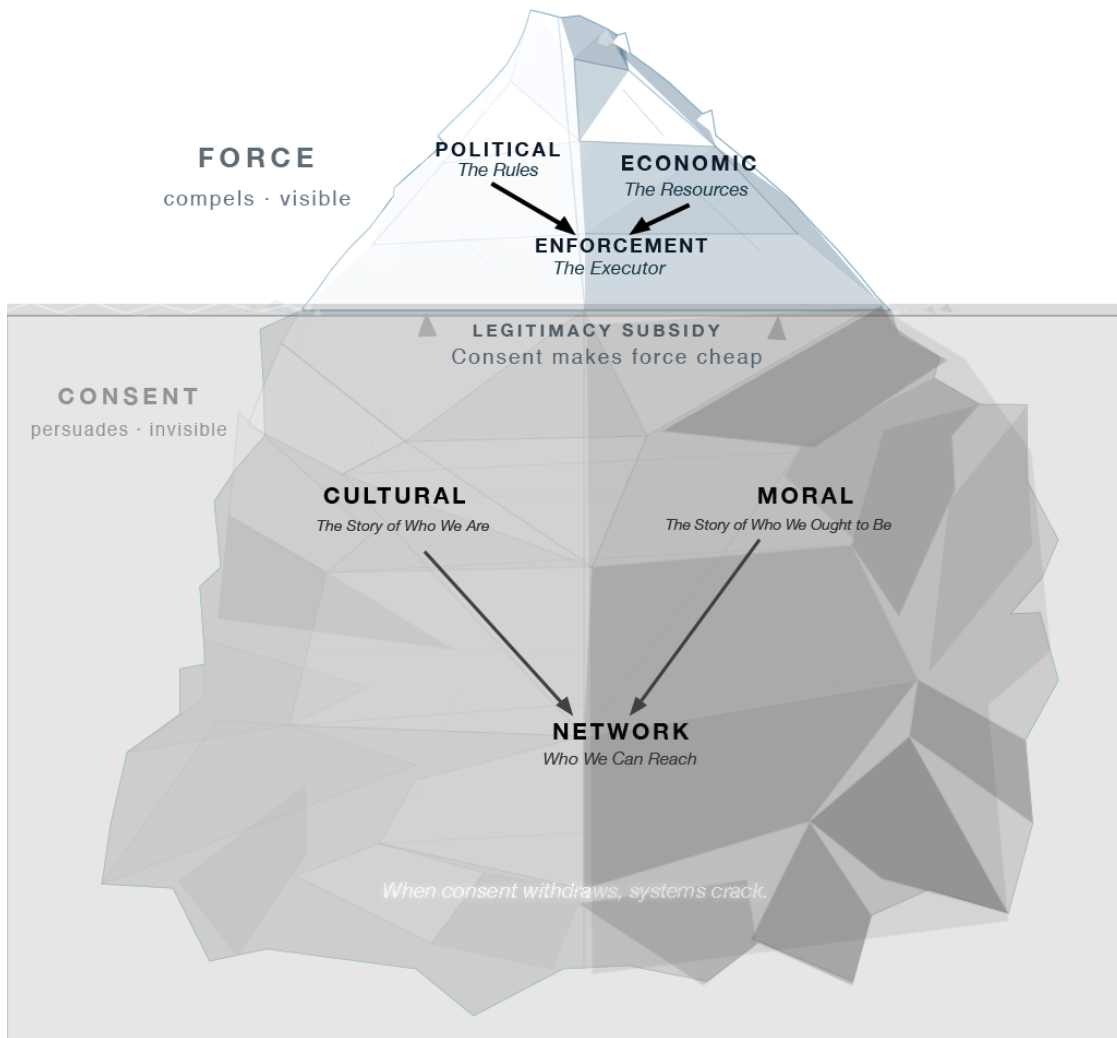


# The Invisible Game

## The Full Taxonomy of Power

Darcy Burner • Netroots Nation 2026



*Elections are just the tip of the iceberg*

# Table of Contents

ORIENTATION	3
How power actually works	3
ABOVE THE WATERLINE • FORCE	6
Political Power	6
Economic Power	13
Enforcement Power	19
BELOW THE WATERLINE • CONSENT	26
Cultural Power	26
Moral Power	32
Network Power	36
SYNTHESIS	42
How the Powers Chain	42
FROM THE BOOK	44
A Fable for Tomorrow	44
The Cargo That Wouldn't Move	48
I'm Not Mad	51

## THE INVISIBLE GAME: THE FULL TAXONOMY OF POWER

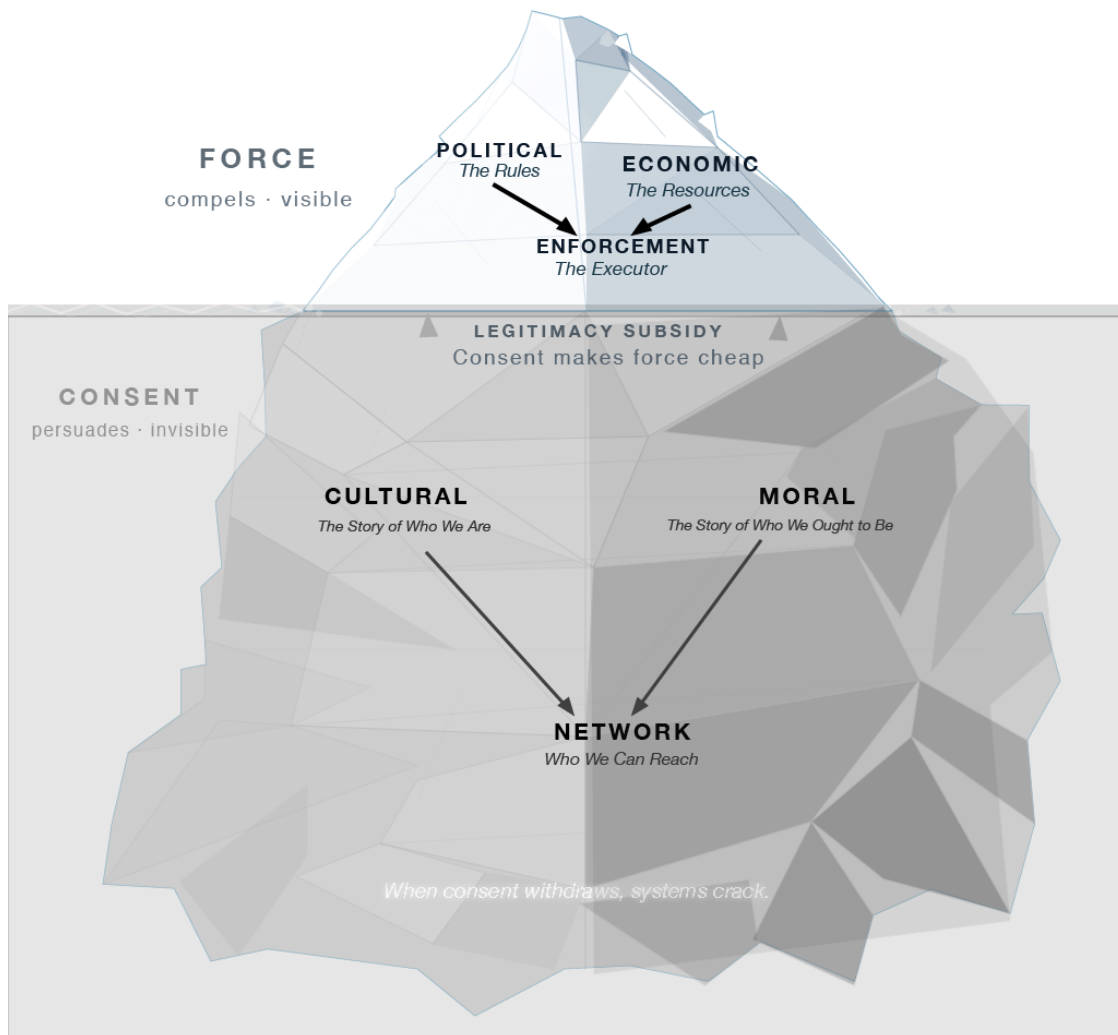
Darcy Burner · Netroots Nation 2026

© 2026 Darcy Burner. All rights reserved.

## How power actually works

Most people think power means elections: they vote, watch the returns, and feel triumphant or helpless until the next cycle. Elections are the tip of the iceberg: real, but a fraction of the structure below the waterline. Power is six capacities, each with its own levers:

<b>POLITICAL</b>	the rules of collective life. Who decides, between what, by what process, at what level.
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	where resources flow. Coordination turns individual choices into leverage. You don't have to be rich; you have to be organized.
<b>ENFORCEMENT</b>	makes rules real, turning laws into consequences and contracts into binding commitments.
<b>CULTURAL</b>	what people believe is normal, possible, and right. The most durable form, and the ground the others build on.
<b>MORAL</b>	who we believe we <i>ought</i> to be. It works through shared values, religious and ethical conviction, and moral witness, holding people to their own stated principles. The most asymmetric form, open to those with no money, organization, or army.
<b>NETWORK</b>	connects individual choices into collective action. Scales one stand into a movement.



*The iceberg of power: above the waterline, force (political, economic, enforcement) is visible and compels; below it, consent (cultural, moral, network) is invisible and persuades; the waterline between them is the legitimacy subsidy.*

**Above the waterline, force** (political, economic, enforcement) compels, and it is visible.

**Below it, consent** (cultural, moral, network) persuades, and it is invisible.

The waterline between them is the **legitimacy subsidy**: legitimacy is consent subsidizing force. When a system feels legitimate, compliance is cheap and enforcement is rarely needed; when consent withdraws, the subsidy collapses and no amount of force holds for long. Every successful movement worked both halves. Scan for levers you haven't tried and powers you haven't engaged.

**Tools rewrite the board.** New technology creates levers that didn't exist: ActBlue, Signal, and Wikipedia were each built by tiny teams and reshaped an entire field. Building the tools is itself power: cheap, asymmetric, and durable, and whoever builds the infrastructure others run on shapes what everyone else can do. Often the highest-leverage move is to build the thing that changes the map.

**The † mark** flags levers that attack the rules themselves (independent courts and the rule of law, fair elections, a free press and free expression, due process, a shared factual record, and the right to dissent) rather than contesting power within them. They're listed so you can recognize them, name them, and defend the guardrails when they come under attack.

# Political Power

*The power to shape the rules of collective life. Six questions, five-plus levels of government, and technical-governance bodies that set standards with the force of regulation.*

---

Levers run in both directions. • Levers can be threatened as well as pulled. • Levers chain. • Political power can build or break capacity in the other powers.

## I. Which body decides?

LEVEL	local (city • town • township • county • district) • state • federal • international • tribal
BRANCH / VENUE	legislature • regulatory agency • courts • ballot initiative & veto referendum • executive • switch venues after a loss
DURABILITY	constitutional (survives the next legislature) • statutory (repealable; defend it) • regulatory • executive (fast, revocable) • judicial (needs standing + theory; to set policy via courts → see Enforcement) • technical standards (IETF • W3C • IEEE • platform governance • AI)
FORCE THE FEDERAL/STATE FIGHT	interstate compacts (National Popular Vote) • multistate-AG litigation • nullification & non-cooperation (→ §V)
DENY OPPONENTS A VENUE	preemption laws • block judicial review (TX SB 8) • Congressional Review Act • strip standing or jurisdiction
CREATE OR RESHAPE THE BODY	citizens' assembly • constituent assembly • independent commission (CA/AZ/MI redistricting) • admit new states (DC / PR statehood)

---

## II. Who decides?

### CHANGE WHO GETS ELECTED

---

#### WHO COUNTS AS A CITIZEN (UPSTREAM OF THE VOTE)

birthright-citizenship rules • naturalization & denaturalization • due process in removals (stripped via the Alien Enemies Act) †

---

#### CENSUS & APPORTIONMENT

contest the count • citizenship-question fights • hard-to-count outreach • apportionment & funding litigation

---

#### ELECTORATE

registration drives • automatic registration • fight purges • same-day registration • early / mail / extended voting • challenge voter-ID laws • restore felon voting rights (FL Amendment 4, later narrowed by fines-and-fees) • lower local voting age • secretary-of-state races

---

#### RUN, DELIVER & CERTIFY THE VOTE

ballot printing & distribution • mail-ballot / USPS infrastructure • ballot tracking & barcoding • who controls the voter list (centralize or contest list authority; federally-built lists) • certification & canvassing boards • recounts & ballot challenges • voter-roll maintenance & purges • polling-place allocation & closures • adequately fund election administration • voter / election-protection legal teams • poll working (Power the Polls)

---

#### CANDIDATES

recruit for open / uncontested seats • run yourself • primary incumbents • candidate pipelines (Emerge) • train to campaign • train on governance • train on institutional skill

---

#### WIN THEM SEATS

canvass / deep canvass • phone & text bank • postcards • house parties • GOTV • voter-file modeling & microtargeting • A/B-tested messaging • relational organizing & peer-to-peer texting • digital ad targeting • data infrastructure (Catalist, NGP VAN)

---

#### BUILD THE TOOLS

fundraising & payment rails (ActBlue: two coders → \$15B+) • voter data & turnout apps • relational-organizing platforms • redistricting tools (Dave's Redistricting App) • secure comms (cheap to build, durable once built)

---

#### MONEY

donate & bundle (ActBlue) • create / fund PACs • super PACs & independent expenditures • 501(c)(4) dark money • donor networks & coordination tables (Democracy Alliance, Koch) • fund ballot-measure campaigns • self-funding

---

---

**RULES**

ranked-choice voting • independent redistricting • proportional representation • public financing (NYC 8:1) • anti-gerrymander litigation • participate in redistricting • off-cycle → on-cycle election scheduling • universal / compulsory voting

---

**ENTRENCH OR BREAK INCUMBENCY**

patronage (jobs / contracts / grants / pork to allies) • constituent services as incumbency engine • ballot-access barriers • fusion voting • sore-loser laws

---

**REMOVE MID-TERM**

recall • impeachment

---

**CHANGE WHO GETS APPOINTED**

---

advocate for nominees (Federalist Society list) • oppose hostile nominees • appointee pipelines (ACS) • boards & commissions • cultivate career staff • elect judges • monitor appointees (Fix the Court)

**WORK THE PARTY**

---

precinct committee officer • local party meetings • party leadership • delegate • factional orgs (Progressive / Freedom Caucus) • shape the platform

**CLAIM VACANT SEATS**

---

serve on juries • show up at overlooked meetings

**STAFF & RUN THE BUREAUCRACY**

---

build & protect a professional civil service (merit hiring, for-cause protections, whistleblower channels) • train staff • place staff (Heritage) • staff pipelines (CHCI, Koch) • fund staff externally (fellows) • institutional memory across cycles • mass pre-vetted personnel + day-one agendas (Mandate for Leadership / Project 2025) • Schedule F & reclassifying civil servants • reorganize / relocate agencies to hollow them out • abolish or defund agencies outright (USAID, CFPB) • capture statistical agencies (Census, BLS) • seize payment & data systems to defund and surveil (DOGE in Treasury / SSA / IRS) †

### III. What are they choosing between?

---

**FIRST DRAFT**

model legislation (ALEC) • adapt from other states • partner with drafting offices • policy clearinghouses (SiX) • comment with proposed language • trigger laws & sunset clauses (pre-positioned law) • pre-draft resolutions & coalition statements

---

**AGENDA**

get onto committee agendas • time introductions • messaging bills • stack bills for momentum • petition for rulemaking • nationalize on a platform (Contract with America)

---

**INFORMATION LANDSCAPE**

white papers (Heritage “Mandate”) • think tanks (CAP, EPI, Roosevelt) • fund research • fiscal scores (CBO) • brief staff • messaging guides

---

- Shifting what’s thinkable at all (the Overton window) lives in Cultural.

### IV. What procedures govern it?

---

**THREE TIERS**

informal norms • formal rules • constitutional provisions.

---

**MASTER THE RULES**

learn your institution cold (ACA reconciliation path) • Robert’s Rules • committee structure • track legislation (Sunlight) • track regulatory calendars (Unified Agenda)

---

**PROCEDURAL TOOLS**

points of order (Byrd Rule) • discharge petitions • filibuster / threat • exploit deadlines (Hyde rider) • break quorum (TX Dems) • pack galleries (ACT UP) • control the calendar • lame-duck sessions • exploit crises to pass pre-positioned agendas (shock doctrine)

---

**INSIDE-THE-CHAMBER LEVERAGE**

whip ops / build a blocking caucus (Freedom Caucus) • holds • logrolling & vote-trading • motion-to-vacate & leadership fights • party-switching to flip control

---

**POWER OF THE PURSE**

appropriations riders • conditional federal funding (strings on grants) • defund programs • shutdown & debt-ceiling brinkmanship • earmarks • impoundment (refuse to spend) • reconciliation

---

**OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATION**

hearings • subpoenas & contempt • special counsels & commissions (9/11, Jan 6) • IG & GAO referrals

---

<b>CHANGE FORMAL RULES</b>	bylaw amendments • primary rules (CA top-two) • delegate selection (McGovern-Fraser) • endorsement processes • internal finance rules • kill procedural barriers (judicial-filibuster, 2013 / 17)
<b>NORMS</b>	establish through practice (Hastert Rule) • exploit (blue slips) • abandon strategically • let drift
<b>AMEND CONSTITUTIONS</b>	state ballot initiative (Prop 13) • build toward federal amendment (17th) • conventions • defend provisions under attack (post-Shelby)
<b>CAPTURE / RESTRUCTURE INSTITUTIONS</b>	sequence to prevent resistance (PiS) • strip a branch's authority • expand or shrink bodies (court-packing) • end agency independence (fire for-cause commissioners; Humphrey's Executor) • embed factional advantage (NC) • integrated systems (Federalist Society)
<b>REGULATORY PROCEDURE</b>	public comments (millions on net neutrality) • sophisticated technical comments • agency hearings • negotiated rulemaking

## V. What pressures shape their choice?

<b>CONSTITUENT PRESSURE</b>	calls in volume • in-person district visits (Indivisible) • personalized letters • on-camera town halls • call-in days (5 Calls) • lobby days • bird-dogging • deliver petitions
<b>DEMONSTRATIONS</b>	march / rally (Women's March: 4.6M) • sit-ins / occupations (Occupy) • die-ins (ACT UP) • vigils • creative visibility
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	scorecards (LCV) • pledges (Norquist) • endorsements • publicize records (GovTrack) • reward hard votes • earned media
<b>COALITION &amp; LOBBYING</b>	bill coalitions • citizen lobbying (AARP) • negotiate with staff • mass individualized comments • donor & bundling pressure
<b>INVESTIGATIVE (CITIZEN-SIDE)</b>	FOIA • monitor enforcement patterns • whistleblowing
<b>REFUSAL / NON-COOPERATION</b>	sanctuary policies • refuse to implement (Medicaid expansion) • jury nullification • work slowdowns • refuse to confirm (Garland)

## VI. What can the executive do alone?

executive orders & agency guidance (DACA; Title IX) • emergency declarations (border wall; IEEPA sanctions) • pardons & commutations (Obama: 1,715 commutations, mostly drug sentences) • appointments & removals (acting officials; firing IGs) • signing statements & OLC opinions • prosecutorial discretion (DA / AG charging priorities) • impoundment & reprogramming of funds • defy or slow-walk adverse court orders † • weaponize prosecution & investigation against opponents † • coerce civil society: cancel contracts & grants, strip clearances, threaten licenses & tax-exempt status, deny access (law firms, universities, press, nonprofits) †



---

<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>	treaty bodies & UN votes • transnational advocacy & naming-and-shaming • trade leverage • law as template (GDPR) • treaty ratification & WTO disputes • treaty obligations as a durability tier.
<b>TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY</b>	sovereign immunity • treaty rights • federal trust relationship • tribal courts • Indian Commerce Clause. Its own legal terrain, with openings (and vulnerabilities) state and local frameworks lack.
<b>COERCIVE INSTITUTIONS</b>	federalize the National Guard over state objection † • Insurrection Act for domestic policing † • purge & install loyalists atop the military & FBI † → see Enforcement.
<b>USED AGAINST YOU</b>	dark money • astroturfing • disinformation & bots • voter suppression † • gerrymandering • election subversion † • SLAPP suits → counter with transparency, voting-rights litigation, redistricting reform, anti-SLAPP statutes.

---

## VII. Resources

### BOOKS

---

**Organizing for Social Change**, by Kimberly Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max. A comprehensive manual covering campaign planning, community engagement, and working with bureaucracy.

**Rules for Radicals**, by Saul Alinsky. The foundational text on community organizing, offering tactical rules that remain influential across the political spectrum.

**No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age**, by Jane McAlevey. Highlights the critical distinction between mobilizing and organizing, using case studies from the Chicago Teachers Union.

**Politics the Wellstone Way**. A workshop-in-book-form covering message articulation, base building, field organizing, and budgeting.

**Stand Up Straight: How Progressives Can Win**, by Bob Creamer. A comprehensive tactical manual covering messaging, coalition-building, and electoral strategy.

**The Blueprint**, by Adam Schrager and Rob Witwer. Documents how donors built progressive infrastructure to flip a purple state; a canonical case study on coordinated long-game strategy.

**The Congressional Deskbook**, by Michael Koempel and Judy Schneider. The reference manual for how Congress actually works, covering rules, procedures, the budget process, committee structure, and floor mechanics.

**The Progressive Revolution: How the Best in America Came to Be**, by Mike Lux. How progressive movements have built power, forged coalitions, and reshaped the political landscape over generations.

## **ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS**

---

**Midwest Academy** ([midwestacademy.com](http://midwestacademy.com)). The gold standard for progressive organizing training since 1973, offering multi-day trainings on direct action.

**Run for Something** ([runforsomething.net](http://runforsomething.net)). Recruits and supports young progressives running for state and local office with seed money and training.

**Indivisible** ([indivisible.org](http://indivisible.org)). Provides practical guides explaining how Congress works and how constituents can effectively pressure representatives.

**Ballotpedia** ([ballotpedia.org](http://ballotpedia.org)). The encyclopedia of American politics, offering unbiased information on elections, voter guides, and ballot measures.

**OpenSecrets** ([opensecrets.org](http://opensecrets.org)). The premier research group tracking money in politics, lobbying activity, and campaign finance disclosures.

**GovTrack** ([govtrack.us](http://govtrack.us)). A free tool for tracking federal legislation and votes; set up alerts for specific bills or members of Congress.

**Brennan Center for Justice** ([brennancenter.org](http://brennancenter.org)). Tracks redistricting litigation and leads campaigns for electoral reform; essential for understanding gerrymandering and voting rights.

# Economic Power

*The power to shape where resources flow, and you don't have to be rich to wield it, only organized. Coordinated, individual choices become collective leverage: half a million people moving \$4.5B together changed corporate behavior.*

Economic power directs resources, *toward* as much as *away*. Withdrawal (boycott, strike, divest) strips what a target depends on; affirmative allocation (buy, bank, invest, crowdfund, build) signals demand, and demand builds supply. • Power comes from concentration & coordination: aligned choices, at scale, are the lever. • Economic power chains into political outcomes. • Stamina decides: whoever can sustain the effort longer wins, whether holding out or building up.

## I. Where does your money go?

<b>BOYCOTT (WITHDRAW SPENDING)</b>	targeted product (UFW grapes) • geographic (NC HB2: \$3.76B) • advertising (Sleeping Giants) • secondary boycotts • sustain past the pain threshold (Montgomery: 381 days) • boycott infrastructure (apps, databases) • target the chokepoint (advertisers, not audiences)
<b>BUYCOTT (DIRECT SPENDING)</b>	values-aligned firms • ethical purchasing guides • co-ops & worker-owned (REI) • buy local (10% Shift) • reward corporate courage (Dick's) • grow new markets & standards through aggregated demand (organic produce; fair trade; EVs)
<b>REDIRECT CAPITAL</b>	credit unions & community banks (Bank Transfer Day: \$4.5B) • CDFIs • screen your 401(k) / ESG • divest from industries (fossil fuels: \$40T+ pledged) • mission-aligned investing • equity crowdfunding (JOBS Act)
<b>DEBT AS A LEVER</b>	debt strikes • debt refusal • debtor organizing • debt buying & abolition (Debt Collective Rolling Jubilee: \$32M) • predatory-lending exposure

## II. Where does your labor go?

<b>ORGANIZE &amp; BARGAIN</b>	form a union (Amazon JFK8) • join & participate (members earn ~\$200/wk more) • support other shops (Hot Labor Summer) • worker centers for the non-unionizable (NDWA) • sectoral bargaining (CA FAST Act) • professional associations (Alphabet Workers Union)
-------------------------------	---

---

<b>WITHHOLD LABOR</b>	strike (WV teachers) • work-to-rule • walkouts • sick-outs • refuse overtime • sympathy strikes • wildcat strikes • stand-up / targeted-escalation strikes (Shawn Fain) • build & fund strike funds
-----------------------	---

---

<b>REFUSE PARTICIPATION</b>	quit publicly & explain • refuse specific employers (Project Maven) • refuse to cross picket lines • professional boycotts • collective non-payment (“Don’t Pay”)
-----------------------------	---

---

<b>TARGET THE CHOKEPOINT</b>	ports, rail, warehouses & logistics • run a full corporate campaign (map every pressure point, hit them at once)
------------------------------	--

---

### III. Who owns the capital?

---

<b>SHAREHOLDER POWER</b>	file resolutions (Engine No. 1 → 3 Exxon seats) • vote your proxies • organize institutional investors & pensions (Climate Action 100+; CalPERS) • question at annual meetings • proxy access • persistent coalitions (ICCR)
--------------------------	--

---

<b>DIVEST TO STIGMATIZE &amp; DEFUND</b>	institutional divestment (South Africa: 155 universities) • individual pledges • stigmatize industries • pressure intermediaries (banks, insurers, reinsurers) • time announcements
--	---

---

<b>BUILD ALTERNATIVE OWNERSHIP</b>	worker co-ops (Mondragón: 80,000) • community land trusts • municipal enterprises (broadband) • platform co-ops • ESOPs • mutual-aid funds
------------------------------------	--

---

### IV. What can you build instead?

---

<b>COOPERATIVE &amp; SOLIDARITY ECONOMY</b>	buying co-ops (Park Slope) • mutual-aid networks • credit unions & lending circles (Grameen) • time banks • community currencies (BerkShares) • tool libraries & makerspaces
---	--

---

<b>COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED INSTITUTIONS</b>	municipal utilities • community-owned & social housing (Vienna: 60%) • community-owned renewables • public data / platform commons (Estonia X-Road)
--	---

---

<b>ALTERNATIVE SUPPLY CHAINS &amp; LOCAL ECONOMIES</b>	fair trade • community development corporations (New Community Corp) • anchor institutions (Cleveland Model) • community investment funds
--	---

---

---

<b>LAND &amp; HOUSING</b>	community land trusts • tenant organizing & rent strikes • zoning & land-use reform • municipal land banking • Indigenous land-back
---------------------------	---

---

<b>BUILD ECONOMIC TOOLS</b>	crowdfunding & investing platforms • fintech for credit unions & CDFIs • platform cooperatives • open-source & alternative payment rails
-----------------------------	--

---

## V. Where does public money go?

The public already controls enormous capital: budgets, pension funds, the tax code, procurement. Directing it is economic power at the largest scale.

---

<b>PUBLIC INVESTMENT &amp; INDUSTRIAL POLICY</b>	direct investment & subsidies • grants, loans & loan guarantees • clean-energy & manufacturing incentives (IRA, CHIPS) • public R&D (DARPA, NIH) • development & green banks • equity stakes & revenue-sharing for public return
--	--

---

<b>PUBLIC &amp; POSTAL BANKING</b>	state-owned banks (Bank of North Dakota, profitable for over a century) • municipal & postal banking • public credit for housing, students & small business
------------------------------------	---

---

<b>PUBLIC PENSIONS &amp; ENDOWMENTS</b>	direct the capital (CalPERS, CalSTRS) • economically-targeted & in-state investment • divest and affirmatively invest (housing, infrastructure, clean energy) • vote the shares at scale
---	--

---

<b>PROCUREMENT</b>	public purchasing power • Buy America & domestic content • prevailing wage & project-labor agreements • community-benefit & labor standards in contracts • anchor-institution procurement
--------------------	---

---

<b>PARTICIPATORY &amp; DEMOCRATIC BUDGETING</b>	participatory budgeting (residents direct public spending) • community oversight of budgets • baby bonds & guaranteed-income pilots
---	---

---

<b>THE TAX CODE AS ALLOCATION</b>	build: investment & production credits, LIHTC housing, R&D, EITC / CTC, opportunity zones, TIF • deter: carbon, tobacco & sugar taxes, congestion pricing • redistribute & raise: progressive, wealth, estate, land-value & corporate taxes, global minimum tax • close & enforce: end step-up basis & carried interest, financial-transaction tax, fund IRS enforcement, beneficial-ownership transparency
-----------------------------------	---

---

<b>PUBLIC OPTIONS &amp; ENTERPRISE</b>	public utilities & broadband • public health option • social housing • public insurance (competes with or replaces private provision)
<b>SOVEREIGN / PUBLIC WEALTH FUNDS</b>	invest public assets for public return or a citizens' dividend (Norway; Alaska Permanent Fund)
<b>INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC STATECRAFT</b>	foreign aid & development finance (USAID, DFC) • humanitarian & food aid • aid conditionality (the carrot to sanctions' stick) • debt relief • trade preferences (GSP) • leverage at the World Bank & IMF (contested: tied aid and dependency can undercut the goodwill)

## VI. What are the rules of the economic game?

<b>LABOR LAW</b>	right to organize • collective bargaining • strike protections • minimum wage • paid leave • workplace safety • gig-worker classification
<b>CORPORATE GOVERNANCE</b>	disclosure • fiduciary duty • stakeholder & benefit-corp structures • worker representation on boards (codetermination) • executive-comp reform • curb staggered boards & dual-class shares • corporate criminal accountability
<b>COMPETITION</b>	antitrust enforcement • merger review • break up monopolies • supply-chain accountability
<b>MARKETS, PRICES &amp; MOBILITY</b>	ban non-competes • curb monopsony • rent stabilization • anti-price-gouging • usury caps
<b>FINANCE</b>	bank regulation • consumer protection (CFPB) • accredited-investor rules • community reinvestment (CRA)
<b>IP &amp; DATA</b>	patent reform • open source / Creative Commons • fight patent trolls • compulsory licensing • right-to-repair • data portability • algorithmic-pricing transparency

## VII. What sustains collective action?

<b>STRIKE &amp; ACTION CAPACITY</b>	strike funds (UAW: \$825M) • mutual-aid infrastructure (Montgomery carpools) • emergency funds for risk-takers • cross-org solidarity funds
-------------------------------------	---

<b>FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FROM OPPONENTS</b>	diversify funders • earned-revenue enterprises (Goodwill) • endowments • membership models (ACLU: 1.8M)
<b>RESILIENCE AGAINST RETALIATION</b>	alternative employment for blacklisted workers (Highlander) • mutual insurance against economic retaliation
□	
<b>THE STATE AS ECONOMIC ACTOR</b>	the affirmative levers (public investment, state banks, pensions, procurement, the tax-and-spend power) are in §V. Their coercive deployments: tariffs by executive fiat (IEEPA) • equity stakes & golden shares used to control firms (Intel 9.9%; US Steel plant-closure veto) • coerce firms via contracts, tariffs & selective approvals † • weaponize banking access & financial surveillance (debanking) † • monetize office for private gain (crypto, licensing, favors) • defund jurisdictions to coerce • politicize the central bank (fire Fed officials) • strip federal workers' bargaining rights
<b>USED AGAINST YOU</b>	employer retaliation & union-busting • lockouts • SLAPP suits • capital flight & offshoring • plant-closing threats → counter with NLRB protections, pre-built strike funds, documenting retaliation, legal allies, and a diversified economic base.

## VIII. Resources

### BOOKS

**Secrets of a Successful Organizer**, by Labor Notes. A step-by-step guide for rank-and-file workers to build power on the job.

**Collective Courage**, by Jessica Gordon Nembhard. A landmark work covering the rich history of cooperative economics in Black communities.

**For All the People**, by John Curl. A comprehensive history tracing cooperative work in the United States from colonial times to the present.

**Owning Our Future**, by Marjorie Kelly. Makes the case for cooperatives, community ownership, and democratic enterprise as economic alternatives.

**The Making of a Democratic Economy**, by Marjorie Kelly and Ted Howard. How to scale democratic ownership systemically.

**A Collective Bargain**, by Jane McAlevey. How to rebuild union power at scale in healthcare, education, and logistics.

**Goliath**, by Matt Stoller. A history of anti-monopoly politics and how concentrated economic power captured both parties.

**America Beyond Capitalism**, by Gar Alperovitz. The systemic case for worker ownership, cooperatives, and municipal enterprise as a parallel track to electoral politics.

## **ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS**

---

**Labor Notes** ([labornotes.org](http://labornotes.org)). The essential resource for rank-and-file union members, publishing practical organizing guides and hosting conferences.

**As You Sow** ([asyousow.org](http://asyousow.org)). The nation's leading shareholder advocacy nonprofit, filing shareholder resolutions on climate, racial justice, and executive compensation.

**U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives** ([usworker.coop](http://usworker.coop)). A national organization representing nearly 450 worker cooperatives and providing technical assistance.

**Ethical Consumer** ([ethicalconsumer.org](http://ethicalconsumer.org)). Maintains a comprehensive list of progressive consumer boycotts and publishes ethical shopping guides.

**NCUA Credit Union Locator** ([mapping.ncua.gov](http://mapping.ncua.gov)). The official federal tool for finding credit unions by location.

**NLRB Your Rights** ([nlrb.gov](http://nlrb.gov)). Official resource explaining worker rights to organize and protections against employer retaliation.

**OFN CDFI Locator** ([ofn.org/cdfi-locator](http://ofn.org/cdfi-locator)). A free tool to locate Community Development Financial Institutions serving underserved communities.

**The Debt Collective** ([debtcollective.org](http://debtcollective.org)). Debtor organizing, dispute tools, and collective action for people fighting predatory debt.

# Enforcement Power

*The power to make rules real by attaching consequences. It turns a right on paper into a remedy, a contract into a binding obligation, and a court order into a fact on the ground.*

A right you can enforce is a right you actually have; closing the gap between the two is the work. • The threat often suffices: a 60-day notice letter or a credible whistleblower can win compliance before any case is filed. • Private enforcement fills the gap: when agencies are captured or unwilling, citizen suits, certification, and reputation create their own consequences. • Enforcement is only as fair as it is even-handed: applied selectively, the machinery that protects rights becomes a weapon.

**BEFORE REACHING FOR IT, CHECK** legal basis & standing • will it work on this violator • have faster levers been tried • can you bear the cost (fees, time, retaliation).

## I. What can you enforce yourself?

**CIVIL RIGHTS** EEOC charges (Dukes v. Walmart) • Title IX complaints • ADA (incl. websites) • §1983 for constitutional violations • fair-housing testers • voting-rights challenges (NAACP LDF) • state civil-rights agencies

**ENVIRONMENTAL LAW** Clean Water Act citizen suits (Riverkeeper) • Clean Air Act suits • Endangered Species Act suits (Center for Biological Diversity) • RCRA hazardous-waste suits • monitor discharge reports • 60-day notice letters (often force compliance alone)

**WORKER & CONSUMER PROTECTIONS** wage-theft complaints • OSHA complaints • NLRB unfair-labor-practice charges • qui tam / False Claims Act (GSK: \$3B) • state-AG consumer cases (opioids: \$26B+) • class actions (tobacco MSA: \$206B) • small claims court (no lawyer needed)

**CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS** breach-of-contract suits • enforce settlements & consent decrees • mass arbitration (turn forced-arbitration clauses against the company) • enforce government commitments • document & enforce oral agreements

**DIGITAL & PRIVACY RIGHTS** CFAA • state privacy laws with a private right of action & statutory damages (Illinois BIPA: hundreds of millions) • CCPA • ECPA • GDPR (EU data subjects) • FTC & state-AG complaints (the law’s architecture is the leverage: a private right of action beats an agency-only statute)

---

**IMMIGRATION RIGHTS**

know your rights regardless of status (4th & 5th Amendment; no entry without a judicial warrant; right to remain silent) • asylum, VAWA, T- & U-visas • challenge removals in immigration court, the BIA, and federal appeal • sanctuary policies & prosecutorial discretion (→ Political)

---

**THE JURY (CITIZEN ENFORCEMENT)**

serve and judge • civil juries deliver consequences through damages • grand juries indict or decline • nullification: refuse to convict under a law you find unjust (Fugitive Slave Act acquittals) • the power cuts both ways, so guard its dark side (all-white juries once acquitted lynchings)

---

## **II. How do you hold enforcers accountable?**

---

**POLICE**

internal-affairs complaints • civilian review boards with subpoena power • §1983 suits • film encounters • cop-watch programs • body-camera requirements • end qualified immunity • police-budget accountability • DOJ pattern-or-practice investigations • sheriff & DA elections

---

**PROSECUTORS**

elect reform DAs (among the highest-leverage criminal-justice moves) • bar complaints (Nifong disbarred) • conviction-integrity units • innocence projects • open-file discovery • binding prosecutorial guidelines • monitor plea bargaining

---

**COURTS**

judicial-ethics enforcement (Fix the Court) • court-watch programs • fund public defense • bail reform (Bail Project) • sentencing reform • access-to-justice initiatives

---

**AGENCIES**

FOIA aggressively • APA challenges to unlawful action • inspector-general investigations • GAO investigations • congressional oversight • challenge agency capture (POGO)

---

**SURVEILLANCE & COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE**

legal-observer programs (NLG) • copwatch • operational security & encrypted comms • mesh networking • Know Your Rights & ACLU bust cards • fight fusion centers, social-media monitoring & infiltration (COINTELPRO's heirs)

---

### III. How do you build enforcement capacity?

---

#### LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE

fund legal aid • impact-litigation orgs (Lambda Legal, Earthjustice, Institute for Justice, NAACP LDF) • pro bono pipelines • clinics & rights hotlines

---

#### COMMUNITY KNOW-HOW

Know Your Rights training • train communities to monitor compliance • documentation systems (ACLU Mobile Justice) • build enforcement expertise inside community orgs

---

#### MONEY

legal-defense funds (SLAPP-back) • whistleblower-support funds (Government Accountability Project) • multi-year impact-litigation funding • fee-shifting statutes (make enforcement pay for itself)

---

### IV. How do you use enforcement strategically?

---

#### CHOOSE CASES FOR DETERRENT EFFECT

prioritize or deprioritize (Cole Memo) • enforce selectively for signal value (SEC's Martha Stewart case) • pick plaintiffs, timing & legal theories (LDF's path to Brown) • enforce to create political pressure (Scopes) • file amicus briefs (Brandeis & Ginsburg)

---

#### CHOOSE YOUR FORUM

forum-shop for favorable courts • use state courts when federal courts are hostile • build precedent through sequential cases

---

#### LOCK IN THE WIN

consent decrees • ongoing court supervision • settlements with independent monitors • fee-shifting as a permanent deterrent

---

#### COORDINATE FOR SYSTEMIC IMPACT

enforcement coalitions • time filings with media • turn enforcement data into policy change • sue the biggest violator first, then the rest

---

### V. What enforcement works outside the courts?

---

#### WHISTLEBLOWING & INTEGRITY INSIDE INSTITUTIONS

document before going public (Frances Haugen) • whistleblower statutes & qui tam • anonymous channels (SecureDrop) • collective refusal (Israeli Refuseniks) • support reformers within, and reform candidates & orgs without

---

#### PRIVATE STANDARDS & CERTIFICATION

LEED • insurer requirements • industry self-regulation with teeth (PCI-DSS) • supply-chain certification (Fair Trade, FSC)

---

---

**REPUTATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
ENFORCEMENT**

Glassdoor & Yelp exposure • data transparency (EPA Toxics Release Inventory) • restorative & transformative justice • name and shame • community-benefit agreements with penalties

---

**OPEN-SOURCE  
INVESTIGATION**

OSINT & document forensics (Bellingcat) • satellite & remote sensing for environmental violations • crowd-sourced documentation

---



---

## **VI. International enforcement (the full range):**

---

**ECONOMIC &  
FINANCIAL**

comprehensive embargo (Cuba, since 1960) • Magnitsky-style targeted sanctions (asset freezes, travel bans) • sectoral sanctions (Russia: energy, finance, defense) • secondary sanctions (Helms-Burton; penalize third parties) • freeze central-bank reserves & cut from SWIFT (Russia: ~\$300B frozen) • export controls & entity lists (China chips; Huawei) • investment screening (CFIUS; outbound) • forced-labor import bans (Uyghur / UFLPA) • oil price caps • revoke trade status (PNTR / MFN) • asset recovery & anti-kleptocracy

---

**DIPLOMATIC**

recognition & derecognition • expel diplomats & sever relations • suspend or expel from bodies (Russia from the Council of Europe; G8 to G7) • condemnation resolutions • visa bans

---

**LEGAL & JUSTICE**

ICC arrest warrants (Putin, 2023) • ICJ cases (genocide) • ad hoc & hybrid tribunals (Nuremberg; ICTY / ICTR; a tribunal for the crime of aggression) • universal-jurisdiction prosecutions in national courts • commissions of inquiry & UN special rapporteurs • extradition (and resist Interpol red-notice abuse against exiles †) • transitional justice (truth commissions, lustration, reparations)

---

**COLLECTIVE SECURITY  
& FORCE**

alliances & security guarantees (NATO Article 5) • arm an ally (Ukraine) • peacekeeping, no-fly zones, blockade & interdiction • direct intervention (last resort) • laws of armed conflict (→ Coercive force)

---

**CIVIL-SOCIETY  
PRESSURE**

boycott / divest / sanctions movements (anti-apartheid; BDS) • corporate withdrawal (~1,000 firms left Russia, 2022) • sporting &

---

---

cultural bans • naming-and-shaming (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, Freedom House) • press your own government to act

---

**CONTESTED**

broad embargoes often punish civilians more than regimes (Cuba; 1990s Iraq); targeted measures with humanitarian carve-outs are the reform.

---

## **VII. Coercive force (the monopoly on violence): every other enforcement lever ultimately rests on it.**

---

**INSTRUMENTS**

military • National Guard (state or federalized) • federal law enforcement (FBI, ICE, CBP, Marshals) • state & local police • sheriffs

---

**CIVILIAN-CONTROL  
LEVERS YOU CAN PULL**

the congressional war power & War Powers Resolution • posse comitatus (keep the military out of domestic policing) • use-of-force rules & independent oversight • defund or condition force • service-member & veteran organizing

---

**INTERNAL  
ACCOUNTABILITY**

military justice (the UCMJ & courts-martial) • command responsibility • the duty to refuse unlawful orders • accountability for war crimes (My Lai, Abu Ghraib) • the law of armed conflict (Geneva, the ICC)

---

Command and authorization sit in Political §VI; the abuses are flagged below.

## **VIII. Ending & preventing war (peace as power): the highest use of this power is often to stop force, not apply it.**

---

**PREVENT**

preventive diplomacy & early warning • address root causes (development aid, → Economic) • confidence-building measures & hotlines • de-escalation & off-ramps • arms control, nonproliferation & disarmament (NPT, New START, chemical-weapons, landmine & cluster-munition bans, the nuclear-freeze movement)

---

**END**

mediation & third-party good offices (Norway / Oslo; Camp David) • ceasefires & negotiated settlements (Good Friday Agreement; Dayton; Colombia & the FARC) • back-channel & track-two diplomacy • DDR (disarm, demobilize, reintegrate)

---

KEEP & REBUILD	UN peacekeeping & observer missions • unarmed civilian protection (Nonviolent Peaceforce) • power-sharing & constitutional design for divided societies • truth, reconciliation & reconstruction (→ transitional justice)
CIVIL-SOCIETY PEACE LEVERS	antiwar & nuclear-freeze movements • conscientious objection & war resistance • veterans for peace • citizen diplomacy & sister cities • war-crimes documentation that builds pressure to stop
WHEN ENFORCEMENT IS TURNED AGAINST YOU	selective & political prosecution (target enemies, shield allies) † • defy or slow-walk court orders, the move that nullifies every other lever † • strip due process & habeas (mass removals without hearings) † • pardons used to nullify enforcement † • purge & politicize DOJ and the FBI † • domestic military deployment & the Insurrection Act for policing † • martial law † • militarized & unaccountable force (masked agents, denial of counsel) † • mass surveillance & data purchases to monitor dissent † • SLAPP suits • infiltration of movements → defend with independent courts, inspectors general, whistleblower protections, anti-SLAPP statutes, legal observers, and operational security.

## IX. Resources

### BOOKS

**The New Jim Crow**, by Michelle Alexander. Essential for understanding how the criminal justice system operates and the foundations for reform movements.

**Just Mercy**, by Bryan Stevenson. Demonstrates how legal advocacy can expose and remedy injustice through the lens of defending the wrongly condemned.

**Shielded: How the Police Became Untouchable**, by Joanna Schwartz. A legal breakdown of qualified immunity and the structural barriers that prevent citizens from holding law enforcement accountable.

**Crisis of Conscience: Whistleblowing in an Age of Fraud**, by Tom Mueller. A deep dive into the history, mechanics, and immense personal cost of whistleblowing.

**A Civil Action**, by Jonathan Harr. How private citizens use civil litigation to enforce environmental laws when government regulators fail.

**Serpico**, by Peter Maas. The definitive account of the NYPD whistleblower, illustrating the systemic nature of corruption and internal retaliation.

**Simple Justice**, by Richard Kluger. Chronicles the decades-long legal strategy to defeat segregation, showing how courts were forced to act as executors of civil rights.

## **ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS**

---

**ACLU** ([aclu.org](http://aclu.org)). The nation's premier defender of constitutional rights, offering Know Your Rights resources.

**NAACP Legal Defense Fund** ([naacpldf.org](http://naacpldf.org)). America's first civil rights law organization, focusing on racial justice through litigation and criminal justice reform.

**Innocence Project** ([innocenceproject.org](http://innocenceproject.org)). Works to exonerate wrongfully convicted individuals and advocates for prosecutorial accountability.

**National Lawyers Guild** ([nlg.org](http://nlg.org)). A progressive lawyers' organization providing legal support for activists and social movements.

**MuckRock** ([muckrock.com](http://muckrock.com)). Tools to simplify the FOIA request process, with a repository of hundreds of thousands of government documents.

**LawHelp.org** ([lawhelp.org](http://lawhelp.org)). Connects low-income individuals with free legal aid providers by state.

**Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press** ([rcfp.org](http://rcfp.org)). Over 40 years providing FOIA guides and resources for First Amendment issues.

**Electronic Frontier Foundation** ([eff.org](http://eff.org)). The leading nonprofit defending digital privacy, free speech, and innovation, with surveillance self-defense guides.

# Cultural Power

*The power to shape what people believe is normal, possible, and right. It runs through stories, symbols, frames, and shared assumptions, the invisible architecture of meaning. Every cultural narrative was made by someone, which means it can be remade.*

Culture is upstream of politics: by the time people vote, their sense of what’s possible is already set. • Repetition beats argument: saturation makes a belief feel normal, and normal beats true. • Whoever names it first usually wins: the first frame sticks, and reframing is far harder than naming. • Control of the channels matters as much as the content: a perfect message with no distribution is nothing. • Culture changes slowly, and that is its leverage: the shifts are durable, and backlash is the sign the ground is already moving.

## I. What stories are told?

### PERSONAL TESTIMONY

surrogates in mainstream media (marriage-equality couples for a decade before Obergefell) • testimonial video (Humans of New York) • storytelling infrastructure (The Moth, StoryCorps) • the human case study (Lilly Ledbetter) • ghostwrite for sympathetic figures

### ENTERTAINMENT & FICTION

write for existing shows (Storyline Partners) • fund film & documentary (Participant: An Inconvenient Truth, 13th) • normalizing characters (Will & Grace) • emerging formats (Serial) • frame-changing books (The New Jim Crow) • theater (The Laramie Project)

### NEWS & JOURNALISM

place op-eds • feed reporters stories • fund investigative journalism (Dark Money) • build independent outlets (Texas Tribune) • direct-to-reader channels & newsletters (Heather Cox Richardson: 1M+) • leak infrastructure (SecureDrop)

### EDUCATION & CURRICULUM

textbooks & standards (Texas board ripples nationwide) • lesson plans (Facing History) • public-education campaigns (Truth anti-smoking) • found schools & institutes (the Federalist Society began as debate clubs) • train the trainers (Marshall Ganz) • educational media (Crash Course)

### ART, MUSIC & PERFORMANCE

public art (AIDS Memorial Quilt) • protest music (“We Shall Overcome”) • viral visual art (Faurey’s “Hope”) • performance (Pussy

---

Riot) • comedy & satire (Jon Stewart) • movement symbols (the pussy hat) • memes & internet culture

---

## II. What language frames it?

---

### NAMING & TERMINOLOGY

coin terms that carry your frame (“pro-life” vs. “pro-choice”) • rebrand (“estate tax” to “death tax”) • refuse & replace hostile terms (“illegal alien” to “undocumented”) • shorthand that spreads (“NIMBY”) • name new debates first (“AI” vs. “automated decision systems”)

---

### METAPHOR & ANALOGY

strategic metaphors (“invasion” vs. “journey”) • analogies to settled moral questions (abolition) • expose opponents’ metaphors (Lakoff’s “strict father”) • make the abstract physical (“the 1%”)

---

### CATEGORY CREATION

group in your favor (“people of color”) • dissolve categories opponents rely on • expand or contract strategically (“working class”)

---

## III. What feels normal?

---

### NORMALIZE THROUGH VISIBILITY

come out & be visible (Harvey Milk) • media representation (GLAAD) • repetition (“I’m a Mormon”) • authority-figure validators (retired generals for DADT repeal) • publicize majority-support polls • model the behavior

---

### SHIFT THE OVERTON WINDOW

stake out the edge to move the middle (\$15 wage, radical in 2012) • build permission structures to change one’s mind • non-threatening messengers (evangelical “creation care”) • “wrong side of history” • incremental policy (civil unions before marriage) • fund the idea factories (Mackinac Center, where Overton named the window)

---

### DE-NORMALIZE

make the once-acceptable costly (MADD) • name and shame (Sleeping Giants) • social proof of disapproval (mass open letters) • reframe the status quo as the radical position

---

## IV. Who controls the channels?

---

### OWN THE MEDIA

buy or build outlets (Bezos/WaPo; Murdoch/Fox) • boards of cultural institutions (Koch on PBS, Smithsonian) • advertiser pressure (Stop

---

	Hate for Profit) • platform content policy (deplatforming) • media-consolidation fights
<b>DISTRIBUTION &amp; ALGORITHMS</b>	optimize for algorithmic amplification (Daily Wire) • own email & direct lists • manipulate trending topics • shape search & SEO (crisis pregnancy centers) • flood the zone (Bannon) • build the tools (own platforms, decentralized social)
<b>FAITH &amp; COMMUNITY MEDIA</b>	churches & megachurches • religious broadcasting & publishing • religious schooling & homeschool networks (the Christian Right's cultural infrastructure)
<b>GATEKEEPING</b>	become the gatekeeper (scholars reshaping a field) • awards (Pulitzer) • conference programs (TED) • grant criteria (Ford's social-justice art) • the production supply chain (sensitivity readers)
<b>VALIDATORS &amp; INFLUENCERS</b>	celebrities & athletes • creators & influencers • trusted messengers inside a community

## V. What counts as knowledge?

The deepest layer: stories persuade, but epistemic structures certify. Whoever defines valid knowledge sets the ground the rest rests on.

<b>CREDENTIALING &amp; EXPERTISE</b>	get your people credentialed • build credible validators • expose the funding behind captured expertise (Merchants of Doubt)
<b>EVIDENCE PRODUCTION</b>	commission independent studies • partner with universities • community-based & participatory research • challenge industry-funded methodology
<b>DATA OWNERSHIP &amp; ACCESS</b>	FOIA & data liberation • citizen science (air-quality bucket brigades) • community surveys (data asymmetry is power asymmetry)
<b>INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY</b>	place allies in universities, scientific bodies & professional associations • build alternative knowledge institutions • challenge captured ones • expose manufactured doubt

## VI. What history do people believe?

---

### SHAPE THE RECORD

fund & publicize history (1619 Project) • museums, monuments & memorials (National Memorial for Peace and Justice) • remove or recontextualize monuments (Confederate statues, most erected during Jim Crow) • popular history (Zinn: 2M+ copies) • documentaries (Eyes on the Prize)

---

### FOUND & CLAIM ORIGIN STORIES

ritualize founding moments (Stonewall, Pride) • claim existing narratives (MLK claiming the Declaration) • continuity as restoration (originalism) • expose opponents' real origins (the "pro-life" movement's segregation-era launch)

---

### MARK TIME & PLACE

create holidays (Juneteenth, MLK Day) • rename streets, buildings & places • rituals & commemorations

---

## VII. When and where do you intervene?

---

### EXPLOIT MOMENTS

capitalize on crisis (2008 into Occupy's "1%") • hijack collective attention (Kaepernick & the anthem) • manufacture a recurring moment (Earth Day, 1970) • use anniversaries (Bloody Sunday at 50) • time releases to policy windows

---

### TARGET STRATEGICALLY

bellwether institutions (AP style guide on "illegal immigrant," 2013) • concentrate geographically (Harlem Renaissance) • professional training (anti-racism in med-school curricula) • children's media (Sesame Street since 1969)

---



### INTERNATIONAL / SOFT POWER

public diplomacy & international broadcasting (Voice of America, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty) • educational & cultural exchange (Fulbright) • cultural export as influence (the global reach of US film, music & TV; K-pop as Korean soft power) • counter authoritarian propaganda (RT, Confucius Institutes). The affirmative complement to USAID's aid and to the sanctions stick; its abuse (state propaganda) is flagged below.

---

---

**USED AGAINST YOU**

capture cultural institutions to control programming (Kennedy Center board purge) † • defund public media & the arts (NPR / PBS via EO 14290; NEH; IMLS) • coerce the press (FCC license threats, network lawsuits, revoke access, the AP pool ban) † • impose an official history & ban “divisive concepts,” with book bans (the 1776 / “patriotic education” orders; military-base removals, including 1984) † • scrub or falsify federal data & mandate language (deleting climate & health pages; “Gulf of America”) † • manufactured disinformation, bots & deepfakes † • flood the zone → defend with independent and diversified media, deep source credibility, rapid response that refuses to amplify, and data rescue (archive before it is deleted).

---

## VIII. Resources

### BOOKS

---

**Don’t Think of an Elephant!**, by George Lakoff. The foundational text on political framing, explaining how frames shape perception.

**The Political Brain**, by Drew Westen. Explores how the brain processes political messaging, explaining why campaigns that appeal to reason often lose to those that appeal to emotion.

**Don’t Buy It**, by Anat Shenker-Osorio. A masterclass in strategic communications, showing how the metaphors we use dictate what people believe is economically possible.

**Re:Imagining Change**, by Doyle Canning and Patrick Reinsborough. The definitive guide to story-based strategy, offering tools to craft effective messages.

**The Sum of Us**, by Heather McGhee. Demonstrates how to reframe racism as an economic issue affecting everyone.

**Made to Stick**, by Chip and Dan Heath. Explores why some ideas thrive while others die, using the SUCCEsS framework.

**Silent Spring**, by Rachel Carson. A masterclass in cultural power, demonstrating how a narrative mystery can change how a nation thinks about the natural world.

**Roots**, by Alex Haley. A cultural touchstone that transformed how a nation conceptualized slavery by giving the history a human face and name.

**Merchants of Doubt**, by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway. How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco to climate change; the essential text on manufactured epistemic uncertainty.

## ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS

---

**FrameWorks Institute** ([frameworksinstitute.org](http://frameworksinstitute.org)). Uses social science research to help nonprofits reframe social problems as policy issues.

**The Opportunity Agenda** ([opportunityagenda.org](http://opportunityagenda.org)). Provides communications research on racial justice messaging, including their “Vision, Values, and Voice” toolkit.

**Beautiful Trouble** ([beautifultrouble.org](http://beautifultrouble.org)). A repository of over 300 stories, tactics, principles, and methodologies for creative activism.

**Center for Artistic Activism** ([c4aa.org](http://c4aa.org)). Trains organizations to combine the emotional power of the arts with strategic planning for social change.

# Moral Power

*The power of conscience: the appeal to who we believe we ought to be. It confronts people with the gap between their stated values and what they are permitting, and forces the question, “what kind of person, and what kind of country, are you going to be?” It is the most asymmetric power of all, available to anyone with no money, no organization, and no army, yet able to crack open systems that look invincible.*

---

Moral power calls people to their own values, working through what an audience already believes is right and holding them to it. • It works through contrast and witness: peaceful people facing violent systems, truth spoken inside lies. The gap between what is and what ought to be is the power. • Discipline is the multiplier: nonviolence keeps the contrast intact, which is why the strongest campaigns train for it relentlessly. • It is the spark, not the fire: moral power creates the will to act, then must be channeled into political, economic, cultural, or network power to last. • The only permanent answer to a valid moral claim is to remove the injustice. Everything else (discrediting witnesses, controlling the image, force) is temporary, and a true claim resurfaces.

---

<b>THE WITNESS FORMULA</b>	someone perceived as innocent of wrongdoing voluntarily puts themselves in harm’s way for the sake of the cause official power overreacts in a way that shocks the conscience the image is captured and spread widely to an audience who can directly or indirectly change the outcome
----------------------------	---

---

## I. How do you create moral witness? (the protest path)

---

<b>STAGE CONFRONTATION</b>	peaceful witness against a violent system (Birmingham 1963: hoses and dogs on children broke the Civil Rights Act stalemate) • choose witnesses no one can dismiss (Rosa Parks, chosen by the NAACP) • visual contrast (Standing Rock: prayer facing militarized police) • high-visibility staging (Jennifer Keelan crawling the Capitol steps for the ADA) • the impossible image (Tank Man)
--------------------------------	---

---

<b>DOCUMENT &amp; CAPTURE</b>	embed photographers in every action • build sympathetic press relationships • train participants to film (Cop Watch) • live-stream (Philando Castile) • preserve & archive (Syrian Archive) • the single compelling image (Alan Kurdi, galvanizing Europe’s refugee response)
-------------------------------	---

---

---

**SACRIFICE & WITNESS**

accept suffering without retaliating (the Freedom Riders) • hunger strikes (Bobby Sands) • extreme sacrifice (Thích Quảng Đức) • sustained occupation (Julia Butterfly Hill, 738 days) • resign on principle (the Saturday Night Massacre) • whistleblow at personal cost (Ellsberg)

---

**TESTIMONY & TRUTH-TELLING**

testify publicly (Anita Hill) • prophetic sermons (Óscar Romero) • letters from jail (King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”) • bear witness across generations (the Shoah Foundation: 55,000 testimonies) • truth & reconciliation processes (South Africa’s TRC)

---

## **II. What institutions give you moral authority? (the religious and secular paths)**

---

**RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

claim the sacred texts (abolitionists on Exodus and Galatians) • invoke the prophets (King in the line of Amos and Isaiah) • organize clergy to speak together • moral-political preaching (Barber’s Moral Mondays) • denominational statements • new moral movements (the Social Gospel)

---

**RELIGIOUS INFRASTRUCTURE**

houses of worship as organizing hubs (the Black church carried the civil rights movement) • sanctuary (the 1980s Sanctuary Movement: 500+ congregations) • interfaith coalitions (the Poor People’s Campaign) • religious resources for organizing (Catholic Campaign for Human Development) • train clergy as organizers (Faith in Action)

---

**SECULAR & UNIVERSAL ETHICS**

human-rights frameworks (Amnesty measuring states against the UDHR they signed) • professional ethics (Doctors Without Borders; the Hippocratic oath) • scientific moral authority (the Doomsday Clock) • invoke the authority of the dead (who can credibly claim MLK) • principled-consistency institutions (the ACLU)

---

## **III. How do you live the truth? (the individual path)**

---

**PERSONAL REFUSAL**

stop performing loyalty you don’t feel (Havel’s greengrocer taking down the sign) • speak the unspeakable in official settings • refuse unjust orders (Hugh Thompson at My Lai) • civil disobedience (Thoreau to Gandhi to King) • return honors & resign • live the alternative (Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker)

---

---

**COLLECTIVE TRUTH-TELLING**

simultaneous truth-telling that creates safety in numbers (#MeToo) • protected channels for disclosure (SecureDrop, hotlines) • independent investigations (the Boston Globe’s Spotlight) • publish what was hidden (the Panama Papers) • open letters with distributed risk • parallel institutions (samizdat, underground universities)

---

## **IV. How do you convert moral power into change?**

---

**TO POLITICAL**

turn moral moments into voter registration (March for Our Lives: 800,000 marched, fueling a youth registration surge) • moral authority as legislative leverage (Argentina’s Mothers of the Disappeared) • run moral leaders for office (Raphael Warnock) • time witness to the legislative calendar

---

**TO ECONOMIC**

boycotts grounded in moral claims (Montgomery, 381 days) • pressure investors & donors (fossil-fuel divestment) • shame the brand (Nike’s sweatshops) • give people an economic action for their outrage (the grape boycott)

---

**TO CULTURAL**

art from witness (“Strange Fruit”) • let witness redefine normal (smoking made shameful) • claim cultural space (the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) • build institutions from moral movements (HBCUs)

---

**EXPAND THE MORAL CIRCLE**

extend who counts (abolition, suffrage, disability rights, animal welfare, future generations) • public apology, repair & reparations as moral acts

---

## **V. How do you deploy it strategically?**

---

**CHOOSE & PREPARE**

pick battles for maximum moral clarity (the NAACP vetting Brown plaintiffs) • train in nonviolent discipline (Lawson’s Nashville workshops) • escalate gradually (Gandhi, from noncompliance to the Salt March) • create dilemmas with no comfortable middle (the sit-ins) • “jail, no bail” (SNCC)

---

**DEFEND AGAINST MORAL POWER TURNED AGAINST YOU**

acknowledge legitimate claims fast (Tylenol’s recall vs. Boeing’s stonewalling) • refuse to overreact (Bull Connor handed the movement its victory) • distinguish genuine witness from manufactured outrage • above all, address the underlying injustice

---

---

## USED AGAINST YOU

discredit or bait the witness (DARVO; provoke a loss of discipline) • manufactured, astroturfed outrage • co-opt moral language (“religious liberty” as a license to discriminate; “integrity” as suppression) • deepfakes, denial, and drowning the image in counter-volume • claim religious authority for domination (Christian nationalism) • criminalize protest & humanitarian aid and persecute witnesses (anti-protest laws, prosecuting border-aid volunteers, deporting student protesters) † → defend with nonviolent discipline, unimpeachable witnesses, verified chain-of-custody capture, naming the co-optation, and removing the injustice (the only permanent answer).

---

## VI. Resources

### BOOKS

---

**The Politics of Nonviolent Action**, by Gene Sharp. The foundational three-volume work on nonviolent resistance, including a catalog of 198 methods.

**Why Civil Resistance Works**, by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan. Groundbreaking research demonstrating that nonviolent campaigns are more than twice as effective as violent ones.

**Letter from Birmingham Jail**, by Martin Luther King Jr.. A profound articulation of the moral obligation to disobey unjust laws; available free through Stanford’s King Institute.

**The Prophetic Imagination**, by Walter Brueggemann. Explores how prophetic voice works by embracing the pain of the people while creating new possibilities.

**This Is an Uprising**, by Mark and Paul Engler. Reveals the hidden craft behind moments of transformative unrest and strategic nonviolent action.

### ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS

---

**International Center on Nonviolent Conflict** ([nonviolent-conflict.org](http://nonviolent-conflict.org)). A premier educational foundation offering free online courses and an extensive resource library in nearly 70 languages.

**Training for Change** ([trainingforchange.org](http://trainingforchange.org)). Provides capacity-building workshops in strategic planning, campaign building, and direct action.

**Faith in Action** ([faithinaction.org](http://faithinaction.org)). The largest faith-based community organizing network in the U.S., training those most impacted by injustice.

**Global Nonviolent Action Database** ([nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu](http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu)). Swarthmore College’s searchable database of thousands of nonviolent campaigns throughout history.

# Network Power

*The power to connect individual choices into collective action. One person is ignorable; a thousand coordinated are a force. The network is the mechanism that turns isolated decisions into power, and it scales every other power: one moral stand into a movement, one purchase into a boycott, scattered discontent into organized pressure.*

---

Networks run on trust: the substrate every other lever depends on, slow to build and instant to destroy. • Architecture determines capability: centralized is fast but fragile, distributed is resilient but slow; the structure you choose decides what you can do and what can be done to you. • The investment-to-action ratio is lopsided: eighteen months of showing up buys forty-eight hours of action. Invest first. • Feedback loops sustain it: people stay where their actions visibly matter, so close the loop or watch the network decay. • Scale by federation, not command: local autonomy inside shared frameworks is the only model that grows without collapsing.

## I. How do you build trust?

---

### DEMONSTRATE RELIABILITY

show up consistently for years (Stacey Abrams building Georgia for a decade before anyone watched) • share losses with wins • put your own skin in the game • deliver value before asking • own mistakes publicly

---

### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

invest one-to-one (Ganz's relational organizing: power lives in real relationships, not contact lists) • create peer-to-peer spaces (Indivisible chapters) • show up when people don't need you (weddings and funerals) • practice reciprocity • remember and follow up

---

### ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY

build genuine expertise before spending it • borrow trust from respected validators • a track record of being right • accept accountability • stay consistent in public and private

---

## II. How do you build bonds and belonging?

Trust is the precondition; bonds are what it deepens into. This is where the most powerful and most dangerous dynamics live.

---

### AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

real relationship (meals, celebrations, grief) • value people beyond their use to the cause • a community worth belonging to between campaigns

---

<b>IDENTITY &amp; RITUAL</b>	shared language, symbols & rituals • formative shared experiences • when the group becomes part of who you are, commitment changes in kind
<b>CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP</b>	vulnerability, consistency, visible sacrifice, making people feel seen (a force multiplier, and a single point of failure; Ella Baker's relationship-centered model outlasts any charismatic leader)
<b>PARASOCIAL CONNECTION AT SCALE</b>	media manufactures the feeling of relationship without reciprocity, a tool for connection and a rival force that argument can't penetrate
<b>GUARD THE CULT FAILURE MODE</b>	love-bombing, isolation, us-vs-them, escalating commitment, and information control are the dark version of every lever above. Build the safeguards from day one: distributed leadership • financial transparency • tolerance of dissent • keep members' outside relationships • regular leadership transitions • accountability that doesn't depend on the leader's goodwill

### III. How do you structure the network?

<b>DESIGN FOR RESILIENCE</b>	distribute leadership so there is no one to arrest (Otpor!) • build redundancy (multiple orgs) • multiple channels (Hong Kong's Telegram, AirDrop, Bridgefy at once) • keep human relationships alongside the digital • offline fallback (Solidarity's samizdat networks) • compartmentalize under pressure (the Underground Railroad survived because no one knew the whole)
<b>OWN YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	build tools you control (own the email list, don't rent the following) • convert algorithmic reach into owned relationships • physical gathering spaces (the Black church) • technical resilience (Signal not SMS, mesh networking, decentralized platforms). If you can own the pipes, own the pipes.
<b>MASTER ALGORITHMS WITHOUT DEPENDING ON THEM</b>	study what each platform amplifies • play the reach game • route every follower toward a direct relationship • diversify (when Twitter became X, the over-invested found out) • value over virality (algorithms reward outrage; trust comes from being useful)

## IV. How do you activate the network?

---

**MAKE ASKS EFFECTIVE** specific and concrete (“call this number, say this sentence”) • reduce friction ruthlessly (every extra step loses half) • scripts and templates • batch and escalate • clear triggers for pre-planned action (MoveOn rapid response)

---

**USE SOCIAL PROOF** make participation visible (yard signs, “I voted”) • public commitments • running counts (a climbing counter recruits) • early adopters trigger the bandwagon • escalate visibly

---

**CREATE URGENCY** real deadlines (votes, filing dates) • mass action at a single moment (Lights for Liberty) • respond to opponents’ mistakes in real time • stack actions on a compressed timeline (Hot Strike Summer)

---

## V. How do you sustain participation?

---

**SHOW IMPACT** close the loop fast (“you called; here’s what happened”) • show aggregate impact (“together, 2 million calls”) • real-time feedback (thermometers, live maps) • publish wins • show the counterfactual

---

**RECOGNIZE & ADVANCE** public recognition • formal honors • differentiate doers from free-riders • share credit widely • build advancement paths (volunteer to lead to coordinator to staff)

---

**BUILD COMMUNITY** social connection alongside action (meals, music, childcare) • celebrate together • a recurring rhythm (weekly meetings, annual convenings like Netroots Nation) • escalate commitment gradually • name setbacks honestly

---

## VI. How do you defend the network?

---

**AGAINST ATTACK** assume infiltration and design to work anyway (COINTELPRO awareness) • transparency about threats beats secrecy • encrypted comms • rapid-response protocols • hold your own narrative before opponents define you

---

**DISRUPT HOSTILE NETWORKS** map topology and target key connectors (isolating bridge people fragments a network faster than hitting leaders) • expose lies to break the trust substrate • platform pressure • raise participation costs • slow hostile spread with friction and fact-checking

---

---

**BUILD COUNTER-NETWORKS**

build where the opposition is absent (Swing Left) • offer belonging to people leaving hostile networks (Life After Hate) • reach opposition audiences through their own channels (Lincoln Project) • bridge polarized communities (Braver Angels) • address the real grievances harmful networks exploit

---

## VII. How do you scale?

---

**FEDERATE**

a national framework with autonomous local chapters (Indivisible: thousands of independent groups, shared tactics) • scalable onboarding (Wikipedia’s graduated roles) • self-enforcing norms • accept messiness as the price of speed

---

**BUILD COALITIONS**

find common cause among unlikely allies (left-right criminal-justice reform) • formal alliance structures (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights: 200+ orgs) • bridge organizations (Working Families Party) • joint actions that build intergroup trust (Standing Rock) • manage tension productively

---

**TECHNOLOGY AS MULTIPLIER**

relational tools that reach supporters’ own networks (Empower, OutVote) • tools that lower coordination costs (shared calendars, collaborative docs) • automate the routine, humanize the important • build the tools (often the highest-leverage move is building the platform itself)

---



**INTERNATIONAL / DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE**

fund and train civil society, independent media & election monitors abroad (NED, NDI, IRI, USAID’s democracy programs) • transnational solidarity & diaspora networks • support pro-democracy movements (the Otpor! / CANVAS model). The network face of USAID; autocrats attack these as “foreign interference,” and that charge gets weaponized in both directions.

---

**USED AGAINST YOU**

platform capture & algorithmic manipulation (a billionaire turns a network into a political weapon) • AI astroturfing & bot armies • infiltration (COINTELPRO’s heirs) • surveil and map organizer networks † • criminalize assembly & deport organizers † • foreign-agent & nonprofit-status laws that defund civil society † • internet

---

---

shutdowns & throttling † • cult-style manipulation → defend with owned infrastructure, distributed leadership, encrypted comms, structural safeguards, exposing connectors' lies, and meeting the real needs harmful networks exploit.

---

## VIII. Resources

### BOOKS

---

**Networks of Outrage and Hope**, by Manuel Castells. Examines social movements in the internet age and how networks enable contemporary movements.

**People Power**, edited by Mike Miller and Aaron Schutz. The definitive rendering of Alinsky's work on collective action theory.

**Blueprint for Revolution**, by Srdja Popovic. A highly practical guide focused on creating movements people want to join, written by a key figure in Otpor!.

**Stir It Up**, by Rinku Sen. Covers lasting movements, leadership development, and cross-issue strategies for the 21st century.

**Diminished Democracy**, by Theda Skocpol. Traces the decline of mass, member-led civic organizations and explains why movements must build community identity that outlasts any single leader.

**Twitter and Tear Gas**, by Zeynep Tufekci. Explores why digitally networked movements can scale at unprecedented speeds but often collapse under pressure because they bypassed the slow work of building infrastructural trust.

**How Organizations Develop Activists**, by Hahrie Han. A critical look at the difference between organizations that merely mobilize people and those that build deep, resilient network power.

**Chokepoint Capitalism**, by Rebecca Giblin and Cory Doctorow. A tactical look at how corporate monopolies capture digital pipes and algorithms, and how organizers and creators can fight back.

**Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion**, by Robert Cialdini. The foundational text on how social proof, commitment, and belonging drive behavior; essential for understanding both healthy activation and manipulative dynamics.

**Terror, Love and Brainwashing**, by Alexandra Stein. How attachment theory explains cult dynamics; essential reading for understanding the continuum between healthy movements and coercive ones.

### ORGANIZATIONS & TOOLS

---

**Industrial Areas Foundation** ([industrialareasfoundation.org](http://industrialareasfoundation.org)). The original institution-based organizing network, with a history of major local victories.

**Leading Change Network** ([leadingchangenetwork.org](http://leadingchangenetwork.org)). Trains organizers in a model emphasizing narrative (heart), strategy (head), and action (hands).

**re:power** ([repower.org](http://repower.org)). A premier training organization for progressive digital organizing, covering email, analytics, and strategic digital planning.

**The Commons Library** ([commonslibrary.org](http://commonslibrary.org)). A free collection of social change resources, including guides on coalition building and distributed leadership.

## How the Powers Chain

No power works alone. The strongest strategies use one power to reshape the conditions that govern another, and the most durable victories get encoded across several at once. “Reform bail” isn’t a single lever: you choose which power you bring (political: change the law • enforcement: litigate the current one • cultural: reframe it • moral: bear witness • economic: fund the alternative • network: organize the affected). The first link decides which taxonomy you use; the target decides where it lands.

- Power types chain: sequence a win in one to reshape another (Act 10: political legislation gutted unions’ economic power, which destroyed network infrastructure, which weakened the political ground game; one bill, four powers).
- Chaining makes wins durable: a political win that doesn’t reshape underlying power gets reversed, and a cultural shift not encoded in law stays vulnerable. Durability comes from reinforcing wins across powers.
- Opponents chain too: read an attack on one power for what it enables in the others (voter suppression enables anti-union law enables defunded schools).

**Political reshapes** → *Economic*: set wage floors (Fight for \$15), protect organizing (PRO Act), antitrust, tax & redistribute • *Enforcement*: sentencing & bail reform, fund or defund agencies (IRS in the IRA), end qualified immunity, confirm or block judges • *Cultural*: set curriculum, fund or defund public media, regulate platforms (Section 230), immigration shapes who is present • *Network*: protect or criminalize assembly, regulate labor organizing (Taft-Hartley), defund community orgs (ACORN) • *Moral*: criminalize protest (ag-gag), classify information, bar observers from sites of injustice

**Economic reshapes** → *Political*: fund campaigns & infrastructure (ActBlue/WinRed), strike for legislation, lobby, threaten capital flight • *Cultural*: buy media (Bezos, Murdoch, Sinclair), fund production, advertiser leverage, fund universities • *Enforcement*: fund impact litigation & legal aid, private enforcement via insurers & payment processors, SLAPP-back funds • *Network*: fund organizer salaries & space, strike & bail funds, or defund opposing networks

**Enforcement reshapes** → *Political*: litigation creating urgency (Brown), consent decrees binding future officials, discovery exposing corruption • *Economic*: antitrust breakups, environmental & labor enforcement, class actions redistributing wealth (tobacco MSA) • *Cultural*: trials as public education (Scopes), discovery exposing hidden practices, precedent shifting norms (Loving) • *Network*: RICO dismantling orgs, injunctions against protest, surveillance chilling formation, or legal protection enabling it

**Cultural reshapes** → *Political*: shift the Overton window so laws feel inevitable, make positions embarrassing, frame the debate first (“death tax”) • *Economic*: shame corporations, normalize or denormalize consumption, reframe relationships (“essential workers”) • *Enforcement*: reframe who deserves protection (BLM vs. copaganda), normalize or denormalize punishment (The New Jim

Crow) • *Network*: build coalition identity (“people of color”), normalize participation, cultural events as organizing infrastructure (Pride)

**Network reshapes** → *Political*: voter contact & lobbying at scale, rapid response, candidate recruitment, flood local party meetings • *Economic*: coordinate boycotts (BDS), wildcat strikes, investor action (Climate Action 100+), pooled mutual aid • *Enforcement*: mass NLRB filings & arbitration, witness networks (Cop Watch), crowdsourced legal funding • *Cultural*: spread narrative (#MeToo), distributed content, pressure gatekeepers, build alternative media • *Moral*: safety in numbers for truth-telling, simultaneous witness, carry individual witness to millions

**Moral reshapes** → *Political*: Emmett Till’s casket creating legislative urgency, make inaction shameful (Parkland), give leaders cover to act • *Economic*: ground boycotts in conscience (Montgomery), make investment uncomfortable (divestment) • *Cultural*: moral shocks permanently shifting the acceptable, sacrifice becoming monuments • *Enforcement*: outrage creating the will to prosecute (Floyd), whistleblowing triggering investigation, witness becoming the record for tribunals

Compound chains (the cascades that made history):

---

<b>CIVIL RIGHTS (1954-1968)</b>	moral (Birmingham, Bloody Sunday) → cultural (national coverage shifts opinion) → political (Civil Rights & Voting Rights Acts) → enforcement (DOJ, consent decrees)
<b>MARRIAGE EQUALITY (1993-2015)</b>	cultural (visibility, Will & Grace) → moral (“love is love”) → political (state laws, ballot measures) → enforcement (litigation to Obergefell) → cultural (normalization loop)
<b>CONSERVATIVE LEGAL MOVEMENT (1982-PRESENT)</b>	economic (donors) → network (Federalist Society) → cultural (reshaped legal climate) → political (judicial nominations) → enforcement (precedent for a generation)
<b>WISCONSIN ACT 10 (2011)</b>	political (strip bargaining) → economic (unions lose dues) → network (organizing collapses) → political (ground game weakened)
<b>FOSSIL-FUEL DIVESTMENT (2012-PRESENT)</b>	moral (climate justice) → economic (\$40T+ committed) → cultural (stigma) → political (conditions for regulation)
<b>ANTI-APARTHEID (1960-1994)</b>	moral (Sharpeville, Soweto) → cultural (boycotts, solidarity) → economic (divestment, sanctions) → political (negotiation) → enforcement (new constitution, TRC)

---

## FROM THE BOOK

*How Power Really Works* — three sample chapters. Forthcoming.

# A Fable for Tomorrow

In the spring of 1958, Rachel Carson received a letter from a friend named Olga Owens Huckins.

Huckins lived in Duxbury, Massachusetts, where she and her husband had created a private bird sanctuary on their property. That summer, the state had sprayed DDT over the area to control mosquitoes. The next morning, Huckins found dead and dying birds scattered across her sanctuary, songbirds that had been feeding on insects poisoned by the pesticide.

“The ‘harmless’ shower bath killed seven of our lovely songbirds outright,” Huckins wrote. She asked Carson, a marine biologist and nature writer who had already published three acclaimed books about the sea, if she knew anyone in Washington who could help.

Carson didn’t know anyone who could help. But she knew something about DDT. She had tried to write about it years earlier, in 1945, when the chemical was still being celebrated as a miracle of modern science. No magazine had been interested. DDT had helped win World War II, protecting soldiers from typhus and malaria. It was progress. It was the future.

Now, thirteen years later, Carson began to research what that future actually looked like.

What she found horrified her.



DDT didn’t just kill mosquitoes. It accumulated in the food chain, in the fish that ate contaminated insects, in the birds that ate the fish, in the mammals that ate the birds. It persisted in the environment for years. It was showing up in human tissue samples. And the chemical industry was spraying it everywhere: on farms, in suburbs, over forests, into wetlands. Millions of pounds per year.

Carson began writing. She gathered studies from wildlife biologists who had been sounding alarms that no one heard. She documented mass die-offs of birds, fish kills in streams, the mysterious thinning of eggshells that was causing entire populations of eagles and pelicans to collapse. She traced the chemistry of how these persistent organic pollutants moved through ecosystems and into human bodies.

And then, in April 1960, she discovered a lump in her left breast.



The biopsy revealed cancer. By December, she learned it had metastasized.

Rachel Carson spent the next two years writing *Silent Spring* while undergoing radiation therapy. Her cancer spread to her bones and liver. Her vertebrae splintered with tumors. She suffered crushing fatigue and constant pain.

She told almost no one.

She knew that if the chemical industry learned she had cancer, the very disease she was arguing pesticides might cause, they would use it to discredit her. They would call her a hysterical woman projecting her fears onto science. So she kept writing, kept researching, kept her diagnosis secret, racing against her own mortality to finish a book she believed might change how America thought about the natural world.

She was fifty-four years old. She had perhaps two years to live. And she had something to say.



*Silent Spring* opens with a fable.

“There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings,” Carson wrote. She painted a picture of a place that could be anywhere in suburban America: farms and orchards, foxes and deer, streams filled with trout, birds singing in the spring. Prosperous. Familiar. Normal.

Then she described a strange blight that crept over the land. The birds stopped singing. The fish died. The chickens couldn’t hatch their eggs. Children fell ill. “There was a strange stillness,” Carson wrote. “The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices.”

The chapter is only three pages long. It ends with a simple explanation: “No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.”

This was Carson’s genius. She didn’t open with data. She didn’t lead with chemistry or biology or policy recommendations. She told a story, a dark fairy tale that made the abstract tangible and the invisible visible. Stories don’t just communicate evidence; they give people new ways of seeing. Carson wasn’t just presenting evidence. She was changing the story Americans told themselves about pesticides from a story of triumph to a story of poison. She gave readers a mystery to solve: Who silenced the spring?

The remaining fourteen chapters provided the answer. But by then, readers already cared. They could see, in their mind’s eye, the silent town that might be their own.



The chemical industry saw *Silent Spring* coming.

In June 1962, three months before the book's publication, *The New Yorker* ran excerpts in three consecutive issues. The response was immediate and furious.

Velsicol Chemical Corporation sent threatening letters to *The New Yorker*, to Carson's publisher Houghton Mifflin, and to Audubon magazine, warning that publishing criticism of their pesticides might "jeopardize the financial security" of magazine employees and their families. Monsanto published and distributed five thousand copies of a parody called "The Desolate Year," depicting an apocalyptic world of famine and plague if pesticides were banned. The National Agricultural Chemical Association launched a \$250,000 campaign (equivalent to more than two million dollars today) specifically to discredit Carson and her book.

They called her "hysterical." They questioned her sanity. Robert White-Stevens of American Cyanamid declared that Carson wrote "not as a scientist but rather as a fanatic defender of the cult of the balance of nature." An executive at American Cyanamid warned that "if man were to faithfully follow the teachings of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth."

The attacks were fierce, sustained, and sexist. And they backfired completely.

*Silent Spring* was published on September 27, 1962. It sold over a hundred thousand copies in its first three months. It remained on bestseller lists for thirty-one consecutive months. It would eventually sell more than six million copies in the United States alone.



Even before the book reached shelves, it had reached the White House. A reporter asked President Kennedy about pesticides at a press conference in August 1962. Kennedy ordered his Science Advisory Committee to investigate.

On April 3, 1963, CBS broadcast a prime-time documentary: *The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson*. An estimated fifteen million Americans watched as Carson, frail and wearing her wig, spoke calmly and precisely about the evidence while chemical industry spokespeople grew increasingly defensive and dismissive.

On May 15, 1963, the President's Science Advisory Committee released its report. It vindicated Carson completely. The next day they started hearings. Carson testified before a Senate subcommittee. She sat before the senators, hiding her cancer, knowing she might not live to see the policy changes she was advocating. She spoke quietly, precisely, marshaling evidence while acknowledging uncertainty. She didn't call for banning all pesticides, only for ending the "reckless and irresponsible" poisoning of the environment without understanding the consequences.

Senator Abraham Ribicoff called her testimony "a great and historic service."

Carson died on April 14, 1964, less than eighteen months after *Silent Spring* was published. She was fifty-six years old.



Before *Silent Spring*, DDT was a chemical triumph, a weapon against global disease that had helped win a world war. Pesticides meant progress. The industry operated with virtually no regulation. The very concept of environmental damage from chemical use didn't exist in mainstream American thought.

In 1967, the Environmental Defense Fund was formed. In 1969, Michigan became the first state to ban DDT sales. In 1970, President Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, described by one historian as “the extended shadow of *Silent Spring*.” In 1972, the EPA banned DDT for agricultural use and severely restricted the other compounds Carson had indicted: chlordane, heptachlor, dieldrin, aldrin, endrin.

On the first Earth Day in 1970, twenty million Americans gathered in cities and towns across the country to protest environmental destruction, the largest single-day demonstration in American history to that point.

One dying woman with a typewriter had changed what an entire nation believed was possible, normal, and necessary.

# The Cargo That Wouldn't Move

Leo Robinson had spent eight years trying to make four hundred longshoremen see what he saw when he looked at South Africa.

On a Thursday night in October 1984, standing in the back of the ILWU Local 10 hiring hall in San Francisco, he watched it finally happen. The men in the folding chairs had spent their working lives unloading ships from around the world carrying Chilean copper, Japanese electronics, Australian wool, Chinese tea. They knew cargo from the receiving end. They did not understand what was happening at the sending end in South Africa.

*Last Grave at Dimbaza* ran for sixty minutes. It showed the forced relocations, the pass laws, the migratory labor system that separated Black families for most of the year so the men could work the gold mines for poverty wages. It showed a children's cemetery in a resettlement town called Dimbaza, where 450 children had been buried, most of them dead before the age of two, some of them buried in tomato boxes because the town had run out of coffins. The camera held on a row of empty graves, already dug, waiting for next month's dead.

Then the narrator delivered the arithmetic: during the hour you have been watching this film, sixty Black children have died of malnutrition, and the gold mining companies have made a profit of £35,000.

The hall was silent.



Leo Robinson had grown up in the Cypress Village housing projects in West Oakland, where his father had worked the same docks he worked now. He'd served four years in the Navy after Korea, then worked the assembly line at the GM plant in Oakland where he hated the monotony, and finally made it onto the waterfront in 1963, a second-generation longshoreman. He'd become a rank-and-file leader, a self-described "Red," a man who saw the connection between workers in San Francisco and workers in Soweto. He was forty-seven years old.

In 1976, after South African police massacred student protesters in Soweto, Robinson had convinced Local 10 to create something unprecedented: the Southern Africa Liberation Support Committee, the first anti-apartheid organization inside an American labor union. For eight years, his committee had educated their fellow workers, raised money, collected food and medical supplies for freedom fighters across the subcontinent.

But they had never done what Robinson was about to propose.

When the lights came up, a longshoreman named Howard Keylor made a motion: Local 10 should refuse to unload the next ship carrying South African cargo.

Robinson amended it. They would unload everything on the ship except the South African cargo. Let the apartheid wine and steel and auto parts sit in the hold and rot.

The vote was nearly unanimous.

A few weeks later, the Dutch cargo ship Nedlloyd Kimberley steamed into San Francisco Bay.



When most people think about how apartheid ended, they think of Nelson Mandela walking out of prison. They think of international condemnation, moral outrage, and the righteous tide of history. They imagine that the apartheid regime simply became unsustainable: too embarrassing, too illegitimate, too obviously wrong, and that it collapsed under the weight of its own injustice.

That's not what happened.

What happened was that longshoremen in San Francisco refused to touch cargo. Students at Berkeley demanded their university sell its South African investments. Churches divested their pension funds. Musicians refused to play a resort called Sun City. State legislatures passed sanctions. And eventually, the banks did the math.

In the summer of 1985, Chase Manhattan Bank, one of the largest lenders to South Africa, quietly informed the apartheid government that it would not be renewing its short-term loans. Other American banks followed. South Africa suddenly couldn't roll over its debt. The regime declared a debt moratorium, a formal announcement that it could not meet its obligations to foreign creditors, effectively an admission of national insolvency. The economy began to strangle.

A Chase executive later explained the decision: "We felt that the risk attached to political unrest and economic instability became too high for our investors. We decided to withdraw. It was never the intention to facilitate change in South Africa. The decision was taken purely on account of what was in the interest of Chase and its assets."

Chase didn't pull out because apartheid was evil. Chase pulled out because apartheid had become unprofitable. That was enough.

Leo Robinson's longshoremen didn't need to convince Chase Manhattan that Black lives mattered. They just needed to make it too expensive for Chase Manhattan to pretend they didn't.

The Nedlloyd Kimberley sat at Pier 80 for eleven days. Each morning, Local 10 dispatched workers who refused to touch the South African cargo. Each day, hundreds of supporters gathered on the docks, church congregations in their Sunday best standing beside students in jeans and keffiyehs, other union locals with their banners, activists carrying hand-lettered signs that read "Mandela Is Our Brother." They sang freedom songs. Their employers tried to reroute the ship to other West Coast ports; solidarity from other ILWU locals meant no port would take it.

Finally, under threat of a federal injunction and massive fines, the cargo was unloaded. Robinson's committee had lost.

Except they hadn't.

The action electrified the Bay Area anti-apartheid movement. UC Berkeley students, already pushing for divestment, escalated their protests into the largest sustained campus activism since Vietnam. The cities of Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco all adopted strong divestment policies. The pressure rippled outward: more universities, more pension funds, more banks deciding that South Africa was simply too risky.

Six years after the Nedlloyd Kimberley sat untouched at Pier 80, Nelson Mandela walked out of prison.

A few months after that, Mandela stood before 58,000 people at the Oakland Coliseum. He had ten days to tour the United States, ten days to thank a nation for its role in the struggle. He used part of that precious time to talk about longshoremen.

“We salute members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 who refused to unload a South African cargo ship in 1984,” Mandela said. “They established themselves as the front line of the anti-apartheid movement in the Bay Area.”

Leo Robinson was fifty-three years old when Mandela spoke those words. He had been fighting since Soweto. He would keep fighting for another two decades, for dockworkers' rights, for political prisoners, for the people of Palestine. He never held office. He never ran a foundation.

He died in 2013, at seventy-five. Hundreds gathered at Local 10's hiring hall for his memorial, the same hall where, twenty-nine years earlier, four hundred longshoremen had watched a smuggled documentary and voted to change history. The South African government sent its ambassador. He presented Robinson's widow with the Nelson Mandela Humanitarian Award, a nation's formal acknowledgment that a dockworker in West Oakland had helped bring down a regime eight thousand miles away.

Leo Robinson understood that cargo has weight, and sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is refuse to move it.

# I'm Not Mad

On her Instagram, she described herself as a “poet and writer and wife and mom and shitty guitar strummer from Colorado; experiencing Minneapolis, MN.”

Renée Good was thirty-seven. She had three children. Her second husband, Tim Macklin, was an Air Force veteran and stand-up comedian, and he had died in 2023 when their son was four. She moved back to Kansas to live with her parents for a while after that, because there was nowhere else to go. Her father would later say she had a good life, but a hard life.

In the summer of 2025, she and her wife, Becca, drove from Kansas City to Minneapolis to start over. They held hands in the car the whole way while their six-year-old drew on the windows to pass the miles. When they weren't writing or reading or talking about writing, they had movie marathons and made messy art. A neighbor who met Renée a few weeks before she died said Renée had fed her tea and cookies while they talked about school. The neighbor next door had an Australian shepherd named Hazelnut, and Renée's son ran to pet her every time they walked by. “They're always outside playing,” the neighbor said.

Becca would later write that Renée “literally sparkled. I mean, she didn't wear glitter but I swear she had sparkles coming out of her pores.”

Her ex-husband told reporters that Renée had never participated in a protest in her life. She was a devoted Christian who had gone on youth missions to Northern Ireland when she was younger. She was not an activist.



On the morning of January 7, 2026, Renée dropped her six-year-old at school and drove a few blocks home. It was twelve degrees in Minneapolis, cold enough that your nostrils stick together a little when you inhale, cold enough that the snow doesn't melt but creaks under your boots like Styrofoam. The day before, the Department of Homeland Security had announced what it called the largest immigration enforcement operation ever carried out, flooding the Twin Cities with more than two thousand federal agents. Parents near the school were texting each other about unmarked vehicles circling the block.

Renée stopped her maroon Honda Pilot on Portland Avenue, a few blocks from her house. Other neighbors had come outside too, blowing whistles, a signal that had spread through community group chats: if you see ICE, blow a whistle so your neighbors know.

A masked agent walked behind her car, holding up his cellphone. He was filming her. She was in her car, window down in the freezing air, and she looked at him.

She smiled.

“I'm not mad at you,” she said.

Those were the last words Renée Good ever spoke. They were captured on the agent’s own phone.

More agents approached. One tried to open her door. Another reached through the window. Becca, standing behind the car, called out: “Drive, baby. Drive!”

Renée reversed slightly, turned her steering wheel to the right—away from the agents—and began to pull forward. Agent Jonathan Ross, standing to the front left of the vehicle, fired three shots in under a second. One struck the windshield. Two went through the open driver’s side window.

Her son’s stuffed animals were in the glove compartment. The family’s dog was in the back seat.

Becca’s voice, on video, pierced the frozen air: “They just shot my wife. They shot her in the head.”



In 2020, while studying creative writing at Old Dominion University in Virginia, Renée had won the Academy of American Poets Prize for a poem called “On Learning to Dissect Fetal Pigs.” It was a meditation on what happens when science crowds out wonder, when knowing how things work stops you from marveling that they do. It begins:

i want back my rocking chairs, solipsist sunsets,  
& coastal jungle sounds that are tercets  
from cicadas and pentameter from  
the hairy legs of cockroaches.

And it ends with a question:

can i let them both be?

She was a poet who heard pentameter in the legs of cockroaches, a woman who made messy art with her children and fed cookies to neighbors she’d barely met, someone who had never attended a protest in her life, who stopped her car on a frozen street because she was worried about her neighbors.

Within an hour of her death, the Department of Homeland Security called her a domestic terrorist.



DHS said Good had “violently, willfully, and viciously weaponized her vehicle” to run over a federal officer. The president said she had “viciously ran over” the agent, who was supposedly recovering in a hospital.

The problem was the phones.

At least four bystanders had been filming. The agent himself had been filming. Within hours, multiple videos from multiple angles were circulating, and none of them showed what the

government said had happened. They showed a woman turning her wheel away from the officers. They showed an agent who remained standing after the car passed. They showed three shots fired in rapid succession at a vehicle that was leaving.

Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey went to a microphone. “Having seen the video myself, I want to tell everybody directly that is bullshit,” he said. “To ICE, get the fuck out of Minneapolis.”

By January 13, eighty-two percent of registered American voters had seen the video.

Renée Good’s final moments were recorded by at least five cameras, including the one held by the man who shot her. The evidence was distributed before anyone in authority knew it existed.

Two days later, Becca released a statement. Their six-year-old, she reminded the world, had already lost his biological father in 2023. Renée had been his only surviving parent. The boy who ran to pet the neighbor’s dog every afternoon had now lost everyone. “We had whistles,” Becca wrote. “They had guns.”



That night, thousands filled Portland Avenue in the dark. Candles and flowers and whistles filled the patch of snow where Renée’s car had crashed after she was shot. At the base of a barren tree, someone had scrawled two words in red in the snow: ICE KILLS. People built makeshift fire pits at the barricade ends to keep warm. Some held flowers. Some sang. Some cried. The site was less than a mile from the corner where George Floyd had been murdered by police in 2020.

Over the next three days, vigils spread to Buffalo, Chapel Hill, Durham, Kansas City, Los Angeles. On January 10, tens of thousands marched through Minneapolis. “Say it once. Say it twice. We will not put up with ICE.”



Seventeen days later, on the morning of January 24, federal agents in the Whittier neighborhood were chasing a man named Jose Huerta Chuma, a forty-one-year-old Ecuadorian immigrant who had been driving for a rideshare company and was on his way to pick up a delivery. Huerta Chuma ran into a doughnut shop on 26th Street. The employees locked the doors behind him.

Across the street, a man named Alex Pretti was standing with his phone out, filming the agents and waving cars past the scene.

Pretti was thirty-seven, the same age as Good. He was an intensive care nurse at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs hospital. Growing up in Green Bay, Wisconsin, he had played football, sang in the Green Bay Boy Choir, and became an Eagle Scout. He went to the University of Minnesota, studied biology, worked as a research scientist, then went back to school to become a nurse so he could take care of people directly. His colleagues at the VA knew him as the person who called people out for

making sexist comments to female physicians, the person who stayed past the end of his shift because a patient needed him.

His friend Heather Zielinski remembered being in his kitchen, drinking tea, looking at a photograph on his refrigerator of his dog wearing a little pink tutu, and listening to him laugh.

The dog's name was Joule, the unit of energy ICU nurses use to measure the current that restarts a stopped heart. She was a Catahoula Leopard dog who went everywhere with him. She had died about a year before he did.

Alex loved mountain biking and the outdoors. He was a regular at Angry Catfish, a bike shop in south Minneapolis. A few days before January 24, a Latino man had come to fix his garage door. With everything happening in Minneapolis, Alex gave him a hundred-dollar tip.

His parents had called from Wisconsin. "We had this discussion with him two weeks ago or so," his father said later. "Go ahead and protest, but do not engage, do not do anything stupid. And he said he knows that. He knew that."



At 8:58 a.m., Alex Pretti held his phone toward a federal officer on 26th Street. A second agent approached carrying pepper spray. Then an agent shoved a woman toward the sidewalk. Another woman walked over, and the agent pushed her to the ground.

Alex walked over and helped her up. He put his arm around her.

The agent pepper-sprayed him in the face. Alex raised his hands to block the spray. More agents arrived. At least six surrounded him, dragged him to the street, and pinned him face-down. One agent repeatedly punched him while he was on the ground. Another agent reached into the pile of bodies and pulled a gun from Alex's waistband—he was a lawful gun owner with a permit to carry, and at no point in any video is he seen reaching for it.

One second after the agent removed the gun, another agent opened fire.

Ten shots in under five seconds.

A pediatrician watching from an apartment window across the street filed a sworn declaration describing what happened next. The agents did not check his pulse. They did not begin CPR. "Instead of doing either of those things," the pediatrician wrote, "the agents appeared to be counting his bullet wounds."

About a minute after the shooting, as Pretti's body lay motionless in the street, one officer was recorded asking: "Where's the gun?" The agent who had removed it from Pretti's waistband walked over. "I got the gun," he said.

The White House said Pretti had arrived at the scene to “inflict maximum damage” and “massacre” federal agents. The deputy White House chief of staff called him an “assassin.” The phones said otherwise.

Alex’s parents found out he was dead when an Associated Press reporter called them. They tried the police. The police said call Border Patrol. Border Patrol was closed. The hospitals wouldn’t answer questions. Eventually they called the Hennepin County Medical Examiner, who confirmed they had a body matching the name and description of their son.

“Please get the truth out about our son,” they said. “He was a good man.”

His colleague at the VA, Dr. Dimitri Drekonja, said: “There is no reason for a guy like that to be dead, let alone to be killed by the agents of a government that employed him.”



That Saturday night, on street corners all over Minneapolis, neighbors came outside in subzero temperatures. Small groups gathered on snowbanks, holding candles, singing, talking in low voices. A GoFundMe for Pretti’s family hit a million dollars in twenty-four hours. Minnesota had already held a general strike. The state attorney general obtained a restraining order forcing the federal government to preserve what evidence remained: agents had already swept the crime scene and defied a court order to stop.

The following Saturday, cyclists in forty-three states and fourteen countries rode in Alex Pretti’s memory. In Atlanta, an organizer wrote: “He was one of us.” In Minneapolis, riders wore yellow safety vests that read PEACEFUL OBSERVER DON’T SHOOT. Bruce Springsteen released a song called “Streets of Minneapolis.” Tom Morello held a benefit concert. Jingle dress dancers held ceremony at the sites where Good and Pretti fell.

Minnesota congresswoman Kelly Morrison stood on the House floor: “Two thirty-seven-year-old Minnesotans are now dead, a poet and a nurse, for what?”

Not everyone was moved. In parts of the country, Good and Pretti were described as people who got what they deserved: agitators, obstructors, people who should have known better than to challenge armed federal agents. Moral power requires an audience capable of being moved, and that has always been its limitation. Minneapolis did not erase it.

But eighty-two percent of voters saw the video. And the moral chain, from act of conscience, to evidence, to distribution, to institutional response, completed faster than it ever has in American history.



Renée Good was not a strategist. She was not making a calculated decision about which messenger would be most credible or which image would have the greatest impact. She was a poet who heard

tercets in cicadas, who sparkled, who fed tea to neighbors she'd barely met, who drove across the country holding her wife's hand while her boy drew on the windows. She had never protested anything in her life. She dropped off her son at school and stopped her car because she was worried about her neighbors.

Alex Pretti was not an activist with a plan. He was a nurse who named his dog after the jolt that restarts a human heart, who sang in a boy's choir, who tipped a hundred dollars because the world was cruel and he could make it less so, who saw a woman knocked to the ground and walked over to help her up.

They saw something happening to their neighbors, and they couldn't look away.

The difference between them and previous examples is the technology. The Tank Man needed Jeff Widener on that balcony with a telephoto lens. The Birmingham children needed Bill Hudson with his camera. Claudette Colvin needed nothing but courage, and without a camera present, courage alone produced a footnote rather than a movement.

Good and Pretti had phones. So did everyone around them. The act of witness, which has always been the most fragile link in the moral power chain, is no longer hostage to whether a photographer happens to be in the right place. It's distributed and redundant, present in every pocket on the block.

That doesn't make moral power easy or safe. Renée Good and Alex Pretti are dead. The phones didn't protect them.

What's changed is that the sacrifice can no longer be hidden.

*"I'm not mad at you,"* she said to the man who was about to kill her. She was a poet. She had good words.

| can i let them both be?

The whistles and the guns.

And then the phones made sure the world saw what happened next.

---

© 2026 Darcy Burner. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or redistributed without permission.

You can read more of my stuff at [burnery.substack.com](http://burnery.substack.com)

Don't forget to take care of each other.