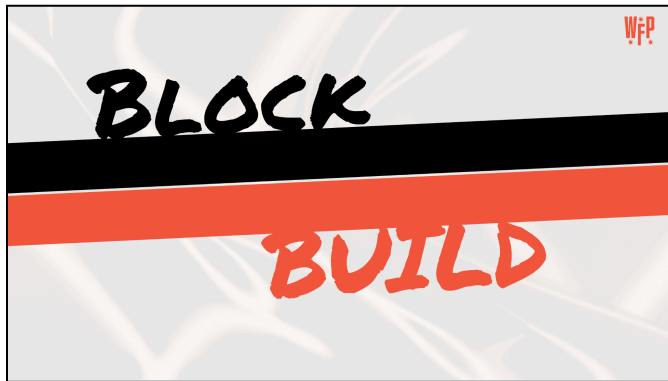


WORKING FAMILIES PARTY **MASS CALLS**

2024 Mass Call #11 - Political Education Script



- For today's Block and Build political education session we are going to talk about POWER. We keep using that word. We know what powerlessness looks and feels like because we see that every day. And we know we can't just wish that THEIR power OVER us will just go away on its own. So it is clear we need to BUILD OUR OWN POWER. Tonight we want to get specific about how we define power, why we need it, and what wielding power in the world of politics and elections actually looks like.
- As always, if you like these political education sessions, we will give you information at the end about how you can access the recordings and the downloadable slides and curriculum. Stick around for that.
- But before we get into today's topic, let's take a moment like we always do to review some of the material we have gone over on past calls.



- We keep coming back to this slide because it is so important. When we all have a shared understanding of this, it makes it easier for us to coordinate and break down silos, and it helps us understand how my work connects with your work, even if we have different tactics.
- In this political crisis the two major parties aren't serving us. The Republicans have been taken over by an authoritarian faction, and both major parties, yes, including the Democrats, are heavily controlled by corporate and ultra wealthy forces. Working class people are stuck with a bad set of choices.
- Our task is to build a new majority and to pursue the power to govern.

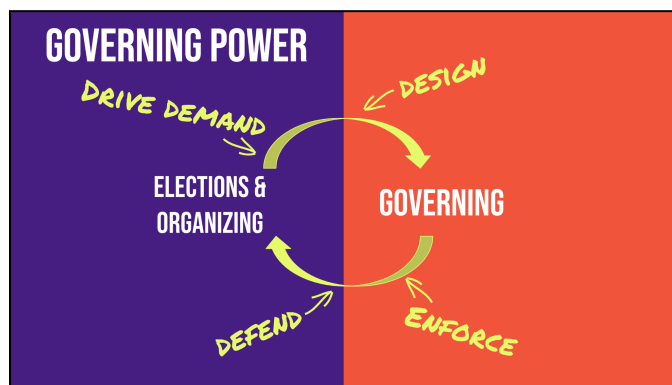


- We also keep coming back to this guy, Stuart Hall.
- Stuart was one of the most influential political theorists in the game. This quote of his comes from a book that he wrote called *The Long Road to Renewal*, which he wrote in the 1980's. He wrote it after the Labour Party had lost a historic election to the right wing, and had lost support of many working class voters along the way.

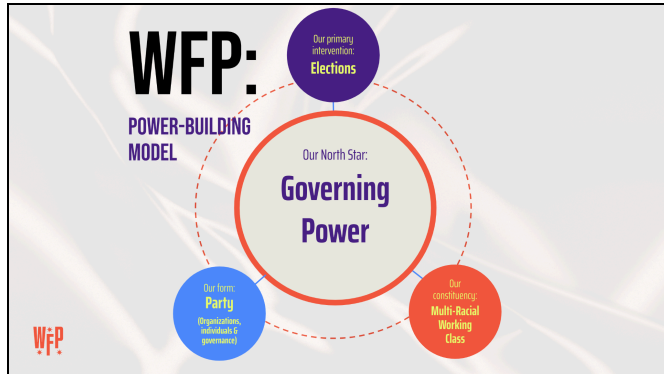
- He helps us understand that politics is bigger than just elections. It is actually a long-term project of constructing majorities. We are going to come back to Stuart Hall later on, so remember this...

**GOVERNING POWER IS ABOUT
CONTROLLING THE GOVERNMENT.**

- On past calls we have done a deep dive on governing power. We offered this simple definition...that governing power is about controlling the government.



- But we also talked about how it is not such a simple definition. It is an ongoing process, and there are a lot of different things going on under the hood here!



- We shared that governing power is at the very heart of the WFP's power building model, which you can see pictured here.
- So now that we have reviewed some of our previous political education sessions, we are going to dig deeper into the idea of power. We are going to look at the kinds of power we need to build and how politics and elections are one place where we can do that.



- To get us started with this discussion, I want to tell you a story. It is called "The Last Stop Sign."



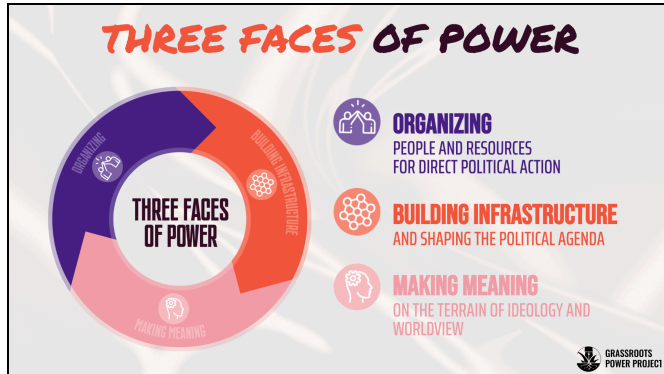
- The “Last Stop Sign” is actually the title of a short essay written in 1998 by this guy, Gary Delgado.
- Gary is a long time community organizer. He got his start knocking on doors with ACORN, a multi-racial power-building organization. ACORN was targeted and eventually broken by the right wing because of the power they built, but many of the organizers from those days are still in the game.
- In the essay Gary described his early days as an organizer in the 1970’s. Back then he described that it felt like he was organizing with the wind at his back. There were powerful social movements on the streets.
- In that time, organizing seemed to be working. But by the time he wrote the article in the late 1990’s, it was a different political climate. Organizers were now facing stiff headwinds as the right wing was resurgent in the country.



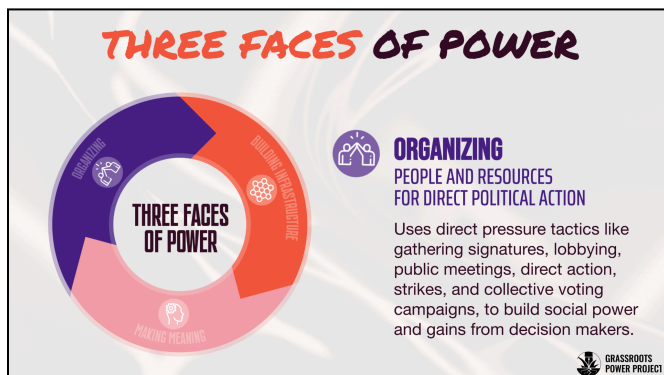
- The metaphor of a stop sign in Gary’s essay was the idea that community organizers are taught to find “small winnable” campaigns that matter to the everyday lives of the people in that community. In this case, the idea is that we are organizing neighbors to get the city to install a stop sign at a dangerous intersection.
- **We need more of this kind of organizing!** This is the kind of back-to-basics work that we will need to fight for the hearts and minds of working class people like our friends and neighbors. At the same time, Gary was offering a critique.
- He was not criticizing the idea of finding small winnable fights. But he was identifying that there was a problem with the idea that these fights would all

somehow add up to something bigger.

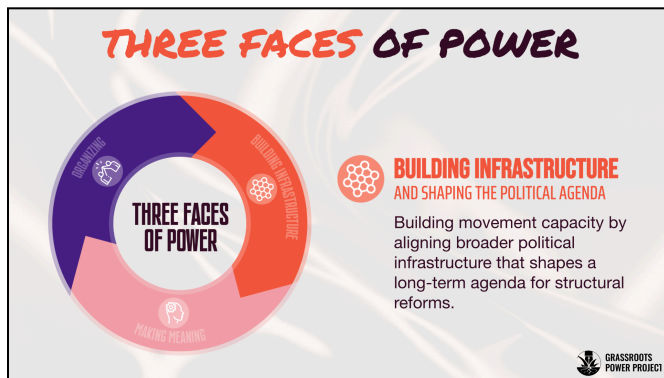
- The theory had been that we get people in a neighborhood organized to fight for the stop sign. When they win that, they will start to feel a sense of their power – something which had been robbed from them by decades of under-investment and red-lining and over-policing and the like.
- As the community's sense of their power grew, we could take on bigger fights. We could form bigger organizations. And our neighborhood organization could grow into a city-wide organization and eventually have real power on the really big stuff.
- To give credit where credit is due, this approach worked for a long time. Organizers like Gary, and working class communities like the ones he was working in, did start to win some big stuff. They started to take over cities.
- In fact, the right wing likes to attack the Working Families Party because we were founded 26 years ago by a coalition of progressive labor leaders and ACORN organizers in New York City. They attack because we did win, and we continue to win, some big stuff in New York City and in New York state!
- The problem was that the theory was also starting to break down by the time Gary wrote this essay. The right wing had perfected using “culture wars” to define the political debate. They were winning more and more power in both states and at the federal level.
- They were breaking apart the working class solidarity that had made the Democratic Party the home of organized labor and working people since the 1930's, and they were winning over more and more working class people to their politics.
- Gary ended his essay by calling for organizers to develop “political vision.” It is a short essay, and he does not really get into what that means. But he was making very clear that something needed to change.



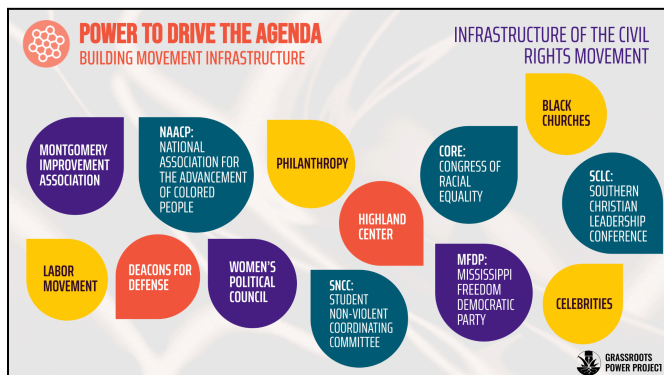
- Around the same time that Gary wrote that essay, an organization called the Grassroots Power Project was coming into being. Many of you know them.
- Our homies at GPP introduced the idea that there are more dimensions to power than we may be aware of. We need to work on all these levels if we want to stop winning battles but losing the war.
- We will go through each of these faces of power, and at the end we will tie it together to see how these different dimensions of power show up in our work of doing politics and elections...



- The first face of power is all about organizing. Here we are talking about the good old fashioned organizing that Gary described in his essay: going to where working class people live, where they work, where they worship, where they meet their friends...meeting people where they are at and getting them involved in local fights.
- This is the most basic and important form of our power. Without this kind of power we can't do much of anything else.

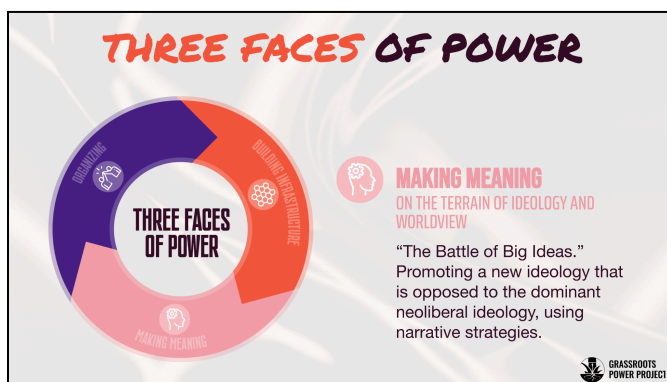


- The second face of power is a little less visible, but just as important.
- This is the power of building infrastructure. This might be easier to explain using an example...



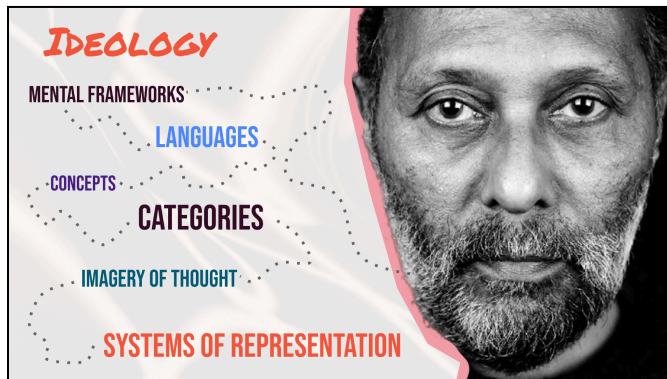
- During the Civil Rights Movement, there were many different organizations that played different roles. They often had tensions with each other, but they still maintained functional unity. Let's walk through some of these organizations.
- There were large national organizations:
 - The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was organizing churches and preachers to join the movement.
 - The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, which organized students both for direct action campaigns and to do grassroots organizing and voter registration in Black communities around the South. Shoutout to the SNCC Legacy Project and the continuation of this great work.
 - The NAACP invested heavily in legal challenges, but many of their leaders also did direct action.

- Congress of Racial Equality: CORE was an interracial organization that engaged mainly in non-violent, direct action in the South.
- There were smaller organizations in the South as well:
 - The Deacons for Defense that provided self-defense and protection to civil rights organizers.
 - The Highlander Center trained activists in non-violent civil disobedience and helped to build the ties that bound together the civil rights movement and many movements.
- There were local organizations:
 - The Montgomery Improvement Association and the Women's Political Council that organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
 - The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party registered Black people to vote in the South and, then in turn, to challenge the national Democratic party.
- These organizations were connected to a number of other forces in society:
 - Black churches across the country
 - Sections of the labor movement
 - Sections of philanthropy
 - And a number of celebrities.



- The third face of power is even harder to see than the other two, unless you are really looking for it.
- The third face is something we sometimes refer to as the “battle of big ideas,” or ideology.

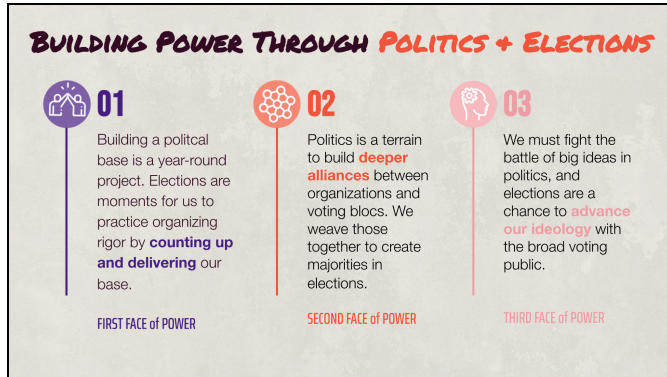
- Let's unpack that...



- Remember this guy? This is Stuart Hall again. He gave us this idea that politics is actually the process of **CONSTRUCTING** majorities.
- Stuart spent a lot of time thinking about ideology. He wrote about the ways that ideas and images and other cultural reference points have influence over how we make sense of the world – and what that means for our ability to construct majorities in politics.
- He talked about how people can look at the same thing and understand very different things. Now this may seem obvious, but it was pretty groundbreaking. It directly challenged the notion that just because someone grew-up working class they would automatically vote in line with their working class interests.
- We sometimes ridicule this as people “voting against their own self-interest.” But we should have more curiosity than that. We should want to understand what power is making it so that working class people vote for a boss and a landlord like Donald Trump because he is able to **APPEAR** more protective of the working class than the alternative. We should want to understand that because that is real power too!



- Every single person on the planet has a jumble of different ideas floating around in their head at the same time. At election time, politicians are trying to help us – the voters – make meaning of those ideas in a way that is advantageous to their cause.
- This word cloud has some to the ideas and images that were floating around in this most recent election.
- You will likely have an instant reaction to many of them. They will bring up whole frames of reference for you. They will tap into collective experience and shared history.
- But as we know, the meaning I assign to a word may not be the same as the meaning someone else assigns to it!
- Whether you love him or hate him, we have to acknowledge that Donald Trump possesses an instinctive – almost primitive – understanding of how power works on this level. He taps into people's grievances. He mobilizes their resentment. And he gives them clear people and things to blame for their problems and false promises to fix those problems.





- So as we wrap up, let's look at how all of this stuff ties together in politics and elections. Remember, politics is more than just elections.
- In politics we build our base year round, and then in elections we have to rigorously count-up and deliver our base.
- In politics we have to weave together the shared self-interest of many different organizations and voting blocs, and then in elections we have to mobilize this infrastructure as part of a winning voter coalition.
- In politics we have to fight the battle of big ideas and not sit there thinking that this ideological stuff is too in the clouds for people to understand. People do understand it, but if the only folks talking to them on this level are people like Trump, we are already losing. In elections – when millions and millions of people are listening – we have to insert our narrative and our worldview into the public debate.

Watch the recordings and download the materials at:
www.workingfamilies.org/masscalls

MASS CALL #1: WHAT'S THE SCORE IN AMERICA

In this call we talk about the threat posed by the MAGA movement, and the need for a united front strategy to defeat it. We make clear that in the context of the ongoing political crisis in America, elections are a doorway, not a destination.

[Download the Curriculum](#)


(Sample slides from the curriculum)



- Now if you like these political education sessions we have been doing on these calls we are posting the recordings on the WFP website at www.workingfamilies.org/masscalls. We'll drop the link to that in the chat.
- And we've also put downloadable versions of all the slides and speakers notes for these political education sessions right there on the website. You can find the materials at www.workingfamilies.org/masscalls.

