

37: Movement Building

Focus Issue: Leadership Development; Pan African & Latino/a History; Political Education & Social Justice; Community Service & Responsibility; Educational Achievement

Objectives: 1) To introduce youth to three grassroots leaders who were essential to social justice movements in the US and 2) To expand their knowledge of the history of these movements

Materials: *Movement Building* HANDOUT, excerpts from the documentaries *Eyes on the Prize, Parts I and II* (Blackside Film and TV Production) and *Common Man, Uncommon Vision* (PBS).

Overview: The 1960s and '70s was a time of mass grassroots activism on issues ranging from civil rights, to women's equality, to the rights of laborers. The visible leaders and those who managed the day-to-day activities of movement building were equally responsible in bringing about social change. Together they acted with courage and extreme dedication and with faith, often risking their lives for their beliefs and deep sense of justice. Ella Baker, César Chávez, and Fannie Lou Hamer are three such people.

Preparation: 1) Review *Eyes on the Prize, Parts I and II* and *Common Man, Uncommon Vision* (PBS) in order to select excerpts for your group to view and to familiarize yourself with this history.

2) Research local people who are/were involved in social justice organizing. You might also want to invite them in as guest speakers. Suggestion Source: Community Works (www.communityworksny.org)

WORKSHOP (2 hours)

1. Introduction (15 minutes) - Ask your group to brainstorm social justice movements and a list of familiar facts and faces representing them.

2. Three Grassroots Leaders (45 minutes) - Distribute the *Movement Building* HANDOUT and review it with your group. Include your research on local organizers. If possible, have your guest organizer share her/his

experiences. (See *Oriki* HANDOUT, page 80, to help them prepare their presentation.)

3. Video Viewing (30-45 minutes) - Show the clips you selected, providing time for your group to discuss their reactions and opinions. You might highlight the major actions and reforms listed below. (See also *Does Voting Matter* HANDOUT, page 169.)

The March on Washington

In 1963, a quarter of a million people participated in a day of marches and speechmaking to press the issue of equal rights. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his "I Have a Dream Speech."

Freedom Rides & Freedom Summer

Throughout the South in 1964, hundreds of people from around the nation challenged segregation laws with marches, sit-ins, and boycotts, and conducted mass voter registration drives that included education classes to prepare future voters for the registration application.

The Civil Rights Act

Legislation was passed in 1964 guaranteeing basic civil rights to all Americans regardless of their race.

United Farm Workers of America

Using the image of an eagle ("huelga" in Spanish) symbolizing pride and dignity, the union organizes a 340-mile march in 1973 and uses other nonviolent tactics inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Rap-up (30 minutes) - Have your group reflect on the videos by considering:

What were the challenges and motivations of social justice workers of the 1960s and '70s?

What might encourage or discourage the same level of activism today?

How have our civil rights improved since the 1960s-70s, and what still needs to be worked on?

What is our individual and collective responsibility in creating positive social change?

Movement Building

ELLA BAKER

1903 Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Ella Baker was the granddaughter of slaves. Her grandmother was brutally whipped for refusing to marry a man her master chose for her.

1927 Graduates from **Shaw University** in Raleigh, North Carolina, as class valedictorian and then moves to New York City.

1930 Joins the **Young Negroes Cooperative League**, an organization created to increase economic power through collective planning. She is also involved in women's organizations.

1940 Becomes involved with the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**, an organization created in 1909 as a multiracial organization working to achieve justice for all.

1943-46 Serves as Director of the New York City NAACP Branch – becoming the first woman to do so – and helps move it from addressing legal battles to community activism, including the desegregation of New York City's public schools.

1957 Moves to Atlanta, Georgia, to help form **Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC)**, running its voter registration campaign. SCLC is created to fight segregation using nonviolent means for bringing about change. SCLC is an affiliation of local community organizations across the South that are open to all, regardless of race, religion, or background.

1958 Leaves SCLC to offer assistance to the students' movement following their sit-in campaign in Greensboro, North Carolina, in which they refused to leave a Woolworth's lunch counter.

1960 Helps form **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** at Shaw University where her work inspired the creation of the **Black Panthers** and many other groups of the 1970s. SNCC is created to coordinate sit-ins, support community leaders, and publicize civil rights activities. It disbanded in 1966.

1986 Baker dies in New York City, having worked throughout her life for the civil rights for Blacks and women. She is remembered as a quiet leader who listened to and encouraged activists. She believed, "Strong people don't need strong leaders."

CÉSAR CHÁVEZ

1927 Born near Yuma, Arizona, Chávez is named after his grandfather who escaped from slavery on a Mexican ranch and arrived in the Southwest during the 1880s.

1937 Chávez's family loses its property during the Great Depression and is forced to migrate to California in search of work. He receives very little schooling, and by the age of 12 he is already working full time to help support his family.

1944 He joins the **United States Navy** and serves in World War II.

1948 Helen Fabela and Chávez marry and move together into a one-room shack in Delano, California. He also participates in his first strike for farm workers' rights.

1952-58 At age 25, he meets Fred Ross, who is part of the **Community Service Organization (CSO)** formed by Saul Alinsky, one of the "fathers" of the community organizing movement. Chávez joins CSO and begins urging Mexican-Americans to register to vote. He also travels extensively throughout California making speeches in support of workers' rights. Six years after joining CSO, he becomes the General Director.

1962-65 Co-founds the **National Farm Workers Association** (NFWA) with Dolores Huerta to focus on issues of unemployment insurance. He helps organize a strike on behalf of grape pickers, mostly Filipino workers, demanding higher wages and better working conditions. NFWA evolves to become the **United Farm Workers of America** (UFW), a union of farm workers fighting for fair wages and better working conditions.

1967-75 UFW organizes strikes and boycotts to get higher wages for its members from grape and lettuce growers and survives an attempted takeover by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. By 1975, 17 million consumers have joined in the strike by not buying grapes.

1988 Protesting the use of toxic pesticides on grapes and the effect on farm workers, Chávez begins a *Fast of Life*, one of several he conducted over the years. Thirty-six days into the protest, the actor Edward Olmos, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Whoopi Goldberg, and other supporters take over his fast.

1993 After a life of tireless activism and organizing on behalf of Mexican-American and other farm workers, Chávez dies at his home in California having lived by these words: "I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men!" **San Francisco State University** named an institute in his honor.

2003 **United States Postal Service** issues a César Chávez stamp.

FANNIE LOU HAMER

1917 Born in Mississippi, Hamer is the youngest of 20 children born to sharecropper parents. Her home has no heat, electricity, or plumbing.

1913 Begins picking cotton at age 6 and by age 12 is doing it full time. She loves to read, even though she is not formally educated. When she breaks her leg and it is not treated correctly, she develops a permanent limp.

1962 At age 44, she attends a **SNCC** meeting and is overcome with energy and enthusiasm. On learning Blacks have constitutional rights, she is the first to volunteer to register to vote. When Hamer and others arrive at the courthouse to register, they are told they failed the test. As a result of her actions, she and her family are thrown off the plantation where they have lived for 18 years, but Hamer says: "They kicked me off the plantation, they set me free. It's the best thing that could happen. Now I can work for my people." She begins working to register voters throughout Mississippi.

1963 On the way to South Carolina, she and other SNCC workers are stopped in Mississippi. When some of them go into the "white only" waiting room, all of them are arrested and brutally beaten. Hamer sustains injuries that bother her for the rest of her life. She also co-founds the **Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party** (MFDP), using a Black Panther as its symbol and challenging the all-white delegation to the **Democratic National Convention**. In a televised broadcast, Hamer delivers such an eloquent speech to the **Credentials Committee** that two MFDP delegates are given speaking rights at the convention and members are invited as honored guests.

1969-74 Works on the **Freedom Farm**, a cooperative owned and operated by local Blacks that provides food and jobs. In recognition of her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, she receives honorary degrees from the all-male **Morehouse College** (Atlanta, Georgia) and **Howard University** (Washington, DC).

1977 Hamer dies at the age of 59 and is forever remembered for her simple, powerful statement: "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

SOURCES: www.ibilio.org; The King Center (www.TheKingCenter.org); The Chávez Foundation (<http://www.chavezfoundation.org>); www.incwell.com/biographies/Chavez; <http://en.wikipedia.org>; <http://www.peacemakersguide.org/peace/Peacemakers/Cesar-Chavez.htm>