

Notes on *Inciting Democracy**

Randy Schutt

Hi, I'm Randy Schutt. Thanks for coming to hear about the book, *Inciting Democracy*. I'm happy to be here, talking to people who care about making the world a better place.

- Announcements
- You can buy copies at the back of the room
- Handout has the main points I'll make
- How many of you are activists?
- A bit about me — grew up in Tyler, Texas, worked with Abalone Alliance, Livermore Action Group, Center for Economic Conversion, Agape Foundation, Peninsula Peace & Justice Center, Ruckus Society

2 /// This Talk: 3 Points +

In this talk, I'd like to make three main points:

1. It is possible to create a good society [— there is hope]
2. There are 5 main obstacles to creating a good society
3. We can overcome these obstacles with a long-range strategy based on widespread education and democratic social change movements

Then I'd like to tell you a bit about the Vernal Education Project — as described in the book — and how it could help implement this strategy and help transform society. I'll only give you a taste — there is a lot more in the book.

Before I begin addressing these points, though, let me read a very short excerpt from the preface of the book:

“Imagine a society where no one lives in poverty. Imagine a society where it is safe to walk city streets at any hour of the day or night. Imagine a society where addiction to cigarettes, alcohol, and other destructive drugs is rare. Imagine a society where corruption in business and government ... is quite uncommon. Imagine a society where murder, rape, domestic violence, and sexual abuse of children are extremely rare occurrences. ... Imagine a society where racism, sexism, and other ... hatreds are virtually unknown. Imagine a society where every citizen is encouraged to understand and participate in civic affairs and most actually do. Imagine a society where people laugh freely, openly, and often.

“If it were your job to create such a genuinely good society, what would you do? What resources would you need? How would you go about it?”

[p. xv]

These are the questions that I asked myself, and I tried to answer in a practical way in *Inciting Democracy*. I wondered if it was possible and if so, how we could actually do it.

* Randy Schutt, *Inciting Democracy: A Practical Proposal for Creating a Good Society* (Cleveland, OH: SpringForward Press, September 2001, <<http://www.springforwardpress.com>>).

My Experience

These questions came to me out of my **experience** as a social change activist over the last 25 years and the contrast between the really wonderful experiences and the really poor ones. [Abalone Alliance, Livermore Action Group, Center for Economic Conversion, Agape Foundation, Peninsula Peace & Justice Center, Ruckus Society]

My first really good experience was when I was a student at Stanford University in the mid-1970s, I was a close observer of an effort to get the University to stop supporting apartheid through its investments in companies that did business in South Africa. **This campaign, waged over about six months, was incredibly well-designed and executed.**

Students first did outstanding **research**. They documented the horrendous policies of the South African government and its oppression of blacks. They showed that US companies in South Africa bolstered the government. They showed that the University's investments in these companies (including our tuition dollars) were directly supporting these companies.

Then, students did fantastic outreach — they distributed three detailed leaflets to almost every student living on campus through door-to-door **canvassing**. They showed the film “Last Grave at Dimbasa (?)” over 50 times in dorms, sent out a guerrilla theater troop that dramatized the situation in South Africa and the University's connection to that situation, published numerous letters to the editor of the University newspaper, held rallies, marches, and fasts. After a month of intensive outreach, every student on campus understood the situation and most sympathized with the anti-apartheid campaign.

The campaign concluded with a massive **rally** to make a rather mild demand that the Trustees vote their shares in Ford Motor Company in favor of a resolution that called for Ford's withdrawal from South Africa. The Trustees, without reading the information sent to them, voted against the resolution. This spurred 294 students to take over an administration building and risk being expelled from the University and ruining their careers.

This powerful act got **worldwide attention** and helped spur the anti-apartheid movement. Eventually, this movement was able to get US corporations and the government to withdraw support from the apartheid South African government, which led to its demise.

I saw that this campaign at Stanford directly led to the end of the repressive South African government.

At the same time as this campaign, I was living in a large, wonderfully supportive vegetarian co-op (which was also the headquarters for the anti-apartheid campaign). Students were loving and supportive of each other. We also tackled tough issues and made difficult decisions cooperatively and democratically. This provided an excellent contrast to the autocratic decision-making of the University.

This experience, and many others in the safe energy and peace movements, gave me a very good sense of what a good society might look like and how we might create it if we took it just a little further.

===== **OPTIONAL** =====

Let me read another short excerpt from the Preface of the book that briefly describes my vision:

===== OPTIONAL =====

A Vision

- “I visualize a time, perhaps forty years in the future, when there are a million people in the United States working earnestly for deep, far-reaching positive change. These progressive proponents are knowledgeable and skilled in the methods of individual empowerment, critical thinking, ... participatory democracy, ... coalition building, respectful conflict resolution, ... therapy, and nonviolent struggle.
- “As I envision it, these advocates are largely free from dependency on mainstream institutions. Instead, they support each other — and thereby protect themselves from being attacked or manipulated by power-holders or swayed too much by the dominant culture. They develop a wide array of alternative institutions based on progressive values — personal responsibility, freedom, democracy, respect for dissent, cooperation, altruism, and global stewardship.
- “With skills, values, and alternatives in hand, these million progressive advocates forcefully challenge existing institutions. They work together in strong, cooperative organizations. They pass on their ideas, skills, and methods to other people directly — without the distorting influences of the news media or other intermediaries — and they do so repeatedly over a long enough time to let the ideas sink in.
- “Over time, they influence vast numbers of people, build a variety of successful alternative institutions, and win many significant changes. ...
- “[Then] With the active cooperation of a large portion of society and the passive acceptance of most of the rest, these million progressive advocates eventually surmount their own dysfunctional cultural and emotional conditioning and overcome the resistance of the power structure. At a time, perhaps eighty years from now, they bring about fundamental and enduring changes in every aspect of society — political, economic, social, and cultural.
- “In this vision, I do not assume that progressive activists are any more intelligent or virtuous than activists today — only that they are more experienced, have more knowledge, and have greater skills than most current activists. I also do not assume they employ new techniques or strategies — although they might. Instead, I see an expansion of the best of what I have already seen Our best is very impressive and — multiplied severalfold — I believe it would energize activists and captivate the whole world.” [p. xvi]

With that introduction, let me now make my first point:

3 /// 1. It Is Possible to Create a Good Society

[Ch. 1: Background]

Given the terrorism and war that engulfs the world right now, the scandalous corruption at high levels as represented by Enron, as well as all the other problems that plague our society, it may seem outrageous to say that we can create a good society. But I think if you step back and look at the **broad sweep of history**, you'll see that our situation is actually quite good:

- In the last 500 years, there have been great strides in understanding and solving many difficult problems such as poverty, delinquency, crime, disease, conflict, and prejudice. As a society, we've learned a lot.

Some Victories [as seen on the handout]

- Ended dueling
- Ended slavery
- Supplied clean water, sanitary sewers
- Developed universal education, library system
- Enacted universal suffrage
- Developed vaccines, antibiotics
- Shifted to treating psychosis as a mental illness rather than as moral depravity
- For example, right now, there are people in the world who know how to:
 - Topple massive military dictatorships using nonviolent methods — people have brought about non-violent revolutions, such as those in South Africa, the Soviet Union, the Philippines, and Iran — these examples just in the last 20 years.
 - Structure society to ensure that everyone's basic human needs for air, water, food, shelter, safety, healthcare, and transportation are met — look at Sweden, for example
 - Help people overcome their racism, sexism, and homophobia and build compassion for others
 - Help people heal their emotional wounds even from deep trauma caused by war and torture
 - Raise children so they will become responsible, caring, and confident adults
 - Build cooperative structures so that people can work democratically together

Indeed, the more I looked into our situation, the more I came to believe that all the major problems I could think of have been solved at least once, somewhere. Of course, problems aren't always solved well. But at least **once, somewhere, someone** has found a good solution to these difficult problems. This means it is **possible** to create a good society. **We don't need to invent anything or discover anything new. Human beings do not have to be perfected.** All we need to do is to implement the solutions that have been found — widely and consistently, instead of just occasionally. Creating a good society is just a matter of applying known solutions most of the time instead of only a tiny part of the time.

Of course, this is not a trivial task because there are many obstacles. But before I get to them, let me just quickly describe what I mean by a "good society" or the "beloved community."

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A Few Things Still to be Done

- End war as a way to resolve conflicts
- End economic slavery — including sweatshops, prostitution
- End economic domination — Inequality in income and wealth, economic manipulation of government, destruction of the environment
- Diversify and democratize the mass media
- End racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, etc.
- Reduce number of people addicted to destructive drugs
- Reduce government control over citizens — Police, prison, INS

4 /// Characteristics of a Good Society

Very briefly, to me a good society would be based on the **Golden Rule** — Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You. It would be humane, compassionate, democratic, responsible, tolerant, wise, and fun.

No one would dominate or control anyone else. No one would live in poverty or feel inferior to anyone else. Decisions would be made democratically. Conflicts would be resolved in reasonable and nonviolent ways.

Notice, that I am not saying that everyone would live blissfully in paradise with never a care. Inevitably, people will still die of disease and old age, they'll still get angry at each other, there will still be jealousy and broken hearts. But as I imagine it, these things would be dealt with well so that people's difficulties and sorrow would be greatly reduced — and their love and joy would outshine their woes and disputes.

To me, this would be a good society. Not perfect, but a whole lot better than now.

Clearly, we are pretty far from this kind of good society right now and there are some big obstacles we will have to overcome.

And that brings us to my second point:

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In particular, conflicting desires would be balanced so that everyone would get what they **really** needed and much of what they **wanted** — all within the constraints of the natural environment so that the society was sustainable over time.

What Is a “Good Society”?

[Ch. 2: Elements of a Good Society]

• Basic Elements of a Good Society — Chart

- **Rudimentary Democratic Consent** — everyone must at least passively endorse the society and, preferably, like it.
- **Universal Access to Human Essentials** — air, water, food, clothing, shelter, and safety.
- **Access to Other Desirable Items** — good housing, running water, electric lights, meaningful work, fulfilling relationships, bicycles, computers, health care, and some luxuries
- **Freedom and Liberty** — everyone is protected from oppression and can do what they want as long as it does not infringe on others
- **Equity and Fairness** — everyone has equal opportunity and roughly equal access to societal resources
- **Environmental Sustainability** — society is in consonance with the natural environment
- **Balance** — between conflicting wants and needs (such as security balanced against liberty, personal desires balanced against common good, freedom against responsibility, etc.)
- Additional Characteristics:
 - **Humane and Compassionate** — empathetic, loving
 - **Democratic and Responsible** — cooperative decision-making
 - **Tolerant and Wise**
 - **Fun**
- **Caveat:** A “Good Society” is neither “Paradise” nor a “Perfect Society” — there would still be disease, death, conflict. People would still have bad days and still get angry. Life would still be hard, but people's love and joy would vastly outshine their woes and disputes.
- **Examples:** A sustainable economy that protects the environment, meaningful work at a reasonable pace, livable income for all, single-payer health for all, secure social security, nonviolent conflict resolution, “education, not prisons,” etc. See particularly utopian novels like *News from Nowhere*, *Ecotopia*, *The Dispossessed*, and *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You*. Also, look at the ideas and platforms of the New Party, the Green Party, the Alliance for Democracy.
- **Ideals of Progressive Behavior and Attitudes** — Chart [Figure 4.2, p. 65]

5 /// 2. There are 5 Key Obstacles to Creating a Good Society

There are, of course, many obstacles preventing us from creating a good society, but I think they can be placed in five main categories:

1. An adverse power structure

- There are powerful people (an elite) who seek to maintain their money, status, and power — top 1% of population owns 40% of all wealth [next 19% owns 40% more, leaving only 20% for bottom 80%]
- Everyone else tries to fit into the existing structure and advance our position
- Those at the bottom (poor folks, blacks, women, gays) are trampled, but don't have resources to change
- Unfortunately, we are all caught up in this power structure. Our daily lives support current structures — they don't move us toward a good society.

For example, we want to buy inexpensive goods. Stores compete to offer goods at the cheapest prices so this drives them to buy from suppliers in foreign countries where dictators and the military repress people and prevent them from fighting for higher wages. So, given current societal structures, our desire to be prudent consumers leads us to inadvertently support repressive governments.

For example, we pay our taxes — which are used to build up our military, but if we refuse to pay our taxes, we are jailed.

2. Destructive cultural conditioning

- Harmful customs, prejudices, and advertising images teach us materialism, militarism, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc.
- For example: Difficult for people to work together if some think they are better than others

3. Dysfunctional emotional conditioning — Emotional traumas condition people to act in rigid and dysfunctional ways

- For example: people who were beaten or sexually abused as children tend to have low self-esteem and get addicted to drugs, difficult to change

4. Widespread ignorance — Most people have a limited understanding of the workings of society. Few people know about positive alternatives or social change methods.

5. Scarcity of progressive resources among people of goodwill working for change — Most progressive activists are financially poor, receive meager personal support, and are ignorant.

How can we overcome these obstacles?

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What Stands in the Way?

[Ch. 3: Obstacles to Progressive Change]

Research on Historical Strategies

I did a lot of research and found ten strategies that people use to bring about massive change in society — such as revolution, electoral politics, building alternatives, advertising, and countercultural transformation, technological advance. I looked at the positive and negative aspects of each of these strategies and tried to come up with a comprehensive strategy that encompasses the positive aspects of each, but not the negative parts. Based on this research and my own experience in the anti-apartheid, safe energy, and peace movements, I came up with 8 important characteristics that appear to be essential aspects of a good strategy that would bring about fundamental positive change in our society.

How Can We Overcome these Obstacles?

[Ch. 4: Elements of an Effective Strategy]

Past efforts are instructive. Historically, ten methods have been advanced for bringing about major transformation of society. Each has positive and negative aspects:

- **Violent revolution**
 - **Positive:** Riveting spectacles, attract wide attention, interrupt daily routines, and expeditiously replace old powerholders with new ones
 - **Negative:** Bloody, chaotic, terrifying, tragic, transfer power to new powerholders who often are as brutal and oppressive as the old; violence makes people callous
- **Historical materialism**
 - **Positive:** Inevitable
 - **Negative:** But hasn't happened yet
- **A vanguard party**
 - **Positive:** Can speed up the “inevitable” process
 - **Negative:** Vanguard Party may become as brutal and oppressive as old regime
- **Countercultural transformation**
 - **Positive:** Potentially transforms people deeply
 - **Negative:** Often isolated communities; underestimate extent of conditioning
- **Alternative institutions**
 - **Positive:** Provide a positive alternative
 - **Negative:** Unless rest of society changed, they are vulnerable to being attacked and undermined
- **Mass advertising**
 - **Positive:** Easy
 - **Negative:** Expensive; better suited to disseminating inflammatory propaganda than building informed democracy
- **Technological advances**
 - **Positive:** Can make society much better (medicine, transportation, computers)
 - **Negative:** Can also make society more dangerous (weapons, environmental destruction)
- **Conventional electoral politics**
 - **Positive:** Legal, straightforward
 - **Negative:** Winner-take-all elections favor bland centrists; candidates with most money usually win; once elected, politicians often go awry
- **Mass social movements** (leafletting, boycotts, strikes, blockades)
 - **Positive:** Can bring about massive change (civil rights movement)
 - **Negative:** Vulnerable to differences among mass numbers of people, to deep conditioning, to infiltration and disruption by opponents
- **Incremental change** (small changes on immediate issues — direct mail, canvassing, lobbying, supporting progressive politicians)
 - **Positive:** Can bring about changes
 - **Negative:** Changes are slow and limited; changes often undone later

6 /// 8 Crucial Characteristics of a Fundamental Change Strategy

To be both progressive (democratic, fair, moral) and effective, the strategy to create a good society must be:

- **Powerful and Inspiring** enough to overcome opposition
- **Focused on Broad, Fundamental, and Enduring Change** — change individuals, institutions, and culture; change enough that they don't revert to the old ways [Examples: Roe vs. Wade decision, nuclear power coming back]
- **Reliant on Ordinary People** — since elite usually will not help
- **Democratic and Responsive** — not autocratic or oppressive
- **Focused on Ending Oppression, Not Toppling Individual Oppressors** — since anyone has the potential to become oppressive; the battle is not between right and wrong people, but between positive forces (knowledge, cooperation, compassion, goodwill) and negative forces (ignorance, domination, destructive emotional and cultural conditioning)
- **Nonviolent** — not oppressive or destructive.
- **Means in Harmony with the Ends** — so efforts do not go astray
- **Direct and Personal** — so they can deeply touch and transform people; face-to-face attention is more human; people respond to smiles, hugs, and physical warmth.

I believe that to create a truly good society, we must build into our strategy the aspects of the good society that we are trying to create. It must be democratic, non-oppressive, and moral.

The only way I can see to do that is to rely primarily on widespread education and mass movements. So this is my third point:

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• Democratic Transformation

“Because it is so often misunderstood or downplayed, let me emphasize one important point: creating a good society is quite different from grabbing control of society's power structure or manipulating the masses. To create a good society, progressive activists must transform deeply held cultural norms, overcome emotional blocks, redistribute power from the elite to everyone in roughly equal measure, and ensure people use their newly-acquired power responsibly and compassionately for the common good. To create a truly good society, activists must make these sweeping changes without establishing another coercive power structure.

“I can see only one way to bring about this transformation democratically: activists must prepare people to take power and prepare them to assume power responsibly once they have taken it. In order not to be dictatorial, activists can challenge people, offer information, and provide support, but they cannot force people to act in any particular way. Therefore, **the main activities of progressive activists must be to develop and consistently convey alternative ideas to large numbers of people and help them integrate these ideas into society as they see fit.**

“If people find these ideas valuable, they will eventually adopt them, just as progressive activists have adopted them for themselves. If people do not like these ideas, then as free citizens, they must be able to reject them.” [p. 66]

7 /// 3. We Can Overcome these Obstacles with a Long-Range Strategy Based on Widespread Education and Mass Social Change Movements (encompassing on the order of one million skilled activists)

If we want to bring about **fundamental, progressive** change in a **democratic** way, we must:

- **Educate and liberate the imagination** of every person in society so that everyone can choose collectively and democratically to create a good society.
- **Build powerful social change movements** capable of challenging entrenched political, economic, and social power and building alternatives

As I see it, what we need are change movements that would be like the civil rights movement, but much larger and stronger.

- **Must create positive alternatives**, not just tear down the existing structure.
- **Not reliant on a few leaders** who can be assassinated or who have big egos.
- **Must be comprehensive** and address not just the political sphere, but also the economic and cultural.
- **Must address emotional hurts** that make people racist, etc.
- And they must be **massive and broad**, extending into every corner of our society.

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6 Components of the Strategy

1. **Clear conceptions of progressive change** including
 - A clear vision of a good society
 - A comprehensive and feasible strategy for change
2. **Widespread education** in which people can
 - Learn how society actually functions
 - Learn to practice democracy and cooperation
 - Learn to overcome destructive cultural conditioning
 - Learn to change society
3. **Widespread emotional therapy**
4. **A supportive community for progressive activists**
5. **Large numbers of progressive activists** working simultaneously for change
6. **Concerted change efforts continuing for many years**

Basic Strategy

In the book, I go into detail about this strategy — the stages of the process, the leadership and structure of the movements, the methods they would employ. But at its heart, the strategy is very simple. I'm really just calling for more of our best efforts. I'm saying that we need:

- More activists to do more basic social change work — that is, more activists
 - **Persuading** people to have a more progressive perspective
 - **Encouraging and inspiring** people to act
 - **Educating** people about ways to be effective
 - **Supporting** people so they can persevere (building strong and supportive organizations)
- Activists work smarter — build winning campaigns that win non-reformist reform — and activists spend less time fighting with each other
- Activists have greater resources and support — so they can be more effective and persist longer

I don't think we need to invent any new ideas or new techniques, though it would be fine if we do.

How could we actually implement this strategic program?

In *Inciting Democracy*, I offer a project — called the Vernal Education Project — that I believe could implement this strategy and help make it successful over the next 80 years.

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What Kind of Endeavor Could Incorporate these Components?

[Ch. 5: A Strategic Program]

- **A Four-Stage Strategic Program** for creating a good society that incorporates these characteristics and components — **Chart**
- Progressive activists would:

1. Lay the Groundwork

- A. Find Other Progressive Activists
- B. Educate themselves — learn how human affairs are organized and other ways they might be organized
- C. Learn and practice change skills and overcome destructive and dysfunctional conditioning
- D. Form supportive communities with other people of goodwill

2. Gather Support

- A. Raise others' awareness about the possibility of creating a good society and the means to do it
- B. Build powerful political and social organizations

3. Struggle for Power

- A. Vigorously challenge the power structure and destructive cultural norms through conventional political and legal methods
- B. Illuminate domination and oppression using various methods of nonviolent action
- C. Resist oppression using nonviolent action
- D. Develop appealing alternative institutions based on progressive ideals

4. Diffuse Change throughout all of society

- This program would create a democratic, bottom-up change movement structure
- **A Tiered Structure** — **Chart**
 - At the bottom, a small number of dedicated activists working many hours each week personally informing, supporting, and inspiring:
 - A larger number of steadfast activists who, in turn, inform, support, and inspire:
 - A much larger number of progressive advocates who work just a few hours each week. Together, they would inform, persuade, support, and inspire:
 - All of the people of the United States

8 /// The Vernal Education Project — Basic Idea

The idea of the Vernal Education Project is to:

- Provide a deep, broad education to a large number of dedicated activists — those who have worked intensely for at least a year and are likely to work intensely for at least another 5 or 10 years.
- Then these dedicated activists educate, support, and inspire other activists.
- Together, all these activists then challenge, educate, support, and inspire everyone in the U.S.

They would build egalitarian, cooperative organizations that worked for fundamental change.

9 /// If the project worked the way I hope it will, after a 20-year start up period there would be

- 50 education centers around the U.S.
- Each center would offer a one-year program to 120 students in four sessions (one starting each season — 30 students each)

Adding this all up, the project would have a total of 6,000 students graduating each year all over the country. They would provide a powerful influx of skilled activists to a variety of social change movements.

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How Could We Implement this Strategic Program?

[Ch. 6: The Vernal Education Program]

- To implement: the Vernal Education Project, a yearlong education and support program for dedicated progressive activists designed to be practical and inexpensive
- **Design Criteria for Vernal Education Project — Chart**
 - Offer a Wide-Ranging Education to Progressive Social Change Activists
 - Vastly Increase the Skills, Strength, and Endurance of Activists
 - Facilitate the Development of a Cooperative Community
 - Operate Efficiently
 - Span the Country
 - Integrate with Activists' Lives
 - Grow Rapidly and Continue for Decades
 - Conform to Progressive Ideals
- Fifty education centers around the country each teach four sessions of 30 students each year — this would produce 6,000 graduates each year

10 /// The Vernal Education Program — Components

To make the Vernal program effective and inexpensive, it would consist primarily of these 7 components [as shown on the handout]:

1. Student-run study groups — held at student's homes
2. Internships with existing social change organizations
3. Independent social change work — with a local change group
4. A small amount of social service work — with a social service agency
5. Self-study of current affairs
6. A series of five ten-day, staffmember-facilitated workshops — at a retreat center
7. Student-run emotional support groups — held at student's homes

Tuition would be about \$6,000 and many scholarships would be offered so that poor activists could attend.

Note that there would be no campus or buildings. The program would rely on structures that already exist to a large extent.

As I envision it,

- To be admitted, prospective students would have at least one year of prior experience.
- Students would learn a great deal about all aspects of change — both theoretical and practical
- For 7 years after graduating, students would attempt to work at least 20 hours/week for change

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- Each yearlong session could cover most of what activists need to know to be effective progressive social changers
- In addition to these 7 parts
 - Regular exercise and to take care of their health
 - Informed of other community resources (like computer classes, leadership seminars, etc.)
 - Social events that would enable students to connect with other activists
- This program would offer activists a chance to experience and learn direct democracy, cooperation, emotional therapy, personal support, and a variety of social change methods while building strong bonds with other nearby activists.
- Prospective students would be required to have at least one-year of experience and be committed to working for positive change
- Students would be encouraged to work for fundamental progressive change at least twenty hours per week for seven years after they graduated.
- Likely Applicants
 - Career Activists
 - Progressive Organization Staffmembers
 - People Financially Supported by their Spouses
 - Vigorous Retirees
 - Bright-Eyed Young People
- Tuition of \$5,000 (in 1995 \$) for the yearlong program, but eventually enough scholarships so average cost would be \$2,400 (1995 \$)
- This program could be replicated across the United States to fifty communities so that eventually six thousand students could attend a program every year

11 /// Vernal Graduates — Number

Graduates of the Vernal Education Program would:

- Focus on teaching and supporting other activists and doing basic grunt work
- Be able to teach and support about 6 other “steadfast” activists (who work at least several hours/week for change)

This would make grassroots organizations much stronger and build strong communities of support. Activists would be able to work smarter and endure longer.

In particular:

If 6,000 students graduated each year from the 50 programs, then it is likely that about 25,000 would be working simultaneously — at least half-time for change.

12 /// If each Vernal graduate supported 6 other steadfast activists, they could support 150,000 steadfast activists. This is perhaps three times as many as today. They would also be more knowledgeable and better supported than now.

If Vernal graduates and the steadfast activists they support together supported an average of 6 progressive advocates (who each worked an average of at least 1 or 2 hours each week for change), then this would constitute a movement of over 1 million activists working for change. This would be an exceptional movement, able to bring about massive social change in all aspects of our society.

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How Could Graduates Help Bring about Transformation?

[Ch. 7: Building a Powerful, Democratic Movement]

- This education project could greatly bolster and support progressive change organizations
- 6,000 graduates each year — but many turning to other endeavors
- Under reasonable assumptions, after 25 years of development and growth: perhaps 25,000 very active vernal graduates (who worked at least 20 hours/week) simultaneously
- With very active Vernal graduates essentially serving as steady, part-time staffers, organizations would likely be much more capable than most current or past grassroots social change groups
- Each graduate could support and mentor perhaps 6 others: a total of 150,000 steadfast activists. Together, they could support and mentor 900,000 progressive advocates (who worked at least a few hours/week). This would comprise more than 1 million activists.
- This would probably triple the size of the movement for fundamental change and greatly increase the skill level. Overall, they might enable progressive efforts to be 3 or 4 times as powerful as now.
- I imagine them working all across the United States, mostly with grassroots organizations. Perhaps 4 Vernal graduates would work together (to ensure they got enough personal support) in four kinds of local organizations:
 - **Issue-Oriented Advocacy Groups** (environmental, pro-women, anti-racist, campaign finance reform, etc.) working for policy changes. More than 2,500 groups across the country (about 6 in each Congressional District). Each group of 4 very active Vernal graduates would support perhaps 24 other steadfast activists and perhaps another 140 active supporters. Main activities: research, prepare publications, educational outreach, lobby politicians and news media, and nonviolent struggle. Vernal activists would mostly support, encourage, and mentor other activists and mediate disputes — so activities are more powerful with less in-fighting.
 - **Alternative Institution Development Groups** (cooperative businesses, co-housing, farmers’ markets, direct democracy forums, etc.) — perhaps 2 groups in each CD supported by Vernal graduates
 - **Progressive Political Parties** (Green Party, New Party) — 1 group in each CD supported by Vernal graduates
 - **Progressive Caucuses in Conventional Organizations** (labor unions, civic organizations, etc.) - 3 groups in each CD supported by Vernal graduates

Also similar groups working at the state and national level — perhaps 2,000 graduates at the state level and 1,000 at the national level

Societal Transformation

In the book, I detail what I believe one million activists could accomplish over 80 years — that they could transform society. But I don't want to go on too long here, so let me just recap briefly what I've said and then stop.

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Could these Movements Transform Society?

[Ch. 9: Transforming Society]

- By working smarter and having less in-fighting, by having a force 3 or 4 times more powerful than now, and by working diligently for many years, the project would support powerful change movements that could bring about fundamental transformation of society in 80 years.
- Early victories would inspire more people to get involved. Larger numbers of people would make the movement more visible and make it safer for everyone to participate. With enough people, even bigger struggles could be won. Social change would snowball, just as in the fall of the Soviet Union.
- Old conservatives would die. Young people would grow up in an exciting time of change and hope (like the 1960s and 1970s). As people changed, they would treat their children better (less abuse). Fewer children would grow up in poverty or violent ghettos. More would grow up well adjusted, self-confident, and ready to be empowered, responsible citizens.
- After about 50 years of sustained struggle — with a majority of the public favoring fundamental progressive change — transforming society would then begin to be easier. The change process would accelerate and could be largely completed in just 30 more years.
- Hopelessness and cynicism would be replaced with hope and determination. And it would be fun.

How Can We Launch this Endeavor?

[Ch. 10: Implementing the Vernal Project]

- Publish *Inciting Democracy* and use it to discuss these ideas with large numbers of activists.
- Find a few people who want to implement the project. They prepare a curriculum and reach out to large numbers of potential students.
- Facilitate a few test workshops and then a 6-month pilot session.
- Arrange internships, attract students, admit students, and then begin the first session.
- For the next 5 years, expand the center until it is facilitating 4 sessions/year.
- Then over 15 years, replicate the program to 49 other places around the country.
- Continue at this level for 40 more years, then stop.
- Movements continue on for another 20 years (or more!)

Recap

The main points I made are:

1. It is possible to create a good society — we know how to do it, we just need to provide the information and resources to more people so they can transform society
2. There are 5 key obstacles to creating a good society
3. We can overcome these obstacles with a long-range strategy based on widespread education and democratic social change movements

I then (very) briefly described how

- The Vernal Education Project could inform, support, and inspire activists
- Thousands of Vernal graduates could support and mentor a million other activists
- Working together over 80 years, they could transform society

One reason for writing the book is to give activists hope. Our whole society tells us that it is impossible to really change anything significantly. I hope that the book makes it clear to people that it **is** possible to create a good society. Let's do it!