

# Communication for Change

[ This synopsis is extracted from [War of Ideas](#) by [Jay Taber](#) ]

## INTRODUCTION

Contrary to claims that political non-participation by most Americans is an indicator of widespread apathy and cynicism alone, I would argue that the choice to refrain from activism and the duties of citizenship is largely a symptom of the terror deeply embedded within the collective psyche of a society held captive by the fear of punishment administered by the Free-Market system. What is significant, in my opinion, is the degree to which some highly-motivated Americans, as citizens of a state of unparalleled privilege, have nevertheless demonstrated a willingness to risk economic punishment or social exclusion compelled exclusively by conscience.

When we examine selected social justice movements in American history, the recurrent basis for engagement is concern or survival; for commitment, a conviction based on values, rooted in morals, and expressed in our religious, ethical, and legal codes. The crucial question raised by such acts of altruism is: “What structures and methods have successfully inspired the requisite confidence and courage within these individuals to both articulate and act on their convictions?”

Global liberation and self-determination movements--of the last two decades in particular--demonstrate that the primary obstacles to engagement are ideological, and that the primary task in overcoming these obstacles is a communicative one. Organizations, nations, groups, and networks that have managed to facilitate open, uncensored, unmediated dialogue and discussion, through which group wisdom and collective values are expressed, have consistently generated the empathy, understanding, and insight needed to dream of a better world—and more importantly—to attempt to bring these dreams alive.

**The challenge for those devoted to training and nurturing agents for social change, is in providing programs that focus on the specific tools these agents will need as teachers, organizers, and inspirational leaders engaged in strengthening civil and indigenous societies.** It is my hope that the program outlined in this proposal will be a useful contribution toward that goal.

## SUMMARY

**Communicating Social Transformation** comprises six seminars that examine key factors influencing public participation in the democratic process. The purpose of these six complementary courses--that, combined, might constitute the core of a certificate or degree program--is to spark discussion of and experimentation with strategies and tactics that foster continuous societal debate, dialogue, and discussion regarding the development and implementation of public policy; active resistance to oppression; internal truth and reconciliation; and the restoration of honorable relations

between nations. In short, the program focus is on the art of facilitating citizenship.

**The program includes analysis of both theory and case studies of the civil society process of communication essential to breaking the cycles of misinformation and spectacle generated by state and market sectors, fundamentalist religions, synthetic ngos, and criminal networks.** This knowledge of communication provides a bridge that enables a social base to find expression of their values and beliefs in a way that leads to organizing groups and networks, which in turn facilitate democratic community action. By examining historic examples of communicative projects that moved groups from apathy or cynicism to concern and commitment, activists and potential activists enrolled in such a program would become acquainted with the means by which discontent can be channeled into productive avenues for changing society.

Each course contains readings that relate theory with methodologies used by various groups in communicating their claims to economic, civil, and human rights in a manner that generated discovery, revelation, excitement, engagement, and commitment. The program, adaptive to both formal academic and informal popular-education settings, **builds on social and political awareness gained through academic as well as experiential learning, and is designed for enriching feedback and interaction between these two spheres.**

Graduates of such a program will have gained an appreciation of alternative approaches, models, and venues in seeking accountability from power-wielders; mastered the tools needed for accurately assessing the political sophistication and assets of constituencies; as well as learned to do, discuss, and respect the results of research and analysis critical to functioning better and surviving longer in such hostile settings.

## COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

### *The Public Health Model of Community Organizing*

Case studies, combined with interviews of political researchers and organizers engaged in monitoring and exposing anti-democratic groups and movements in the US, serves as the foundation of this course. **Candid reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of community-based research in protecting democratic electoral, administrative, judicial, and legislative processes from subversion provide sober analysis of obstacles to self-governance.** Successful methods are explored in detail, with an emphasis on comparison of commonly-used models of engagement.

### *Social Movement Development*

This course focuses on the dynamics of movement growth and interaction that positions groups and networks advocating social or political change for opportunities to seize power or influence. Using such examples as the world indigenous movement and the transformation of American conservatism, studies look at structural and historic issues that serve to further or hinder a group's goals.

### *Society in Conflict*

This course **provides a framework about societal evolution and the emerging types of organizations societies are building**, with a focus on the movements that launch processes by contesting established orders, rules, and cultures. Particular attention is given to the generation of uncertainty, complexity, and turbulence in society as resource management regimes require greater organization. Dynamics embedded in this framework and some future implications are discussed. Fresh insights into the influence of organized crime on governments, financial institutions, and above world enterprise are also reviewed.

### *Grassroots Communication*

In this course, techniques used to communicate with each other as well as the outside world are examined through the experiences of such groups as the World Indigenous Movement, Latvian Independence, Polish Solidarity, the American Negro Revolution, Italian Social Centers, Palestine Liberation, and Argentine Neighborhood Assemblies. Emphasis is on integrating formal academic disciplines and perspectives with the informal, often tense setting of poverty and malign neglect. Comparisons of communication in violent, non-violent, and hybrid insurgencies and movements are particularly instructive when viewed in light of the lessons examined under Society in Conflict.

### *Psychological Warfare*

Psychological warfare--which includes the use of propaganda analysis and intelligence--focuses on the analysis of basic deceptive devices as used in World Wars one and two. As an approach to the study of current social issues, familiarization with the planning and operations of this type of conflict enables activists to be better shielded from this kind of assault.

### *Analysis of Popular Education*

This course examines--through case studies--methods of assisting marginalized and oppressed peoples to participate in the development of the educational tools they need to organize themselves into socially-based activists. Attention is given to the analysis of social control by looking at the effect on society of the sacredness of illusion, in which simple images become effective motivations of hypnotic behavior.

## JUSTIFICATION

Looking at societies, cultures, and individuals as evolving, conscious organisms that possess organic “natures” and acquired characteristics--that are both responsive to conscience and vulnerable to manipulation--encourages **research, analysis, and discussion of how social change happens**. Scrutiny of movements, actions, and

fundamental conflicts in multiple eras, societies, and venues provides a context for engagement that enables both holistic thinking and critical examination of often unquestioned perspectives and personal positions.

Distinction of authentic grassroots activism from more socially acceptable elite-sponsored activities serves to both inspire and shield the kind-hearted who choose to engage in public affairs. The application of public health methodology to the realm of politics is useful both literally and figuratively: Our collective, globally-interdependent ideological and sentient well-being depends not just on autonomy and accountability—it depends on systematic prophylaxis exercised by civil society. Without it, our mutual destruction as a species—from either microbes or nuclear warheads—is, indeed, assured.

## CONCLUSION

In writing this proposal, it was not my intent to downplay the need for institutionalized law enforcement, military preparedness, or political diplomacy. Nor was it my intent to disparage the important efforts of those engaged in social reform. Rather, it was my hope to **examine these approaches vis a vis their ability to protect society** from obstructive or subversive interference that threatens public participation in the regenerative process we call democracy.

Analyzed from a functional standpoint, it was my expectation that they might be better understood as models of engagement. Critiqued for their weaknesses, I hoped to provoke reflection on the need for examining these models within a political context that has an historical background. Doctrine and dogma is, in my experience, just as debilitating to reform as it is to reaction.

Contrary to popular views, I contend that what is needed is more thought and less action. The regular undirected or ill-considered expenditure of energy through ineffective models produces frustration, that, when repeated, can lead to cynicism. To overcome forces of reaction requires careful preparation and education based on a clear understanding of the spectrum of opposition to democracy, its agendas, and its methods of operation.

It is my opinion that to be prepared for fundamental conflict with an opposition that is determined to dominate not only our society but the entire world by any means necessary, organizers need to consider and **develop research and analysis capacity in a manner similar to intelligence and security capabilities conducted during military warfare**. Mastery of ideological warfare is what has enabled a minority of aggressive elites to rule—it is the field of battle where political outcomes are determined.

To wage ideological war against those who are terrorizing the entire planet requires serious disciplined investigation and study--not sloganeering, hyperactive zealotry, or fear-mongering. Those are the methods of militarists and colonialists bent on preventing open inquiry and freedom of expression. My faith in humanity to resolve conflict when the “white blood cells” are functioning depends in part on my ability to persuade readers that the public health model is appropriate for circumscribing political violence.

That it must incorporate tactics from the other models as well as acknowledge its location in a world where the operations of these other models are taken into account is assumed.

That we live in a world of perpetual trauma where the temptation to shut down emotionally is great, and impatience and argumentation has intensified to the point where many no longer want to stop and listen to the grievances of the deprived, must be approached in a way that gives people comfort and peace of mind, that restores their psychic well-being. Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace building—the public health model of social change—is a philosopher’s task. The task is to honor our collective wisdom.

Leadership is not the ability to get people to follow you; it is the ability to inspire confidence in others to act on their convictions by helping them articulate the beliefs and values they hold dear. It implies trust and care, generated by honest and open dialogue, through which the group wisdom expressed by a leader is composed. This in turn becomes **the basis of the power to endure and create**. By exercising this power, we gain empathy and understanding—the insight needed to dream of a better world. The dynamics and relationships explored and communicated through open societal discussion bring these dreams alive.

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