



VOICES | PIONEERS IN JUSTICE

building networks and movements for social change



PUBLISHED BY LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

**GIVING VOICE TO
SOCIAL JUSTICE**

BY DANIEL LEE

An introduction to the Voices collection—and why supporting this new generation of social justice leaders is critical, world-changing work.



Bob Haas, chairman emeritus of Levi Strauss & Co., once said that “a pair of Levi’s® is like the embodiment of the energy and events of our time.” The Levi Strauss Foundation, too, strives to be that embodiment. Since 1952, our foundation has worked to promote equity and justice in the United States and

around the world. At every turn we have tried to ensure that this work is responsive to the needs and the ethos of the day. What do today’s social justice leaders and organizations need in order to gain traction against the seemingly intractable? How might we not just fund progress but help to produce new kinds of progress that will advance the vital movements happening all around us?

In 2009, we saw a new opportunity to have a significant impact in this space. Five bedrock civil rights organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, where we are headquartered, were experiencing a dramatic shift in leadership. Their longstanding executive directors were being replaced by young and relatively new leaders. Most were coming in from the outside and with varied professional backgrounds. But all were charged with the same mission: to bring these legacy organizations into the “2.0” world of social justice—a world driven by grassroots activism, new forms of collaboration and partnership, and new perspectives on what it takes (and what it means) to work at the intersections and on frontlines of movements.

These five leaders had already started meeting informally to talk about the challenges and the opportunities of their mandate. Intrigued by their alliance, we started inquiring about their needs. What we heard, overwhelmingly, was a sense of urgency. “If we only use the tools and traditions that were handed down from our predecessors, we’re going to fall short,” these young leaders said. If their organizations didn’t adapt, they would perish. But this was in the immediate wake of the economic crisis, a time when many prominent funders were exiting the social justice field. Resources were scarce and getting scarcer.

We knew that we needed to help. Supporting these leaders to take their organizations into a new era of activism struck us immediately as field-changing work. And so we offered to shepherd them through this transition process, providing whatever support, training, and capacity building they needed to bring organizations that were beginning to

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If we only use the tools and traditions that were handed down from our predecessors, we’re going to fall short.

flounder into a new era of vitality. To be totally transparent, we didn't know what this work would look like. Something like it had never been tried. But we made a commitment to stay responsive to what we and these leaders were learning, and to navigate the path alongside them. "This is about what you want to do," we told them. "We will provide you with the room to do it." And that's how the Pioneers in Justice initiative—a five-year experiment that has proved one of the most groundbreaking in our foundation's history—was born.

FINDING THEIR VOICE

Early in the program, the Pioneers developed a clear view of what it would take to begin transforming their work, their organizations, and the field more broadly to better meet the promise of advancing justice. For the first few years, two areas of work became the group's main focus: boosting their capacity to use social media and other new technologies to drive greater impact, and experimenting with new forms of collaboration and more networked ways of working. We were astounded by how much they accomplished toward both goals in a short space of time—so much so that halfway into the five-year initiative we published a book, *Pioneers in Justice: Building Networks and Movements for Social Change*, capturing the breakthroughs, challenges, opportunities, and insights that emerged from the first phase of this journey.

But it was another area of work—one that became the focus of the initiative's final 18 months—that has arguably proved the most transformational. As the program progressed the Pioneers came to believe that for their work to have movement-level impact, they needed to develop and strengthen their own voices as civil rights leaders. These Pioneers, though, are a humble bunch. They railed against the cult of personality so prominent in the generation of leaders that preceded them, saying, "I don't want to become that." Yet they also felt an urge to move beyond the more proscriptive ways in which they had been working and leading. "Are you willing to stand out and stand up in this brave new world of social media?" journalist Kevin Weston challenged them at one Pioneers gathering. "Are you willing to assert your leadership and share who you are inside these messy conversations that you cannot control?"

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To be totally transparent, we didn't know what this work would look like. Something like it had never been tried. But we made a commitment to stay responsive to what we and these leaders were learning, and to navigate the path alongside them.

Weston’s words—along with the Pioneers’ own self-realization—stuck with them. They made a commitment to get good at sharing their stories, to bring the “I” into their work, and to push and be pushed by one another to get their voices out there. Together they grappled with how to enter into messy public debates with courage and transparency. This was extremely hard work. But witnessing the Pioneers’ emergence around voice has been among the greatest rewards of this program. Whether on Twitter, in long-form articles, or through speeches, these Pioneers have shed their reserve. They are standing out and standing up in increasingly public ways. They have found their authentic expression—and they are letting it rip.

The essays that follow are in many ways a culmination of this voice journey. When the Pioneers initiative ended, we asked each leader to write an essay sharing something about their experience, their progress, or their learning from the initiative. What did they want other leaders in this space to know about the journey they went through as Pioneers? What can they now see clearly about themselves, the field, and its future as a result? As you’ll see, everyone in their own way lays it bare. These are not leaders who shy away from honesty, even when it is difficult. They are truth tellers, and they tell that truth in the essays that follow.

Chris Punongbayan and Lateefah Simon write candidly about their struggles to find their own voice. Arcelia Hurtado and Titi Liu share their perspectives on why collaboration and intersectionality are the future of movement building yet so hard to pull off. Kimberly Thomas Rapp and Abdi Soltani confront some of the choices leaders need to make when moving their organizations forward into the 2.0 world. Vincent Pan and Hyeon-Ju Rho explore the soul of this work, with Vin looking at the deeper layers at play within social justice movements and Hyeon-Ju issuing a powerful call to action for leaders to find their authentic voice. The collection also features contributions from two of the inimitable outside partners who helped support the Pioneers throughout the initiative: Tessie Guillermo, who calls out what is needed for social media to be a force for good, and Heather McLeod Grant, who lays out a few emerging principles for helping leadership cohorts break through to deeper learning.

We hope the essays in this collection speak to social justice leaders who are wrestling with these same issues or feel that they might need to step into them more. We also hope that both the essays and the

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These are not leaders who shy away from honesty, even when it is difficult. They are truth tellers.

work they stand for inspire other funders to see the value of investing in leaders over time. Admittedly, the “over time” part can be tricky. Setting out on long-term work without knowing where it will lead is uncomfortable and can feel rife with risk. Because we were listening and responding to needs in real time and moving into an area where there hasn’t been a lot of work—a place where civil rights, advocacy, and social media converge—we always felt we were just five minutes ahead. Not everything was the right thing and not everything was perfect. But cultivating this kind of patience in philanthropy has had deep and rich returns.

What do we know now that we didn’t know then? That investing in social justice leaders is among our most urgent needs. That this work is transformational—and the world will change if leaders are given the support to find their way *in* this way. That giving these leaders time to learn with and from one another gives rise to both personal growth and a collective sense of what is needed next. That when leaders are given the space to experiment and make mistakes and put themselves out in the world differently, they tend to find their most authentic expression. And that the impact of this work is lasting. Several Pioneers left their jobs during the program and more have moved on since, some even switching to other sectors. But as you’ll read in the essays that follow, what they learned as Pioneers has stayed with them. The impact continues.

In 2016 the Levi Strauss Foundation launched a second, five-year phase of Pioneers in Justice dubbed “Pioneers 2020.” The first phase partnered with leaders of established civil rights organizations wielding the power of litigation, policy advocacy, and direct legal services. In this new phase, we’re working with remarkable leaders of grassroots community organizations—seasoned organizers on the front lines of dynamic social movements. This new group of leaders is very different from the first, and they are pushing us to learn a whole new set of lessons about the power and the process of this work. Just as the first phase of Pioneers illuminated the how-to of funding “grasstops” civil rights leaders, there is incredible urgency and upside for funders to learn about how to effectively support grassroots movement leaders—particularly in this disruptive, dynamic political landscape. We are up for that challenge.

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The Pioneers in Justice initiative continues to be one of the most riveting, intimate, and rewarding journeys of my professional life. I've watched extraordinary leaders rethink what it means to lead a social justice organization, try on networked leadership, and become stronger voices of their movements and of social justice more broadly. I've seen them take leaps of faith, talk openly about failures, and steer their organizations in new directions. And I continue to feel great pride in seeing these already incredibly accomplished people gain a new kind of energy by coming through the Pioneers program. They are, themselves, an embodiment of the energy and events of our times. I have become a better leader through their example, and it is an honor to stand in this space beside them.

**“I LIKED TO CONNECT, NOT
CONFRONT. AND I NEVER WANTED
TO WRITE ANYTHING THAT WOULD
MAKE ME AFRAID TO READ THE
COMMENTS SECTION.”**

LATEEFAH SIMON

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

YOU MUST RAISE YOUR VOICE

BY LATEEFAH SIMON



**There are truths that need to be spoken.
How dare we not speak them.**

The Pioneers program came at the most pivotal time in my life. It was about six months into my stint as executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. Though just 32 years old, I had been operating in the nonprofit and civil rights worlds since becoming executive director of the Center for Young Women's Development at age 19. I'd spent most of those years working with young people inside juvenile halls, in prisons, and on the streets. But now I was a non-lawyer leading a legal organization, which felt exciting and unfamiliar. I also had a newborn on my hands. I had been a teen mom and already had a young adult daughter. But I'd fallen in love again, gotten married, and during those first months at Lawyers' Committee, had my second girl.

It was a pivotal time for other reasons as well. It was 2009. The markets had collapsed and we were experiencing the worst depression in 45 years. All of us Pioneers were taking the helm of legacy legal organizations, many of which were falling apart. Social media was utterly transforming how people talk to one another and how information travels in the world, yet most of us had little experience

with social media tools—and our organizations had even less. The Pioneers program was an invitation to step into this amazing vortex of opportunity and of challenge. But let me be honest here: in the beginning I was far more focused on the challenge than the opportunity.

Prior to my time in Pioneers, I was not into social media. But my husband, Kevin, was. He was a journalist. He had Facebook and everything else that was out at the time, and he was forever writing provocative articles and posts. I'd read them and say, "Oh my God, you're going to put this out?!" At the time, I was the opposite of provocative. I'd been giving speeches on big stages since I was a teenager, but

most of the time I chose the content of my messages based on what I thought other people wanted to hear or what might serve to inspire them. I liked to connect, not confront. And I never wanted to write anything that would make me afraid to read the comments section.

But the Pioneers pushed me to think and do differently. Ninety-nine percent of our work during those first few years was around finding our voice and unapologetically speaking to the truth that we were working for. We weren't just learning how to use the tools of social media in and for our organizations and movements. We were learning to trust in a new kind of boldness. We were learning to trust that the world needed to hear what we needed to say, unfiltered and unadulterated, and that we had not just the ability but the responsibility to share it.

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WE WEREN'T JUST LEARNING HOW TO USE THE TOOLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN AND FOR OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS. WE WERE LEARNING TO TRUST IN A NEW KIND OF BOLDNESS. WE WERE LEARNING TO TRUST THAT

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SCREW THE COMMENTS SECTION

Still, it took time for me to embody this truth. In 2012, after almost three years at Lawyers' Committee, I realized I'd done what I had come there to do and that my voice needed to be somewhere else. So I resigned. Then, just as I was settling into a new job at the Rosenberg Foundation, my husband was diagnosed with leukemia. The diagnosis was devastating, and I felt immediately overwhelmed. I was still attending a lot of the Pioneer forums, and I remember saying at one of them how difficult it was to keep sharing the news with people and providing updates. "I can't make all these phone calls," I blurted during

one session. Merle Lawrence, part of the Levi Strauss team running the Pioneer initiative, replied: “Use what you learned in the training, Lateefah. Just tell the story.”

So that’s what I did. I started posting every day on Facebook from a dark hospital room while machines beeped in the background. In response I heard from people all over the world who were suffering in similar ways. Within a few weeks, I wasn’t just posting about Kevin. I would see something in the paper about a BART strike and post about that, too. Robbed of a normal routine and a normal work schedule, social media became a sanctuary—or maybe even a mission.

Something else was happening, too. My fear of offending people was evaporating. When Kevin was getting a bone marrow transplant in Seattle, an editor from the *Guardian* called, wanting an interview. I remember being so tired during that call and saying exactly what I felt and thought—and they put all of it in writing. After I read the piece, my eyes drifted downward to the dreaded comments section. Many readers were not kind. Some called me a criminal because I’d been on juvenile probation when I was young. Incredibly, I didn’t care. More than that, I realized I was sick of being someone known for inspiring people. I didn’t want to be the person anymore who says things that make everyone clap, because that wasn’t changing anything. If I talked about the ways in which people heal from being in the criminal justice system and what it takes to get there, not everybody was going to agree. But the right people might see it, and maybe then we could get somewhere.

For me, this shift in perspective was the beginning of a new life. Having the worst thing in the world happen—losing my partner to a terminal disease—had the unintended effect of finally opening my voice to its full volume. When life gets real, theory has a way

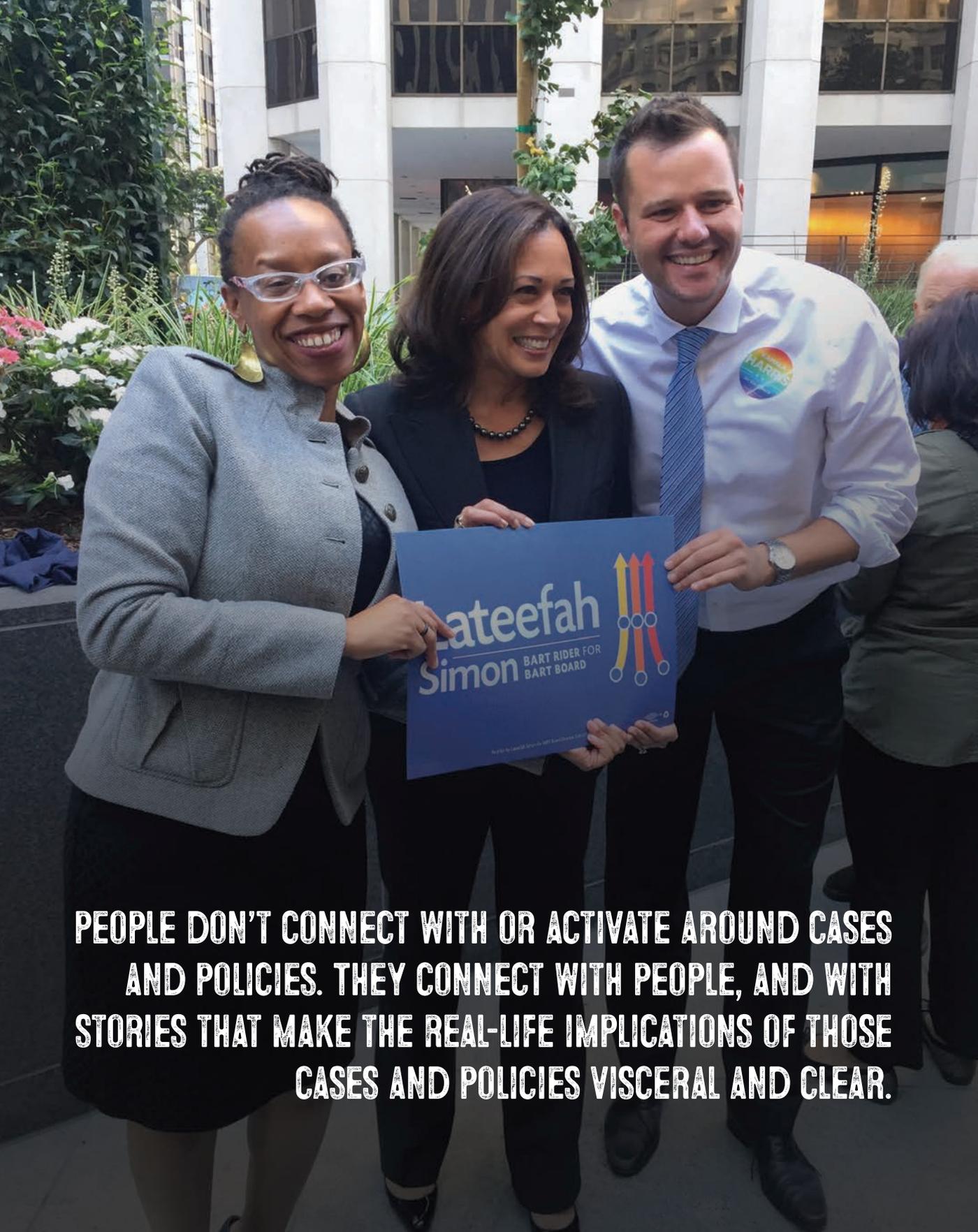
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of shifting into practice. When your husband is dying before your eyes, being bold takes on new meaning. When a client you’ve been working with is getting deported the next day, the theory on how to talk about that work and that pain becomes—must become—an action. Legal strategies go out the window when you start talking about the debt we pay as human beings for having cruel policies, and the real debt we pay for breaking families apart.

I was profiled in a local paper recently. In that story, I was straightforward in talking about how we need to defund the beat police if we’re going to really invest in education. Five years ago, I would have been scared to say that—to say anything that wasn’t going to make everyone from the right, left, and center feel good. Of course, there are times when that strategy is important. But I don’t think we make a difference if we do that all the time. Whether it’s on Twitter or Facebook or in an interview with the media, I need to speak what the people that I’m working for would say if they had a microphone. Most of them don’t have the microphone and never will. My friend Joshua, who was shot multiple times by the police, is not going to get an op-ed published. But I can.



PEOPLE DON'T CONNECT WITH OR ACTIVATE AROUND CASES AND POLICIES. THEY CONNECT WITH PEOPLE, AND WITH STORIES THAT MAKE THE REAL-LIFE IMPLICATIONS OF THOSE CASES AND POLICIES VISCERAL AND CLEAR.

In fact, I believe that sharing the voices of others is just as critical as sharing our own. If experience has taught me anything, it's that people don't connect with or activate around cases and policies. They connect with people, and with stories that make the real-life implications of those cases and policies visceral and clear. Minimum wage means one thing if you're looking at the commercials paid for by lobbyists but quite another if you are telling the story of a promising student who can't finish high school because she needs to help support her family, where both parents work multiple minimum wage jobs. I believe that every single policy issue can and must be explained in real-life terms. It's both a privilege and I think an obligation that we get to bring those real stories to life.

IF YOU'RE NOT UNCOMFORTABLE, YOU AREN'T LEADING

I'm still learning how to be fearless. But to the new and future Pioneers out there, and to anyone leading in this space, I'd say this: you need to get used to the discomfort of saying what needs to be said. At one of our Pioneer sessions, I remember Beth Kanter (coauthor of *The Networked Nonprofit*) saying: "These are uncomfortable places, and you have to sit with that discomfort. Because as you get good at this stuff you will start being called upon to speak outside your normal walls and beyond your normal boundaries." For me, that's exactly what happened. I've spent most of my advocacy career working and speaking and teaching at conferences and on panels—so many panels I can't keep track. Now, I talk just as much in juvenile halls and in prisons. When I see an injustice and an opportunity to speak out to a wider audience,

I take it. If we're going to make real change, we can't just talk to politicians, executive directors, and judges. We need to talk to our neighbors, whether it's by knocking on doors, writing something in the newspaper that they read, being on a television show that they watch, or putting ourselves out there through social media.

I wouldn't have reached this place without the Pioneers program. I've been through many fellowship programs, but never once was I pushed the way I was by Pioneers. Being uncomfortable became part of my work plan. I started doing interviews where I talked about legal organizations being 20 years behind the line. I started talking directly about how civil rights organizations were complicit in the repression of people in the criminal justice system because they never wanted to step forward. I wrote an op-ed about the police officers' union being bullies that ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on Super Bowl Sunday. Why not? They *are* bullies, and they need to use their words instead of reaching for their guns. But these are things that, at the time, I wasn't used to saying publicly. These are things I was scared to say before I was pushed by my fellow Pioneers and our extraordinary mentors.

This sector creates people who speak in group-think. What we need instead are visionary leaders who say what they believe and what they feel outside of what's going to get them funded or what's going to keep their organizations alive or what will keep them in the good graces of people in the community who run like-minded organizations. I say screw those things. Yes, it is extremely uncomfortable to put yourself out in the world like this, because people come for you. But if we're given the privilege of having people listen to what we are saying, how dare we not speak the truth? It really is that simple.

**“BEING HONEST ABOUT MY
OWN EXPERIENCE AND MY OWN
STORY GARNERED RESPECT FROM
OTHERS, EVEN THOSE WHO DID NOT
SHARE MY PERSPECTIVE.”**

CHRISTOPHER PUNONGBAYAN

ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE

FINDING MY VOICE

BY CHRISTOPHER PUNONGBAYAN



Influencing hearts and minds can mean learning how to communicate all over again.

When I was a junior in college and still at the front end of my activist life, I found my way to the inaugural convention of a new national organization focused on the Filipino American community. Hundreds of people from across the country attended. Although an active student organizer on my campus and throughout the Northeast, I had never participated in a gathering so large, and I was excited to contribute my ideas.

During the conference's various plenary sessions, microphones were spaced throughout the room, so that anyone with an idea for the organization's founding charter could publicly propose it. After listening to dozens of great ideas, I realized I had one of my own that felt critical: a resolution about how the organization would be inclusive of LGBT issues. But when I read it aloud, I got shouted down. "That's not what this organization is about!" people yelled. I was mortified, and also a little indignant. That non-LGBT organizations need to stand up for LGBT communities was (and is) to me basic and essential. Obviously not everyone agreed.

The experience of standing in front of a crowd and feeling the brunt of homophobic exclusion—by my own community no less—was a seminal moment. It helped propel me into social justice and civil rights work, and reinforced that I needed to stick my neck out when it really mattered, regardless of whether or not people agreed with me. It also taught me just how critical yet complex it can be to speak out in ways that resonate. After I got shouted down, several other conference attendees joined my campaign, and together we proposed a revised resolution that passed. It was the same idea, but put differently. I realized I had a lot to learn about how to communicate in ways that enabled my words to be both felt and heard.

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It wasn't until years later, though, that this issue became central to my work. In 2008, I joined Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus as deputy director. My job focused on the internal management of the organization, which suited both my skills and my disposition. I saw myself as a kind of choreographer, helping to ensure that everyone was in sync and delivering an excellent performance. In 2013 I became the organization's co-executive director, and then, in 2014, its solo executive director. Instead of working behind the scenes, I was suddenly

center stage, which required a different set of skills. The executive director position gave me external authority as a spokesperson, and I knew that I needed help in readying myself for this new kind of leadership role. Simply put, I needed to find my voice.

GETTING PERSONAL

I was part of the Pioneers in Justice initiative during these transitions, and the support and trainings we received through the program proved invaluable in preparing me for my new role. The Levi Strauss Foundation saw elevating our voices as critical to our development as leaders and to the impact of our

organizations. Importantly, though, their focus was not on perfecting our speechmaking or running us through other conventional training. Instead, the initial focus was helping us find ways to share our personal stories in our professional work—to literally bring ourselves into our work.

While I found the prospect a little unnerving, I immediately saw the value in this more intimate approach to professional development. Whenever I listen to social justice leaders talk, I

always find myself wanting to know more about them, not just their stance on an issue. The Levi Strauss Foundation wanted to help us learn how to reflect that out. Who were we, not just as leaders but as people? What were our personal connections to our rights work and to our advocacy?

I was not used to being that revealing about myself, so “getting personal” initially felt awkward. But as our training deepened, I started seeking opportunities to practice publicly sharing who I was and how the

social justice issues I worked on every day related to my identity. My local NPR station regularly runs two-minute personal stories and commentaries, called “Perspectives,” read in listeners’ own voices. So I recorded a very personal story about my uncle, who is an undocumented immigrant. I talked about what’s at stake for him in this current political moment, and what the lack of progress being made on the federal front for immigrant rights means for his future. The experience gave me a different kind of exposure and new practice in the art of personal storytelling. I also participated in a half-hour televised roundtable on our local ABC affiliate talking about contemporary issues facing Asian Americans—from our community’s depiction in the mainstream media to issues such as wage theft and immigration.

Very quickly, I started to see the impact of this more personal approach. First of all, I gained confidence. Being honest about my own experience and my own story garnered respect from others, even those who did not share my perspective. It created the kind of relatability that is necessary for a message to really resonate and reverberate. And it was humanizing. Putting a human face on complex legal or policy issues—whether it’s my face, or the face of one of our clients—helps to reach hearts and minds, which is the ultimate goal of our work. The experience made me want to include personal stories and perspectives in most of what I do. It also created its own kind of momentum, giving me the confidence to talk about other issues more boldly.

FINDING FOCUS

If a social justice organization (or leader) were born today, it would be a no-brainer that they would be thoroughly plugged in, using every online channel to the max. But for an older organization that has to

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THE INITIAL FOCUS WAS
HELPING US FIND WAYS TO SHARE
OUR PERSONAL STORIES IN OUR
PROFESSIONAL WORK—
TO LITERALLY BRING
OURSELVES INTO
OUR WORK.

”

learn new habits and let go of old ones, expanding into those channels is a very deliberate process. I think all of us Pioneers were excited to help our traditional organizations make breakthroughs in the new social media landscape—another critical priority of the Pioneers initiative. But that landscape is vast, and our efforts needed focus. To that end, we were encouraged to think about what specific channel of communication we wanted to invest in, rather than going wide and dabbling in everything. I knew that I wanted more control over what I could say than I would get if I focused on Twitter sound bites or landing quotes in newspapers. I wanted the ability to have more nuance. So I focused on long-form writing—specifically, my *Huffington Post* blog and a few other long-form channels.

One of the most significant pieces I wrote was called “What Asian Americans Owe African Americans.” October 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the federal law that dramatically opened up immigration from Asia and other parts of the world—and that had



**NO DREAM
NO DEAL**

CLEAN DREAM ACT NOW

#UndoAPI
ASPIRE

**I DIDN'T WANT TO BE "PC." I WANTED TO
SPARK REAL (AND NEW) CONVERSATION
ABOUT THE SUPPORTS THAT I THINK SHOULD
EXIST BETWEEN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

made it possible for my own parents to come to the United States. It also marked the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting in the United States. Both landmark pieces of legislation came out of the civil rights era, which was led by African Americans but benefited Asian Americans as well.

My piece was about how the African American community helped Asian Americans 50 years ago, and why it is now our turn to help them by supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. The title—and the topic—were intentionally provocative. I didn't want to be "PC." I wanted to spark real (and new) conversation about the supports that I think should exist between our communities. It was the first thing I've written that had some degree of virality. The piece got instant wide circulation through *Huffington Post*, and it drew more than 600 comments, almost 2,000 shares, and more than 8,700 likes on Facebook. I was really proud to get my organization and my voice out there in a way that encouraged Asian Americans to care more about contemporary civil rights issues. It was the first of what I hope will be many pieces that do the same.

FAILING FORWARD

At the beginning of the Pioneers program, I believed that "going viral" was the only true marker of success for any social media (or regular media) effort to get my voice heard. I quickly learned that wasn't true—a critical lesson for any leader in the social justice space. In fact, even efforts that seemed like "failures" can prove valuable. For example, the Levi Strauss Foundation ran several trainings on how to build more online engagement through petition platforms. By applying these lessons, I helped launch several online petitions that drew thousands of supporters. But

when my organization did a petition on affirmative action, it failed. Only about 100 people signed it.

The silver lining is that somehow it got circulated. A producer from New York saw it and contacted me. He was working on a documentary about Asian Americans and wondered why we would support affirmative action given the widely held perception that Asian Americans have "made it." So he interviewed me for his film, giving me the opportunity to explain why many Asian Americans would benefit from affirmative action, especially groups like Southeast Asian refugees struggling still in the cycle of poverty. Our "failed" effort to be more visible through online channels on our issues gave us a platform we probably would not have achieved otherwise.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

My work to develop my voice as a leader—and to share and spread ideas and insights about critical issues through my writing—is still a work in progress. But it has pushed me into new territory, causing me to rethink my own definition of leadership. It has also expanded my communication skills enormously—skills I wish I had back when I attended that conference so many years ago.

Lifting my own voice is essential. It can help advance public discourse on critical issues and it also benefits the organization to have a leader who is recognized as an expert. To be sure, having the discipline to constantly be thinking about how to get my voice out there is challenging. But thinking more externally—about how I can use my position to be the best messenger for an issue—is now part of my regular way of doing business. There's still a lot of room to grow, but finding my voice has already made me a stronger leader in both my organization and my community.

**“I DON’T KNOW THAT I WOULD HAVE
LEARNED THE SAME PROFOUND
LESSONS ABOUT WHAT LEADERSHIP
CAN AND SHOULD LOOK LIKE WERE IT
NOT FOR THIS UNIQUE COLLECTIVE.”**

TITI LIU

ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE

THE NEED TO LEAD TOGETHER

BY TITI LIU



Collective leadership is vital, complicated, and spectacularly messy—but it's also our future.

I still remember how powerful it felt to embark on this leadership journey with my fellow Pioneers. We had so much in common. We were all hired from outside our organizations, and even in some cases from outside the social justice field. We were all brought in with a mandate for change, even as we worked to figure out what that change should look like. But we were also an incredibly diverse group of people—in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, professional background, and the perspectives and skillsets we brought to the work. Looking back, I don't think that our learning and our movement-building would have been as effective without this richness of diversity among us. And I don't know that I would have learned the same profound lessons about what leadership can and should look like were it not for this unique collective.

I'd never been an executive director before taking the helm of Asian Law Caucus. At the time I was still relatively young. I didn't have a clear perspective on what leadership in this context really meant. I'd been at a law firm briefly, then at a huge foundation. I had also worked in China for most of my career, where the concept of leadership is very different.

None of the leaders I had observed in the past were my age, my gender, or even my ethnicity, and they all embodied very traditional models of leadership. As a result, leadership felt like something external to me, something that I had to find and develop.

In my reading, I'd come across the concept of authentic leadership. At first I thought it was just another Bay Area touchy-feely idea. I didn't know what it meant because I had never seen it up close. Then I met my fellow Pioneers. None of them fit the traditional mold of what a leader "ought" to look like, and each had a leadership style that was very different and almost unexpected in some ways for the sector or for their particular organization. And yet who they were as individuals and who they were as leaders were one and the same. They were people who lived their values. Through their example, they helped me realize how critical it was to be in touch with my own values and sources of inspiration and then to lead from that place—especially given the unique challenges of leadership within our field.

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BUT WHAT SURPRISED AND CHALLENGED ME THE MOST AS A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WAS HOW DIFFICULT IT WAS TO FORM MEANINGFUL AND EFFECTIVE COALITIONS EVEN AMONG ORGANIZATIONS THAT ON PAPER HAD MISSIONS THAT WERE COMPLETELY ALIGNED.

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MY BIGGEST LEADERSHIP SURPRISE

If authentic leadership was a fundamental building block of our Pioneers work, another was collaboration, collectivity, and the power of partnership. Rather than operate in the world alone, what might we be able to achieve if we collaborated with other likeminded leaders and organizations to accomplish our shared goals, and to grow networks and build movements that could amplify our impact? When I took the helm of Asian Law Caucus, I naively believed that this sort of collaboration would be easy. But what surprised and challenged me the most as a new executive director was how difficult it was to form meaningful and effective coalitions—even among organizations that on paper had missions that were completely aligned.

The uncomfortable reality is that social justice organizations have many walls standing between them, and some of these walls are extremely hard to break through. If asked to paint a picture of what they would ideally want to see in the world, most progressive legal rights organizations would describe similar visions. Yet these organizations all have different tactics and strategies for how to get there—based on what skillsets they have, who their membership base is, and who they're seeking to represent. Each looks at issues from a particular perspective, with particular goals in mind. What this means, in practical terms, is that sometimes the policies and change that one organization advocates for—even if agreed with in theory—can contradict or challenge what other organizations are seeking to advance.

The Pioneers initiative created a safe forum for talking through this painful tension—one that can often feel undiscussable. Take immigration, for example. On the face of it, the movement to legalize 11 million undocumented immigrants already living in the United States sounds easy to support. But doing so can also mean conceding to things like securing the border or cutting off future flows in other ways. And different ethnic groups could do better or worse, depending on how new policies are written. A significant percentage of these undocumented immigrants are Latino, which means that legalization would benefit them as a group the most. But there are large numbers of undocumented Asians as well, many of whom came to the United States through family reunification quotas. If legalizing 11 million immigrants means agreeing to support policies that cut off future flows through limiting family reunification quotas, then the Asian community would bear the brunt of that new rule.

Similarly, the DREAM Act focuses on legalizing immigrants who came to the United States when they were very young. The rhetoric is that they came to the country through no fault of their own and they've committed to going to college or joining the military. That's a very compelling group of people to put into a PR campaign or to structure a movement around. But running alongside this rhetoric is the implication that other immigrants in this country are somehow less deserving. What about people who came here when they were older? What about people who made a mistake at some point and have a criminal history but are now contributing to society?

These are the kinds of tensions that social justice leaders navigate and wrestle with every day. Do we support an immigration bill that has some good elements in it even if it is going to throw some other groups under the bus—or leave some of our own constituents behind? If the new policies we're

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asked to help jointly fight for include a lot more funding for militarization of the border, which we disagree with, should we support them anyway? These sorts of tradeoffs—deeply embedded within policies, campaigns, and movements—tend to prevent affiliations of likeminded groups from comfortably working together. They are also a leading reason why the field remains so fragmented, and why social justice organizations spend so much time and energy fighting over differences rather than focusing on what they have in common.

RADICAL COLLABORATION

This fragmentation comes at a cost. It diverts energy, keeping leaders focused on defending their turf rather than the larger forces and actions against which we are collectively fighting. At our Pioneer gatherings, we regularly strategized ways to begin overcoming this embedded dynamic. It was our shared belief that



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social justice leaders like us needed to focus on how to push back against extreme views and dangerous rhetoric instead of worrying about whether we were all exactly on the same page—especially in today’s environment. We wanted to collaborate in ways that could break down and break through the barriers that separate social justice organizations from one another, both within our cohort and in other contexts. We also wanted to move our communities to a more progressive place where they recognize the need to be part of multiracial alliances for justice in this country.

The Pioneers initiative nurtured these desires, helping to connect us with the resources we needed to begin experimenting in these new areas. Critically, each of us worked to create the culture shifts needed to turn our organizations into the more networked nonprofits we must be in order to accomplish these goals: organizations that choose trust over control, that both bridge and blow up boundaries, and that focus on shared values more than ideological differences. In the case of Asian Law Caucus, we began running joint campaigns and programs with three other organizations under the Advancing Justice brand, leveraging each organization’s assets and relationships while consolidating their size and power—an effort that ultimately expanded everyone’s impact.

Meanwhile, with the Levi Strauss Foundation’s support, we Pioneers began examining and experimenting with a different kind of collaboration as well: collective leadership *within* our own organizations. Anyone in the field will tell you that a nonprofit’s values tend to be embodied in one person: the executive director. Who that person is and how they live their values matters a great deal, not just to constituents and staff but to donors. The values held by Apple’s CEO aren’t that important as long as people are happy with the company’s products. But nonprofits, especially our kind of nonprofits, are very



different. Money doesn’t come from the people we’re serving. It comes from donors. And at the end of the day most donors give to people, not to organizations.

Effective executive directors have to embrace this. I needed to embrace this, as uncomfortable as it could be at times. But it is very lonely at the top. It can be overwhelming for any one person to have all of that on them, and very difficult to reach out or to partners outside the organization when decisions feel unilateral. All of us Pioneers believed that an executive director blessed with internal collaborators could be far more effective. No longer alone, he or she could see in ways they couldn’t see otherwise and more easily make the kinds of bold decisions required to change the way an organization operates in the world—and particularly how it collaborates.

Not surprisingly, building more collective leadership within our own organizations became another Pioneer priority. This meant encouraging and enabling more people within our organizations to think organizationally; engaging staff in conversation about what we needed to do organization-wide versus what we needed to do in a particular program or for a particular litigation effort; and in every way helping the people who reported to us step up to lead.

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These weren't easy efforts. Like authentic leadership, collective leadership is both vital and complicated. It takes time to build and can be spectacularly messy. But creating these sorts of internal structures and practices—sharing the helm, as it were—can have an outsized impact on the ability of social justice organizations to act broadly, quickly, and bravely in today's environment.

DEEP FUNDING, DEEP LEARNING

Many funders see the value of collaboration—particularly external collaboration—and are uniquely poised to help foster it. With a bird's eye view of the field, they can see where there are opportunities for alliance. They can also spot duplication of efforts or ineffective use of resources, and unhelpful competitive and territorial dynamics. And yet funders often try to encourage and incentivize collaboration in ways that are superficial and don't enable or facilitate working through the kinds of complexity I

described above. Sometimes they force partnership by saying, “You can't get this money unless two groups or a whole set of groups apply.” Sometimes they offer great training programs but not the resources needed to operationalize what is being learned or the time and the space needed to experiment with how to work differently and together.

This is why I think the Levi Strauss Foundation's efforts in this space stand out as both unique and invaluable. Levi Strauss came into this program as an equal partner to all of us, and committed themselves to that partnership for the long term. They gave us the space and the tools we needed to build relationships among ourselves and our organizations in an organic way that built trust. And they understood that building leadership and building collective action are both long-term efforts. We didn't have just one or two meetings designed to spark new thinking and more innovative strategies—we had years of them, after which we were able to take what we'd learned back to our organizations and try to apply it. Incorporating these new ideas into our day-to-day reality was not

always a perfect fit, but there was enough time to tinker, to see what was working and what was not working, to bring the experience back to the group, to reflect on it some more, to rework it, and to try again.

What I learned about leadership and collaboration, through the Pioneers initiative itself and from my fellow Pioneers, translates far beyond the field. In 2012, I left Asian Law Caucus for Stanford Law School, where I advise and teach students who are focused on careers in public interest and public service. I am now teaching what I have learned, and I am learning even more from those I teach. Through this work, I've come to see how vital it is that social justice leaders feel supported by funders, by mentors, and by one another—and how significantly this support impacts their ability to lead not just their organizations but the larger movements surrounding them. One program I'm working to create explicitly addresses the issue of how to build collective leadership within and between public-interest legal organizations, and we are also training, mentoring, and building a networked cohort of emerging leaders in the field. Our pilot cohort will comprise recent

Stanford Law School alumni who are engaged in public-interest lawyering practice; committed to building their own leadership skills within their existing role; and open to exploring leadership roles in their organization, field, or movement at some point in their career.

It's my hope that the leaders who come through our program will emerge as I did from Pioneers: with their eyes, their hearts, and their arms open much wider than they were before, ready to lead in ways that truly hold the promise to change the world. Before Pioneers, I'm not sure I really understood why leadership was so important, and why collaboration and coalition-building was so vital to moving social justice work forward. But now I teach it. I live it. And I'll never forget it.



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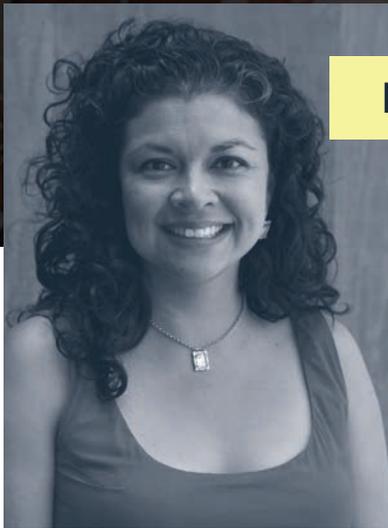
**“IN TODAY’S WORLD, NEARLY ALL
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MULTIPLE ANGLES.”**

ARCELIA HURTADO

NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

LEADING AT THE INTERSECTIONS

BY ARCELIA HURTADO



If we want social justice, then we must help our communities connect with one another.

I have always been drawn to the intersection of identities and the need for social justice organizations to work at those intersections, not only to be more effective and relevant but also to create a space where the whole person can be seen and celebrated. I think I'm drawn to these intersections almost by my nature, because of my own experiences and identities.

I grew up in a small town at the southernmost tip of Texas, separated from Mexico by the Rio Grande River. It was (and still is) one of the poorest counties in the country. My parents were farm workers. My mom trained as a nurse in Mexico but never learned English enough to become one in the United States. We were very proud to be Mexican, and everybody around us was Mexican. But I also identified as a Texan. That was, I suppose, my first identity intersection: I was both Mexican and an American—a Chicana.

When I went to college, at UC Berkeley, more identities blossomed. As a Chicano studies major, I learned a lot about how history and culture and identity develop through politics and through activism. I got politicized.



A lot of my professors were women, so I also learned to be a feminist. Some were lesbians or bisexual and I started to be conscious about that identity within myself as well.

My college learning was grounded in the experience of working in the community. I taught English as a second language to Latino inmates at San Quentin State Prison. I also worked with a nonprofit immigrant rights organization called Centro Legal, helping people from Central America get asylum in the United States. The people I worked with had a shared identity—they were asylum seekers—but within that identity their experiences were strikingly different. Some were escaping civil war, or domestic violence in their families. Others sought safety because they were gay or lesbian or transgender, or because they were being persecuted in their countries. Working with them made me look hard at the labels we place on communities and movements, and to both see and seek out the complexity hidden within those labels.

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I think you become more aware of other situations in which multiple identities are at play when you are highly aware of your own. By the time I graduated college and headed to law school, I was already holding these very different identities, and they were all informing who I was and the direction my career was taking. I also was also determined to give back to my community, not because there was one problem we needed to work on but because there were so many, and they were often interrelated.

STEPPING INTO THIS WORK

When I started my career in social justice, I could see all of these different connections between organizations and issues but couldn't figure out where to start. The immigrant rights groups were focusing on immigration issues. Criminal justice reform organizations were focusing on issues such as sentencing reform but not necessarily on the issues of immigrants within the criminal justice system. I started to see how if you're an activist and a person of color, it's really hard to know where to turn your attention. The impulse in the field is to focus narrowly rather than broadly. Yet I believed that working at the intersections—standing and working in the spaces *between* issues—was what was called for.

I was fortunate to join the Levi Strauss Foundation's Pioneers in Justice initiative at the same time that I was trying to figure out how to navigate this often siloed social justice landscape. Spending time in the company of other like-minded leaders, who were also pushing themselves toward more intersectional work, made me more conscious of and hopeful about making connections with other organizations and communities. And the tools we were learning—how to share our unique voices, how to use social media effectively—gave me new skills to apply as I tried to

more actively operate at the places where social justice issues converge.

I started one step at a time. When I joined the Pioneers cohort, I was executive director of Equal Rights Advocates (ERA), an organization with a 40-year history of fighting to achieve equality for women. ERA had always been focused on very traditional employment issues like sexual harassment and pay discrimination. These were important, but I wanted to push us into new territory by working on the challenges facing formerly incarcerated women. Many women who leave prison can't get jobs because of their criminal record, and even nonviolent convictions can bar them from all kinds of licenses and better paying jobs. Many were also domestic violence and abuse survivors, and they had very few advocates helping them transition back into the prison-free world.

So, with a Pioneers grant, I pushed our work into this little-charted area of women's rights, leading a joint project between ERA and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) focused on women's reentry issues and how to improve their job prospects. We helped pass legislation changing the licensing requirements for several employment fields, such as in-home care, that formerly incarcerated women seek to enter. We reached out to law enforcement and to the criminal justice community, pushing them to look at women's issues. Incarceration is usually framed as an issue for men, because it's mostly men who are incarcerated. But in pointing out how prison affects women, their families, and their children, it became a

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broader issue for some of these organizations. And it expanded ERA's view of women's issues as well.

After the first year of the Pioneers program, I left ERA to become deputy director of NCLR, an organization that was already working at the intersections, particularly through its Immigration Project. I wanted to elevate NCLR's immigrant rights work even more so that our community could become better informed and more supportive. We began by highlighting the plight of married, bi-national LGBT couples. Some states were not recognizing marriages where one spouse was a United States citizen and the other spouse was a citizen of another country. By tying two issues—marriage equality and immigration equality—together, we broadened NCLR's reach. By really pushing at all of the edges of the issue, we also raised the visibility of our immigration work within the immigrant rights and LGBT communities, and helped spark a new understanding of the ways that LGBT issues and immigrant rights issues intersect.

A person is seen from behind, wearing a red and white hat and a white shirt, carrying a large rainbow flag. They are walking in a crowd, likely at a Pride event. The background is blurred, showing other people and lights.

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, MORE AND MORE SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEGUN REACHING OUT ACROSS COMMUNITIES IN AN EFFORT TO BUILD NEW CONNECTIONS AND LINK CRITICAL ISSUES TOGETHER. BUT IT IS STILL NOT AN EASY THING TO DO. IN FACT, IT IS OFTEN HIGHLY UNCOMFORTABLE WORK, AND IT'S INTERESTING TO THINK ABOUT WHY THAT IS.

WHAT WE MUST OVERCOME

In the last few years, more and more social justice organizations have begun reaching out across communities in an effort to build new connections and link critical issues together. But it is still not an easy thing to do. In fact, it is often highly uncomfortable work, and it's interesting to think about why that is. What makes operating at the intersections so hard? What do we need to learn to do better? And what do these challenges suggest about the way the broader social justice field works, or how it should work in the future? I don't have the answers. But it's important to call out a few of the challenges that our field must both acknowledge and overcome in order to succeed in this work.

Perceived risk. Any time an organization becomes known for its support of one issue or associated with one movement, it can feel dangerous to take a new direction or expand the circle of what people think you are. At ERA, expanding our work to include issues facing incarcerated women felt risky. I'm sure some people wondered, "Wait, who is this organization again, if they're doing that?" I also think some organizations, particularly small ones, fear that widening or shifting their focus they might somehow dilute their impact. But experience tells me that it actually does the opposite. In today's world, nearly all social justice issues are multilayered and complex, and can be approached from multiple angles. The challenge is: How can our organizations stay "themselves" while also stretching their reach into important new territory?

Capturing attention. Sometimes an issue will become so dominant that others get pushed to the margins. During the intense period when LGBT marriage equality litigation and activism reached a pinnacle, the immigration reform movement was also happening. Understandably, the majority of the LGBT

community was focused on marriage equality. That was the rallying cry; that's what people gave money to and what they supported. This was wonderful, of course! But at the same time, it was hard to get any space to talk about immigration reform within the LGBT community or convince people to put that message out there. Similarly, it was difficult to get the Spanish language media to run my pieces on LGBT parental rights when they were so focused on immigration equality. Bringing focus to a critical issue when another equally important issue has captured everyone's attention is both difficult and tricky. How do you get the message across without sounding like you're admonishing a community? It's hard to say, "Well, of course X issue is important, but please focus on this other issue too." As a field, we need to ask: What is the proper way to message those priorities?

Measuring progress. Many of us reach our audiences through our writing. But writing about "other" issues often means not getting the affirmation you would get if you wrote about something that was mainstream at that moment. Of course, writing

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something that is not mainstream is exactly the point. But measuring its impact is difficult. Boards and other stakeholders want to know: Do we think that these pieces have been effective? That people are reading them? Are they getting re-tweeted? And, if they're not, does that mean that nobody's reading them? If they are getting a lot of play and if they are getting re-tweeted and posted on Facebook, we know they're being read. But is the opposite true? Are they not being read if we don't have the correct measures of "success"? Right now, we just don't know.

Managing distrust. Nonprofit organizations compete for funding, media attention, and recognition—all things that our boards want us to have. When one organization works with another directly on the same issue, one or both might wonder, "What does that group want from us?" Or, "What are they trying to take away from us?" A few years ago, an advocacy organization was trying to get President Obama to sign an executive order enabling young people who are not US citizens but who have lived here all their lives to remain in the country—a policy called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). The organization had a very loud voice, and was advocating largely alone on this issue. When NCLR began encouraging LGBT funders to create a fund so that DACA applicants could afford the fees to apply, the organization was initially distrustful of our effort. We had to explain why we thought it

was also an important issue for our community, and how we weren't trying to steal the spotlight or get media attention. We had to have some frank conversations and make clear that our efforts were complementary, not competitive.

That distrust also manifests at the community level. When you encourage one identity-based community to support another one, some in that community might get defensive. They might say, "Wait, are you accusing us of not supporting them?" Or you might get the opposite reaction: "That's not our issue." The latter is scary because it exposes some of the contradictions within our own communities, which is why people avoid it sometimes. So that's another tension we must navigate and examine. Are there certain internal challenges that we just don't want exposed to the general public, and why?

Few exemplars. Black Lives Matter is the most prominent example of a social justice movement accomplishing high visibility while messaging its work in a cross-sectional way. Yet its founders are lesbians. When Black Lives Matter protesters blocked traffic on the Bay Bridge in early 2016, some observers were probably confused. They saw primarily African American protesters, but also lesbian and queer protesters as well, and perhaps thought, "Why is there another identity out on the bridge?" Right now, Black Lives Matter is the only big movement where there is potential for multiple identities, equally prominent, to be activated together. Of course, most people think of Black Lives Matter as an African American-led movement; they're not really messaging why it's important to queer people as well. So, I think there's a long way to go—both for that movement and for the

many other potential movements that I hope will enter this emergent space.

SETTING THE INTENTION

I think that social justice leaders are starting to realize that the only way to create change is to do their activism differently and build these kinds of coalitions. Now a policy advisor for NCLR, I spend much of my time working on and writing about different intersectional issues, trying to make this kind of work more visible while helping the organization move into new territory. Through my writing, I try to link issues in ways that I hope inspire both action and insight. Last year I wrote a *Huffington Post* piece on the raids that were being conducted among Central American refugees, even those who had a valid political asylum claim. I tried to link the raids to what happened in the '60s with

the LGBT community in New York before the Stonewall riots. Police were raiding places where LGBT people were trying to express themselves and to just be. I wanted to relate the two things together so that the gay community understands why we all have to say something when things like this happen, and why we must protest and stand together on these issues.

My biggest lesson in doing this work is that cross-organizational, cross-issue collaboration has to be very intentional. You can't assume that other people will see the connections that you do. And you have to be both very loud and very thoughtful about how to help one community see its connections to another. Yet the more I do this work, the more strongly I believe that this is the only way to move movements forward.



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ABDI SOLTANI

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

STRENGTH AND CHANGE

BY ABDI SOLTANI



Bringing a legacy social justice organization into the future comes with a core tension: what to keep and what to change?

I became executive director of the ACLU of Northern California in 2009, during its 75th anniversary. The organization was founded back when the Great Depression still gripped the nation. It had a huge history, a very strong infrastructure, and a lot of excellence. I knew that I wanted to lead the organization in a way that honored this past. But I also had a mandate to move it forward into the future and set the stage for the critical years and decades of social justice work that lie ahead.

Figuring out how to balance these two impulses is not easy. But respecting my organization's past while also make bold decisions to help steward its future has been a central theme of my leadership and my daily work since day one. At every turn, I have needed to ask: What features and approaches of the organization are so tied to its historical identity that they should not change? And what does need to change in order for the ACLU of Northern California to have even greater reach and impact?

The Levi Strauss Foundation's Pioneers in Justice initiative launched soon after my executive directorship commenced. This was great



timing. The program provided a unique kind of space and support that enabled me to work through these complex organizational and leadership questions thoughtfully, both on my own and in conversation with the other social justice leaders—all of them wrestling with similar issues—who were part of our extraordinary cohort.

Looking closely at my organization, some of what *didn't* need changing stood out immediately: our strong fundraising program with its broad base of individual donors; our talented lawyers who do tremendous policy work and litigation; our involvement in a host of critical civil rights issues. I knew that I needed to let these things fundamentally be as they were. But there were other traditional organizational structures and practices that, from my observation, were impeding our progress. In order to bring the ACLU of Northern California into a more modern era of advocacy, these needed to change dramatically.

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FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The ACLU runs on an affiliate model, operating a network of offices across the country. In California we have three affiliates—the ACLU of Northern California, the ACLU of Southern California, and the ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties. Each was founded differently and separately. Although we've had a jointly funded legislative office since the 1960s, beyond that the coordination had been ad hoc and occasional. There was no consistent strategic collaboration. As a result, the vast majority of what flowed and emanated from the three entities was often in a state of disconnect or even dissonance. Our separateness also made it difficult for our peers and partners to collaborate with us on a statewide basis, and we were not positioned or wired to have the work coming out of each affiliate spread statewide.

I felt strongly that we needed California's affiliates to work together in more coordinated ways, and that our individual and collective impact could be far stronger with greater alignment. With funding from the Levi Strauss Foundation, we were able to prioritize bringing about this shift in how we worked. We started at the executive leadership level. While the leaders of each affiliate agreed with the need for strategic alignment, it was also critical for us to align at the level of vision and values, and build the trust and relationships through which our work could flow. Rare as any slights or misunderstandings were among us, they still occupied a large place in people's memories. So it was important to ask: "What are the experiences or the injuries that we're carrying into this new conversation?" Only after these were voiced and addressed could we begin creating alignment at the leadership level.



That foundation then enabled our functional teams and our issue teams to begin collaborating as well.

Creating more statewide alliance has positioned us to be much more effective in advancing civil rights in the State of California. Leaders of each affiliate now actively look for opportunities to collaborate. We all realize how critical it was to figure out where in our design and in our structure we were limiting our impact, and then step out of that to envision how we could set ourselves up differently. Leaders of organizations that are not part of a formal national infrastructure might have to think more creatively about how to foster new forms of collaboration, perhaps by forming partnerships across sectors (like law and organizing) or across geographies. But while these opportunities may be less obvious, they are certainly there—and they have the potential to be extremely powerful.

INVITING DIVERSITY

One of the benefits of being a legacy organization is our longstanding constituents. Many supporters have been with us for decades. Some are Baby Boomers who came of age in the civil rights movement. We also have still-active supporters from the World War II generation, who were adults during the McCarthy era of the House Un-American Activities Committee. These two generations today span in age from 60 years old to over 90, and we absolutely depend on their wisdom and activism. But it is also true that our supporters in these age groups tend to be white.

There has been a persistent desire over the years to introduce more age and racial diversity into the ACLU of Northern California's membership. When I became executive director, I took this on as a priority—and it meant changing some of the fundamentals about how our membership system worked.



MAKING BOLD CHANGES TO THE WAY A LEGACY ORGANIZATION OPERATES—EVEN IF THEY ARE DIFFICULT—CAN HAVE BOTH AN IMMEDIATE AND LASTING IMPACT ON ITS ABILITY TO ENGAGE DIVERSE CITIZENS IN CRITICAL WORK.

Traditionally, ACLU affiliates have had their own local chapters. This system is rather formal and often serves to reinforce the skew toward older, white participation. Over the years, there have been several efforts to support the chapters in becoming more diverse. But we had to do a lot more work to change the chapters before they could become intergenerational or multiracial. We began by inviting more people to engage with our work. Specifically, we built what we called “parallel paths” through which young people and people of color could participate directly in the work of the ACLU through campaigns and issues, but without a formal chapter affiliation. We also began offering workshops and training on issues like immigrant rights and criminal justice reform to college students and community leaders. These programs operated side-by-side but separately from our chapter structure.

Meanwhile, we set out on the longer process of changing our chapters. The ACLU of Northern California has 18 chapters, spanning from Humboldt County in the north all the way down to the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley. In trying to manage 18 different schedules, timelines, and processes, there was no way for our staff to work with the chapters in a coherent way—and it wasn’t leading to good outcomes. Each of our chapters elected its own board members on its own and at different times of the year—so we synchronized the time at which chapter board members are being recruited, as well as the process through which they’re nominated, despite some strong objections. Based on that change alone, the number of young adults and people of color joining our chapter boards increased substantially. We have also been able to better support our chapters in getting involved in local advocacy campaigns. For example, our chapter in Santa Clara County partnered with ACLU attorneys and community groups to pass the nation’s first ordinance requiring public hearings

and a public vote before local government can adopt new surveillance technologies.

Many other ACLU affiliates have closed down their chapter programs and are instead working with community members through coalitions. But we wanted to maintain that kind of local civic engagement as part of the organization, so we built a new model that could foster an intergenerational, multiracial base of leaders who can be effective at advocacy in their communities. These efforts are a work in progress, but the early lesson is this: making bold changes to the way a legacy organization operates—even if they are difficult—can have both an immediate and lasting impact on its ability to engage diverse citizens in critical work.

HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA AND NETWORKS

When I became executive director, the ACLU of Northern California had not yet fully entered the world of social media. I remember coming across a film in our archives that was made by us in the 1950s to counter a propaganda film about the Red Scare and “rooting out” communists. The film got a lot of attention at a time when the House Un-American Activities Committee was still threatening people’s rights. Obviously, my predecessors didn’t have YouTube at their disposal. But they were nonetheless creating and distributing content with great impact. Our chapter leaders would hold screenings of films like the one I mentioned, as well as monitor the local news, physically cutting out and mailing articles to San Francisco for legal action.

But social media has totally transformed the way that people communicate and organize, and bringing these tools to our organization seemed another

critical change that needed to be made—especially in our efforts to increase our reach and our presence. For example, we have long wanted Latinos in California and beyond to be aware of our work and to partner on issues that are of great concern to both the community and the ACLU. One of the most important social media strategies we launched was to create a Spanish-language website and a Spanish-language Facebook presence, in collaboration with the other ACLUs in California. While the website has unfortunately not generated a lot of traffic, our Spanish-language Facebook page has more followers than any other ACLU chapter page in the country.

We also launched a Mobile Justice App, through which people can record interactions with the police in their community. The app automatically uploads photos and videos to an ACLU server, so if a phone is destroyed or confiscated by the police, the data is still preserved. The New York ACLU developed the first one for New York State, where they’ve dealt with the issue of stop-and-frisk for many years. But our Southern California affiliate did a great job of improving it, building it out, and then leading the outreach and networking in California. Well over

100,000 people have downloaded the app, which comes with other “Know Your Rights” information and has become an amazing tool for building more community connections.

Yet the move toward social media has also come with real challenges. Social media is a back and forth. It’s not just you sharing and disseminating but also listening and interacting. The ACLU brand has both strong supporters and strong detractors, and on social media we are a magnet for people with very strong criticisms of some of the things we do. It makes the dialogue a little less pleasant for some of the people we want to be in conversation with. We are also a legal organization, and the legal accuracy that our statements require is sometimes hard to achieve or guarantee when communication is happening in real time. Finding that balancing point, and in a timely manner, is another work in progress.

We also tested social media projects that were absolute duds, and it wasn’t for lack of planning. But I think all of us Pioneers have learned that success is very rarely measured by whether or not a social media campaign goes viral. For any of us trying to lead these innovations for and within our organizations, we need to have measured expectations, do the best we can, and aim for steady progress. When we launched our Spanish language website and Facebook page, we did so with a coast-to-coast bus tour tied to a Supreme Court hearing in a major immigrants’ rights case. At the end of the tour, we had 1,000 Facebook likes on our Spanish language page. That’s about one “like” for every three miles traveled! But we stuck with it, adjusted strategies, invested modestly in advertising, and saw steady growth from there.

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AND INTERACTING.**

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CONCLUSION

Among the many lessons I have learned through this work is that you can only act on so many variables at one time. Pacing this kind of change is as important as the change itself. Unless your organization is in need of a top-to-bottom renovation, you can create a great deal of instability, stress, confusion, and wasted energy if you throw everything open at once. Deciding what to address and in what order ties back to that critical first question: What needs to change, and what doesn't? Identify where to put energy into maintaining the excellence you have already and where to put energy into creating change. And in the latter category, determine how radically and quickly you want to deploy it.

I was fortunate that the Pioneers in Justice initiative gave me the space to consider these questions, colleagues with whom to think them through, and

exposure to tools and experts for launching new change strategies and experiments. Not every social justice leader will have the benefit of the kind of formal program that we had, in terms of the cohort, the learning, and the funding. But all of us who lead social justice organizations can take stock of what's in great shape and should be sustained, and what needs to change and how to do it. Even without a program like Pioneers, I really take away the key point of forming a cohort of peers, creating a space for learning, and prioritizing resources for making whatever changes are needed to help our organizations become more effective.



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**THE QUESTION THAT GUIDES MY WORK
EVERYDAY IS SIMPLY THIS: WHAT
CONTRIBUTION CAN I MAKE AND
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AND THE WORK FORWARD?**

KIMBERLY THOMAS RAPP

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

TRUE MOVEMENT LEADERSHIP

BY KIMBERLY THOMAS RAPP



Being a “movement” leader means working out front, in the background, and from the middle—and knowing when each is called for.

“Kimberly, what is your voice? *Where* is your voice?” During my years in the Levi Strauss Foundation’s Pioneers in Justice program, I asked myself these questions countless times. For me, perhaps the biggest takeaway from the incredible time we spent as Pioneers was the importance of constantly looking at and evaluating our approaches to leadership in our movements and in our work. Embracing this process of continuous reflection has had a deep impact on my ability to recognize and move fully into my own authentic leadership. It has given me the courage to use my voice and *raise* my voice in ways that are shaped and informed by my own instincts rather than outside expectations.

As Pioneers, we spent a lot of time learning how to tell our own stories, how to weave those stories into our public leadership, and how to serve as the face and voice of our organization in ways that ring both true and inspiring. Believe me, this work has proved invaluable to my ability to stand up and stand out when I need to do so. But it is the honing of a different voice—my *internal* voice, the voice telling me how to read

a situation and determine what is needed of me as a leader in that moment—that has become the leadership skill I value most.

In recent years, that internal voice has crystalized an important message for me: now more than ever, social justice work requires true *movement* leadership. By movement I mean the ability of leaders to shift from being the voice of their organization to working in the background or to leading from the middle. I mean the ability to step back and elevate others' voices when that is what the situation requires and to slip nimbly into and out of the many roles that leaders of today's nonprofit organizations must inhabit. I also mean the ability to move our organizations from one way of working to another, and to navigate all of the complexity that comes with that kind of fundamental shift.

LEADING IN AND THROUGH CHANGE

When I started at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, the organization was contracting and struggling to survive in a relatively competitive marketplace for nonprofit legal service providers. The previous executive director had been gone for some time. The managing attorney had left and the legal program director was leaving. External supporters were losing faith and financial support was trailing off, largely because of a dissonance between what the Lawyers' Committee had been and what cutting-edge civil rights issues were requiring it to become. Nobody was effectively managing that transition or standing in the gap to hold both things constant.

In those early days, my first instinct was to move *forward*. The moment required a direct leader

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I FELT AS IF THE ORGANIZATION WAS RESTING ON MY SHOULDERS, AND THAT THE LIGHTS WOULD LITERALLY BE ON OR OFF BASED ON WHAT I DID AND HOW I LED.

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with a calm, clear voice. It did not feel like an opportunity for collective leadership—even though, under other circumstances, deeply engaging staff in collaboratively developing a vision for the organization's future would have been my inclination. Time was of the essence. I felt as if the organization was resting on my shoulders, and that the lights would literally be on or off based on what I did and how I led.

At that time we were just over a \$1 million organization that had a little over \$18 million worth of demand for *pro bono* legal services work, and we could only do that work (then as well as now) because of the tremendous network of lawyers in private firms that supported us. With them, too, I needed to move forward—to be both the voice of the organization they already knew and, equally, the voice of the organization into which we had to evolve. I needed them to trust in my leadership and know that the organization was unwavering in its commitment to the law as a tool for justice. In turn, I had to trust my

own ability to reengage these critical players, re-inspire their commitment, and bring them along with us through the changes that were coming.

Once we were in a more stable place, the next step was to begin leading the organization through—and from—the “messy middle.” Internally, we needed to think both carefully and strategically about how to stay true to what the Lawyers’ Committee had traditionally done while also moving boldly forward into new areas. And the “we” here was critical. This needed to be a collective effort, and taking time to engage staff at this juncture was imperative. Staff were invited and encouraged to deliberate on our shared future and claim a voice in how we would grow and develop; new staff who could really think forward were brought onto the team; and open dialogue and strategy sessions became standard practices. This was not a shift I could or should bring about on my own. It was only by leading from the middle that both the answers and the organizational commitment that we needed could emerge.

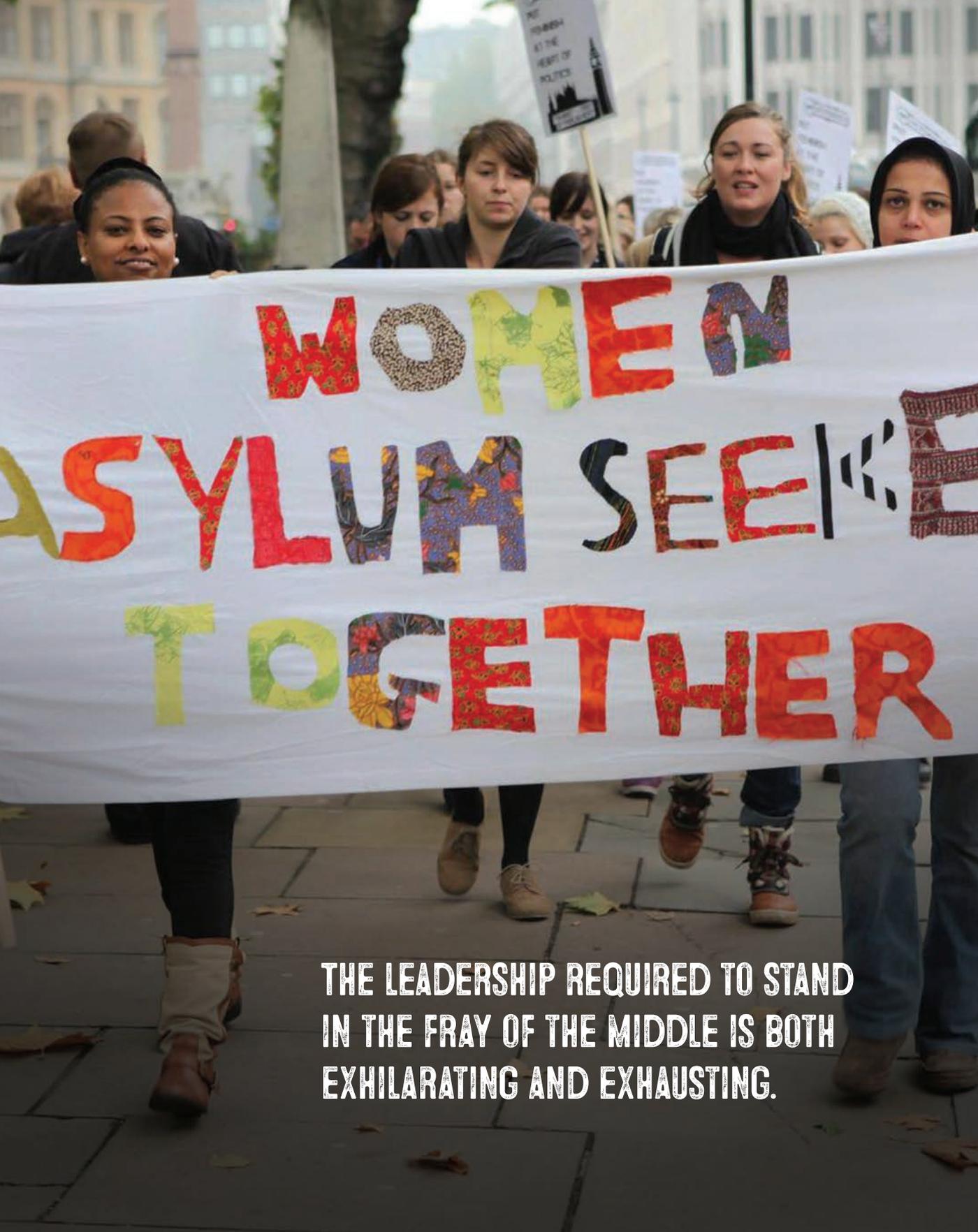
Moving an organization through this kind of change was not easy. The Lawyers’ Committee has a deep history of providing indispensable legal services in several core areas. Our Asylum Program, for example, is decades old, and the need to help secure safety for those fleeing unimaginable conditions remains ongoing and constant. So it felt vital not just to retain but to reinvest in this and other legacy program services. However, it was equally important that we expand our scope and reach—and urgently so. Specifically, it felt impossible, in today’s world, for a civil rights organization not to be engaged in some facet of criminal justice reform. While our work has traditionally focused on the civil side of economic, racial, and immigrant justice, one of the greatest emerging needs for civil rights engagement is

on the criminal justice front. The mass incarceration and overpolicing of communities of color infringes heavily on civil rights, and changing things on the criminal side, such as prison conditions or sentencing, is hardly enough to fully reform the system and repair the damage reverberating through communities on the ground.

The tension between maintaining our traditional work while also developing and building out this new focus was tricky to navigate in part because not everyone had the same reaction to our expanded mission. Most of our staff favored the new over the old; they eagerly moved into more cutting-edge criminal justice work. With them, my role was to nurture this enthusiasm while also keeping them grounded in our larger body of work. I needed them to forge ahead while staying highly engaged in our core programs, as the work we’d been doing for decades was just as important as our new criminal justice efforts. “Until we have true equality in our communities,” I told them, “somebody has to man the fort on very basic civil rights protections—and it’s us.”

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WOMEN
ASYLUM SEEKERS
TOGETHER

**THE LEADERSHIP REQUIRED TO STAND
IN THE FRAY OF THE MIDDLE IS BOTH
EXHILARATING AND EXHAUSTING.**

Meanwhile, many of the lawyers in our network felt more cautious, and even confused, about our expanded focus. Criminal justice work was not something that was familiar to our loyal and longstanding base. At the time, some of civil lawyers in our network said, “Criminal law is not what we do. It’s not what we’re about. Why is the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights involved in criminal justice reform?” There was discomfort because it was different. Naturally, I was concerned that turning our attention too fast or too much could begin to impact their support, exclude our broader base, and diminish appreciation for the tremendous community need that was already being met by our services. It took some work and strategy to help our partners believe that as civil lawyers, we cannot bury our heads taking a “them” not us approach. With our network of lawyers, my role was to uplift and inform, push back and recast—and help them more comfortably move forward with us.

The leadership required to stand in the fray of the middle is both exhilarating and exhausting. Working to meet community needs and to deliver on the

promise of justice for all is energizing regardless of the mountain height ahead. Yet it is unrealistic to think such an effort is tireless or without loss. The tension was palpable, with a fair amount of backlash on every side, and we did not persevere through that growth stage without losing some staff and partners along the way. But the Lawyers’ Committee is in a much stronger position today. Our budget has doubled to more than \$2 million, and we are doing almost \$22 million in *pro bono* legal services with a motivated and dedicated network of supporters.

BEING ONE OF MANY

Who leads an organization and when matters, especially in our field. Most legacy social justice organizations have had leaders who served as their face and voice for decades. There are even movements underway right now where the entire effort revolves around a single individual. But every step of the Pioneers experience—as we looked at leadership, at voice, and at new ways to collaborate and communicate—helped crystalize for me that I don’t need to fit that traditional leadership model. Despite ample pressure, I have not been a big external public spokesperson, standing in front of news cameras and calling press conferences. It is not that I cannot do it. In fact, I have done my share of such events during my tenure at the Lawyers’ Committee. But I believe it is not always what’s called for to steward the movement or the work.

I’ve come to appreciate that leadership “out front” is not the only—or often even the best—way for me to serve. While others may look to hear from me, I humbly believe that I am not the only person who can talk on behalf of my organization or the movements of which we are a vital part. In my case, there are times when taking that spotlight feels like it could mute the

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voices of our clients or our staff and diminish their ability to shine a light of their own. I firmly believe that the future of this work requires multiple faces and voices moving the civil rights agenda forward—and that it is as much a leadership necessity to be able to elevate and allow space for others to lead and to develop as advocates in their own way as it is for me to be out front as a mouthpiece.

Engaging in movement leadership has also meant that my organization does not always need to be the face of the justice work that we do. Don't get me wrong, it is extremely important to be recognized as a leader, especially within partnerships and collaborations. Leadership fuels the organizational brand and sustains operations. Still, it is important to recognize that organizational strength can be leveraged as a

complement in the movement just as it leans forward acting as a catalyst for change. For example, Lawyers' Committee works in collaboration with myriad community-based organizations that are already serving a population and meeting direct needs yet lack the capacity or the expertise to meet the legal needs of their client base. A new dimension of our work has been to work as counsel within these organizations, which enables us to serve a much broader community of people who are indigent, low-income, or generally marginalized and lacking access to legal services. In some ways, this is a more efficient and more effective way to serve some clients and deliver on our mission—and it means working alongside in collaboration, not working out front on our own.

Again, I want to be clear that stepping back or to the side does not mean

losing your voice—as a leader or as an organization. Looking back, I can see that my voice has been there and has been constant all along. But it has moved along with me, constantly seeking the right volume and literally the right standpoint according to what each moment requires. The dexterity and nimbleness of my approach to leadership has been a necessity for me in this role. Which means that as long as the work is moving forward for the organization and for the communities that we serve, it's okay that not everybody in the world knows my name.

YOU CAN'T JUST STAND WHERE YOU ARE

Leadership *is* movement. And fueling that movement is an acknowledgment that we who lead are stewards of our organizations and of the movement for social justice for the duration of time we are fortunate to serve. I don't own my organization. I don't own this movement. The question that guides my work everyday is simply this: what contribution can I make and should I make at this moment in time to carry the organization and the work forward? That answer can and does change by the year, by the week, and even by the hour. As a leader, you have to move where that answer takes you—forward, backward, or to the side.

I think that circumstances are always calling on us to lead through different manifestations of leadership. To me, the beauty and challenge of leadership is recognizing what moment you are in and rising to that occasion. Truth be told, I am still figuring this out as the pieces are constantly moving in the context of my work, but I know that this sort of sensemaking is a required skill of 21st century leaders along with having the courage to do what needs to be done at every turn. That, to me, is true movement leadership.



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VINCENT PAN

CHINESE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

COMMUNITIES OF CONSCIENCE

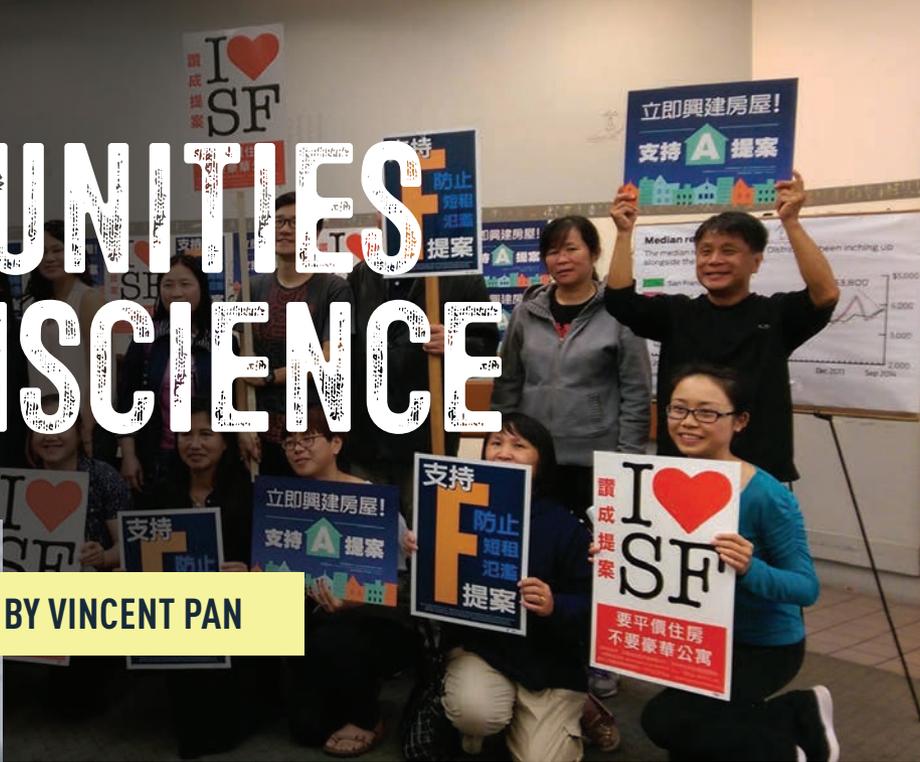
BY VINCENT PAN



Building sustainable movements involves more than just encouraging people to swarm in and out of protests.

As the world grows more interconnected and our societal challenges become more urgent and intense, philanthropy and the nonprofit sector face serious questions about how to operate and organize in ways that bring about real change. What does a robust ecosystem of individuals and institutions effectively “winning” social, economic, and environmental justice look like? How do we nurture those components parts in need of restoration to ensure sustainability for all? And how will new technologies continue to change the roles and responsibilities that we collectively share and distribute, as well as the networked nature of the ecosystem itself?

As we work to resist the many explicit and extreme dangers facing our world right now, it seems clear that we must find ways to think and act more collectively. The threats facing one vulnerable person are wholly connected to the threats facing every other vulnerable person, whether those threats target Muslims, immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, working class families, or women. Similarly, it would be a mistake to approach the different policy areas in which these threats are manifesting—such as education, health, the economy, the environment,



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BUT WE CAN CHANGE THAT.

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and global peace—without acknowledging the ways in which our various organizational strategies can work both in support of and against one another.

Renegotiating our responsibilities to one another makes sense for another reason. Emergent technologies continue to upend how we work as well as the nature and tempo of public discourse. Understanding how to harness these technologies and changes for good is both critical and within our grasp. Indeed, we are missing opportunities to support and better engage one another all the time. But we can change that.

BECOMING A PIONEER

When the Levi Strauss Foundation called in 2009, I remember being surprised. Very rarely do nonprofits receive unsolicited calls from foundations that do not fund them. It is almost always the other way around.

When I met with executive director Daniel Lee and then program director Merle Lawrence, they told me about recent conversations they’d had with a few of my peers. Like me, these peers were relatively new executive directors of advocacy organizations in San Francisco. Like Chinese for Affirmative Action, their organizations had outstanding records of important civil rights litigation and legislation but also wanted to modernize themselves and engage new constituents.

When the Pioneers in Justice cohort was announced, I learned that I knew or had worked with every leader who had been selected. All of them were amazing people I respected, liked, and admired. All were leading organizations that saw one another as close allies.

At the time, social media was already beginning to revolutionize how people communicate. But this was before the Arab Spring, before Occupy Wall Street, and before Black Lives Matter—and some were dismissing social media as a fad for the young. The Levi Strauss Foundation—and the Pioneers—saw it as a way to push social change forward. The printing press, broadcast radio, and cable television had fundamentally disrupted who in society got seen and heard, and those disruptions in turn fundamentally changed the political structures of society. Why wouldn’t activists want to explore new tools for engaging, educating, and mobilizing others?

The Pioneers initiative also recognized that technology does not exist in a vacuum. In previous decades, racism, sexism, and xenophobia had

smoothly spread across technology platforms—from talk radio to cable news and then to the internet. There was no reason to believe that social media would be insulated. The Tea Party and Breitbart News already had their footholds.

When Pioneers launched in 2010, Barack Obama’s historic election was still fresh. One wanted to believe that demography was destiny, that left-leaning netroots and grassroots activism had finally managed to converge, and that DIY media had given the coming American majority—comprising communities of color—the ability to create the cultural language and power we needed to succeed. A core objective of the Pioneers program was to help us navigate our organizations into this shifting technology and political landscape, even as we led broader efforts to update our organizations.

EMBRACING ADVOCACY 2.0

What is Twitter? Facebook? YouTube? It sounds ridiculous now, but that is how our Pioneer learning began. There were also audits of our organizations’ software and hardware, purchases of new equipment, a host of workshops, facilitated dialogues with experts, and social media pilot projects. We learned so much—and everything I learned, I brought back to my work at CAA. We started telling our organization’s story through video, and experimented with Chinese language web content. We looked hard at how our online advocacy efforts were or were not working and how they might bring even more impact. I eventually agreed to use personal social media to advance our work, and before long I was meeting new allies who said they were already familiar with me from my Facebook posts and email blasts.

As the Pioneers program proceeded, CAA was also making great strides with a newly developed strategic direction. On one front, we were committed to engaging Chinese Americans and advancing multiracial democracy in local, visible advocacy campaigns: helping build a permanent City College of San Francisco campus in Chinatown, mandating more local hiring on publicly funded construction projects, winning additional resources for language access, advocating for culturally competent US Census outreach, piloting non-criminalization approaches to public safety, and passing new local and state legislation to support legal services for all immigrants.

On another front, we had also committed to a new organizational aspiration: building a “home” for progressive Asian American social justice efforts. In essence, we wanted to get more support flowing to under-resourced parts of our progressive Asian American community. CAA had been doing this informally for years, but now we wanted to formalize the practice with an eye toward creating community and being of service to younger activists. The Pioneers initiative proved critical in helping us develop this aspiration into a strategy.

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I SUPPORT CAA B/C:
CAA cares about
the community
#GIVINGTUESDAY

THE FOUNDING OF AACRE

The idea that intrigued me most was the potential to use new technology to support new forms of collaboration that affirmed and facilitated cooperative work. Was it possible to develop something more sustainable than simply encouraging masses of individuals to swarm in and out of protests? What could deepen connections that endured after campaign-driven coalitions had ended? Existing formations would still be central to our efforts, but there seemed to be a need for a new arrangement that could nurture and network what I began to think of as “communities of conscience” over the long run.

The limits of single-issue and single-identity organizing had already been articulated by intersectional feminism: in order to be effective, movements had to address how social identities and systems of oppression overlap. But there were few models for what a networked structure that embraced this theory of change could look like. Our attempt to do so, with the support of the Pioneers initiative, was Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE).

This new structure comprised nine groups: API Equality – Northern California, Asian Prisoner Support Committee, APEX Express, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Hmong Innovating Politics, Hyphen magazine, Network on Religion and Justice, and Visibility Project. Through AACRE, all of these groups would share financial, administrative, technology, and facility infrastructure, giving them more opportunities to explore how tangible resources can be leveraged and where cooperation makes more sense than competition. Resources they previously devoted to infrastructure pre-AACRE were now freed up to focus on their unique missions and strategies—from media production and policy advocacy to art activism and direct organizing. And the range of

issue areas these organizations covered—including immigrant rights, LGBTQ inclusion, combatting anti-Muslim hate, and reversing mass incarceration—now had greater opportunity to intersect.

The promise of the AACRE network had to be more than a common infrastructure, though. Across these organizations, we set out to inspire an ongoing commitment to practicing a set of values that reflected what we collectively believed was required to create a more just and equitable world. Because CAA was the fiscal sponsor and a major catalyst for the network, many of our own deeply embedded values were built into the DNA of the AACRE network: inclusion, equity, compassion, community engagement, reciprocal learning, embracing risk, and principled leadership. But I thought AACRE could go even further, creating a space to examine how values could be embodied as practices that are critical to a healthy social justice ecosystem, or at least a microcosm of one: the importance of developing transformational rather than transactional relationships; the need to assert identity and its associated power as a means to an ethical end and not as the end itself; and the application of interdependence as intersectionality in action.



TOWARD A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Though still a work in progress, the AACRE network provides an opportunity to explore whether we can be more intentional about the transformations we wish to see and whether networks can deepen or expedite these transformations. Over the first few years, AACRE organizations documented a plethora of collaborations—big and small, planned and unplanned. In 2015, Tracy Nguyen, an organizer with API Equality – Northern California, wrote about one of these experiences:

“This past winter, API Equality – Northern California was invited by Asian Prisoner Support Committee to co-facilitate an LGBTQ workshop for ROOTS (a program for incarcerated men at San Quentin State Prison). I left our workshop feeling very emotional because I came out to a room full of predominantly straight men that I didn’t know, and I was received with the greatest love and acceptance. To this day, I don’t think I’ll ever experience anything so deeply grounding in the outside world.

In the workshop, I asked them to share with a partner what it feels like to hide a part of their identity or who they are. I asked them to talk about why they hide. Some of them came out to each other about their crimes while others talked about hiding from their families. After they shared, I asked them to describe the emotions that came up:

‘Liberating.’

‘Acceptance.’

‘It was hard.’

‘Empowered because they came to terms with their reality.’

‘Fear of rejection.’

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”

‘Avoided the question.’

‘You have to find the right words.’

‘It was easy because we knew each other.’

‘If it’s something you’re not proud of, it’s hard to share.’

‘There are no words to describe how I feel.’

After jotting their words on the board, I told them these are the exact same feelings I grapple with as a queer Vietnamese woman. It was how I felt about my own coming-out process. With the moment of silence that followed, we were instantly bonded by the experience of feeling ostracized by our own families, communities, and society. It was a moment of genuine empathy across completely different lived experiences.”

Throughout the network and in the collaborative work it fosters, common themes and issues are continuously woven together to create new

narratives. Stories of rejection become stories of acceptance. Stories of silence become stories of visibility. Stories of struggle become stories of resilience.

In its earliest phase, AACRE also invested significant time and energy to bring some of these stories to light via social media, and we maintained that footprint for a period of time. What social media was best at, we learned, was reaching larger numbers of people across boundaries of every sort. Social media could help us connect with and even give voice to those who were isolated and marginalized, and this aligned with the central offering of the two AACRE groups working in media and journalism—Hyphen, an online magazine, and APEX Express, a broadcast radio program. And yet the limits of social media—its lack of depth and shortage of sensitivity—also revealed what work needs to be prioritized offline and in the real world.

In this modern era, the challenges of communication and engagement—set against a backdrop of limited time and resources and false facts—are painfully clear to social justice advocates. As it becomes more critical to deepen and expand meaningful connections, technology can pull us in the opposite direction. But if we understand social media as connective tissue, we can recognize it is meaningless

on its own and only as good or bad as what it is weaving together. It is my view that there are emergent communities of conscience, people working to broaden the conception of the beloved community, whose power is only beginning to be harnessed.

Social justice practitioners are less exceptional than we need to believe. Rather, they exemplify how with thoughtfulness and patience we can attend to the type of social justice ecosystem needed to stop the rise of neo-fascism in today's social media environment. In a world where the boundaries between institutions and individuals continue to blur, all foundations, nonprofits, and public-minded organizations must recognize that they are part of this ecosystem, too. Technology need not be just a force multiplier to amplify already loud voices. It can be a window to explore new possibilities for what it means to be an ally, to identify what resources we already possess that can be shared, and ultimately to weigh new obligations in a hyper-networked society.



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HYEON-JU RHO

ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE

LEADING FROM THE INSIDE



BY HYEON-JU RHO

How do we spark and fuel true movements? First and foremost, by living courageous and authentic inner lives.

From December 2011 to May 2014, I was executive director and then co-director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus (ALC). Going in, it felt like the job I'd been preparing for my whole life. I wanted to serve, and at a deeper level I was yearning for belonging and purpose.

I found what I was looking for, but not in the way I expected.

I thought what would be needed from me was dedication and hard work. In the end what it took was to fall apart, so that I could find the courage and the freedom to be honest with myself. What I found on the other side was the home I'd been searching for—not in an external identity, but in myself. And from that home has come a deep sense of purpose, grounded not in outside expectations but in internal integrity.

This is the story of that journey and its gifts. These gifts are what I would wish for anyone walking in the fire of leadership right now.



THE SETUP

Leadership only magnifies what we bring with us. In my case, I'd spent much of my life learning how to be anyone but myself.

The lessons started early. My family immigrated to the United States right before I entered first grade, to a southern city with few other Asians or immigrants. I still remember that raw feeling of being unguarded, as all children are, and knowing that whatever I was, it wasn't going to bring me the things I longed for: acceptance, friendship, the warm security of knowing I was OK. Children adapt quickly, and I absorbed the tools I needed to be normal, to protect myself from ridicule, and to get along. These included a new language, new cultural references and different ways of speaking and holding myself.

No one ever asked me the question, "Who are you?" And certainly I never thought to ask this question of myself. The frame I grew up with was about survival: "I am someone who works hard in order to succeed, and success will bring me and my family security."

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I also accepted without question that the rules for whether and how I would succeed were all external to me. Power was outside—in mainstream culture, in school and other institutions and in other people.

I would love to say that exposure to racial equality and social justice ideas in college freed me of all of this. It did, on one level. It gave me a positive alternative to the narrative of racial inferiority I'd grown up with, and gave me permission to replace shame with righteous anger.

It didn't, however, fundamentally change my sense of truth and validation as something outside myself. The progressive social justice communities I was a part of in college had their own rules and norms, and I wanted as much as ever to belong. I never felt secure enough to question, "What in all of this is true for me? What does it sound like in my own voice?" In other words, I replaced one external narrative with another, albeit more empowering, one.

And I could convince myself I'd found what I should aspire to because it was noble. The Quaker leader Parker Palmer calls this "a life spent imitating heroes instead of listening to [your] own heart." My life imitating heroes took me to public interest law and to leadership positions in legal advocacy nonprofits. Engaging the world through law never resonated with me, and neither did policy advocacy. I experienced these spheres as sterile, foreign, and distant.

What had always moved me was deep connection at an individual level, and the mystery of the human experience. And yet, I soldiered on, convinced that even if it felt like I was wearing borrowed clothing, I just needed to try to make myself fit them.

FALLING APART

If someone had constructed a situation to bring all of this tumbling down, they couldn't have created a better scenario than the executive director position I walked into.

My sense of worthiness depended on other people's validation—the one thing the job was designed not to provide. ALC had a reputation for being tough on executive directors. Its culture included a skepticism of authority that contributed to fearless advocacy outside the organization, and an uneasy relationship with positions of power within ALC. Layered on top of this was a deep internal conflict that defined my tenure. The Board had approved an organizational change that many staff viewed as compromising the group's core identity. In the months before I started, staff mobilized to oppose it. I thought we could find common ground; it never happened. The constant conflict, unhappiness and disapproval would have been hard on anyone. For me, it was devastating.

As a leader, I'd always relied on a kind of disembodied skillfulness to get through things—shut down the emotions and push through what needs to be done. It was enough to make me a good administrator, but ALC needed more than that. As it navigated identity change and internal conflicts, it needed someone who could convene honest and courageous conversations, and create space for genuine connection and healing. It needed a leader who could lead at the level of the heart. I felt the need for this but was too disconnected from my own heart to know how to respond.

My participation in the Levi Strauss Foundation's Pioneers in Justice initiative made it impossible to ignore that disconnection. It forced me to confront

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the gap between what I knew how to give and what leadership was calling me to give. It was a space that called for our own voice and our own vision, a space where it was impossible to hide behind someone else's voice. And yet, I did. It wasn't that I didn't hear the call to authenticity, or that it didn't resonate with me. It was more that I'd never chosen my inner voice over external expectations. More than that, I suppressed my voice when they conflicted. It seemed impossible to explore, in a real way, what that would look like in a context where the stakes felt so high.

All of this felt like failure, which my fears told me made me unworthy of respect and ultimately of love. And this kept me running and striving as if something existential, my very survival, was at stake.

FINDING MY PATH

In 2014 my husband took a job that required us to move to a new city. As painful as my leadership role was, it was hard to leave. Looking back, I can see I was still chasing that external validation that would have enabled me to feel that I had done a good job, that I was OK.



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ADVANCING
JUSTICE

When I let the striving go, I was just exhausted. Mostly, I wanted to hide. But I finally felt bad enough that I knew something fundamental had to change. For the first time in my life, I gave myself permission to just be, without expectations; to think and feel freely; and to take risks in order to find my own truth.

I'd been so scared of walking into the unknown and letting go of the external anchors of my identity—a respected job, professional achievements, and other people's approval. My time at ALC revealed these to be false refuges.

The more I explored what needed to change, the more I realized it was simply this: to live courageously and with integrity by being authentically and fearlessly myself. I had no idea what this would mean in practical terms and took things as they came. I accepted that I didn't enjoy the law and never had, so I left it. I read and listened to anything that made me feel engaged and alive. In conversations with people, I stopped trying to be polished, neatly packaged, or anything else that I wasn't. I started writing for myself again as a way to get acquainted with my own voice. I brushed the dust off of the dreams I'd once had: to be a Jesuit Priest (yes, a priest), a teacher of literature, a therapist, or a coach.

This discovery process was joyful at times, but mostly it was deeply uncomfortable. It's hard to deviate from old patterns. It's also hard to invest in ourselves, especially for those of us who've grown up learning to focus on other people's needs. And it's hard to claim space for inward exploration, especially in our culture of doing and achievement.

But as Joseph Campbell has said, when we live from our hearts, "the universe will open doors where there were only walls." In the midst of this exploring, an organization I'd worked with earlier in my career called out of the blue and asked if I would coach a new leader. This enabled me to try on a new identity.



It wasn't long afterward that I signed up for a coach training program.

At the training, I experienced something I'd given up on in my professional life. Simply put, I made sense. The things I'd always been drawn to but had suppressed in my prior work—intuition and emotion as forms of knowing, vulnerability as an expression of radical love, embracing the mystery of the human experience, focusing on people rather than policies or institutions—all had a place here. Shortly thereafter I started my own coaching practice, supporting people to live and lead from inner authenticity and integrity.

The profession I've chosen is less important than the realization that it's possible to be at home in our lives and in our work. These days I'm experiencing the pleasures of working from authentic self. I used to depend on imitating others, following outside formulas that left me exhausted. Now my contribution is generated from within and feels flexible and generative. I used to think I wasn't creative. Now I find inspiration and surprise in the creative process. The ideas come when they are needed. And there is the peace of knowing I am contributing the best of what I have to give.

CHOOSING LOVE OVER FEAR

Living from authentic self has opened the door to something else that was missing from my leadership experience—love.

The thing that fueled me instead was fear. When I look back on the moments that make me wince, fear is what they all have in common: shying away from hard decisions and conversations, instilling a feeling among staff that their work was never good enough, acting out of competition rather than solidarity and generosity. It's painful even now to write these things down.

The opposite of fear, I'm learning, is not fearlessness. It's love.

What I'm talking about is connection to one another and to our common humanity, a radical openness where we are able to see the beauty in others and also allow ourselves to be seen. Here, we know there is something more real than security, achievement, or success. What emerges instead is a kind of courage

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WHEN I STOPPED RUNNING FROM MYSELF,
I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO GIVE MYSELF THE
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that is willing to do anything, risk anything, for the truth of who each of us can be as individuals and who we can be together.

Authentic self is the opening to love, because although love takes us radically beyond ourselves, it starts from within. When I stopped running from myself, I was finally able to give myself the things I'd been seeking from others—acceptance, understanding, and ultimately love.

And this opens the door to bravery. Love fuels the desire to give, and it also provides the shelter that makes courageous giving possible. You know that on the other side of giving, whether it's success or failure, you will still be here: precious, whole, and worthy of love.

TAKING A STAND

We want to see more boldness in our leaders. We want to see more out-of-the-box thinking and disruptive creativity. We want to see transformation, not just at the level of policy, but also at the level of millions of individual hearts.

I'm taking a stand that all of this is possible, but only if we take seriously the kind of courageous inner lives that are needed to spark and fuel the changes we're desperate for.

We're so practiced at looking outside ourselves for answers—the latest best practices; the models for how we should structure our campaigns and meetings; the expert analysis of what messaging works or doesn't. There's valuable information here, but too often it takes the place of simply being with the people right in front of us, of speaking honestly from what is in our hearts,



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 HUMANITY.”

of bringing something true into the world rather than something designed to have a certain impact.

What we all want, what we're all fighting for, is the experience of our full humanity. We structure our battles against the institutionalized ways in which our humanity is taken away from us—racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty—and we act as if the humanity part will take care of itself once the structural barriers are removed. I have been engaged in social justice work for 20 years. This work gave me righteous anger and language to demand respect, but it wasn't until I went deep inside that I found love and a path to embracing my *own* full humanity.

We've all heard the call to “be the change you want to see in the world.” I'd always seen this as a call to action. What I see now is a much more demanding call to inner transformation as the ground for transformation in the world.

The world needs so much right now, but it all comes down to whether our hearts are open—to love

someone we've learned to demonize, to feel our connection to the earth, to risk seeing our fates as intertwined. Hearts respond only to other hearts. The only power we have to engender love is our own love. If we thought we could somehow hold ourselves safely apart while working for social change, we were mistaken. The best of what we have to give is right here, waiting for our courage to claim it.

OUTSIDE VOICE

**WHAT NONPROFIT
LEADERS
REALLY WANT**

BY HEATHER MCLEOD GRANT

**Why “training” alone can’t provoke the deep learning
that today’s networked leaders require.**



Until recently, most leadership development in the social sector revolved around workshops, trainings, or conference breakout sessions. Nonprofit leaders would shuffle into windowless hotel ballrooms and listen for an hour, or a day (or two!), as experts unleashed content aimed at boosting

their management skills. Then they'd head back to their organizations and hope to apply what they'd learned. But in the last few years, there's been a shift away from these content-delivery approaches toward more participatory, experiential, relationship-based models for learning and leadership development. Why? Because "training" alone can't promote the deep, real-time learning that social-sector leaders operating in today's more networked, complex, and adaptive world require.

Mobilizing social movements and tackling intersectional problems aren't just hard tasks—they are also highly relational, demanding a leadership stance that is radically different from the "command and control" organizational management of the past. One of the best ways to help leaders develop this more connected, collaborative stance is by creating experiential peer learning opportunities—like the Levi Strauss Foundation's Pioneers in Justice cohort—that enable leaders to both practice and embody a more relational way of working. Through these experiential "learning labs," leaders can bring their real-time challenges into the group, receive peer counsel and support, and make sense of the complexity they have to navigate every day.

Creating these cohorts is new enough that the guiding principles are still emerging. But in my experience, a few key elements must be in place for these cohorts both to work and to have lasting impact, including the "four Ts" below.

Time. Today's nonprofit leaders aren't just resource constrained financially—they often don't have the time they need to focus on their own growth and development. Striving to change big systems like education, healthcare, structural racism, or income inequality is both exhausting and incredibly complicated. Having time to talk through these challenges with peers—not just occasionally but regularly—enables them to "go deep" and develop new insights about themselves, their leadership, the cohort, and the larger systems they seek to change. These experiences can also create a lasting sense of solidarity and

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Mobilizing social movements and tackling intersectional problems aren't just hard tasks—they are also highly relational, demanding a leadership stance that is radically different from the "command and control" organizational management of the past.

renewed energy for the work. While the first Pioneers in Justice cohort has “graduated” from the program, they continue to learn from and collaborate with one another in meaningful ways.

Trust. Without trust, leadership cohorts crumble. Building trust is what sets the “container” so that deep learning can occur. It is what enables leaders to make themselves vulnerable to the group, to share their most pressing problems, and to show up as who they really are. Critically, this trust needs to run in multiple directions and among everyone involved in the learning cohort. There must be trust between participants themselves. These leaders also need to trust the funder—which requires funders to be honest about their intentions and not use their power to coerce the group. And there must be trust between participants and facilitators, too. If leaders feel they are being pushed through a process or manipulated in any way, they will hold back and not take emotional risks—and their learning and growth will be compromised. Just like funders, facilitators have to show up authentically, inviting participants to reveal themselves to one another by modeling it themselves.

Tools. Leaders do need tools and frameworks to help with their work, but not in ways that overwhelm them. Complicated theory should be distilled to its simplest essence so that what leaders really need—practical frameworks or practices for applying this learning—can be imparted. Want to teach systems thinking? Rather than delve deep into complexity theory, have leaders discuss the dynamics of the systems they are seeking to change: what do they observe, what are they learning? And how might that influence their actions? Leaders can also focus on the set of relationships—and networks—they need to build in order to change these larger systems. How do they think about the people in that system? How are they connected to them? How might they build influence across those relationships? Network mapping is one simple tool for helping leaders understand and navigate that complexity in an easier way. Similarly, rather than expound on theories of power, equity, and race, present leaders with a framework, or a psychologically safe process, for having “difficult” conversations about white privilege, race, and power dynamics.

Tension. Another key element? Striking the right balance between focusing on process and focusing on results, and maintaining an appropriate tension between the two. Some leadership programs in the

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Rather than delve deep into complexity theory, have leaders discuss the dynamics of the systems they are seeking to change: what do they observe, what are they learning?

social sector (or more broadly) focus almost entirely on *process*—the relationship and trust building components. They take leaders on deep journeys that open their minds to new possibilities and to one another, or help them develop individual skills. But how this influences their work remains highly mysterious. Other programs focus predominantly on social change tools and content, bringing leaders together to focus on *impact* without any of the interpersonal elements designed to build trust, relationships, or deep learning. The truth is, you can't focus just on process and assume that real change will happen as a result, nor can you get impact by bypassing the “touchy-feely” side of experiential learning. It takes both for leaders to prosper.

Programs like Pioneers in Justice that attend to both process and impact are still the exception not the rule. But other funders are starting to understand this “both/and” when it comes to leadership development for social change: you have to set an expectation of real impact for the cohort, while acknowledging that getting there requires developing as a leader and working through the messiness of human dynamics. Achieving this balance is more art than science. But it is the key to truly preparing leaders for the realities and complexities of leadership in today's world.

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OUTSIDE VOICE

**SOCIAL MEDIA FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE:
PERILS AND
POSSIBILITIES**

BY TESSIE GUILLERMO

**Four things we must understand and address before social media
can truly ignite social movements.**



In 2010, the Levi Strauss Foundation asked if I wanted to help a group of young social justice leaders revolutionize their impact through the tools of technology. My instant answer was yes. As president and CEO of ZeroDivide, I spent my days helping diverse organizations develop and implement

technology programs that support underserved communities. I saw the invitation as another way to help move the world toward greater digital equity, and felt both excited and honored to help this extraordinary group of leaders launch themselves into the world of technology—especially social media.

Integrating the latter into their organizations and into their own work was no simple task. There are real limits to how much legal organizations can be out there giving voice to causes and movements, and understanding these was its own piece of work. But other constraints were more self-imposed. The Pioneers' orientation toward service and *servng* was so strong that they initially had trouble putting forward their voices and opinions so publicly—something that effective and evocative social media requires. They worried how their posts could affect their constituencies and their work on the ground, and they didn't want to step up too much and be the sort of charismatic leaders of the past, when organizations and movements revolved around one person. They also felt pressure to voice the collective sentiment of their constituencies and make sure there was consensus on what they should be saying. "You only get so many chances to be heard," they reasoned. "I better make sure I do it right."¹

But as the program progressed, so did the Pioneers' readiness—and even eagerness—to put themselves out there. They embraced not just the idea but the hard practice of sharing their perspectives and helping spur movements forward in more public and even provocative ways. Social media has a power to it that the Pioneers recognized and wished to harness, and it was incredible to see them commit to that journey together—to learn and experiment and regroup and strategize and find their footing as individuals and as a cohort. Here was a set of high-profile social justice leaders actively and boldly using social media for good.

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Social media has a power to it that the Pioneers recognized and wished to harness, and it was incredible to see them commit to that journey together.

1 I want to recognize the very important contribution of Laura Efurud, ZeroDivide's VP of programs. Laura managed our work with the first Pioneers in Justice cohort, and did so beautifully.

Now that work continues—as it must. Through their ongoing social media experiments, the Pioneers are gaining critical insight not just for themselves but also for the field. And the field desperately needs that knowledge. Social media has the potential to become a foundational tool in the social justice space, a necessary and vital component of any organization’s effort to raise awareness, engage constituents, and inspire collective action. But there are things we need to understand and to talk about much more if we’re going to reach that potential. Four in particular are worth calling out.

Social media is a tool, not a strategy. Posting videos on Facebook, firing off timely tweets—these seem like no-brainer methods for social justice organizations to employ in their public engagement efforts. But social media is meaningless unless it is part of a larger strategy. In other words, it must be highly intentional and directional, not merely opportunistic or reactive. Having a social media strategy is what allows leaders and organizations to respond to the events of our times in ways that propel their work and their movements forward. Social media that’s not connected to a larger strategy is just a series of random acts.

Analysis, analysis, analysis. Social media is still young, and there is no clear or agreed upon way to evaluate its impact or what the measure of that impact ought to be. If somebody watches a cellphone video of police brutality shared on the ACLU’s Facebook page then becomes politically active on that issue in their community and through their voting as a result, how will anyone trace or know that influence? How can we measure the impact of a communication campaign that uses social media, for example, and who is the arbiter of that impact? Without the ability to demonstrate effectiveness, it will remain a steep challenge to convince funders and boards that building out a social media capability is a worthy investment.

Funding. Funders like to invest in programs and initiatives with easy measurement—and, as I explained above, that’s not social media yet (and it won’t be for a while). Putting the right infrastructure in place to do social media well is critical but expensive, and right now there is no “provable” return on that investment. To funders and boards, it can just seem like increasing overhead. They may require you to have a revenue model or a plan to make it self-sustaining or even to scale. But, of course, in order to scale you have to invest. Until more foundations are willing to fund social media infrastructure and capacity and stick with that

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Until more foundations are willing to fund social media infrastructure and capacity and stick with that investment, the possibilities of scale—and of assessing impact—will never be a reality.

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Programs like Pioneers move us ahead exponentially. There was brilliance in the Levi Strauss Foundation’s decision to support not just one leader but a cohort of leaders in building their technology capacity. In planning and launching their social media experiments, the Pioneers were able to not just theoretically rely on one another but strategically plan for it. “I heard your two-minute piece on youth radio so I know what message you’re bringing to your audience. I will bring this other piece and refer back to yours.” Or: “I know what your Twitter strategy is and what you’re going to measure in your analytics, and we can bring those analytics together and combine those audiences and make a case.” These are the kinds of synergies and accelerated learning that a true network enables.

The Pioneers have already proved that these new ways of working can have high impact: changing the way they lead, the way their organizations stand in the world, and the way their movements find scale. Yet this is all so *new*. Getting to the place where social media and other technology-rich approaches are expected and embedded—rather than starved for funding—will take persistence and time. But I believe what the Levi Strauss Foundation has sparked through the Pioneers program will eventually catch fire. And when it does, we will start to see new ways to address the many challenges that currently stand in the way of such progress.

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In planning and launching their social media experiments, the Pioneers were able to not just theoretically rely on one another but strategically plan for it.

BEHIND THE BOOK

CREDITS

BEHIND THE BOOK



ARCELIA HURTADO

Immigration Policy Advisor, National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)

Arcelia Hurtado has been a lifelong activist for civil rights. Currently, she is an associate attorney at Kazan, McClain, Satterley & Greenwood and serves as immigration policy advisor at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, a nonprofit organization dedicated to achieving LGBT equality through litigation, legislation, policy, and public education. Previously, she served as NCLR's deputy director and as trial and appellate lawyer representing adults and children in the criminal justice system as well as women on death row. She also served as executive director of Equal Rights Advocates, a national women's rights organization, and founded and codirects the Breaking Down the Barriers/Let Her Work Project, which assists formerly incarcerated women reentering the workforce. Hurtado has taught at various law schools, mentored students pursuing public interest legal careers, and is an active board member of various professional, legal services, philanthropic, and community-based organizations. She has also served on San Francisco's Board of Appeals and was named a "Bay Area Changemaker" by the San Francisco Chronicle in 2012.



VINCENT PAN

Executive Director, Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA)

Vincent Pan is a progressive leader on issues of racial justice and social change. Whether reforming immigration laws or fixing the criminal justice system, promoting language access or increasing civic participation, he believes that social justice campaigns must be aggressive and visible while also connecting people with shared values such as compassion, inclusion, and equity. To create a world that works for everyone, he advocates a holistic approach that simultaneously changes laws as well as hearts and minds. Prior to joining Chinese for Affirmative Action in 2006, Pan was a consultant to the William J. Clinton Foundation, where he helped start treatment programs for children living with HIV/AIDS in China. Before that he cofounded and directed Heads Up, a nonprofit organization that runs after-school and summer programs for low-income children in Washington, DC. His work with Heads Up was profiled by The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and other publications. He is a former winner of the Do Something Brick Award for community leadership and has been a fellow with the Center for Social Innovation at Stanford University, the Echoing Green Foundation, and the Stride Rite Foundation.



CHRIS PUNONGBAYAN

*Director of Equity and Social Justice,
Northern California Grantmakers*

Chris Punongbayan has been involved in grassroots activism in the Asian American, immigrant worker, and LGBTQ communities for his entire career, and his vision of social justice is grounded in the realities of those communities. He currently serves as director of equity and social justice at Northern California Grantmakers, an organization that brings together foundations, nonprofits, government, and business to tackle the region's most pressing social issues. Previously, he served as executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, the nation's first legal and civil rights organization serving low-income Asian Pacific American communities. During his tenure at ALC, the organization appeared twice before the Supreme Court of the United States. Prior to that, he worked as a Ford Foundation New Voices Fellow with Filipino Advocates for Justice and held positions at Positive Resource Center and Asian Americans for Equality. A former vice-chair of the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission, Punongbayan is a member of the Community Advisory Panel of KQED and treasurer of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote Action Fund. He is also a certified yoga instructor and blogs regularly for The Huffington Post.



HYEON-JU RHO

*Leadership and Transition Coach,
Hyeon-Ju Rho Coaching*

Hyeon-Ju Rho is a coach specializing in helping leaders develop the inner resources to lead with resilience, creativity, authenticity, and integrity, as well as to navigate the personal and professional complexities that come with a change in professional direction. Before finding her calling in this work, Rho served as executive director and then co-director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, where she presided over an organizational name change and affiliation with three other organizations, in effect quadrupling the reach of her team's work. A graduate of New York University Law School, Rho has also served as a trial attorney in the civil rights division of the US Department of Justice; practiced poverty law as a staff attorney at the Urban Justice Center in New York City; and spent six years in China consulting for the Ford Foundation and heading up the American Bar Association's Rule of Law initiative. She holds coaching credentials from the Coaches Training Institute and the International Coach Federation.



ABDI SOLTANI

Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California (ACLU-NC)

Abdi Soltani is a nationally recognized civil rights leader who has dedicated his adult life to social justice and equal treatment for all. His early work as an organizer helped change California from a state that passed some of the most regressive policies in the mid-90s to a state that is among the most progressive in our nation. As executive director of the ACLU of Northern California since 2009, Soltani's fight for civil liberties has been expansive and inclusive of racial, gender, and economic justice. He has deepened the ACLU's partnerships with communities most directly impacted by injustice and disparities and expanded the organization's presence into the Central Valley and the State Capitol, which has enabled the ACLU to defend and advance the civil liberties of all Californians and to mobilize our communities as a collective voice for fairness and equity. Previously, he served as executive director at Californians for Justice, the Campaign for College Opportunity, and Parsa Community Foundation. He serves on the board of Public Advocates, a legal advocacy organization, and is a graduate of Stanford University.



KIMBERLY THOMAS RAPP

Former Executive Director, Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights

Kimberly Thomas Rapp is TK. Previously, she served as executive director at Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR), where she helped broaden the scope and relevance of the organization's triple-barreled work as direct service providers, impact litigators, and advocates in the areas of racial, economic, and immigrant justice. Before joining LCCR, she served as lead deputy counsel for the County of Santa Clara and as legal counsel to the Santa Clara County Office of Education and various school districts. Before her public service, Thomas Rapp was the director of law and public policy for the Equal Justice Society. Before and after law school, she worked in the private sector, conducting investigations and trainings on workplace discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual harassment, and issues of hours and wages. Throughout her career, Thomas Rapp has been motivated by her grandparents, who grew up picking cotton in Texas and encouraged her to take advantage of every opportunity that came her way, from undergraduate studies at Berkeley to Stanford Law School.



LATEEFAH SIMON

President, Akonadi Foundation

Lateefah Simon is president of the Akonadi Foundation, a nationally recognized advocate for civil rights and racial justice. Previously, Simon served as director of the California's Future Program at the Rosenberg Foundation, a strategic effort to change the odds for women and children in the state. Prior to that, she served as executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, leading the organization through its first strategic planning process in more than 10 years. She also served as head of the Reentry Services Division of the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, helping to launch and lead programs designed to prevent former offenders from returning to a life of crime. Simon's advocacy career began at age 19, when she became executive director of the Center for Young Women's Development. She is the recipient of numerous honors, including a MacArthur Fellowship, the Jefferson Award for extraordinary public service, and the State Assembly's "California Woman of the Year." In 2016 Lateefah was elected to serve District 7 on the BART Board of Directors and was appointed by the governor to the California State University's Board of Trustees.



TITI LIU

Director of International Public Interest Initiatives, Stanford Law School

Titi Liu is the director of international public interest initiatives at Stanford Law School's Levin Center, where she develops and implements programs that support students who are pursuing a career path in international public interest lawyering and serves as a resource for leading practitioners in the field, with a focus on transitional societies. Liu has a long career advancing social justice issues both domestically and internationally. She was most recently the executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus. Prior to that, she was the law and rights program officer for the Ford Foundation in Beijing, China, and a State Department and USAID consultant. She has also served as the Garvey Schubert Barer visiting professor in Asian law at the University of Washington, where she studied the role of public interest litigation in social movements in Asia, and has published extensively in the US and China on the relationship between litigation and social change.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

The National Center for Lesbian Rights

The National Center for Lesbian Rights (www.nclrights.org), founded in 1977, is a national legal organization committed to advancing the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-gender people and their families through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education.



Chinese for Affirmative Action

Chinese for Affirmative Action (www.caasf.org) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and to advance multiracial democracy in the United States. CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian and Pacific American community, advocating for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial injustice.



Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus (www.advancingjustice-alc.org) based in San Francisco, is the nation's oldest organization advocating for the civil and legal rights of Asians and Pacific Islanders. Its mission is to promote, advance, and represent the legal and civil rights of these communities, with a focus on addressing the needs of low-income, immigrant, and underserved individuals.



The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (www.lccr.com), founded in 1968, works to advance, protect, and promote the legal rights of communities of color, low-income persons, immigrants, and refugees. Assisted by hundreds of pro bono attorneys, the Lawyers' Committee pro-vides free legal assistance and representation to individuals on civil legal matters through direct services, impact litigation, and policy advocacy.



The American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California

The American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California (www.aclunc.org) is the country's largest ACLU affiliate. In 2019, it will celebrate its 85th anniversary as a leader in defending and advancing the civil rights and civil liberties of all Californians.

LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION CORE TEAM



DANIEL LEE

Daniel Jae-Won Lee is the Executive Director of the Levi Strauss Foundation, which supports pioneering social change in the areas of HIV/AIDS, worker rights and well-being and social justice in communities touched by Levi Strauss & Co.'s business. The Foundation's signature initiatives include Pioneers in Justice and Worker Well-being (scaling factory-based worker empowerment initiatives in the apparel industry).

Board service includes La Cocina, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Astraea Foundation, Council on Foundations, Funders Concerned about AIDS and Massachusetts Asian AIDS Prevention Project; and advisory councils of Global Fund for Women, Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, The Giving Side and Horizons Foundation. Previously, he was Senior Program Officer for Asia Pacific at the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and a researcher-writer for Let's Go travel guides. He received his AB in religion from Princeton University, Master of Divinity from Harvard University and Honorary Doctorate of Sacred Theology from the Starr King School for the Ministry. Daniel grew up in South Dakota, lived abroad in Singapore and Korea and resides in San Francisco.



EVELIA PEREZ

Evelia Pérez is Program Manager at the Levi Strauss Foundation, overseeing the gender equity and women's human rights portfolio as well as the Pioneers in Justice initiative. Previously, Evelia was the Program Coordinator for the Koshland Program at The San Francisco Foundation, a neighborhood-based leadership initiative that worked with local leaders in community building efforts. She also served at several nonprofits working with low-income and vulnerable populations. She holds an AB degree from the University of California, Berkeley. Evelia was born in Mexico and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

CONTRIBUTORS

JENNY JOHNSTON, WRITER AND EDITOR



Part journalist, part anthropologist, Jenny Johnston is an expert in helping leaders and organizations find innovative and “sticky” ways to communicate their visions and their stories to the wider public.

Her recent clients include Omidyar Network, Skoll Global Threats Fund, UC Berkeley, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Presidio Trust. She also served as developmental editor on a handful of recent books, including a Wall Street Journal bestseller. Before starting her own practice, Jenny served as senior editor at Global Business Network, a scenario planning consultancy and futurist think tank based in the Bay Area, where she shepherded an ever-changing range of publications and presentations from concept to completion and ran modules on “strategic storytelling” for clients and coworkers. Prior to that, she was copy chief for a major consulting firm and an arts and culture editor in Boston. She holds an AB in cultural anthropology from Princeton University, an MA in the same from UC Boulder, and an MS in journalism from Boston University.

J SHERMAN STUDIO



J Sherman Studio, Ltd. is a top-tier design firm in Newton, Massachusetts lead by principal and owner, Julie Sherman. The Studio partners with nonprofits, foundations, and companies to create clean, creative, and

intentional design. Julie’s team is built of a small group of talented artists, who enjoy solving problems and working collaboratively so that every project benefits from their combined expertise. The Studio strives to bring clarity, confidence, and energy to clients’ ideas, helping them achieve their goals and getting them the attention and results they deserve. Over the past ten years, J Sherman Studio has worked with major foundations including: Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation. The Studio is proud to work with many local and national organizations, amplifying their messages, strengthening their brands, and magnifying their impact. These include Centering Healthcare Institute, The diaTribe Foundation, Global Impact Investing Network, Harvard Office for Sustainability, Open Impact, and the Social Innovation Forum.

TESSIE GUILLERMO



Tessie served as President & CEO of ZeroDivide from 2002 to 2015. ZeroDivide is a social impact consultancy focusing on digital equity, technology adoption and innovation to improve health, economic

opportunity and civic engagement outcomes for disadvantaged communities. Prior to ZeroDivide Tessie served for 15 years as CEO of the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, a national health policy/advocacy organization. She was appointed by President Clinton in 1999 as a Charter Member of the President’s Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Tessie is currently the Chairwoman of the Board of Dignity Health, one of the largest health systems in the U.S., serves as a board member of the Nonprofit Finance Fund, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the Center for Asian American Media and is a trustee of the California State University East Bay Education Foundation. Tessie was a board member of The California Endowment, serving for 3 years as Chairwoman. Ms. Guillermo received her Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from California State University East Bay, is an alumna of the University of California, Berkeley, and a Fellow of the Center for Asian Pacific American Women.

HEATHER MCLEOD GRANT



Heather is the co-founder of Open Impact and a social entrepreneur, author, and consultant with 25 years of experience in social change. She is coauthor of the bestselling Forces for Good: The Six

Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits, named a Top Ten Book of the Year by The Economist, and numerous case studies, articles and other publications. Previously she was the principal of McLeod-Grant Advisors. Heather helped lead the nonprofit practice at Monitor Institute and served as a McKinsey & Company consultant. She began her career as an Echoing Green Fellow when she cofounded Who Cares, a national magazine for young social entrepreneurs published from 1993 to 1999. She is a Venture Partner with Draper-Richards-Kaplan and has served on numerous local, national, and global nonprofit boards. She holds an MBA from Stanford University and an AB from Harvard University.

LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION

The Levi Strauss Foundation is the corporate foundation of Levi Strauss & Co., one of the world's largest brand-name apparel companies. The foundation's philanthropic work is grounded in the company's values of originality, integrity, empathy and courage. For over 60 years, the Levi Strauss Foundation has embraced the energy and events of our time to advance pioneering social change in the areas of HIV/AIDS, worker rights and well-being, and social justice in the communities where the company has a business presence.

ABOUT PIONEERS IN JUSTICE

In 2010, the Levi Strauss Foundation launched a first-of-its kind initiative designed to help local social justice organizations amplify both their reach and their impact. Through Pioneers in Justice, LSF set out to support a cohort of Bay Area leaders, all of them Gen Xers, who had recently taken the helm of legacy social justice organizations and were charged with helping their nonprofits adapt to a rapidly changing world.

This collection of first-person narratives is a final reflection from each leader on how the initiative impacted them personally and their work. These accounts address a number of leadership and change management topics in a candid, probing and personal manner. We believe that sharing these collective lessons will benefit both organizations and funders working in the field of social justice.