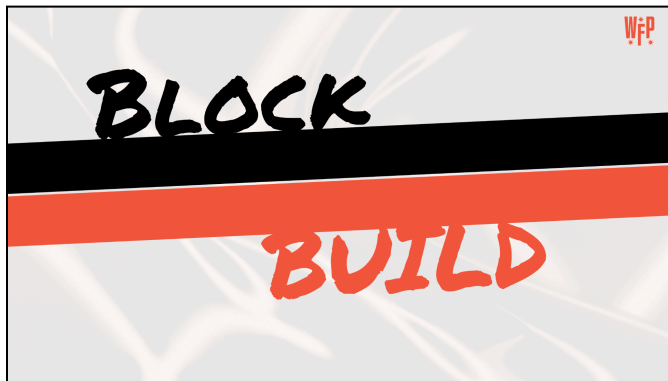


WORKING FAMILIES PARTY MASS CALLS

Political Education Script - Mass Call #12



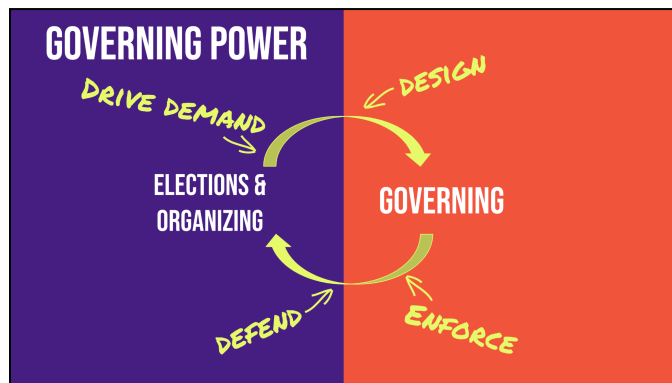
- For today's Block and Build political education session we are going to keep talking about POWER.
- As organizers we have to be very clear about what we mean by this term, so we are going to spend the next couple political education sessions digging in here.
- But before we get into today's topic, let's take a moment like we always do to review some of the material we have gone over on past calls.



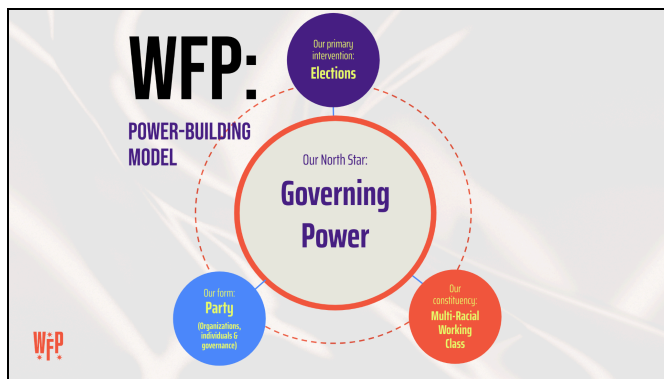
- We are in a political crisis: the two major parties aren't serving us. The Republicans have been taken over by an authoritarian faction, and both major parties, yes, including the Democrats, are heavily controlled by corporate and ultra wealthy forces. Working class people are stuck with a bad set of choices.
- Our task is to build a new majority and to pursue the power to govern.
- There's that word again...POWER...

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

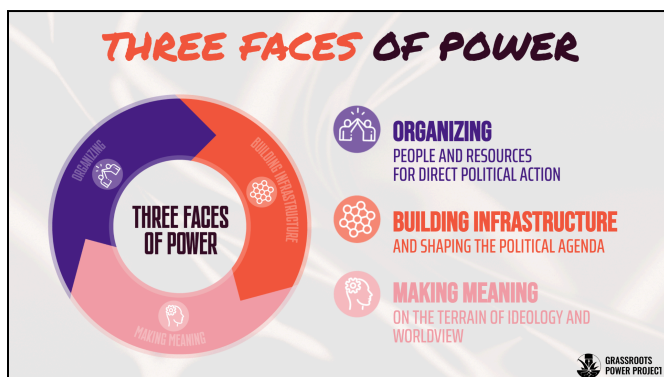
- Our definition of governing POWER is deceptively simple....it simply means controlling the government.



- But we know this is not simple to do! There are so many things that go into it. It is about what happens in elections. But it is also what happens as part of a whole life cycle. To really govern, our movement needs to master all parts of this life cycle.



- At WFP, the relentless and ruthless pursuit of governing power is at the very center of what we do. It is at the core of our power building model.
- We are crystal clear that this is not an easy project and it won't be accomplished in one or two election cycles. It is a generational project. And it is actually an ongoing struggle.
- To some this may sound depressing or hard. To others it may sound like an extension of the path of struggle that we and our ancestors have already been on.
- However this strikes you, it is important for us to be grounded in the fact that we have complicated problems, and the answers are not always so easy!



- In our past session we introduced a framework from our friends at the Grassroots Power Project called the “three faces of power.”
- We talked about the fact there are aspects of power that are more and less visible to the naked eye. These forms of power are all very real, and they all contribute to our ability to win for our communities.



- So this is the point in our discussion of power that we need to name the elephant in the room...
- For many people – especially those not trained as organizers – the word “power” has a whole bunch of negative meanings. So let’s dig into that...
- The associations we have with power can be very personal, and very visceral. They may tap into our experiences in our family. They may bring up trauma from confrontations with authorities like the police.
- Let’s look at it another way...the term “broligarchy” has been trending lately. One meaning of this is that Trump ran a campaign, and is now seeking to form a government of, by and for “the bros.” For many people, this is the kind of image that appears in their brain when they think about government and power. Now, with Trump, everything is a bit more exaggerated and cartoonish. But even if we are not talking about Trump, many people’s idea of power in government is a bunch of rich dudes...a bunch of self-defined experts who think they know better than us...telling us the way things are and ought to be.
- But I will take it a step further...if you have ever worked in or around an election campaign you may also recognize that there is a broligarchy there too. If you are a nerd like me and watch TV shows about politics, you will recognize right away the stereotype of the political operative...he is a tense white dude, talking fast, walking fast, always on his phone. He is the guy who has the polling and the inside scoop and the gossip...and he tells the volunteers and the people he sees as less important than him just enough to keep them doing their jobs. This is another way that those of us who have been involved in electoral campaigns see the currency of political power accumulated and spent.
- I should mention...WFP ran a program called Women Run Campaigns and currently runs Bet On Us a program that trains Black women in campaign skills to combat this very image of who gets to be the smart people in the room when it comes to building winning election campaigns!

- I want you to reflect on where were you taught that power is bad? Not to want it? Or, maybe just that power is something people like you would never have? Do you have an experience of power being used against you? Reflect on it. If you want to drop something in the chat feel free to do that, but you don't have to. Sometimes our worst experiences of feeling powerless have real emotion attached to them.

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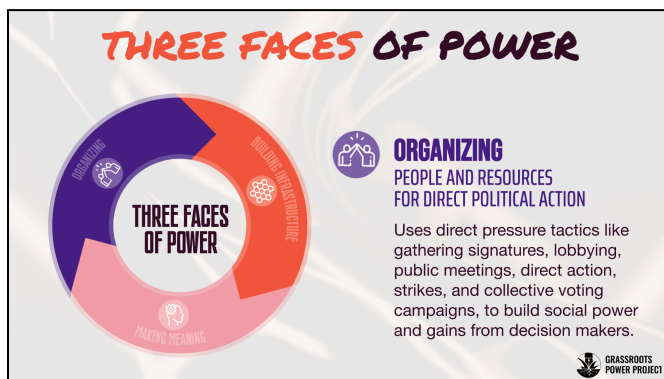
Reflect on: where were you taught that power is bad? Not to want it? Or, maybe just that power is something people like you would never have? Do you have an experience of power being used against you?

- [Read some out, respectfully maybe omitting names if sensitive stuff comes up cause we don't want it online forever]
- Does anyone have an experience of power being used well? or being a part of using it?
- Thank you for those examples. The point I am trying to make is that we need to sit with ALL of the emotions that the idea that power brings up. We need to face it...as a community.

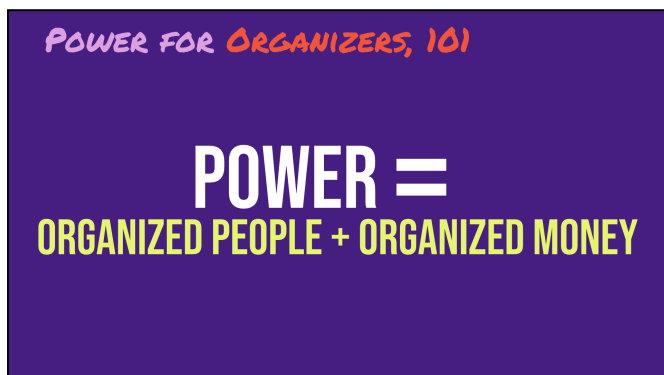
EMPOWERED	SURRENDERED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we do has a real impact on the outcome of elections. • The outcome of those elections has a real impact on people's lives. • We can work together to build something for all of us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our involvement has no actual impact. • Our choices are crummy now, so they always will be, regardless of what we do. • "Sending a message" is the most any of us can do in any election.

- We can't afford to turn away from power because we know what powerlessness looks like in our communities.
- Bayard Rustin...one of the leading thinkers and organizers of the Civil Rights movement, pointed out that the movement had a tendency within it that had argued that power would corrupt them. But he posed the problem in reverse...the ABSENCE of power can also corrupt. The sense of sitting forever in our own powerlessness can corrupt our souls and tear our communities apart.

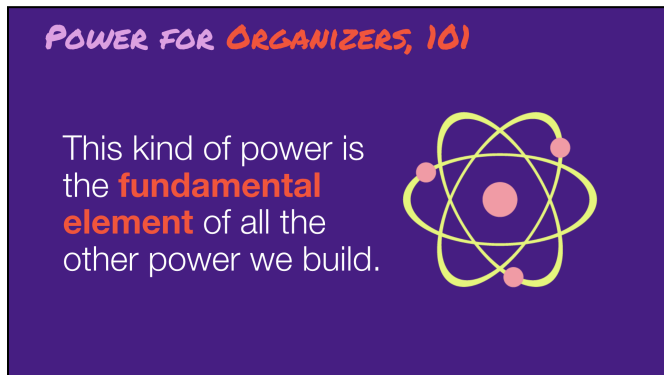
- We are going to talk about Bayard Rustin more in a little bit...so let's remember that name.
- I like to think of power like a hammer. Can someone use it to hit you over the head? Yes, but we all need a hammer if we're going to build a village.
- What helps me move with an affirmative stance toward power is knowing what we do has a real impact on the outcome of elections. Trumps victory may feel wide, but everyday more and more data is showing that it was not deep. Further, I hold in mind that the outcomes of elections have real impacts on people lives. Knowing this, helps me move with an empowered stance, focused on building power with others, in community.



- So let's look at what we are calling "first face power" on this slide.
- Power on the first face is about building direct pressure on decision makers and the system to achieve our goals. This might look like gathering signatures, lobbying, public meetings, direct action, strikes, or collective efforts to turn out the vote.
- We sometimes talk about this kind of power as "social power" or sometimes "people power."



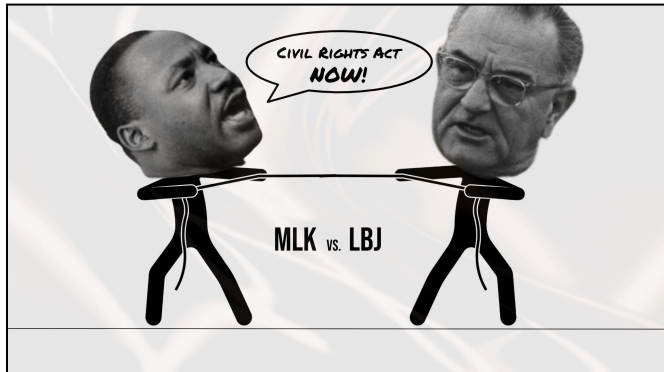
- If you have ever had training as an organizer you will likely recognize this simple definition of power. It is organized people combined with organized money.
- Quite often the other side has more money, so we have to compensate with more people. But these two things are the key ingredients of this “social power.”
- Power like this is sometimes referred to as “power you can count.” In other words, we can count how many people came to our meeting, or how many votes we need to move on the city council to win our issue campaign. It’s measurable.



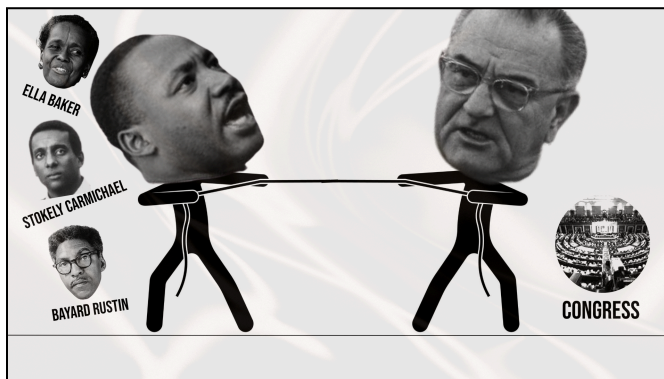
- Let’s be really clear about it: this kind of “power we can count” is the most basic and important form of our power.
- On election day, you can count how many votes you did or didn’t get. The same after a union drive, or a legislative campaign.
- Without this kind of power we can’t do much of anything else. We can’t skip this step!
- Lastly, this kind of power can dissipate. Hannah Arendt, a German Philosopher on authoritarianism warned “Power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse.”
- Overtime what organizers have learned is to build power that delivers people and money in a countable way and to build it in enduring political vehicles (political homes) that keep it from dispersing. If we do, overtime we can aggregate and sustain power, not just organize it for individual fights. We believe, there is a key role for WFP as a political party here. A political party is a shared idea in the minds of most people. People understand what a party is differently than a grassroots organization, or c3 table, or “coalition”. And when we organize enough people and money in one place to win, sometimes that can transfer to other places. So if when we won in NYC, folx may hear about it which makes it easier to elect Kendra Brooks and Nicolas O’Rourke to city council on a WFP ballot line

in Philadelphia, and on and on.

- Like a fire, power can be sparked. But also needs to be harnessed in lanterns and ultimately a power station that consistently delivers for masses.



- There is a very oversimplified picture of how history works. It was probably written by a card carrying member of the broligarchy...
- That theory of history is called the “great man theory of history.”
- In this version of how the world works, historic change comes from historical actors – usually men – engaged in some great struggle. This is how the story of Presidential elections over the decades gets told.
- It is also how the history of the Civil Rights movement sometimes gets told. In this version we have two actors – the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Lyndon Johnson.
- Now we probably know enough of our history to have a sense that this is just wrong, and it erases all the complexities. It also leads to people coming along later and turning Martin Luther King – who in his day was under FBI surveillance – into some kind of Hallmark card!



- This picture is still way too oversimplified, but it starts to show a bit more clearly what was going on. There were obviously LOTS of people involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Here we show three of them:
 - **Ella Baker** was a leader in the NAACP, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She was a mentor to many of the leaders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC. She was incredibly influential throughout the movement.
 - **Stokely Carmichael** helped organize the Freedom Rides in Mississippi and was a leader in SNCC. He played an influential role in giving voice to the “Black Power” movement and was a leader in the Black Panther Party.
 - **Bayard Rustin** was a lead organizer of the March on Washington. His work overlapped with Ella Baker’s at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and he also had ties to the labor movement and socialist politics.
 - You can learn more about these folks and so many others by checking out the SNCC Legacy Project’s Digital Gateway. We’ll drop it a link to it in the chat

TECH CUE:

SNCC Digital Gateway: <https://snccdigital.org/>

- Again...there were many more people than just these three! We could spend all day adding to this list. The more people we would add to the list, the more diversity of opinions on strategy and tactics we would find.
- But the other part of this picture we have to look at is that circle over there behind Lyndon Johnson. There we see Congress. And if you want to look at power you can count, you can start by looking at the process of counting votes in Congress.
- Lyndon Johnson was famously good at counting votes.
- But he was not the only one who was able to count power on this terrain of struggle. Bayard Rustin, in his essay, from *From Protest to Politics*, which he wrote in 1965, is very clear-eyed about the balance of power in Congress after Lyndon Johnson’s landslide election victory in 1964.

Tech cue:

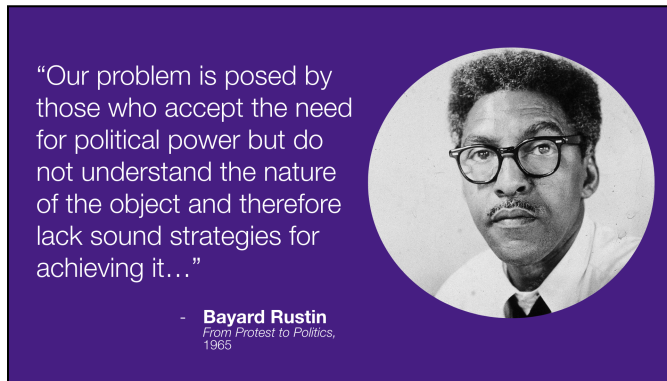
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***From Protest to Politics*–Bayard Rustin:**

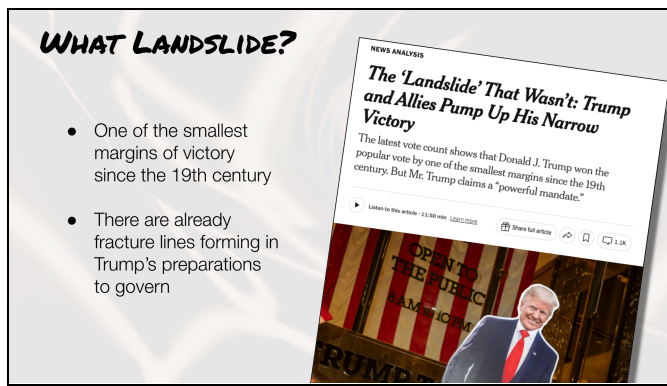
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1965-bayard-rustin-protest-politics-future-civil-rights-movement-0/>

- Because LBJ had won so convincingly, and because the only states that voted against him were a few Southern states, it was clear to Bayard Rustin how this

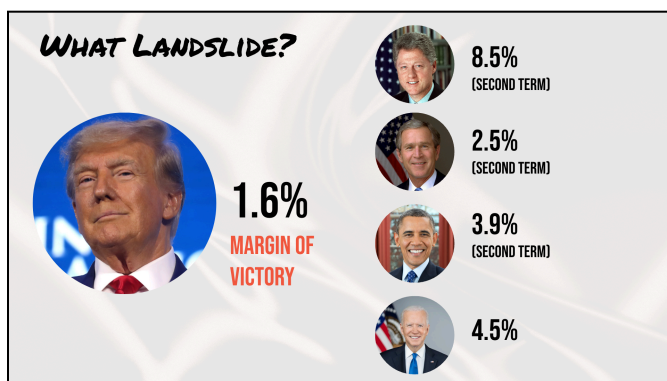
tipping of the political scales had contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act.



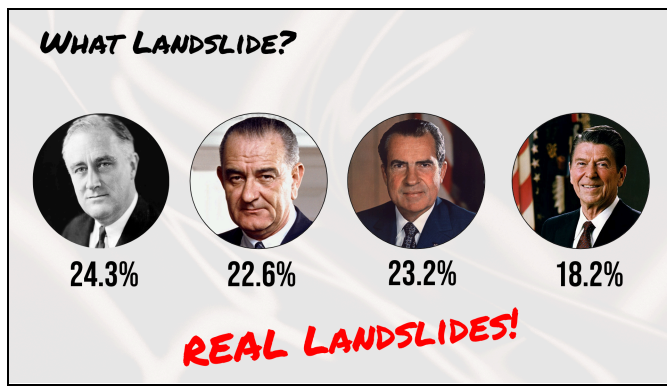
- In the essay, Rustin talks about the need to build political power.
- And he also talks about the dynamics of doing so in a two party system where broad coalitions will always have to be built in order to win and sustain those wins.
- We may know that just before his assassination Martin Luther King was organizing a "Poor People's Campaign." This is told as part of the story of how MLK broadened his political views over time to include critiques of class, and also US empire.
- In his 1965 essay, Bayard Rustin gave us a glimpse that this was the direction the movement was moving. He talked about the need to ensure that civil rights for Black people were completely intertwined with the social and economic welfare of everyone.
- He was doing this because – again – he was counting up the power the movement had. He was planning ahead. He could see the white backlash against the Civil Rights Movement was coming. And as a political strategist he was attempting to protect the gains of the movement by building a cross-racial majority behind it.



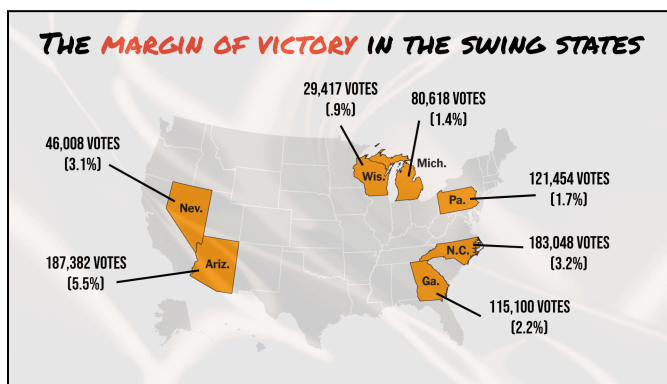
- Now, let's switch gears from history to counting up power in the present.
- If we just let Trump and his loyalists tell it, with all the votes counted he has won a historic landslide.
- But we know this is VERY far from the truth. It was a historically LOW margin of victory in the popular vote.
- And in Congress Republicans have a historically SLIM majority.
- In this context, we are already seeing fracture lines developing in Trump's coalition.
- Our job is to make those little cracks turn into big cracks!!



- Trump's margin of victory was very small.
- Compared to the last four presidents, he is at the bottom of the class.



- And when he or his minions talk about a “landslide,” we need to remember what a REAL landslide looks like. These are the margins of victory for Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.
- So when Trump says his 1.6% margin of victory is a historic watershed, let’s just situate that lie within the context we are talking about here!



- I am not saying all of this as “copium.” We can’t afford to sit back and tell ourselves that just because it was not an actual landslide that Trump is stuck.
- The fact is, Trump will try to take as much power as we let him take. So we have to be both grounded and also fight against complacency or apathy.
- And real talk: this slide shows us why we can’t be apathetic. Trump did win every swing state. He did it by winning over working class voters that at the very least were so fed up that they were willing to vote for him to send a message.
- We have to take a very close count of this picture and get very clear about the power we need to build from here.



- Let's end today's political education session by remembering this slide that we looked at before the election, which is still relevant now.
- We can't afford to adopt strategies where all we do is react and lurch from one blocking maneuver against Trump to another. When we only do that, and fail to build our own independent power, we are handing power back to the Democratic Party.
- At the same time – like Bayard Rustin – we need to be able to count the power we have and the power we need to build. We can't pretend that the power struggle going on with Trump and in our country is not going on, and we can't afford to just turn inward. If we do that we will also be surrendering our power.

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](#)

Watch on

(Sample slides from the curriculum)

- If you like the 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.

TECH CUE: Drop link to website in the chat.

Check out the recordings and materials from our past calls:
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- 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.

