Movement Makers Convene to Explore Civil Rights History, Social Change, and Storytelling for Liberation

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In mid-June, our current cohort of Movement Makers gathered in Atlanta for Convening 4, the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and home to the Cherokee people. After learning about South Africa’s anti-apartheid history and their current social movements, it seemed fitting to come home and immerse ourselves in our Civil Rights history and the cutting-edge movement work of Black Lives Matter.

What we hadn’t expected is that the start to our convening would be shattered by the devastating news that 49 people, mostly Latino LGBTQ people, had been massacred in Orlando. We re-committed ourselves to Beloved Community and drew on our courage to continue approaching this much-needed social change work with open hearts and minds, all while grieving and weeping together.

Our collective loss added fuel to the fires already burning within us. Movement Makers passionately shared how they are transforming their approaches after one year in the program:

- incorporating breathing and Forward Stance into meetings
- thinking more seriously about movement-building
- centering Black girls and asking hard questions about where our organizations are falling short
- embracing self-care and bringing on a director of radical self-care and an elder-in-residence
- raising visibility for diverse Native communities
- thinking about what it means to do healing-informed work rather than trauma-informed
- building linkages between MEV and the thousands of other people having similar conversations

And, overall, continuing to challenge ourselves to be bolder.
Boldness was in full effect with our Fireside Chat special guest, Alicia Garza of Black Lives Matter and National Domestic Workers Alliance. She joined us for an evening to spark our “revolutionary imagination” and to remind us that we get to decide what is possible. She shared how the work of Black Lives Matter is about holding a collective vision for Black Liberation where everyone regardless of race has a stake in it and about embracing all kinds of strategies toward that goal. She challenged us to move past identity politics and to be in community with everyone who is actually doing the hard work toward this vision.
It was clear this group of Movement Makers is ready to tackle deeper questions of how we actually make societies change, using storytelling as our starting point. Stories can vividly describe the journeys we are taking toward our liberation – how we get called, what feelings manifest, pathways we choose, which values we honor, obstacles and crises, and what our destination looks like. By grounding ourselves in our collective story, we were then able to strategize what it would take to end incarceration as a solution to violence, to raise healthy men, to value girls and boys of color.

During the week, we devoted time to having some big conversations the Movement Makers identified as being essential for the movement we are working in: the role of spirituality in our work, whether the centering of Black women and girls can free us all, how to move beyond the gender binary while addressing the gendered reality of violence. It wasn’t possible to resolve these questions, but it was an important first step to digging deep with each other and the larger community.

Stay tuned for a podcast of our conversation with Alicia, and a few great tools from our faculty that we tested at Convening 4!