

MOVEMENT GENERATION – YOUNG ORGANIZERS CONNECT THEORY AND PRACTICE

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PROBLEM

So it's the new millennium in the San Francisco Bay, a metropolitan area composed of 7 million people spread over 9 counties.



People living in the region's low-income communities of color are facing common problems, such as a lack of affordable housing, toxics in the environment, and a healthcare system that is on the verge of crisis. Income inequality is increasing and most of the new jobs created are of the low wage, no future type. Women, youth, low income people and LGBTs are still facing social oppression and violence. California is spending more on keeping an inmate in prison than the cost of a year's tuition at a state university (today \$35,000 and growing). Meanwhile, the public school and transit systems in the Bay Area are woefully under-resourced.

SOLUTION

On the left, there is an analysis of why this is happening: it's the neoliberal economic model and globalization playing out in a regional market of a racist, capitalist country. Since the 1990s, intermediaries have been talking about regionalism as a way to address inequity and resolve some of its structural causes. Yet, often the analyses and solutions offered by movement institutions and progressive think tanks don't connect with what's going on at the neighborhood level, where community organiza-

tions face crisis after crisis, local politics, and need additional resources and new talent.

In this context, the Movement Strategy Center and SOUL (School of Unity and Liberation) initiated a project in 2004 to get beyond the splintered, weakened state where the progressive movement currently finds itself and develop the next generation of leadership the Bay Area's progressive movement. About a dozen movement organizations across the Bay Area participated in a community-led process, supported by the Vanguard Foundation, to conceptualize the project. These organizations also committed to involve their young leaders in the process, participate in report-backs and potentially be involved in other projects emerging from the school.

What emerged from these discussions was Movement Generation, a year-long process to develop skills and analysis, build solidarity between organizations and communities, and provide strategies and tools for movement building.

While not every lesson is applicable to everyone, some lessons from the California Bay Area can be used in both city and rural organizing.

WHO

Movement Generation recruits participants who are 35-years-old or younger and have 3–5 years experience organizing under their belt. Participants must be in a leadership position in a base-building or movement-building organization that works with people of color, women, or queer communities, and identify

as progressive or leftist. It is important to understand that Movement Generation recognizes organizers as leaders and not merely staff people with no opinions, no politics and no voice.

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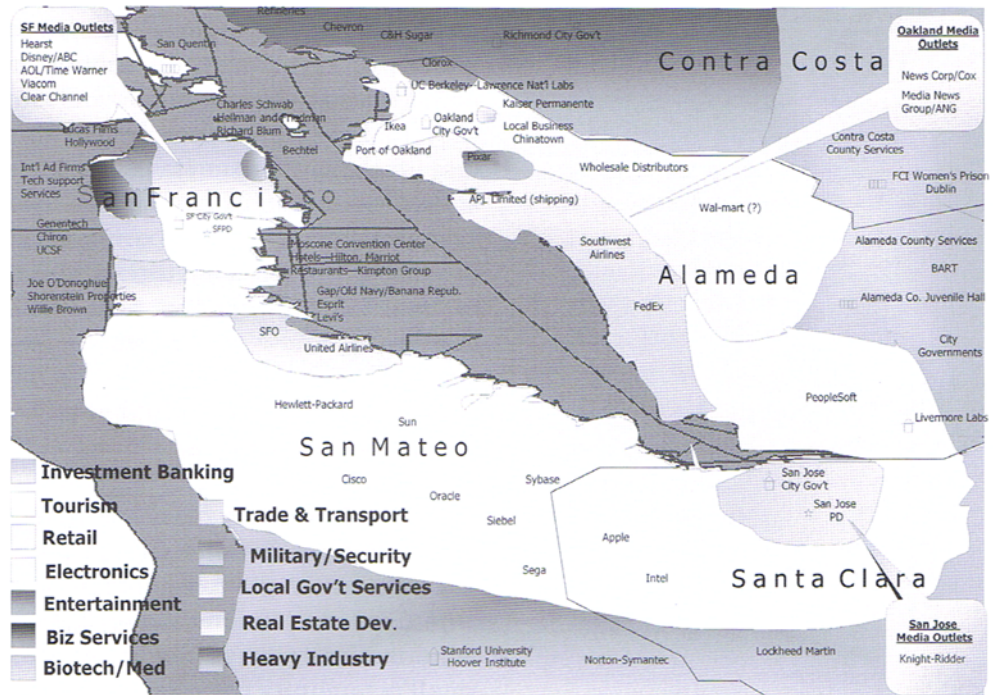
“Our initial concept was to bring together people to represent a younger generation’s perspective. Not leaders who came of age in the Viet Nam War or Civil Rights struggles, but those who came up in the Post-Gulf War I, Clinton-Era,” explains Jason Negrón-Gonzales, director of Movement Generation. “We were looking for people who were working on the ground, had been knocked around by a few campaigns, and because of that were investing in better developing their analysis and strategy for their work and the movement.”

Movement Generation was designed to encourage conversations across communities, ideologies and even generations through a series of trainings lasting several months. Most participants were from Oakland and San Francisco, with some coming from San Jose and Richmond. Dialogue about current situations in different communities was meant to turn into discussion about the various progressive movements in the Bay Area, then on to discussion about what strategies can be developed to move into the next phase of organiz-

ing for change. Guest speakers from local organizations, unions, universities, and the movement were invited to come speak as part of an educational process to develop a shared critical analysis.

The first group of young leaders and organizers to go through Movement Generation, in 2005, came from a variety of leftist political traditions. No one agenda or campaign was pushed by either the conveners or participants. Rather, Movement Generation created an open space for participants to share experiences

and, indeed, to come to understand how neoliberalism and globalization are having an impact in communities in the Bay Area and that there may be cases where it makes sense to adopt a regional approach to a problem. In the future, as the organizers of Movement Generation seek to create responsive processes, the next phase may see more on-the-ground support of alumni-initiated strategic alliances rather than another year-long study session. ○



Movement Generation 2005: Bay Area Political Economy/Civil Society Map