

# Part III

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## Afterword



## The Next Movement: Saving Our Children and Youth and Our Nation's Future and Soul

*If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation... want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.*

–Frederick Douglass

**N**othing short of a transforming movement bubbling up from every nook and cranny of America demanding that every child be able to live, learn, thrive and reach safe adulthood and their highest potential will transform America's values and priorities. Those Black and Latino citizens waiting for the next Dr. King or Cesar Chavez to come and save us need to recognize they are not coming back. We are it and need to get on with the business of protecting children. And we need to stop waiting on political leaders to take care of children's problems. They will respond to what we demand. The ball is in our court!

Movement building is very, *very* hard. Discouraging. Unpredictable. Requires deep faith and great perseverance. Deep inner reserves. Unwavering commitment to a heartfelt vision. A sense of call worth fighting and risking all for. It requires discipline, focus and long range planning, yet a willingness to turn on a dime and seize the moment, and an ability to live with ambiguity and complexity.

Movement building for children requires openness to many different kinds of people with different needs, approaches, interests and talents without losing sight of the overarching goal: to dismantle the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and to *truly* Leave No Child Behind. It requires zeal and iron will to keep moving ahead when others yell stop and throw up roadblock after roadblock, drag their feet or repeatedly pronounce you politically unrealistic. It requires hanging in until we reach the finish line and have addressed all of the crucial needs of children and their families. We must not be satisfied with a foot of child care, a leg of health care, a thigh of nutrition, a hand of housing, a neck bone of education, a backbone of after-school care, a toe of gun control, a shoulder of parental education and training. We must address the needs of the whole child who does not come in pieces but in families and lives in communities shaped by cultural and national values that must become more just in practice and honored by responsible adults with power.

Movements are not built in a day, year or decade. They are a long time coming. They burst forth from many seeds planted in many places over time and from many grievances that simmer, boil over and erupt, after being ignored or inadequately addressed, into a mighty stream. Many decades before *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Montgomery bus boycott, Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall and a small band of brilliant Black lawyers quietly began developing legal theories and with courageous Black parents filing test cases to crumble the seemingly impenetrable walls of legal segregation and inequality in public education in America. Black veterans returned home from World War II fighting for a freedom they were denied at home. A. Philip Randolph pushed for nondiscriminatory employment opportunities. Ida Wells and the NAACP campaigned against lynching violence and discrimination against Black citizens. All these and other things heated up the pot for social change. Myles Horton at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee was bringing people of every race and faith together for fellowship, community building and citizenship education. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. King, Septima Clark and Mrs. Rosa Parks were among the many leaders, some prominent and some unknown, who gathered there and who helped lead and seed the nonviolent army needed to overturn racial segregation in the south and nation. Other training centers developed as safe havens for people seeking racial and social change to come together to share experiences and strategies and find renewal.

Alex Haley's former farm in Tennessee is CDF's gathering place for spiritual renewal, leadership training and community building for our 21<sup>st</sup> century movement for children. It is where leaders participating in the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC) met and debated and planted a number of seeds that have sprouted including the CDF Freedom Schools<sup>®</sup> program, the Harlem Children's Zone, annual child gun violence reports, Beat the Odds<sup>®</sup> celebrations and scholarships for high school youths who are joining with other young leaders to change the odds! Over 12,000 young leaders have been trained to become child advocates and teacher-mentors. And more than 60,000 children have experienced the *CDF Freedom Schools* message that *they* can make a difference and can achieve!

Building a children's movement will require a critical mass of effective servant-leaders of all ages, faiths, races and disciplines playing their role—each of us trying to complement not duplicate or reinvent the wheel; to collaborate not compete; to serve children and not just ourselves, our organizations or our political interests. I hope each and all of us will pray daily to get ourselves out of the way for a bigger good and ask only to be used to do whatever is needed to build a movement to save our children.

Adults must hold ourselves and others accountable and empower our children to stand up to make a difference *with* us. We must not let words and photo-ops be substitutes for action or fig leaves for policies and budget choices that hurt children. People who profess to care for children but who don't do the hard work, or who promote or tolerate policies and budgets that leave millions of children behind must be challenged. The litmus test for political leaders should be whether their votes close the gap between the rich and the poor and ensure all children a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and the chance for a successful

transition to adulthood. Children cannot eat or be housed or educated by promises. Before the coffers of wealthy corporations and individuals, already overflowing with massive federal tax breaks, are extended, children who are hungry, homeless, trying to learn in crumbling schools, and in need of health care and child care should be protected. Every adult must vote and speak truth to power in all political parties and at all levels of government and in every sector of American society until all of our young are able to grow up healthy, nonviolent, respectful, educated and safe.

