



a journal of positive futures

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YES! #29, spring 2004 A Conspiracy of Hope

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.

When many of us hear the word “globalization,” we think of McDonalds’ spreading from Paris to Timbuktu; jobs fleeing Detroit and even Silicon Valley for China and Mexico; or Minnesotans eating Chilean strawberries in January. Corporations and brand new technologies lead this globalization. It transforms everyone’s lives, for better and worse, yet ordinary people have little voice in shaping it.

But there is another kind of globalization, one that builds the power of people instead of undermining it. Ordinary people can reach across borders to gain power together that they lack separately. Sometimes this grassroots globalization uses new technology to creative effect—such as video cameras and the Internet. But cross-border grassroots movements are as old as worldwide trade itself. While the onslaught of corporate globalization suggests there is no alternative, people around the world are creating more just alternatives and discovering that while the shrinking of the globe has opened many doors to undemocratic power, people can use those same openings to foster global democracy.

This discussion guide centers on the following articles. You might want to discuss a different one at each session.

- Zahara Heckscher, “A Conspiracy of Hope”
- Dana Hughes, “Making the Whole World a Witness”
- Mark Surman and Katherine Reilly, “Appropriating the Internet for Global Activism”
- Mike F. Leonen, “Etiquette for Activists”

A conspiracy of hope

The protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 were not in fact something completely new, but a continuation of a long history of citizens reaching across borders to resist unjust practices. Zahara Heckscher describes three examples: the anti-slave trade movement, the First International Workingmen’s Association, and the movement against the vicious colonization of the Congo by King Leopold of Belgium.

- How does the current activism against corporate trade differ from the history outlined by Heckscher? How does it build on that history (or does it)?
- In each of Heckscher’s examples, there was some success and some failure. What would you regard as successes and



failures of current movements against corporate globalization? What do these articles suggest about the prospects for the success of current movements?

- What (if any) issues in your community are linked to issues people face elsewhere? In what ways might these issues be transformed by working with these other communities?

Making the whole world a witness

The grainy, amateur videotape of the beating of Rodney King by four Los Angeles police officers outraged millions and attracted worldwide attention. The musician Peter Gabriel wondered if the power of video could be used systematically to shine the light of global attention on potential human rights abuses around the world, thus preventing some of those abuses. He created the organization Witness to find out. Witness puts video cameras and know-how into the hands of people who might themselves be subject to human rights abuses, giving them the tools to connect to a global audience of people who care.

- Does exposing rights abuses help end them? Why and under what circumstances? What concerns might there be for those exposing abuses?
- What makes this technique different from the use of e-mail alerts or Amnesty International's letter writing campaigns?
- When has awareness of an injustice spurred you into action? What was it that made you want to act? What kind of information or images have made you feel unwilling or unable to act?
- Describe how you learned about some event that shaped history or your own life (a loved one's death, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the World Trade Center disaster, etc.). Through what medium did you learn about it (word of mouth, radio, television, etc.)? How did the *way* you learned about it shape the way you felt about it and acted in response to it (or didn't)?

Etiquette for activists

All too often, well-meaning attempts to work across barriers of culture, nation, race, and class end in frustration and affront. *YES!* managing editor Mike F. Leonen talked to a number of activists from diverse communities, and they offered suggestions for working successfully across these boundaries.

- Have you ever experienced a gulf of culture, race, or class that made a shared project difficult? What happened? Was the difficulty successfully resolved? If so, how?
- Have you had experiences that have either increased or reduced your capacity to work across culture, race, and class borders? Have you had experiences that resulted in a community, or group of people, developing greater trust and capacity to work together (or the reverse)?
- How does your own background shape your style of interaction and your expectations for others?
- Some people feel they must be able to operate in two worlds—that of their own culture and that of the dominant culture. Have you had that experience? What is it like? What are the benefits and costs of working within the expectations and norms of two or more cultures?

Appropriating the Internet for global activism

When the Internet was first conceived, only people in academics and the high tech industry used the Web. Now 166 million Americans are on-line, conducting research, e-mailing, and organizing through the Internet. Mark Surman and Katherine Reilly highlight six examples of activists using new technology in innovative ways that further their purposes, linking movements around the world.

- Do you use the Internet? If so, how?
- Do you use the Internet for any form of political activism? Has the Internet changed how much you engage in activism? Has it changed how you engage in activism? Has it changed your involvement in distant versus local



efforts? Has it affected how engaged you feel?

- In the past year, MoveOn.org and the Howard Dean campaign have received a lot of attention for their use of the Internet for political organizing. How effective do you think these groups, or others you know of, have been in using this technology to further their political goals? What advantages and disadvantages do new technologies have over older techniques?
- The authors of this report suggest that we are only beginning to scratch the surface in terms of the potential uses of Internet technologies for making positive change. What are some next steps that you found intriguing? Any thought on how “appropriating the internet” could make your social change work more effective?

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