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What Came Before Remembering Movements with Philadelphia's Teacher-Organizers

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Abstract

This article discusses the relationship between the contemporary teacher movement and the social, political, and labor movements of the past. Using interviews with Philadelphia teacher-organizers, this investigation highlights specific past movements that shaped, informed, and inspired their work in the city. More specifically, the significance of the Jewish labor movement and Black liberation movements are explored, underscoring the ways that many of today's movement teachers learn from and stand in solidarity with the movements that came before.



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Introduction

In the past several years educators in West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Oakland, and more have collectively taken up efforts to reshape an untenable educational landscape, often confronting white supremacy and neoliberal austerity, and bringing direct action back to the forefront of labor's arsenal. In 2018 and 2019, these efforts took the form of massive teacher work stoppages. As Kerrissey (2018) notes, in the spring of 2018 alone “five percent of all U.S. workers in K-12 public education walked out on strike” (para. 1). In total, some 373,000 teachers in 2018 and 264,000 teachers in 2019 struck (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

While this uptick in teacher strikes has been the most visible element of the movement, throughout the past decade extensive teacher organizing has been grounded in social justice caucuses, which began forming in the early 2010's in many of the United States' largest teacher unions (Stark, 2019). After the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) took leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) in 2010 and successfully struck in 2012, similar groups began forming around a vision of teacher unionism that was democratic, member-driven, and committed to fighting for and *with* the schools, students, parents, and communities teachers serve. Stark (2019) explains that these caucuses work to confront the damage of neoliberal education reforms “as well as systemic racism and other power structures that maintain inequalities and thwart democracy in unions, schools, and communities” (p. 5). Social justice caucuses now exist in over twenty localities, joining together under the umbrella of the United Caucuses of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE).

In this time of great movement, scholars have rightly aimed to document, explore, analyze, and theorize the teacher movement as it developed. Numerous teachers within the movement have generated detailed first-hand accounts and analyses that center important reflections and lessons from their work (Gordon, 2019; Karvelis, 2019; McCullough, 2019; Riley & Cohen, 2018; Shiller & BMORE Caucus, 2019). Scholars and scholar-activists have taken up investigations of how teachers and their organizations operate, strategize, use technology, think, theorize, learn, struggle, and take action (Asselin, 2019; Blanc, 2019; Brewer et al., 2018; Brown & Stern, 2018; Dyke & Muckian-Bates; 2019a; Gautreaux, 2019; Maton, 2016; Meiners & Quinn, 2016; Morrison, 2018; Stern & Brown, 2016; Stern et al., 2016). Yet with the work of these teachers growing out of—and, in some cases open rejection of—past efforts, scholars must also tend to the important task of situating contemporary teacher organizing within the rich history of past movements if they are to more fully comprehend the complex relationships that ignite and sustain them (Dyke & Muckian-Bates, 2019a, 2019b).

In what follows, I expand on this call, highlighting the importance of remembering past movements and arguing that this process is an essential task that can provide contemporary organizers with not only critical lessons for the present, but also a deeper sense of heritage, solidarity, and possibility to sustain movement work into the future. I then underscore some of the specific past movements that shaped, informed, and inspired four teacher organizers from Philadelphia's social justice caucus, the Caucus of Working Educators (WE). More specifically, I highlight the significance of the Jewish labor movement and Black liberation movements to these teachers and their organizing.

Why Remember?

In the quest for “movement-relevant” scholarship (Bevington & Dixon, 2005) that produces knowledge useful to those engaged in movement organizing, the inclusion of past movements in investigations is crucial. Quite practically, remembering the past can support organizers in developing a more thorough and contextualized power-structure analysis for their present work (McAlevey, 2016). This analysis reveals not only the top-down constructions of the bureaucracies and structures that stand against movements, but also the yet-to-be-uncovered possibilities of power growing out of the grassroots. Organizers can look to specific cases and learn from their contexts, strategies, successes, and failures, all in the name of informing their own critical decisions in the present.

What’s more, we know that this is already happening in the modern teacher movement as current research has documented educators’ ongoing engagement in movement-relevant political education (Riley, 2015; Riley & Cohen, 2018; Maton, 2016, 2018; Morrison, 2018). In Philadelphia, the site of investigation for this paper, the Summer Reading Series organized by WE has facilitated the exploration of over 40 historical texts in the past seven years with 19 of those texts focusing explicitly on organizing or movement histories. Likewise, as I show below, WE’s teacher-organizers have continuously drawn lessons from past movements in ways that directly impact their organizing in the present.

Remembering, however, can do more for movements than inform their strategy decisions in the present. For teachers in the struggle for public education, labor rights, racial justice and much more, remembering past movements can be an act of radical solidarity with those that came before. Shackel and Palus (2006), for example, argued that in addition to our ongoing struggles, movements must also engage in the “struggle for memory” (p. 50), which resists the dominant narrative that centers elites and traditional heroes while leaving others, particularly mass movements, out of the picture. When we resolve to remember and learn from prior efforts, we stand in solidarity with those movements in this struggle for memory, creating a deeper and more meaningful embodiment of the practice.

This remembering also, however, extends solidarity from those in past movements to those in the present, reminding contemporary organizers that they are not the first to take up struggle, and thus, are not alone. As Edward Thompson (1995) articulates, “History is a form within which we fight, and many have fought before us. Nor are we alone when we fight there” (p. 303). This conceptualization of intergenerational solidarity through remembering is crucial for left movements, which, in their struggles for recognition, redistribution, and recompense, also often struggle with what Enzo Traverso (2016) has called *left-wing melancholia*, a complex “constellation of emotions and feelings” brought on by engagement in an ongoing historical struggle with no clear end in sight (p. xiv). With this unavoidable uncertainty at the core of left movement work, there is an essential affective power in the collective resolve of historical solidarity, in knowing that you are not, and have never been, the only one.

As the uprisings after the murder of George Floyd have most recently shown, the struggle for what we remember is ongoing, and it is a struggle that matters for movements. Confederate and colonialist statues have been torn down not in a moment of impulsive destruction but in what Russel Rickford (2020) has described as “an act of creation . . . a restructuring . . . of both the public sphere and the consciousness of the aroused masses” (para. 6). These efforts have been a part of the current racial justice movement because activists recognize that what we remember

about the world has power. As historian Tom Holt (1990) states, it is through our narratives about the past “that we make accessible certain ideas about human possibilities and foreclose others” (p. 11). Speaking specifically about understanding movements historically, Dyke and Muckian-Bates (2019a) argue that such a process could help us envision the unique “limits and possibilities for struggles,” which vary geographically and politically *as well as* across time (p. 9). Thus, not only does remembering what came before deepen our practice of solidarity to and from movements in the past, it also writes into existence a wider spectrum of possibility for movements in the present.

The remembering of past movements was a recurring theme in my conversations with contemporary teacher-organizers in Philadelphia. Some of the educators noted important lessons they learned from prior movements as critical in their current praxis of organizing in the city, while others connected to the heritage of past movements indicating something akin to the radical historical solidarity I describe above. In what follows, I will highlight two of the past movements identified by the teachers as well as the ways in which these movements impacted their work in the contemporary educator movement.

Teachers Remembering Movements

I began meeting with Philadelphia teachers in the summer of 2017 as part of my dissertation research. My intention was to more deeply understand *why* and *how* many of the city’s teachers, who were routinely overworked, took up intensive and time-consuming grassroots organizing throughout Philadelphia. As a doctoral candidate in the region, I reached out to a few specific teacher-organizers who I had met at different education events in the city and sought their participation. From this initial subset of educators, I mapped out additional teacher-organizers as well as grassroots organizations that might have teachers working in them. In the months that followed, I facilitated twenty one-on-one interviews with 10 educators involved in a variety of change-seeking efforts throughout the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the city, and the region. These teachers were some of the most engaged members in Philadelphia’s grassroots organizations and coalitions including: the 215 People’s Alliance, the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Education, Teacher Action Group-Philadelphia, Philadelphia Democratic Socialists of America, Black Lives Matter Philly, Our City Our Schools, and WE.

The initial interviews began with a simple open-ended question, *can you tell me a little bit about yourself?* It was in this introductory process of getting to know the teachers that nearly all of the educators, eight out the 10, identified a past social, political, or labor movement as a part of who they were and why they became engaged in movement work. Some discussed learning about or within the movement as “the point” at which they knew they wanted to work for change. For others, the movements were more of an underlying or omnipresent aspect of their experiences and identity. For all of the teacher-organizers who identified past movements, however, it was either an unprompted choice or an unconscious instinct to include these movements as central elements in their personal narrative of contemporary movement work.

In what follows, I detail two historical movements as well as reflections from the four teachers that connected with them. These movements, the Jewish labor movement and Black liberation movements, were selected because of their relevance across participants as both of the two historical movements were noted by more than one of the teachers in the original study. Additionally, centering on these two movements allowed for a more focused context as all of the teachers that identified these two movements were active members of the city’s social justice caucus, Philadelphia’s Caucus of Working Educators (WE).

The Caucus of Working Educators

Formed between 2013 and 2014, WE brought together a collection of Philadelphia educators who drew inspiration from the notion that a teacher union could be member-driven, justice-oriented, and could work for meaningful change in the city. Since its inception, WE has gone on to organize yearly conventions, an annual Summer Reading Series (Riley & Cohen, 2018), and a city-wide school-based network of caucus members. WE has also successfully organized in targeted coalition campaigns to abolish the unelected School Reform Commission (Morrison, 2018) and to remediate the district's toxic buildings (Isser, 2020). The caucus' Racial Justice Committee even initiated the first ever Black Lives Matter Week of Action in 2017, which quickly grew into a nationwide network of organizers in the Black Lives Matter at School coalition (Morrison & Porter-Webb, 2019; Rogers, 2020).

In the 2019-2020 school year, WE focused its energies on running for leadership of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), constructing a city-wide campaign that sought to expand its more traditional base of justice-oriented teachers. In particular, the caucus made concerted efforts to bring in the district's paraprofessionals by fostering the development of the caucus-affiliated group Para Power. While the campaign for leadership of the PFT was ultimately unsuccessful, these efforts highlight WE's long-term goal of building grassroots power in pursuit of change in Philadelphia.

With this organizational context in mind, I will discuss important reflections from key WE teacher-organizers on the Jewish labor movement and Black liberation movements. More specifically, the following sections will detail elements of these historical movements as well as the ways in which the teachers connected to and learned from them.

The Jewish Labor Movement

The radical Jewish labor tradition offers the first important example of an historical movement that has influenced contemporary teacher-organizers. Growing within the milieu of the global workers movements of the mid-19th century, the Jewish labor movement was characterized by a variety of ideological currents that connected with the Jewish working classes of Eastern Europe in distinct ways (Brossat & Klingberg, 2017). As noted by Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg (2017) in their extensive history of Jewish radicalism, currents of communism (e.g., Trokstyism or Stalinism) operated alongside other factions, characterizing the movement through to the second World War. Poale Zion, for example, a Zionist faction, envisioned "a red and socialist Eretz Israel" as the solution to the economic problems faced by Jewish workers (Brossat & Klingberg, 2017, p. 11). The faction that traces lineage to the teacher organizers of today, however, is primarily the General Jewish Workers Union or the Bund (Yiddish for union).

Expressly secular and anti-Zionist, the Bund drew in around 35,000 members in the opening years of the 20th century, establishing a widespread network of mutual aid funds, operating a popular press, distributing hundreds of leaflets, organizing learning circles, and coordinating dozens of mass demonstrations and political strikes (Brossat & Klingberg, 2017, pp. 23-24). Yet while the Bund played an ongoing role in the Russian social democratic movement that eventually led to the 1917 revolution, political pressures from within and without led to the organization redirecting its efforts toward more cultural ends and eventually joining the Central

Yiddish School Organization (CYSHO) as part of a secular and progressive Jewish educational movement (Brossat & Klingberg, 2017).

It was these redirected efforts that connected to my discussions with Zach and Leah¹, two teacher-organizers in Philadelphia who were both active WE members who identified as racially white and ethnically Jewish. Their experiences with secular Jewish schools (Zach) and the Jewish teacher union tradition (Leah) in New York drew direct lineage from the radical Jewish labor movements' cultural transition and informed their grassroots work in the present. As Klepfisz and Soyer (2017) explained, Bundists of the early twentieth century believed in the importance of the secular cultural Jewish identity or *veltlekhe kulturele yidishkayt* and took great efforts to not only increase Yiddish literacy as the language of the Jewish working class, but also to educate about the Jewish values of “community, cultural autonomy and engaged activism for freedom, equality and social justice” (p. 2). This ideology influenced the establishment of Yiddish schools, or *folkshules*, in both Eastern Europe and the United States throughout the early 20th century.

Throughout our conversation, Zach detailed his upbringing in one such shul in Park Slope, Brooklyn as well as his discovery of its radical origins later in life. In particular, Zach focused on what he described as his after-school teachers' “grassroots organizing approach” to pedagogy in which learning about global social movements took center stage. As Zach explained, “at the time there was a lot of post-Cold War stuff, so we learned a lot about Central American struggles, but really we learned a lot about social movements all around” (Zach, personal communication, July 11, 2017). These experiences led Zach to express that grassroots movement work had “always been part of [his] upbringing” (Zach, personal communication, July 11, 2017).

The importance of this heritage was evident in our conversation as Zach positively recounted his recent realization of the shul's place within the radical Jewish tradition as well as his desire to visit some of the educators from the program to reconnect with this past.

In our discussion about the shul's curriculum, Zach explained that the program often drew direct lineage to the Jewish tradition, stating that the message conveyed to students at the shul “was very much like, ‘the Jewish struggle has been a struggle for liberation, so let's learn about other liberation struggles’” (Zach, personal communication, July 11, 2017).

Zach took this message to heart in his work as an organizer on WE's Immigration Justice Committee. As he explained, the purpose of the Committee was to push educators in WE to consider how they could “engage in the struggle for immigrant justice” (Zach, personal communication, July 11, 2017). Throughout our interview, Zach spoke about a recent action in which the committee organized testimony in front of the district's governing body to push for a training for all school staff on immigrant rights. After several months of this targeted campaign, the district created a toolkit for supporting immigrant and refugee families (Caucus of Working Educators, 2017), and finally, as celebrated by Zach, agreed to a district-wide training. While Zach remained cautious about the content of the training and stated that the committee would be pushing for it to align with their goals, he described the effort as an ongoing and necessary process of “building a web of relationships that lifts everyone up together” (Zach, personal communication, July 11, 2017).

¹ All names of the teacher-organizers discussed in this paper are pseudonyms in compliance with the original project's IRB approval.

In the United States, *folkshules* like the one attended by Zach were primarily associated with the Workmen's Circle or *Arbeter Ring*, now named the Worker's Circle. Organized as a national Jewish labor fraternal order in New York around the time the Bund was founded in Eastern Europe, the Worker's Circle articulated its commitment as working for "a *besere un shenere velt* (a better and more beautiful world)" (Klepfisz & Soyer, 2017, p. 18). Given their similar ideological commitments, the Worker's Circle and the Bund saw significant overlap in their membership, particularly as forced immigration in the Jewish working class sent Bund members fleeing to the United States (Klepfisz & Soyer, 2017). By 1928, the Worker's Circle enrolled over "6,500 children in its 105 shules" on the East Coast, using curriculum that included both cultural history and Socialist political economy (Klepfisz & Soyer, 2017, p. 13).

In addition to the *shul* network, the Worker's Circle maintained an engaged membership, many of whom were teacher unionists associated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and its subsidiaries (e.g. United Federation of Teachers (UFT) of New York City). As Simmons (2017) notes, the Worker's Circle "shared a similar mandate" to the union in its "support for fair labor practices dating back to the early 1920s" (p. 1). More directly, the Worker's Circle and the AFT held several prominent leaders in common, including Hyman Weintraub, Israel Kugler, and Albert Shanker (Simmons, 2017). In conversation with Leah, she highlighted this connection to the Jewish labor movement as she discussed not only her family's ardent teacher union background, but also how critiques of that background informed her current movement work. As Leah explained:

There is a history, especially in east coast urban cities, of staunch union, teacher's union, first generation Jewish men and women, who were often the first college-educated people in their families, being very 'union first, community second.' Teachers first, students second, students of color second, families of color second (Leah, personal communication, July 17, 2017).

This history noted by Leah was centered in WE educational efforts that year, sparking intraorganizational conversations around the traditionally contentious relationship between predominantly white teacher unions and communities of color. One event, a public documentary screening, provided background on the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict between a white, largely Jewish, unionized teaching force and a primarily Black and Puerto Rican led community school board (Erickson, 2013; Podair, 2008; Stivers, 2018). This conflict resulted in a city-wide UFT strike, headed by member of the Worker's Circle and then UFT President, Albert Shanker. The strike, won by the teachers, eventually led to a dramatic curtailment in the power of neighborhood-controlled community schools and increased already existing divisions between predominantly white teacher unions and communities of color.

For Leah, this aspect of the Jewish labor movement's history generated an important lesson that informed her organizing praxis in Philadelphia. As she explained in our interview, it was essential for her, in being aware of this past, to "work with the tension" and stand *with* the school community she served in a largely Black and Hispanic section of Philadelphia (Leah, personal communication, July 17, 2017). In her words, she was working with WE in order to build a community of union teachers who approached unionism differently, who were "ready to organize for their schools and their teachers and their families and their kids" (Leah, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

Leah's reflections on the historical tensions between the Jewish labor movement and racial justice efforts led by Black and Brown communities exemplified a broader discussion taking place in WE during this same time period. In a multi-year study with the caucus, Maton (2018) detailed a transformation in the framing of the caucus' work "from one centred on market-based reform as the primary issue facing public education" toward a position that situated "structural racism as directing the logics and effects of market-based reform" (p. 11). This shift to acknowledge the racialized nature of the neoliberal era grew out of concerted educational efforts led by many of the caucus' Black members who argued that "alliances and membership are more effectively built and maintained through centering organizational conversations about race" (Maton, 2018, p. 17). Thus, as Maton (2018) concluded, these discussions shaped WE's values and strategies moving forward, particularly around questions of *why* and *how* the predominantly white labor organization should foster and maintain strong relationships with teachers, students, parents, and communities of color.

Black Liberation Movements

Black liberation movements, both in the U.S. and around the globe, offer another important example of how prior efforts have influenced contemporary movement teachers. In conversation with Samantha and Isaac, both founding members and leaders in WE, I came to understand the real impact of Black freedom struggles on the teacher-organizers of today. For example, during my first interview with Samantha, a white middle school teacher, she identified her time working with women organizers of the South African anti-apartheid movement as "the point" at which she knew she wanted to work for social change. Prior to this experience abroad in her senior year as a Peace Studies major, Samantha had studied liberation movements of Zambia and Tanzania in academic settings. Yet as she expressed, it wasn't until living with ex-combatants that she got to "see those big movements from the ground up" (Samantha, personal communication, July 17, 2017).

The Anti-Apartheid movement spanned nearly half of the twentieth century in South Africa, driven by organizations like the Pan Africanist Council, the Azanian People's Organization, and the African National Congress (ANC) among many others. Often operating in exile throughout the apartheid era, these organizations relied heavily on the internal grassroots organizing of women to maintain the movement (Hassim, 2006). As Shireen Hassim (2006) explained, during this time "women emerged as a powerful force in community-level politics, organizing around bread-and-butter issues such as high rents, lack of services, and corrupt local councils" (p. 49). These women were credited with increasing underground ANC-affiliated political activity while its leadership was in exile, primarily through drawing women into organizations like the Phoenix Women's Circle.

The founders of the circle relied heavily on grassroots tactics, approaching individual women to become organizers, holding meetings on each street, and going door to door to get women to attend (Hassim, 2006, p. 50). In spite of these efforts, women often held second class status in organizations like the ANC with the ideological framework of the movement being centered on nationalism rather than any kind of feminist ethic (Hassim, 2006). This issue, in fact, is what most impacted with Samantha in her work as a teacher-organizer in Philadelphia. As she explained:

After seeing things from the perspective of women on the ground, I realized that the further away things got from the local level, the more unprincipled it seemed to

get, the more corrupt it seemed to get. Like the more flat-out sexist and, you know, abusive toward women it seemed to get. So, talking to dozens and dozens of women across South Africa and Zimbabwe specifically is what made me realize that stuff that happens at a local level is the building blocks of everything else and is the most meaningful (Samantha, personal communication, July 17, 2017).

Learning directly from women organizers about the complex challenges of the Black liberation struggle against apartheid shaped Samantha's commitments to seeking change. Not only did this experience spur her to engage in change-seeking work, but it taught her an important lesson about the essentiality of organizing at the grassroots. Speaking about building power at the local level, Samantha argued, "those are the kernels of where the world change happens" (Samantha, personal communication, July 17, 2017).

The application of these organizing lessons were evident in Samantha's efforts just a few months later when her school was identified as "failing" by a Philadelphia accountability program called the System of Great Schools (SGS). Samantha, in conjunction with fellow WE member, Leah, who also taught at the school, began organizing on the ground locally to prevent the school from being "turned around," a fate which typically resulted in the loss of 50% or more of the teaching staff. Teachers at her school went classroom-to-classroom and parent-to-parent to organize a coordinated effort to influence the district's evaluation process by focusing the community's messaging on the school's lack of resources (e.g., bilingual teachers or updated facilities and materials). Samantha and her colleagues made direct contact with current and former students, parents, community members, staff and teachers to generate large turnouts to the SGS meetings with the district, all of which played a part in the SDP's decision to provide the school with additional funding and resources instead of initiating turnaround (Leah, personal communication, November 30, 2017).

While experiences abroad with African Black freedom struggles were particularly meaningful for Samantha, for Isaac, a Black African American history teacher in the district, connections to the U.S. Black liberation movement were most significant in our discussions. In particular, Isaac expressed deep connection to the intergenerational lineage of the Black freedom struggle, citing everyone from Harriet Tubman to Fredrick Douglass to Malcolm X as essential in shaping not only his movement work but his identity. In fact, in our first interview, Isaac directly connected his personal development to the heritage of these struggles, explaining how movement leader, Malcolm X, played a key part in some of his earliest memories as a Black child.

As Isaac recounted, in the fourth-grade he experienced a traumatic interaction with a racist teacher that took place in front of the entire class. After hearing about the incident, the school's librarian gave him her original 1965 copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Reading this text with the encouragement of his mother shaped Isaac from that moment forward. As he explained, "by 5th grade I was wearing Malcolm X hats and kids were calling me Isaac X" (personal communication, Isaac, July 25th, 2017). Connecting to the heritage of the Black liberation struggle played a role in Isaac's movement efforts even as an adult.

In the year I worked with Isaac, for example, he organized a city-wide event with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement that celebrated the anniversary and history of the 1967 Philadelphia Black student walkout. The walkout, which saw hundreds of Black students coordinating around a core set of demands, was a flashpoint in Philadelphia's Black freedom struggle. In our last interview together, Isaac expressed a deep connection to the walkout and the

anniversary event in particular, which brought together people from the local movement's past and present. For Isaac, the event facilitated a powerful cross-generational discussion about where the city's Black freedom struggle had been and should go in the future. This conversation was important because, as he explained, "the Black freedom struggle must be passed down generation to generation through purposeful, intentional storytelling ... through the oral tradition ... and documentation" (personal communication, Isaac, November 29, 2017).

For Isaac, his discussion of the Black freedom struggle was deeply relational, as he spoke of the movement's liberatory history as part and parcel of African American identity, his identity. As he explained in one interview:

All of African American history, the whole history is a pursuit of liberation and I would argue the whole identity, it's rooted in a liberatory structure ... We wouldn't even have concepts of what freedom means in our modern mythology without the struggle and the bleeding and dying of Black people going out into the world and participating and actually creating a more humane world not just for Black people but for everybody. (Isaac, personal communication, September 26, 2017).

In our time together, Isaac frequently discussed the Black liberation tradition and its contribution to broader movements, explaining that for him, as Black man, this history presented an "obligation ... to fight for justice and freedom and humanity" (personal communication, Isaac, November 29, 2017).

As Robin D. G. Kelley (2002) argues, however, the robust history between Black liberation struggles and the universal struggle for a more humane world has often been subject to a "conspiracy of silence" in the United States, creating an incomplete picture of the Black liberation movement's contributions (p. 62). While widely known organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress on Racial Equality, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee organized direct actions that focused on issues connected to U.S. citizenship (e.g. voting rights and desegregation), the Black liberation tradition also includes groups such as the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Black Panther Party that connected Black liberation with the liberation struggles of poor and working people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Kelley, 2002).

For Isaac, this historical heritage grounded his own work in the caucus as he explained that being a part of the Black liberation tradition was his primary motivation for organizing. In his words, any organization that works for Black liberation, "I wanna to be a part of it . . . because I believe Black liberation stands in the middle of human liberation" (personal communication, Isaac, November 29, 2017). As Isaac argued, the caucus, and social justice unionism more generally, represented the "last stronghold, the last institutional possibility of resistance" (personal communication, Isaac, July 25th, 2017).

Conclusion

As I pen the conclusion to this paper, teachers across the country are organizing a National Day of Resistance with students, parents, and community members to collectively demand a safe and equitable reopening of schools that also provides for communities and working families (Demand Safe Schools, 2020). The calls for cash assistance and rent/mortgage cancellation alongside the calls for police-free schools and access to online education, highlight the contemporary teacher movement's commitment to the complex and interconnected nature of 21st

century struggles. As suggested by this investigation, however, this commitment has been more fully developed through many movement teachers' active remembering of past struggles.

In remembering the movements that came before, the teacher-organizers discussed above generated critical lessons for their work in the present, particularly as they recognized moments when movements succeeded or stumbled. Additionally, they expressed an element of relationality, affinity, and solidarity with movements of the past, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and joining in the heritage of prior struggles. While I chose to center two particular historical traditions, the Jewish labor movement and Black liberation movements, other teachers identified a variety of Marxist or socialist movements and organizations as well as industrial and health care labor efforts (e.g. organizing with garment worker and nursing unions). One retired teacher even expressed the meaningfulness of working in more organizationally driven electoral movements such as the National Rainbow Coalition, which grew out of Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign.

These movements, while often broadly characterized as being 'of the left,' have not always found easy alliances with one another. Ideological differences, strategy disagreements, and interest divergence have led to inter-movement conflicts perhaps more often than affinities have led to meaningful convergence. The Jewish labor movement and the Black liberation movements in particular represent struggles emerging from two communities where this tension between coalition and contention has been embedded within the very fabric of their histories in the U.S. (Greenberg, 2010). It is with this in mind that future research on the connections between the contemporary teacher movement and movements of the past must set out to more directly explore the ways in which ideological, strategic, and socio-political (e.g., race, class, gender) elements of historical movements manifest in today's context, for better or for worse.

The responses from the teachers shared above suggest that remembering what came before is a significant process undertaken by many of today's teacher-organizers. Not only can remembering facilitate active reflection on prior efforts and shape current praxis, but, as discussed above, it can also draw us into the direct lineage of past struggles, generating a more profound and empowering sense of heritage, solidarity, and possibility in the present. In remembering these pasts, we connect, and in connecting, create greater opportunity for movement work in the future. Thus now, more than ever, we need to remember.

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