

BOOK REVIEW – *When We Fight We Win! Twenty-First Century Social*

Movements and the Activists That Are Transforming Our World

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“Ordinary people are taking on extraordinary problems, gaining traction, and making the impossible possible” (location 112).¹ In *When We Fight We Win! Twenty-First Century Social Movements and the Activists That Are Transforming Our World*, those ordinary people are presented in this visually innovative book about the most important social movements from 2000 until 2015. Many human rights themes have emerged in the last 15 years, with people from different backgrounds and perspectives fighting for social justice issues in the United States. *When We Fight We Win!* focuses on the most popular American social movements, including the struggle for same-sex marriage, Black Lives Matter, and Occupy Wall Street. The book is organized in an innovative way. First, each chapter is organized according to seven attributes related to a specific topic. Second, the book is a combination of narratives, facts, and visual arts. Third, even though each chapter is about a separate topic, the themes are related, thus highlighting the integration of different issues and people involved in various social movements. *When We Fight We Win!* is a guide for understanding the different aspects of a human rights-focused social movement.

¹ Please note that the author reviewed the Kindle edition of this book. Therefore, several quotes are attributed to their Kindle location rather than a specific page number.

When We Fight We Win! is a partnership between Greg Jobin-Leeds and AgitArte. Jobin-Leeds is the founder of the Schott Foundation for Public Education, a foundation with the goal of increasing the quality of public education in the United States. As a high school teacher and a founder of many school projects, Jobin-Leeds witnessed 2011 New York State budget cuts for inner-city schools. As the school quality declined in the following months and years, he started to analyze what was necessary to change political and public will in order to transform the lives of the people suffering from their denied basic rights. However, he found that no book truly outlined those lessons. Together with AgitArte, Jobin-Leeds decided to write his own book about the movements that create social changes. AgitArte is an organization of artists and activists that promote solidarity with the use of art to increase the development of marginalized communities. *When We Fight We Win!* connects interviews conducted by Jobin-Leeds and the illustrations created by AgitArte.

The LGBTQ movement, the fight for the “soul” of the public education, ending mass incarceration, immigrant rights, the struggle for economic power, and environmental warriors are the six social movements explained in *When We Fight We Win!* Jobin-Leeds interviewed social movement organizers and activists. Based on those interviews, he identified seven characteristics of how an issue can be transformed from a human rights violation into a well-established social movement: (1) It is necessary to build organizations in impacted communities; (2) to make people transform their points of views; (3) to give examples based on significant narratives; (4) to focus on the core of the problem; (5) to regain the unity of people with different struggles but focusing in the same issue; (6) to change the power dynamics; and (7) to increase solidarity and group unity. Additionally, the chapters also emphasize the opinions of different activists related to the issues, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that contributed to the development of social movements are also mentioned.

When We Fight We Win! is dynamic because it mixes narratives from the activists, important facts about the issues, and visual arts. Each chapter starts with background information about the issue.

The information evolves into the presentation of some activists and how their personal issues are connected to the bigger picture: the social movement in question. Therefore, each chapter evolves from an informative text to a narrative of the activists themselves. Chapter 4 about immigrant rights, for instance, starts with the explanation that “the discourse about immigration today too often is dominated by demands for higher fences, longer jail terms, and harsher penalties for the people called ‘illegal’” (p. 79). A few pages later, the stories of three activists (Juan Rodriguez, Felipe Matos, and Gaby Pacheco) are presented, and their personal stories as undocumented youth are interrelated with the work of the NGO DREAMs. Their powerful quotes, such as “We’re not afraid! We are undocumented! We’re standing together to fight for our people” (p. 83), and their symbolic gestures, such as when one activist refused to shake the hand of President Obama in a meeting about undocumented immigrants, creates empathy between the audience and the social movement leaders. Personal stories and examples helps the audience feel connected to the people immersed in the issue. The use of photos, drawings, banners of campaigns, and advertisements also illustrate the issues.

Even though those innovative features are important for catching the attention of the reader, the different styles and the use of visual arts can also become confusing. The constant change of text style does not always result in a necessary flow of information. For instance, Chapter 1 starts with the explanation that the LGBTQ community has already achieved important rights such as marriage equality, but there is a necessity to “diversify the movement” (p. 8). This discussion about the diversification of the LGBTQ movement is interrupted with a text box about the history of gay marriage litigation. A few pages later, the text box ends and the subject changes to the differences between transgender rights and the other aspects of the LGBTQ community. Therefore, there is no efficient transition among the different topics. The use of visual arts, such as photos and posters of the social movements, occasionally gives the impression that the illustrations are disconnected from the text. In Chapter 2 about the rights to public education, it’s the whole narrative focuses on the city of Chicago, where schools are being

closed and/or have a bad quality of performance. However, many of the visual arts show protests in Puerto Rico, Philadelphia, and Arizona. Consequently, even though the text is explaining the fight of the Chicago Teachers Union, the pictures highlights movements elsewhere in the country. Therefore, the innovative style is not always beneficial for the transmission of the book's message.

When We Fight We Win! explains that every person can take an action "to make some societal change" (location 295). The fight for human rights through social movements is portrayed as beneficial and essential in the 21st century. Moreover, the book highlights how movements are not separate issues; instead, they are all connected. For instance, the different activists refer to what they learned from previous social movements on different topics. In the LGBTQ chapter, activists mention the suffrage movement, how women fought for their rights to vote and work in the last century, and how their struggles give the LGBTQ community strength to continue their battle for human rights. According to Rea Carey, an LGBTQ activist: "We can't ask someone to be an undocumented immigrant one day, a lesbian the next, and a mom the third day" (p. 11) because people face different struggles every single day. The fight for human rights, therefore, is well represented in this book because human rights are universal. Every human being has the same needs, and that necessity is what connects people, stories, and struggles regardless of color, gender, or culture.

In the context of human rights, *When We Fight We Win!* is an innovative guide for future activists and/or people interested in developing knowledge about social movements. The violations of human rights in different aspects within the United States are both expressed through facts and through the personal stories of activists. The use of illustrations and different styles of texts are, generally, important to catch the reader's attention and highlight all of the perspectives behind an issue. Most importantly, the book brings an important message about how social movements are not clear cut. Every struggle for human rights unites people in different circumstances. *When We Fight We Win!*

explains that the battle for human rights connects diverse people and their victories create profound changes in society.

Book Information

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