Nainita Madurai

SAGES Reaction Paper

02/02/10

 Change is incredibly difficult to define. The intellectual community across the world attempts to define different types of change and different change agents. Often, intellectuals use revolutions or social movements as examples of change, but change can also occur in small ways. For the purposes of this essay, the examples given will be social movements and their relation to change. Bill Moyer is an academic who proposed a model for how a successful social change occurs. In the sixth chapter of his book, Doing Democracy, Moyer specifically discusses the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and how it ties into his theory.

There are various opportunities to participate in many of the world’s societies. People can get involved and cause large-scale change in myriad ways in their communities and governments, especially in the United States. In the United States, our founding fathers established a government that was meant for citizen participation. It is our *civic duty* to get involved and actively participate for or against the issues that are brought up in our government and our communities. Citizens have the opportunity to engage in activist groups that can alter the economy, the environment, the healthcare system, and the education system, to name a few. However, time and time again, citizens choose to participate in movements that affect society and specific groups in society. Some of the largest movements are those which affect the social aspects of everyday life. Why is there such an attraction to social movements?

 Citizens give their attention to social movements because social movements are influenced by our passions, our morals, and our values. Social injustices invoke sympathy, empathy, and desire for change. Social issues are the issues in which citizens want to have a say because they affect them on a personal level. In the United States, if society needs a change, then government has a big influence on the outcomes. Bill Moyer depicts the American Civil Rights Movement. He explains that for any social movement to be successful four roles of social activism must be played: the citizen, the rebel, the change agent, and the reformer. Furthermore, he goes on to describe the eight stages of a successful movement. The Civil Rights Movement, according to Moyer, was a success; all roles of social activism were played and all eight stages were completed. The Civil Rights Movement has a legacy and still continues today but with less intensity.

The Choosing to Participate exhibit sponsored by *Facing History and Ourselves* was an eye opening exhibit to the mindsets that many people had during the Civil Rights Movement. As the exhibit explained, little things are big. During social movements, changing a law does not necessarily change a practice. Social movements require a change in attitude and mindset; this is why it is difficult to achieve goals in social movements. Also for this reason, social movements can go on for years. Even now minorities must struggle to defend their rights. Retrospectively, people regret taking action against the Civil Rights Movement. Even more, people regret their *inaction* in the face of injustice. During the “Little Rock Nine” incident, indifference left a deeper impact than hatred or support.

As a critique to Moyer, perhaps not all four roles of social activism are needed for a social movement to be successful. In some cases there are even more than four roles of social activism. Similarly, there may be more or fewer than eight stages to a social movement. Not all social movements follow a certain mold. Moyer also stresses that nonviolence is a key aspect of social movements. However Malcolm X and the Black Panthers are two examples of violent groups that were an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement. Categorizing and generalizing change is a difficult task because of the fact that change and how it occurs is always changing.