in the case of celebrity resources, a sharply increased public profile. Most activists don’t start with a pile of money, and the sacrifice or opportunity cost of working for a cause doesn’t lend itself to building a strong financial portfolio. But there are many people that have built a portfolio of success and care deeply about a cause, but don’t have the freedom or flexibility to devote themselves to activism. These two groups of people need each other. Find your grant maker, your resourcer, your true believers with a heart of gold.

**Network Builders and Amplifiers:** This person is a social butterfly, a connector, an attractive spirit who people enjoy being around. They turn verbal promises into action, and facilitate partnerships with other organizations. They know how to enhance messages and talking points, content, and stories—and they know who to call when a boost is needed. Without an amplifier, you might be lucky to engage 1,000 people. With such a person, you might engage 100,000 - or more.

One other question people often ask is, “Should the team be volunteers or paid staff?” In the beginning, you can work with volunteers, especially
if it’s the work of the heart. It’s organizationally much easier, and involves far less paperwork! As you scale, though, pay your people—and pay at market rates as soon as you can, to get the better part of their attention.

The Public Facing Person

Now let’s switch over to the role of the charismatic leader. Whether you’re a person recruiting a leader, or you yourself are that leader, you’ll need to know: What makes a person shine in this role?

To make any new vision a reality is a sort of summoning. To be able to see a world that does not yet exist, and to paint that picture for others, is a kind of magic. It’s no mistake that in some ancient societies creators are considered tricksters: They can see through what is and trick others, in a productive way, to break the spell of the old way of seeing. The question is: How do you temper or contain the trickster energy to serve the social good? Removing a long-standing, preconceived idea is like thinning plants, or weeding a garden: it makes space for healthy new ideas to grow. An effective leader takes away old concepts, and replaces them with new inspirations.

In public roles we are looking for natural leaders, moral or spiritual leaders, and effective diplomats. Yet, the world is replete with leaders who can sway people in a self-serving manner, despite their personal lack of integrity. The list of fallen gurus and flawed topmen is long, and full of abuses. How do we avoid rallying behind someone who has the kind of flaws that can bring down a movement?

Great leaders, I think, possess a self-awareness about how they shift reality—and can sense when it’s self-serving. What they do with this information is another thing. A good leader encourages truth-telling in her or his community and team, which acts as a check and balance.

From the group or pod perspective, it’s important to avoid putting any
individual on a pedestal. As with a student/teacher relationship, the public-facing person has an authority vested in them by their followers. This is the way an appropriate student-teacher relationship is described by Krishnamacharya, the father of Western yoga traditions: “The teacher is no more than a friend, no less than a friend.”

The great American philosopher poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, instructs us to be self-referring and self-sovereign. The interplay between pod and leader is also important: The group must call out any sign of an emerging guru complex. Defusing a narcissistic leader requires the participation of everyone in the inner circle, the pod, and the team.

What are some signs of narcissism in a leader? Some common indicators: Money hungry; can’t take criticism; evicts challengers; uses the position for sexual rewards, or to be connected to fame and power; manipulates and exploits followers; develops a god complex.

Still, movements do need flashpoints and spokespersons. The charismatic front person, who will be in the public eye (for better and for worse), is a valuable asset. If you are looking for that person, or want to be that person (and are willing to take the pressure!), here are some qualities that serve a person who serves, and is in the public eye:

- **Devotion to the Cause**. Unrelenting clarity of vision on their own “why.”
- **Mastery**. An unassailable competence in their field and topic area.
- **High Energy**. Physical energy, charisma, personal magnetism, charm. The movement will need this. This person will need to have an attractive energy, with the ability to be resourced from within on an ongoing basis.
- **Personal Integrity**. This person does what they say they will do, and if they cannot, will proactively communicate that. They invest in thinking about others, and are free of the obvious hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another.
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- **Humility.** Leaders who are resourced from outside themselves, and know the ups and downs of success and failure, do better in the long run.

- **Equanimity.** Nonreactivity and a deep understanding of people, human nature, and human behavior will help quell fears, settle conflicts, and navigate to solutions.

- **Financial Integrity.** The leader should be accountable to where money comes from, how it is managed, and where it goes. There should be complete acceptance of checks and balances, and financial governance.

- **Sexual Integrity.** Do they withhold sexual energy in the interests of team cohesion, and use it with a consciousness of power dynamics and consent?

Because the leader is also the movement’s figurehead, he or she will absorb energy from the public: the good and the bad. They will enlarge their energy field, literally, by becoming a public face. As such they are simultaneously at higher risk, and more vulnerable to attack—but will also be rewarded by being immortalized in history books. With this increased visibility, hidden aspects of their character will be revealed. The pod’s job is to pay especially close attention to this expansion of power, and help the leader stay anchored to the mission and true to themselves.

The intersection of the charismatic persona and their impactful pod exemplifies true genius: a small but mighty team that, when connected with other teams, has the potential to transform cultures with their ideas and actions. Together, they advance a world that elevates everyone.


**Bringing the Stories Alive In Us**

“If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us. But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which experience gives us is a lantern on the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us.”
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“I wonder, sometimes, whether men and women in fact are capable of learning from history--whether we progress from one stage to the next in an upward course or whether we just ride the cycles of boom and bust, war and peace, ascent and decline.”
- Barack Obama
Chapter 12
Bringing the Stories Alive in Us

Know Your Why: Why Are You Doing What You’re Doing?

“She endured too much persecution herself ever to join in persecuting others.”

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton referring to Lucretia Mott

Elizabeth’s words might form a mantra for social justice activists. If you’re going to work for a cause beyond your self or your own lifetime, you need to know your “why” at the cellular level. This might come from empathy, spirit, or insight. It might come from a simple code of ethics, informed by the Golden Rule: Treat others like you’d want to be treated.

That “why” might come from trauma. Traumatic things that happen in our lives can be seen as experiences that prepare us to serve. Even if they are horrifying and ugly, All of the things that happen to us have, as part of their nature, an opportunity or blessing.

We, uniquely, can understand what other people in similar situations are going through. We have a capacity for not only empathy or sympathy but true compassion. The bad experience can be a point of departure from which we bring service to others. It can prepare us for a new beginning, a new perspective.

When you know why, you persist in trying to change the game and the structures you were born into. When you ask yourself why you can’t tolerate injustice, it gets easier to sustain yourself in the activism. These “whys” carry us through difficult times. Once the why is internalized, you might become like Steve Wise, who responded to the question “When your
energy flags, who provides you the most support?” with this succinct answer: “My energy in these matters does not flag.”

Throughout the book, at the end of each section, there are a few insights from each story. There are certainly many more. Here, the same lessons are organized with an eye toward concentric circles, from the inner practices to the outer tactics of the team.

Individual

Here are some things we can do to prepare ourselves for the great work of our lives.

- **Be committed to learning.** We can be educated, and make a commitment to lifelong learning. We can lean into past leaders for motivation, for inspiration, for sustenance. We can find our mentors in books. Learn from other movements.

- **Develop a direct understanding of the invisible force that connects us all.** Maybe you call this faith, but whatever it is, great activists know that we are all just part of a bigger story. All of the people featured here exhibit a wider awareness at the core of their being. Through meditation, nature, transpersonal and mystical experience, as well as through empathy and connection, we find a new place to rest and be replenished. When we expand our self concept, and realize that we are bigger than our small animal bodies, our fear is also reduced.

- **Enjoy yourself.** This might sound counter intuitive, but in our research we found many stories of activists attending dinner parties, dancing, and taking in the wonder of the world. Steve Wise recommended that people “Have a “common” life alongside your activism.” I see that in my own work also: People might respect you or be moved by you, but if you’re unhappy and bitter, or judgmental, they won’t want to work alongside you. Enthusiasm and joy are contagious.
- **Renew your body.** Whether you call this “taking care of the golden goose” or training for your mission, take care of your mind and body. Watch your levels of energy, fitness, nutrition, sleep. To activate with joy is an attractive force—and it’s hard to be joyful when one is sleep deprived and hungry.

- **Be willing to be an outsider.** There’s a lot in here about pods and teams. Sometimes, though, especially as you first come into conviction, and before the pod forms, you might be alone for a while. Cultivating a willingness to stand alone and leave old associations behind is another reflection of inner strength and clarity.

- **Expect struggle.** All of the people who have worked before us tell us to expect struggle. If we prepare ourselves mentally for the ways we might be challenged, we will not be surprised if they do indeed happen. Cultivate tenacity and clarity of purpose. The strategic thinkers among you might even anticipate the common responses from the status quo, and think through your possible responses, for example:
  - People may try to divide you- what will you do?
  - People may try to impoverish you- what will you do?
  - People may try to threaten you - what will you do?
  - People may try to muddy or spin your message- what will you do?

- **Remind yourself of the common arc of beliefs.** Remember that there is also a superset of shared beliefs and personal characteristics. These include:
  - **Self Respect:** “My freedom —and your freedom—are worth the fight.”
  - **Firm Values:** “I know what I stand for and what I believe.”
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➤ **Strong Faith:** “I tap into a higher source of unifying power or energy.”

➤ **Inner Freedom and Peace:** “My state of mind is not dependent on the world around me.”

➤ **Personal Sovereignty:** “It is difficult to harm, threaten, or compromise me.”

➤ **Bravery:** “Even when I am afraid, I act.”

➤ **Resilience:** “I bounce back after setbacks.”

➤ **Identity Beyond the Body:** “I have come to terms with death. I think beyond the immediate or even generational outcome.”

**The Pod or Group**

Here are some basic lessons for team architectures.

- **Embedding in a community strengthens the individual and accelerates the work.** Communities that hold their mission as their central motivation can be powerful incubators and amplifiers; look at what happened at Hull House. It takes just a few people to begin a purpose-driven community. It doesn’t have to be residential, any frequent, supportive person-to-person contact accelerates the work.

- **Gathering spaces, digitally or in real life, are vital.** They lead to cross pollination, refinement of ideas, and acceleration of mission.

- **The right people in the pod.** Ideally your pod structure will fill all the desired roles, have complementary skills, span multiple generations and viewpoints, and include mentorship and hand-offs between generations baked into its design.
Hagiographic leadership does not work. Over and over, people relearn the hard lesson that ignoring the faults of a leader—or relying on the leader and abdicating their own power—leads to trouble. Design teams that lean into each other, not only into the person at the top.

Pod culture. Team attributes that are common and beneficial include working by consensus, working without a dominance hierarchy, and the ability to hold the vision while doing the daily work, including celebrating the wins and regrouping after failures, as part of the normal flow.

Tactics and Techniques

Here are some strategies and tactics that have proven to be globally successful.

Story and language

Move the heart with storytelling. We are uniquely wired for story. You have to make people feel something in order to fully activate them. Cultivate and inculcate empathy. First hand accounts by the oppressed can be very moving.

Use imagery. Harness the power of the photograph, and/or the video: In many instances, people really DO have to see to believe. The children’s rights movement leveraged Hine’s photographs to help people understand the plight of child workers.

Symbolism works. Use color, signifiers, slogans, shorthand. Think rainbow flag, the raised fist, the bended knee.

Speak the language of the dominant class until you gain some power—then begin to change the language.

➤ Speak the language of values in the courts of public opinion. State the arguments in terms of values.
Speak the language of scientific fact in the courts, and in the public domain.

- **Break through the noise with creative interruption.** Look for ways to get into and stay in the public eye at low cost—whether through actual news, high-profile actions, or other methods of driving visibility.

**Build a Distributed Network**

- **Weave a web.** The more like-minded organizations you connect with, the better your chance of creating amplified and complementary messaging and actions. Actively cultivate other leaders and pods as nodes on the network. If 10% of a given population can be swayed to a new idea, it will spread to the majority in short order. A coherent message—and getting that message out to as many touch points as possible—is vital for scale.

- **Eyes on the prize.** There are always differences of opinion, hypocrisy and inconsistency in activist circles. You as a leader rise to a higher frequency, eschew gossip, and join others in their work. Try to rise above the common foibles of human systems, and aim at the greater good.

- **Let benefactors benefact.** It may be hard to believe, but some people find it difficult to receive gifts, possibly because receiving can create a sense of being obligated to the benefactor. Yet, resources accelerate movements. True supporters may provide advice and governance on request, but they will never ask for something specific in return. You can receive them with no promises in exchange, that is how true supporters give. Listen for those who would provide resources, and accept aid, whether that comes in the form of money, space, amplification or anything else that is useful.

- **Leverage Celebrities.** Luminaries who are genuinely interested
in your cause can offer a great amount of reach.

**It doesn’t MOVE until you get political and strategic.**

- **Know the big vision, but find a simple point of entry.** All of the most successful movements had a focused initiative, not just nice rhetoric and a dream of equality. Whether it’s winning the vote, limiting labor to eight hours a day, or gaining reproductive rights, such targeted victories build a platform for other victories.

- **Engage legally, and embed in existing systems.** Work within legislative systems, and use them, while at the same time working outside of systems to change public opinion.

- **Anticipate who might lose, economically and from a social privilege standpoint.** There will be those who perceive themselves as “losers” in the paradigm change. A new wave of anti-feminism is present today, as masculine identity is challenged in a new way. It’s helpful to envision a way for the system’s current benefactors to transition to the new model. How can we speak to those who were inculcated in a social model and not make them the bad guy? How does everyone win.

**Timelines, Recursions and the Long Trajectory**

**Let your activism reflect the understanding that the work takes a long time.** Staying for the long arc, over your own lifetime, will show you unimaginable progress. Consider Harry Hay’s lifetime of moving the ball, or Steve Wise’s 30 years of advocacy—and he’s still relatively young! Know that there will be recursions and setbacks. Celebrate progress and forward movement of any kind. Even though your seedlings might not bear fruit until after you die, plant them anyway.
Conclusion: Indivisible

WHO AM I

I am more than my capacity
I am more than my species
I am more than my religion
I am more than my ethnicity
I am more than my sexuality
I am more than my age
I am more than my gender
I am more than my race

Since the Enlightenment we have been gradually undergoing a fundamental shift in the way we see other human beings. One might call this a process of de-tribalizing, or broadening the concept of one's own identity. Underlying all of the social justice movements in Bending the Bow is a recognition that the light of life rests equally in each individual.

At the same time, we are biologically—and often culturally—hardwired for fear of the Other, to be biased toward seeing negativity and risk, toward competition over collaboration, and survival.

In times of great change, the urge to preserve gets stronger as people grip onto the past, to old ways that will no longer work. Situations, contexts and environments have changed, and sometimes we just wish that wasn’t the case. During these times, as people grasp for certainty and stability, fascism and autocracy may rear their heads. We must speak to the co-creation of a new future, and include everyone.

This is the natural push and pull of human system change. And we also know that power is its own reward for many people; the hunger for it stems from a primal need for security and even dominance. Yet, when power is wielded in a way that causes pain or suffering to individuals, it harms the whole, including the perpetrator. And definitely the perpetrators children.
and grandchildren. Once we understand this, we are on the path to change. I wrote about this in *indivisible*:

“Redesign of our systems won’t come quickly from the body politic or the voting booth. While waiting for those mountains to move, we can make the choice to create change in our own lives and our immediate surroundings.

We begin the redesign from the inside out – from our own values and needs. We don’t have to passively wait for it to shift. Often, people only seek new answers when they are in acute pain. How many of us have embarked on a spiritual journey only after a traumatic loss, such as the loss of a loved one, or an illness, or money or a beloved parent? Yet, searching can also be inspired by a desire to create more joy and fullness of the experience of living. Your joy is contagious. Yes, I want to avoid my own suffering and create more joy, but I also want to find out how the whole world can be more connected, loving, tolerant, less neurotic, less violent, less self centered—and more fun. How it can work better for every one of us. Increasingly I feel that this isn’t just a nice-to-have – it’s a must-have. The things we face as a species really don’t know national borders: we have to get better at collaborating.

I think I was duped, and that many of us were, into believing we are separate. That view has been ported into the larger world: in the anger and violence of armed conflict, into identity-based politics, into a strained relationship with Earth. Yet, a different view is not only possible, it is happening now, all over the planet.

The questions of the inner life of the self are inseparable from the experience of and co-creation of our shared outer world. The two domains are intertwined. The core beliefs we have about ourselves and the people close to us are reflected and magnified in the design of our system. As we shift our interior systems and beliefs, so will
the outside world also be changed."

For now, let us take a deep bow and honor Angelina, Lucretia, Harry, Florence, Sophie, Leonard, and Steven. Let us honor every person who has stuck his or her neck out to stand up for a brother or sister who is persecuted. Let’s channel their clarity when our own vision becomes murky.

When we’re clear on what we’re about, we can direct our attention, time, and mind in a more focused way... and keep our heart and mood steady. To stand in what we’re about diminishes our susceptibility to other people’s dramas, the political climate, and the distractions of the moment. This clarity helps us move through the world with less friction. It increases synchronicity, enables us to resolve conflicts with ease, helps us manifest the ideas floating in the zeitgeist around us. Clarity makes each of us a better channel, a better instrument of change.

I know that we can, each in our own way, accelerate positive change. I think of history as a recursive spiral: We lurch forward, we fall back, we fatigue, things settle, there is a moment’s pause... and it begins again.

The only thing worth doing on Earth, in my opinion, is reducing the pervasive undercurrent of human suffering, and creating more love, joy, beauty, and justice. Let us believe in every one’s freedom, enjoyment, fearlessness, aliveness and absolute joy— including our own—and work in that direction.

FIN
Appendices

All of these appendices, which add significantly more color and depth, can be found at www.christinemariemason.com.

1. The Golden Rule in all Religions

2. The Figures in The Second Generation of the Women’s Movement

3. The Figures in the Second Generation of the Children’s Rights Movement

4. The First Slave Narratives

5. Seven Waves Applied to Black American Racial Justice

6. Complete Transcript of Curb Cuts
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