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August 2017

Michael Jacoby Brown
training & coaching

*Helping organizations achieve their goals
through recruiting and motivating others*

Organizer's Edge



Allentza Michel's Organizing Journey

How and Why I became an Organizer

My journey into community organizing has been a long winding road. No stranger to adversity, my experiences with poverty, prejudice, violence and limited resources had me seeking answers to questions about oppression and systems through community work at an early age. I learned from my challenges to be an agent for positive social change.

My first introduction to inequity was through my upbringing. I was born in Boston just a few months after my family came to the United States from Haiti. We all lived with my aunt, a single mother and her four children, in a two bedroom apartment in Mattapan, known on the streets as "Murderpan" for its history of high crime and desperate residents. That stigma has perpetually impacted resources in the neighborhood to this day. Adjusting to life in the U.S. was very difficult for my

parents, and they learned that culture shock had a lot to do with U.S. policy the hard way. Despite being well-educated, their credentials were not recognized in the U.S. Therefore my mother, a teacher with English proficiency could not find a job, and took work as a store clerk making less than minimum wage. My father, an emerging chemist in Haiti accepted a job working as stocker at a homeless shelter. He would spend many years working odd jobs to support us. The stress and emotional toil led to my parents arguing a lot at home, and often times my parents would take their frustrations out on my siblings and me. Now that I'm older and understand the effects of micro aggressions on one's psyche, I can forgive them.

My second exposure was through institutions, mainly education. As a child, I was often mistreated in school. In first grade, I was placed in a remedial class because the administration assumed I did not speak English, even though I was born in the U.S. I was teased for being black by white students, and teased for being 'Haitian - not really black' by black students. I was bullied until the 8th grade, and unsupported by neither teachers nor the administration of the schools I attended. When I was picked on by other students it was I who was penalized when I reported it. My parents couldn't help me because they couldn't understand what I was going through. All the while at school, my home life wasn't much better as my parents constantly fought. My sisters and I would stay up late at night talking about how one day we would run away, and start our own special secret world, away from pain and sadness.

I struggled with school; not the education but the systems of oppression like racism and classism that plague education institutions. I hated schooling not because I didn't love learning, but because I didn't see myself in the textbook pages, not to mention the constant bullying. I wasn't learning about success through altruism and diversity. And so, I began to teach myself, reading books about social issues and writing poetry. I even wrote a fictional novel when I was 13. By the time I reached high school, I began to see the world, specifically systems for what they were, and I became angry for my disadvantages. When bullies picked on me, I started to fight back, literally (but never started a fight). I was a self-imposed reclusive misfit; a social outcast that found friendship with other outcasts. The school responded by suggesting to my parents

that I be put on medication; never truly responding to my needs. I didn't realize it then, but my experiences were shaping my thoughts as an activist. I couldn't name it then, but a shift was brewing within me. I wrote in my journals about the many things I witnessed and experienced and started volunteering in various places. I started to become more vocal, asking difficult questions about the world and its foibles, and seeking answers. That's when I began to learn what the root causes to my struggles, my family, my people, my race, my community, and others.

I went to college unsure of what I wanted to do with my life. The summer prior I was interning at Boston Medical Center with the aspirations (as planted in my head by my parents) of eventually becoming a doctor. After witnessing how doctors are forced to desensitize themselves in their work, I quit the internship and participated in a social justice education youth program. Soon after I began working as youth worker and in other roles in non-profit organizations. I also began working as a community organizer and facilitator. It was through organizing that I saw the power and potential of community, learned how to show and accept love across race, class and age. Organizing is a core part of my approach to social change, especially in the policy urban planning and design work I do today.

Organizing helped me become a leader. I have since created human service programs and strengthened others. I've seen and heard many things that most people only read about; everything from taking punches to the face when breaking up gang fights to losing people to the streets, prisons and drugs. I have since founded and co-founded many youth programs and social justice initiatives. I also have been a community activist, and developed a wide network of leader and service providers throughout the Greater Boston area and beyond, and even lived on a coffee co-op farm in Nicaragua, making 60 cents a day picking coffee, and connecting with emerging non-profits in the tsunami-impacted Tohoku region of Japan. All the while I was always seeking ways to continue learning and growing. I never stopped trying to build community, justice and peace I long for.

Allentza Michel is a Boston-native with over 16 years of diverse experience across community & economic development, education, food security, public health and transportation. Her background as an artist, urban planner, policy advocate and participatory action researcher and former

youth worker and community organizer inform her current work in civic design, community and organizational development through the practice she founded called Powerful Pathways.

Her leadership and collaborative work has been recognized by the Cambridge City Council and the Princeton Prize in Race Relations. She founded and co-founded nonprofit-organizations and has served on many boards of community-based organizations, civic groups and coalitions. In 2013, she served as co-chair to the City of Boston's first Participatory Budgeting project, representing The City School.

Allentza received a Master's in Public Policy at Tufts University's Department of Urban & Environmental Planning and Policy, as a 2013 Neighborhood Fellow. She was the inaugural fellow for Association for Community Design in 2015 and a 2016-17 Creative Community Fellow with National Arts Strategies.

Feedback Welcome

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Michael Jacoby Brown Story

Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

Caesar McDowell of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,
David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,
Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky
Bob Van Meter with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,
Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.
Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,
Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,
Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,
Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,
Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles
and others, hopefully, including YOU

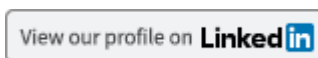
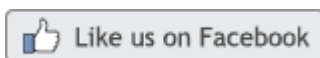
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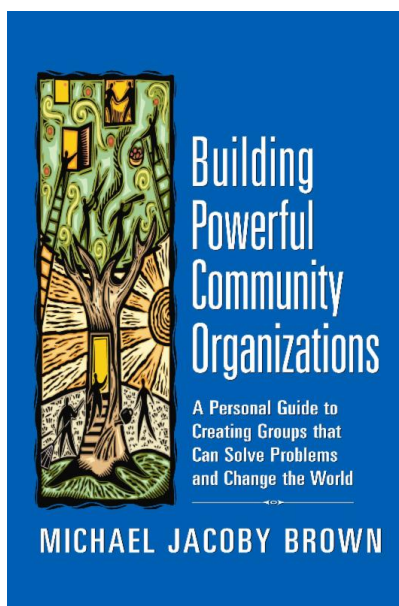
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