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**Michael Jacoby Brown**  
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# Organizer's Edge

This article by Yoojin Janice Lee brings up important issues for all organizers. We would love to hear your reactions.



-- Michael Jacoby Brown



## Love with Power: by Yoojin Janice Lee

*Now is the time-time that we see that love is a more powerful force than anger . --*  
- From Love with Power, Movement Strategy Center

Last fall, when I read [Movement Strategy Center's Love with Power](#) report for the first time, I felt tremendous excitement and hope! Here were signs that others were seeking a way of doing organizing in a way that resonated with me: with a deep focus on love.

The word, "love", is often associated in U.S. society with solely spiritual and emotional matters. Something soft. A feeling. What I've been seeking lately in "love-centered organizing" sees love differently. "Love-centered organizing" - by which I'm referring to community organizing that attends to loving oneself and others, including opponents - retains the core community organizing principles of building power, making real improvements in people's lives, and changing systems to be more just and inclusive. In other words, being "love-centered" does not mean conceding justice-making, policy, and power impacts on society.

The distinction is that "love-centered organizing" prioritizes the practice of love throughout the work. Without exception. Here, love is not a feeling but is evident in action, beliefs, and attitude.

Imagine an organizing culture that - rather than fostering burn-out - encourages individuals to show oneself love (where overwork is frowned upon and individuals' physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social thriving is supported). Imagine an organizing group that prioritizes a discipline of attending to the health of relationships across the organization before "wins". Imagine an organizing culture that (rather than vilifying those who stand in our way) maintains a view that everyone - even targets, opponents, and enemies - are human and deserving of compassion. Imagine organizing in a way that supports individuals and the whole to stay centered and grounded in the forces of justice, mercy, goodness, peace, love, spirit, etc. that are greater than us and sustain us.

With these ideas floating around in my mind, I was fascinated to read in Love with Power about organizing groups that have pursued ways to live out the transformation they want to see in the world by incorporating collective mind-body practices into their work. Here's a passage that particularly grabbed me about an organizing group based on the West Coast that has been using a mind-body practice called, Forward Stance:

*Bringing in surprising props such as water bottles, spoons, and bamboo swords, Norma [Wong] used interpersonal mind-body practice to help each person awaken to how they related to conflict. For example, in a simulated sword battle, each person was asked to face a trainer who was advancing towards them and their job was to hold their ground in an open and centered way. Dana Ginn Paredes remembers, When it was my turn...my body started shaking uncontrollably. Norma said to me. 'That is how you are in conflict right now. You can try to out argue and out debate the other side, but this is how you are. Now that you know that, you have choices.'*

The report goes on to describe how the practice of Forward Stance strengthened the organization's internal cohesion and external power and even led to a bold, successful expansion during recessionary times when others advised "hunkering down".

Fascinated, I jumped at the chance to participate in a three-hour Forward Stance practice session when visiting San Francisco this past January. It was a novel experience for me to be in a room of about ten organizers and activists doing physical movement with an intentionality and an awareness of linking it to our work. Standing in a circle, we did a sequence of movements in synch with one another, sometimes facing in, others outward. Almost immediately, I was struck by the power of organizers learning and strategizing together beyond the usual setting of sitting around a flip-chart, using just our minds and words. Through movement, I felt us able to access a different kind of wisdom and power. This phenomenon is better experienced than described.

There was a particular series of exercises that brought attention to where we fixed our vision. During these, I felt shifts in the way that I "saw" the world around me and actually felt an expansion of my being. I recognized

how using mind-body practices in organizing spaces can help us come up with creative approaches and pursue them anchored in unity, strength, and confidence.

What does this have to do with "love-centered organizing"? This is just one of several collective practices lifted-up in the report through which organizing groups are finding more sustainable, compassionate, and life-giving ways to do the work.

What resonates with you about "love-centered organizing"? What questions or resistance come up? Are there challenges in your organization that it could help address?

*Love even for enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world.*

**- MLK, Jr.**

## **YOOJIN JANICE LEE BIOGRAPHY**

Yoojin Janice Lee has over fifteen years of experience in cultivating leadership for social justice, community organizing, and nonprofit management. She draws upon this experience in her current work as an independent consultant, trainer, and facilitator. Previously, Ms. Lee was Senior Trainer and Manager at Health Resources in Action, a Boston-based, national non-profit capacity-building organization, where she provided training, consulting, and coaching services to nonprofits, coalitions, and government agencies. Earlier on, Ms. Lee served as the Executive Director & Lead Organizer of the Boston-area Youth Organizing Project, which unites low-income, communities of color to build political power for justice in their schools and neighborhoods. She graduated from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government with a Master's Degree in Public Policy and holds a Bachelor's Degree from Smith College. A long-time resident of the Boston-area, she grew up in and around New York City, and recently spent two years living in Seoul, Korea.

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## **Feedback Welcome**

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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### 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

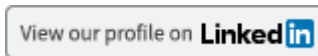
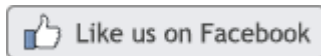
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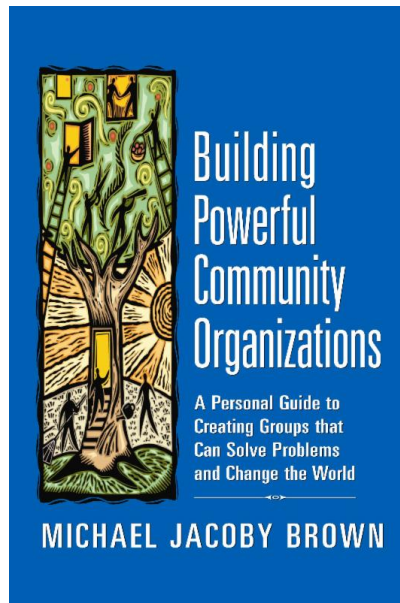
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