

WHY MOVEMENTS MATTER

Building Power, Fighting Power, Reshaping The Future

Movements are born of pain and anger. They channel chaos and build momentum through strategy, they are sustained by creativity, community and joy, and they shift power by inspiring people to fight for what would be impossible to achieve alone. Movements transform unjust systems and institutions by making those in power see the invisible and hear the silenced. By being part of them, we find ourselves transformed too.

What is a movement?

A **movement** is a body of people and organizations growing in size and in influence, working towards a common purpose. It mounts tactical campaigns towards its vision of a reshaped future. The tactics might comprise elements of **protest, litigation, policy advocacy, civil disobedience, electoral campaigning, and public messaging**. A movement might have a **strategic objective** (such as police reform, or the reduction of

carbon emissions) but its revolutionary force comes from the sense of **communal identity and collective power** for those who adhere to it: something that defines and nourishes them as they fight for and defend it, passionately.

Why movements?

“I’m not sure that people realize just how quickly the needle has moved. Even people in the middle ground are now talking about systemic racism. Look at the rapidity with which so many people are finally seeing things for what they are.”

– **Ta-Nahisi Coates**, *The New Yorker*, 20 June 2020

George Floyd’s murder could not have been foreseen but the cultures and structures of racism that caused his death were all too predictable. Collective pain and anger quickly transformed into collective action, breaking down previously-immovable walls and shifting American law, policy and society in ways unimaginable just weeks before. **The wave of protests have led to radical shifts in thought and action, reflected in a wholesale reassessment of policing and a national reckoning on race.** From calls to defund the police and decisions to ban the chokehold; from sweeping legislative reform proposals to corporate and institutional assertions of solidarity and public commitments to change, the Movement for Black Lives is showing us in real time how rapid and transformational change can happen.

But this was not an accident or a fluke; the anguish and despair was always there, and groups from grassroots communities to national organizations have been building their infrastructure and leadership for years. Organizers, leaders, and institutions were prepared to seize the moment when the fires of public outrage were lit. The momentum built, and nothing could stop it: not the pandemic, not tropical storms, not Trump’s threat of military force.

The climate movement: will we be ready when our moment comes?

As a community, we know exactly how to avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis: We have the science, we have the data, we have the money, and we have the technology

to shift course right now. We have everything we need to transform our future, except for one thing: the power to make it happen, quickly.

In the way they shift power, movements can change this equation. Here's how it all adds up to rapid and radical change:

1. They come from the heart.

Movements are born of pain and anger and sustain momentum through creativity, community and joy. They compel you to feel, and give you a way to channel the feeling.

2. They come from lived experience.

Movements derive their power from the lived experience of those on the frontline, and rely on their wisdom and mobilization.

3. They re-imagine the future.

Movements don't just tell us another world is possible. They show us that another world is happening, and it's here. They lead us to the future they are reshaping, by blazing the trail and walking the talk.

4. They go big.

Large numbers join movements, motivated by outrage, urgency, empathy — and hope. This creates a palpable sense of revolution and possibility, thereby inspiring more people to join. Their snowball-like momentum makes them loud and visible, drawing even more people to them, and impossible to marginalize or ignore.

5. They move fast.

Through this momentum, movements have the potential to bring about swift and sweeping change. If the arc of history bends towards justice, movements exert pressure to bend it more quickly. Driven by the urgency of the people and communities with the most to gain and lose, they have no time to waste.

6. They change the story.

Movements propel these lived experiences and wisdom into the public eye through mass mobilization, media and focused actions. They shake us out of inertia by dispelling the notion that change is impossible, and shifting the narrative of what is fair and where power resides.

7. They find a common enemy.

Effective movements reformat traditional loyalties, and cross ideological faultlines, by uniting against a common enemy.

8. They fight back.

Because movements challenge power, they elicit backlash. But their size and forward momentum create power to resist this backlash in a way that individuals cannot, which, in turn, inspires broader mobilization and bolder calls. There is safety in numbers. This is a virtuous cycle that builds power as it fights it.

9. They transform systems and structures.

Movements channel collective action into tactics that disrupt the status quo. They use existing tools – legal, political, financial and media – to bring about rapid change. Outrage and hope that spark movements can be fleeting, but mobilized strategies propel them forward, and art, community and love sustain them for the long haul.

10. And they transform us.

Movements facilitate personal and cultural transformation, as the assertion of collective power helps us see that our individual wellbeing is bound to the common good, and that nobody is free until everybody is.

A movement theory of change

*...those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. **For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.***

Audre Lorde

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

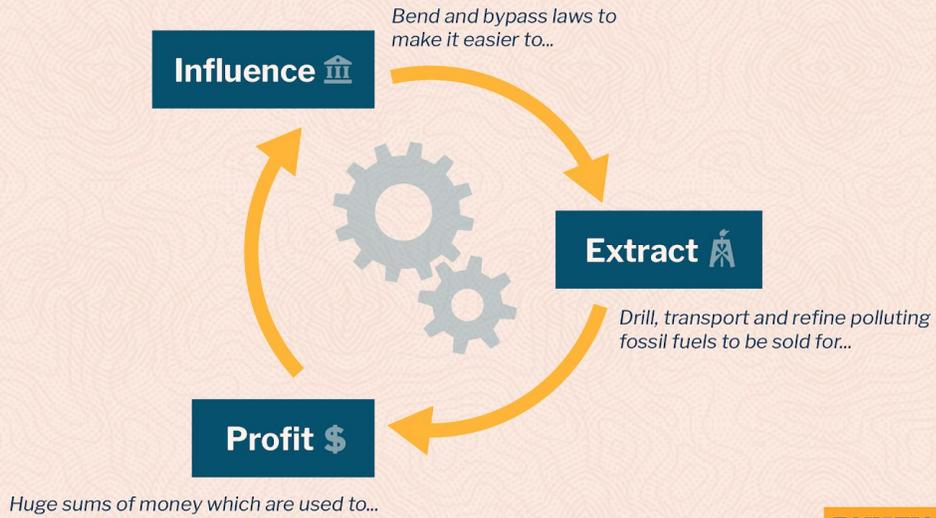
Albert Einstein

Effective movements fuse **strategy** and **vision**. They deliberately use “the tools of the master” — law, politics, finance and the media — to bring about important reforms and temporary wins, while reimagining the future with new ways of thinking to enable a transformational shift.

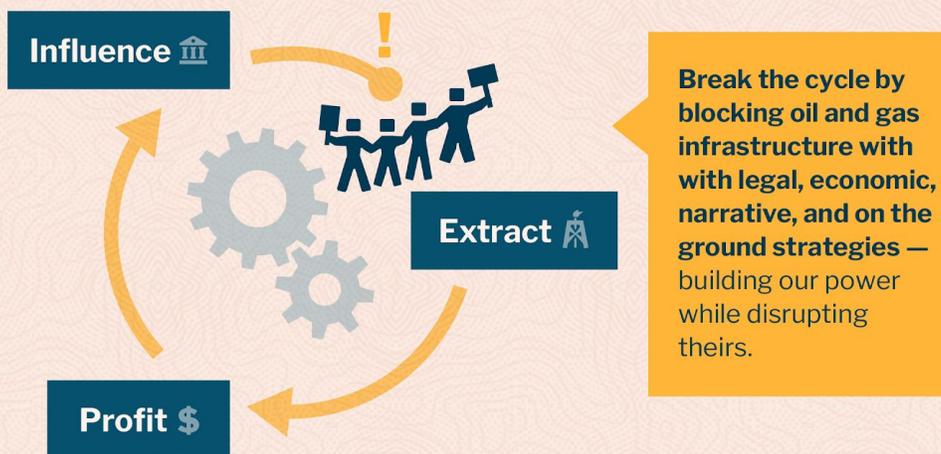
This means dismantling unjust old systems and reconstructing the “house” so that it shelters everyone, built with tools that belong to and serve all of us.

At the same time that effective movements “temporarily beat the master at his own game”, they must sharpen new tools, grow new leaders, and tap into fresh thinking. **Finance tools** like defunding police and divesting from fossil fuels; **Legal cases** that prosecute offending officers, or sue polluting corporations; **Political strategies** that help unseat racists and climate deniers, and **Media campaigns** that change narratives like law and order, energy independence and bridge fuels. Movements repurpose these tools to disrupt the old and catalyse the new while mobilizing the force necessary to dismantle, rebuild and transform quickly.

VICIOUS CYCLE OF THE OIL & GAS INDUSTRY



BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE



The Climate Movement: Keeping Momentum

The youth climate movement accomplished in one year what the environmental movement was unable to do in decades. Those early “experts” were inside the Beltway, in the courts, the board rooms, and the halls of government. Millions of students from 185 countries joined protests and strikes in September 2019, demanding their governments recognize the climate crisis with swift and aggressive action. Young people like Greta Thunberg captured the rage and existential pain of a generation who feel the despair of melting glaciers, raging wildfires, famines, storms, and droughts. Simultaneously, indigenous and frontline movements like Standing Rock and KXL have focused attention on the violence and injustice that oil and gas wreak on the rights and safety of those living at its source.

These are the new and future faces of the climate movement and this is their moment. They have put the crisis in the public eye as never before and insisted that the world does not look away. ***The movement infrastructure and leadership must be resourced and ready to create momentum and sustain power to deliver the change that we need.***

Movements are unpredictable. There is no formula for ensuring success, but there are predictable conditions that can improve the odds: Similar grievances, common enemies, and shared witness to violence and injustice provides unity of identity, intensity and purpose. No-one can know what the spark will be but we can recognize these movement conditions, invest in their infrastructure and leaders, and support their short term strategies to play and win the game as part of the broader vision for a radically reimagined world.

The Movement for Black Lives that has exploded across the United States has united people across the political spectrum, race and class, bridged rural and urban divides and defied one stereotype after the next. Indeed, it was born of pain and outrage, and its force comes from those impacted by the violence and abuse. But its momentum is propelled by a wider sense of anger and empathy, love of justice, and hope for the future. Our plans for climate justice only have hope if we take a page out of their playbook. It is not enough to have the science, the data, the policy, or even the money. We need the momentum, power and speed that only a movement can deliver.

Let's do this.

Contact The Equation Campaign

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or visit [**equationcampaign.org**](http://equationcampaign.org) (coming soon) for more.

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