

July 2004

Special Edition: Working
for Social Justice

Hello colleagues.

This is a special edition of the newsletter: I'm sharing some personal thoughts with you. I hope you'll take the time to read this and reflect. And I promise, the next issue will be back to the old familiar format and content. (P.S. You can find all the sources referenced in this issue at the end. Also, visit my website for more about social change philanthropy and social justice.)

So here goes, the thoughts that I want to share with you:

I'm concerned about the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots in America. And for me, that's a justice issue. I believe that progressive public policy is co-opted each day. And that too is a social justice issue.

I see rampant social injustice - and that breeds a sense of hopelessness.

But I know that you and I can make a difference - through social change philanthropy.

What is social change philanthropy?

Social change philanthropy works by changing the systems (public policy, societal mores, institutional biases) that support social injustice. I believe that if we gave more money to social change philanthropy, we could

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produce social justice - and we wouldn't need so much charity to redress social ills.

As Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner explain in *Inspired Philanthropy: Creating A Giving Plan*, "traditional philanthropy is based on responding to, treating and managing the consequences of life in a society with a capital-based economy."

Social change philanthropy, on the other hand, "analyzes and responds more to cause than effect ... Progressive philan-

thropy strives to fund work that is proactive rather than reactive. Progressive philanthropy's investment lies in supporting and facilitating change, challenging the assumptions that economic and social inequities are somehow unavoidable as the price of progress or prosperity."

"You have to take power," said American abolitionist Frederick Douglass, the son of slaves. "No one gives it."

Social change philanthropy is about organizing and activism. It's about engaging all members of our society in dialogue and action.

Social change philanthropy and activism ensure that people who are typically ignored and disregarded have a seat at the table. By sharing power, we can hold all our institutions - from governments to corporations to nonprofits - and society itself responsible for social injustice.

A willingness to speak out

Social injustice in the U.S. arises because of choices made by voters, elected officials, corporations, and other institutions. Certainly, there are many organizations that fight against social injustice. But not enough.

Fighting against social injustice - and promoting social justice - is a progressive act. Progressives are rarely popular because they challenge established systems, and people naturally resist change.

How strange though. Those of us who work and volunteer in philanthropy have dedicated our lives to improving the lives of others. Surely with this dedication

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comes an obligation to speak out on behalf of people who have no voice in our society.

As Susan B. Anthony reminds us, "Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputations ... can never bring about a reform.

Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly avow their sympathies with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences."

What is politically correct?

It's politically correct today to avoid words like racist and sexist and homophobic and privilege and class. Even the words feminist and liberal tend to be whispered. We talk around them. We don't want to offend. We fear conflict. (I call this dysfunctional politeness.)

But think about it: What's more offensive than people and systems that deny social justice to women and girls, people of color, those who are not affluent, those with a different sexual orientation? Surely this is unjust.

What does it say about us as individuals and a community when we use politeness as an excuse for not speaking out against injustice? "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice," said Father Dan Berrigan. "But there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

How many times will we listen and smile politely when someone in power says, "Sorry, I

just didn't notice." Or when government and organizations take actions that disempower and disenfranchise? Or when someone tells us "security and the economy are more important than social justice."

Great rewards

Social change philanthropy has the potential for great rewards. As Alfre Woodard explained in the preface to *Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Your Money for Societal Change*:

"Tipping the balance of resources to include more of humanity is an adventurous, thrilling, and worthwhile pursuit. Charity is good, but supporting and creating social change is about power. Power can infuse lives with purpose and dignity. That opens up the possibility of joy. The life of the giver, as well as that of the receiver, is transformed ... No matter who we are, no matter how much money we have, whatever our color, gender, age, religion, or language, we can bring change to the world around us.

"Giving isn't a posture reserved for the rich or powerful. It is the responsibility and privilege of every man, woman, and child to participate in the task of building more just and humane societies.

"Philanthropy and activism are a gift to one's self. By giving, we lessen our own cynicism and alienation. Creating social change is exciting. It's proof that we are alive and

thinking. What could be better than to work for a future where fairness is the bottom line?"

The scope of the problem

Social justice philanthropy is not about righting all wrongs. It's about creating an America that lives up to the ideals set down by our founders more than two centuries ago.

Journalist Bill Moyers (speech on June 6, 2003) describes the progressive movement as part of "the oldest story in America: the struggle to determine whether 'we, the people' is a spiritual idea embedded in a political reality - one nation, indivisible - or merely a charade masquerading as piety and manipulated by the powerful and privileged to sustain their own way of life at the expense of others."

Think about social contracts like Social Security and Medicaid. Consider the decline in living wages and the growth in poverty, homelessness and hunger. And for those of us who work in the philanthropic sector, daily we watch the decline in government funding and the abandonment of the safety net for people in our communities.

Moyers reminds us "a Social Security card is not a private portfolio statement but a membership ticket in a society where we all contribute to a common treasury so that none need face the indignities of poverty in old age without that help. That tax evasion is not a form of conserving investment capital but a

brazen abandonment of responsibility to the country.”

Moyers goes on to say that income inequality “is not a sign of freedom-of-opportunity at work, because if it persists and grows, then unless you believe that some people are naturally born to ride and some to wear saddles, it’s a sign that opportunity is less than equal. That self-interest is a great motivator for production and progress, but is amoral unless contained within the framework of community. That the rich have the right to buy more cars than anyone else, more homes, vacations, gadgets and gizmos, but they do not have the right to buy more democracy than anyone else.”

And finally, Moyers says: “Prosperity requires good wages and benefits for workers. And ... our nation can no more survive as half democracy and half oligarchy than it could survive ‘half slave and half free’ - and that keeping it from becoming all oligarchy is steady work - our work.”

Taking action: it’s our work

Each of us has a role in securing social justice for all. To create social change, we need to:

- Get outside of our personal comfort zones. Question our own privilege and position. Put ourselves on the line by taking action. Refuse to opt for “getting along.”
- Lobby for legislation. Laws are an instrument of social change. We need laws that remove the constraints against achieving equity.

- Join groups that fight for social justice. Cross party lines and find the connections among issues to advance basic human rights.
- Vote, and encourage others to do the same. Remember, those that show up decide!
- Build a political force to contend with. No one should be able to run in any election — whether municipal, statewide or national — without dealing with social justice issues. Pressure the political parties at the state and national level to aggressively seek out progressive candidates, and endorse and finance them.
- Give money to elect progressive women and progressive men, because money talks.
- Exercise our economic power. Boycott and strike if necessary. Tell those in power that what they’re doing is not okay.
- Exercise our people power: Confront elected officials. Tell them, “If you don’t do what I want, I will not vote for you and I’ll get someone else to run against you.”
- Personally speak out: Remember, silence is consent.

And we need to give money to social change philanthropy, not just to traditional philanthropy. Giving for social change goes beyond band-aids and demands systemic change. For example:

- researching root causes of social problems like poverty, discrimination, and lack of political access

- communicating such research to the public, particularly to disadvantaged populations
- mobilizing grassroots advocacy, creating alliances between advocacy groups, and organizing communities to improve opportunity, economic development, labor organizing, etc.

Promoting social justice is cost-effective — it gives people the tools to change their world, not just the means to sustain themselves. It strengthens democracy. And it is morally just.

Why now?

Because social justice still does not exist. As long as we focus exclusively on traditional philanthropy, we ignore the root causes of injustice. Our communities and our world need both traditional philanthropy and social change philanthropy.

Individuals and foundations need to think more about social justice and social change philanthropy. The philanthropic profession — in its writing and continuing education — must focus more on both.

We talk about philanthropy as a hallmark of democracy. But until we truly reform our institutions and ensure social justice, how can we claim that philanthropy is a democratic act?

As Dr. Martin Luther King said, “Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice that make philanthropy necessary ... Injustice anywhere is

a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Internet ...

- **Joyaux Associates' website** includes resources on social change and social justice: http://www.simonejoyaux.com/resources/social_change_justice.htm
- **"This is your story - the progressive story of America,"** Bill Moyers, June 11, 2003. Speech at Take Back America Conference, Washington D.C., June 6, when Mr. Moyers received America's Future Lifetime Leadership Award. Available on Joyaux website as noted above.
- **"Understanding Social Justice Philanthropy"** by Brenda Hanzl and John Hunsaker of the National Committee on Responsible Philanthropy can be downloaded free in .pdf format at www.ncrp.org/sjpaper.pdf
- **"Axis of Ideology: Conservative Foundations and Public Policy"** by Jeff Krehely, Maeghan House and Emily Kerman of the National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy. Executive summary online at www.ncrp.org; the full report also can be ordered online.

- **"Social Change Philanthropy and How It's Done"** by Alison D. Goldberg, Foundation News and Commentary, May/June 2002. The article can be viewed online at <http://www.foundationnews.org/CME/article.cfm?ID=1982>.
- **The National Network of Grantmakers** has a research report on U.S. social-justice grantmaking in the 1990s: <http://www.nng.org/ourprograms/research/socchangeppr.htm>
- **The Diana, Princess of Wales Foundation** (www.usdianafund.org): Works to empower marginalized youth.
- **Edna McConnell Clark Foundation** (www.emcf.org): Helps young people from low-income families successfully transition to adulthood.
- **Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy** (www.epip.org)
- **The Ford Foundation** (www.fordfound.org): Addresses social change in the U.S. and internationally. For more information, see the speech by Ford Foundation President Susan Berresford at http://www.fordfound.org/news/view_news_detail.cfm?news_index=131
- **The Funding Exchange** (www.fex.org): National network of social-change foundations.
- **The Jewish Fund for Justice** (www.jfjustice.org): Makes grants to alleviate the root

causes of poverty and disenfranchisement of low-income people throughout the U.S.

- **National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy** (www.ncrp.org): Maintains a database of social-justice funders.
- **National Network of Grantmakers** (www.nng.org): Professional network of social-change philanthropy practitioners.
- **New Profit, Inc.** (www.newprofit.com): Venture philanthropy firm that seeks new markets for social change.
- **Omidyar Foundation** (www.omidyar.org): Recently announced the formation of the Omidyar Network, dedicated to stimulating social change across all sectors of U.S. society.
- **SeaChange** (www.sea-change.org): Support social entrepreneurship.
- **Third Wave Foundation** (www.thirdwavefoundation.org): National activist foundation for women ages 15-30.

Resources ...

- **Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Your Money for Societal Change**, Chuck Collins and Pam Rogers, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. Offers detailed information on using progressive policies and giving to address the root causes of social problems.