

BNPower:

BUILDING NARRATIVE POWER

A set of multimedia tools that explore why some ideas take root while others disappear.

BEYOND STORY PODCAST: Adventures in Narrative Power Show Notes & Transcript

EPISODE 3: When We Fight, We Win: Lessons from the Past, Hope in the Present.

- PART I: M Adams, Freedom, Inc. [<https://freedom-inc.org/>]
- PART II: Dr. Lori Dorfman, Berkeley Media Studies Group's <https://www.bmsg.org/> (start 26:15)

TRANSCRIPT PART I

Makani Themba:

Why do some ideas take root and become prevailing wisdom while others trend a minute and seem to disappear? The reason, we're told, is that ideas that stick are more compelling and easier to grasp than the ones that don't. Umm, but that's not quite true.

[bell rings]

I'm Makani Themba. An organizer, change communication strategist, and black women trying to get free. I've learned that what distinguishes ideas that root and stay with us, good or bad, is the structural and cultural power behind them. It's not about powerful narratives. Though they help. It's about out narrative power. This power is all around us, in our heads...

[singer]

One two three four five six seven eight nine

Makani:

And hearts.

[gospel song]

Makani:

It shapes what we think is true.

[clip]

How Christopher Columbus discovered America.

The power to define what's true, to determine the story of the past and institutionalize ideas so they replicate, this is narrative power.

www.bnpower.org

Makani:

What's fact. What's right. Narrative power determines the story of the past and roots and reproduces ideas over time. It's way beyond story. Join us. As we stretch our understanding of what it means to build narrative power and explore ways to transform the institutions that shape how we, all of us, make sense of the world.

Makani:

We hear an awful lot about what the right gets, right. What we often forget is that we've had some amazing breakthroughs on the progressive side as well. In our animated film project on narrative power, we explore some of these wins. For today's episode, we're going in on two of these breakthroughs. The movement to defund policing and state violence, and tobacco control. M Adams is a leading thinker and organizer around community safety. As a leader, the Madison, Wisconsin based Freedom, Inc, and Movement for Black Lives, they have been at the forefront of work to defund the police.

Makani:

So first I just had to say, I'm so excited to be in conversation with you. M Adams, brilliant person, organic intellectual, deep thinker, organizer. Just somebody whose instinct and analysis I always trust. And so I feel really, really honored that we get to have this conversation. So I'm excited. Thank you.

M Adams:

Excellent. Me too. I'm very excited too. And thank you for thinking of me.

Makani:

Oh, of course, of course. So I want to jump in, just right in ,at the sort of beginning in a way. So you're the Co-executive Director of Freedom, Inc. It's an organization that's very intentional about it's clear and intersectional frame, and centering of Black and Southeast Asian liberation, and in Madison, Wisconsin. All right. So for folks who think that this stuff only happens on the edges of the country, we're in the Heartland, Madison, which I've always found to be an interesting place for all kinds of reasons.

Makani:

And you know, this is a podcast series about narrative power, about dominant narratives, about the way we're fighting back and breaking through. And actually the work of Freedom Inc kind of flies in the face of a dominant narrative. And that is that we can't get along. That we shouldn't build with each other or fight together because it's impossible. So I'm just curious before we even dig in on the police thing and the work to sort of deal with and address those issues, about Freedom Inc itself and how you all kind of confront that narrative. And how do you build with people and help them see this common ground. And also because you guys are also rocking around a queer lens and all these things that people think of as separate.

M Adams:

Yeah. So the short answer is it takes a lot of intentional work. I think one of the mistakes that I've seen people make, who are intentionally building across racial, ethnic identities, or even gender identities, et cetera, is that because they have an understanding how we all are impacted, they assume that that understanding is just there and obvious inside the communities. And we knew that that wasn't true. When we started Freedom, Inc. initially it started off as a Hmong organization only. And it was a group happening on the north side, which has both Southeast Asian girls and Black girls attending the community center. So the Hmong girls were meeting and the Black girls were like, we want to come, we want to group. And so the Hmong girls were like, yeah, come. And when they came, it was a complete disaster. Right. It was for a number of reasons and it maybe wasn't for what you would think, right?

M Adams:

It wasn't that they spoke a different language. I mean, that was true that there was different languages being used, but I think we could have figured out the interpretation. So it wasn't that, or we could have even figured out how different cultures communicate. The reason was how they experienced the same issue looked so different that it was hard for them to have a conversation about it. So for example, when we were talking about militarism, the Hmong girls would talk about their experience in being refugees, the experience of growing up or having their family live through the generation of what we call the Vietnam war, but as is rightfully caught by them, the American war and the secret war, which devastated their

communities and forced them to migrate or force them to be refugees. And so they were having that experience and the Black girls would be talking about, going to ROTC or the army or the military because there just wasn't any job opportunities.

M Adams:

And so without having given them separate spaces to process that, and then come together, we wouldn't have been able to do it. And so how we think about Freedom Inc. and how we approach the work of working with different communities, isn't to put us all in a melting pot and be like, we're the same, but instead to say, wait a minute, we're all impacted uniquely, not all of us the same, right? Depending on the issue, some of us are more impacted than one another, but having this space for all of us to have opportunities to think about ourselves, our experiences, and then from that place build a shared analysis is how we did it. The other thing that we realized is that when you do it for one cohort of people, you have to start it all over anytime you increase your membership, get new staff, new whatever. And so what we've had to learn how to do, is to provide an opportunity for deepening for folks who've already been there as well as on purpose, orienting, creating spaces for people to learn about themselves and each other all the time. And so we're always, always creating new entry points and always, always trying to deepen for those who've already been there some time.

Makani:

Thank you for that. Again, that it feels really important because a lot of folks don't even realize that this work is happening and they're carrying the story and you think of how important, you know, numbers in some ways. But yeah, there's power in numbers, there's power in connection, there's power in not being divided. Right? But that's not the same as, like you said, false unity where people are just like, oh, we're all in the room. We should just figure out how to erase our personal story. So I really appreciate you sharing that. I want to get you to talk a little bit about your role in leadership and Movement for Black Lives. And in particular, the work that you're doing in the context of policing and state violence, if you wouldn't mind sharing a little bit about that.

M Adams:

So I'm one of the leadership team members of the Movement for Black Lives. I've been there for some time. So some of the areas that I contributed to specifically had to do with the building out of transformative policy work, I'm also part of the abolishing patriarchal violence table, which focuses on ending patriarchal violence within and against our communities. And I've also done some work with the base-building organizing groups. So I'm a little bit all over. It's a short response to, uh, what I do inside the Movement for Black Lives.

Makani:

Okay. And can you say a little bit more about for folks who don't know what M4BL is?

M Adams:

Sure. So M4BL is an ecosystem and we use that word on purpose as opposed to calling ourselves a network or alliance to emphasize the way that the 160 organizations that are involved are interdependent on one another. So we're a space where Black organizations, Black-led organizations come together, develop strategy for how this iteration of Black movement can advance our cause and advance our people. Our people, our ecosystem is held together or bound by sort of three main ideological pillars where abolitionists, we're anti-capitalist and we're Black queer feminist. And so that's what M4BL is.

Makani:

Yeah. I appreciate that. I always get happy every time I hear that. And if you could say, because you are also been very involved in the policing table, I know that's a shortcut, that's not what it's really called. There has been such tremendous work that's taken hold nationally, and you guys have been experimenting with all kinds of different ways and forms. So I'd love for you to share with folks because this podcast is basically a lot of organizers, right? And people who try to understand this work of this intersection of culture, changing narrative, and power, and you all have been really doing some amazing things in that place.

M Adams:

Yeah. So M4BL formed in response to the uprisings that were taking place across the country, ignited by the uprising happening in Ferguson as a response to the police murder of Michael Brown. So since then we have been thinking about, and had joined forces to think, some of what you're naming is, how do we change the narrative? How do we change the conversation about policing, police violence, but moreover, how do we change the narrative about Black people in the Black experience here in the United States, but also globally? And so since then we have always been thinking about interventions, right? So how do we stop—you know, there's so many examples of organizing of this question happening in my mind as I share this, but interventions such as organizations working together to remove police officers from schools like we did in Madison, Wisconsin. Organizations working together to think about how to stop increases in police budgets or more money being routed to local prisons or jails. Interventions such as stopping military weapons from going into local police departments or police forces, decreasing police budgets, and many, many other types of interventions.

M Adams:

So we've been doing work like that collectively together for quite some time. And I'm really proud to say there's been quite a many successes, and many victories and that we celebrate. I mean, we know that work isn't done, but we're very proud of that work that has been happening. And a critical part in that work is actually engaging people, changing the hearts and minds of our folks, and also speaking truth to power. So we've done a lot of collective work to develop out a framework in which we hope that people who are not used to discussing policing, people who were not discussing it beforehand, could begin to understand the fundamental issues that are happening with policing and also have an understanding of what abolition is and how we understand it and why we need to be fighting for that. So we've done that on the ground through helping develop our collective toolkits, where people can use that for education.

M Adams:

We've done it through developing social media campaigns that really highlighted, illustrate what the issues are as well as honor those who've been taken for us from police violence and police murder. We've also done that through targeted campaign work together, whether it's collective, like we're all gonna phone in or blitz this or doing that together. And then we also have built and led collective campaigns. So right now, we're inside of a campaign called Local Power, which is one of our main objectives or main pillars over the next five years, inside of our Black Power Rising plan and Local Power. We've defined it in four core ways. So we're going to work with 10 to 20 localities over the next four to five years, and they're going to one weaken the prison industrial complex. So They'll be targeting all the different ways that police are happening and intervening. Two, these communities are going to be building a viable alternative to policing.

M Adams:

So abolition is not just what you tear down, but it's also what you build. And so the alternatives will look a lot of ways. It might be housing, it might be a transformative justice or restorative justice programs, and it could be also other cultural work. Three, there will be a coalition build. We very much believe our power is where the people are. And so we believe in meaningful coalitions and meaningful ways that organizations can work together. And that four, it has to engage a critical mass of folks on the ground. Cause as I said, we need people to win it. And so we're really excited, Local Power just launched in many cities across the country. And we're really, really, really, really excited about what it's going to do.

Makani:

I love that. So that's super helpful and I think really important for to people understand the concrete nature that you're centering this work around. Right. And you all also have been like, there was The Black National Convention, where can you engaged all of these folks who we might call celebrities. Right. But what I also loved about it was that it wasn't just celebrity driven. It was that a lot of the folks in the ecosystem were the ones with the microphone. So yes, there was, you know, the performances and all of that. But the folks who are actually laying out the politics, telling stories, were folks who were part of the ecosystem. So I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind saying a little bit about how you all are engaging culture that centers the folks who are on the ground as well as the quote endquote famous ones.

M Adams:

Absolutely. So The Black National Convention that you're referring to, in case people don't know, it was an incredible project led by the electoral justice table of the Movement For Black Lives. And it was really an intervention to call to question what is Black electoral justice and to demonstrate what it was. And I think that it did that and in many important ways. And one of the things that I thought was successful about that project or that intervention is that it did bring together a wide array of people, as you're saying, right. It brought together people who are on the ground in communities who many people don't know, right. As a result of they're focused on being inside of the communities and less than building out a profile. And it also brought together people who have recognition or people know about because of their music work or other types of work.

M Adams:

And so what's really exciting about this movement, I think, and also building off of movements from the past is we're thinking about an entry point for everyone. And so what was really exciting to see after this last summer is that there were many artists, there were many celebrities, there were many people with profiles who said, how can we be together? How can we partner and advance the work? And The Black National Convention was one. We've also done other things, right? We've had examples of where celebrities have agreed to allow us to take over their Instagram account, for example, where we could share more about our messages, share more about how people can be involved. I think about organizations like the WMBA, where just first of all, shout out to women athletes who I think just tend to be very vocal and very aware of the issues surrounding them, but they were very vocal about the issues happening.

M Adams:

In fact, I went to a game just a month ago and they had images of protests and images of M4BL leaders playing during halftime and showing solidarity with the movement. And so we really have, we've really tried to organize our people, popular people and not to really join the movement. There's space for everybody. And we're going to continue to have folks who have celebrity organize as part of the campaign and not become people who are isolated from us or to become people who even are contradictory toward us. And so, I think The Black National Convention did a great job of that.

Makani:

Absolutely. I mean, it was a little bit of everybody and I was so excited. I watched the entire TV station all day. That was my whole day. So lovely. I want to come back to the defund frame. Right. I had to have a lot of conversations. Folks just were like, oh, that's going to be terrible. And so I'm just curious if you wouldn't mind sharing a little bit about what you think about the frame and how you thought it worked, and if you had any insight and really just lessons from the campaign for other folks who are like, trying to figure out what to test and what to do, and maybe a little scared, a little timid.

M Adams:

Love it. You know, I think part of what was so powerful about Defund is that it came from the ground. It came from rebellion. It came from folks being in the streets who were fighting against the police murders and police violence. And when asked what you want, they said, don't fund them, defund them. It was as simple as that, also one of the things that I also enjoy about that framework is that it was collective, right. I think if you would ask the origin story of it amongst the Movement For Black Lives, there are probably a few different ones, which to me demonstrates that many minds were thinking that. That many people who were involved in this work shared that idea. And because of that, I think it is powerful and popular. Because of that, it carries the spirit or it has the posture rather, of invitation I think.

M Adams:

And so I was really excited about it. We use it. We were like defund defund defund, it continues to be Defund inside of our work. And, you know, I would say that there are a couple of different lessons. One is that it is bold. And I think it is our job as leftists or as revolutionaries, and put another way, as people who are thinking about building the world that we all deserve, we need to be bold, right. It requires both solutions and both shifts to get to that world. And so we should not shy away from what seems too big or too impossible. I'm so happy that my ancestors didn't say 'modified slavery,' that they set down with a completely, that was bold. That was quite bold at the time. And we need to be just as bold and unapologetic here.

M Adams:

Right. I am not fighting for a modified anti-Blackness or a softer or more palatable police violence. I am fighting for no police violence, right. All together. And so I think our vision must be voted because that's what this new world requires. That said, I am optimistic and hopeful around people questioning, right? The fact that people were doubtful says to me that they were talking about it. One of the things that's so important about this movement is we have seen an ideological shift happen within the last years, that you don't tend to over a lifetime, right. So we went from having the average person, who was not necessarily part of an organization go from thinking about the violence that happened against Michael Brown, as thinking maybe if we just had cameras, that would be enough, to now in this moment, five, six years later saying: Hey, cameras is not enough. What is abolition?

M Adams:

This is what people were saying at their kitchen table. Or people will say, well, maybe defund, or they were saying defund how? What about this part? So we think we've been able to shift not only those who talk about the issues all the time, but the average person, right. They said there's movement brought out 26 million people. I mean the numbers are different in different studies, but nonetheless dozens of millions of people to take to the streets to ask these questions. But that doesn't count the number of folks who have been home and then go to the streets for whatever reasons to act, to ask these questions. And so I think Defund has been incredibly, incredibly powerful. I also think it's interesting, the ways that people have tried to co-opt it. I think it's also interesting how Defund is blamed for some politicians not doing enough.

M Adams:

And so I think that, again, as revolutionaries, we need to not be the ones that are conceding. Because we have the freedom vision. We should never concede on freedom. We should never give in to anything less than that. And it's not us who is out there killing and policing and murdering people, right. So why should we be the ones to change our message? It is them. It is the empire that needs to change is shift to our will. And so I think Defund has been incredibly successful. And the last thing that I'll say is one of the things that was really interesting as we are doing Defund work, not only were people that were doing policing having those conversations, inside of gender justice work and gender justice movement, this question hit front and center. So Freedom Inc does a lot of gender justice work, where we intervene specifically around domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of intimate partner violence or violence inside the home.

M Adams:

In communities, people were also saying, well, wait a minute, do we want to defund the state department. Are these particular state departments helping us to get closer to our vision of ending gender based violence? Other folks were saying, well, what about the medical fields. Folks who were advancing intersex autonomy, intersex rights and justice, or saying, well, what parts of our medical facilities and hospitals need to be defunded that are doing this violent thing toward intersex children. So it really opened up, I think, a way for us, not only to be critical of funding around police, but funding toward anything that was harmful to our people. So in that way, I think Defund has been incredibly successful.

Makani:

Yes. Well, thank you. Thank you. Is there anything else that I didn't ask you that you feel like folks should know?

M Adams:

You know, I want to say, and I feel like I've had to say this more and more because movement work can be difficult, right. It is difficult for people to sometimes see the light at the end of it. That's no fault of their own. It's simply because we're up against an empire. Where we have an opposition using a lot of tools and a lot of violence against those of us who are trying to change the world. And I just want to say that I'm confident that we're going to win. And I'm saying that not just out of faith though, though I think faith is really important. Whatever that faith source is to you. I think that we're going to win for a number of reasons. I think that I come from a people who've survived, and defeated shadow and enslavement, right?

M Adams:

I come from a people who've defeated lynching as an institution. I come from people who have defeated Jim Crow as an institution. I am confident that we, as a people can defeat the prison industrial complex. There's no doubt of that in my mind, both in having been my grandmother's child who survived anything and all things are possible, but also say that as a matter of science. We are inside of a moment, as I mentioned, where the common person's ideological shifts are happening in ways that we couldn't even, that I didn't even know to predict 10 years ago, where rebellions are more and more common, both here in the United States, but around the world where people are saying no, no more, no mas, we're not taking this. We also see it and even the ways that mainstream institutions are recognizing they can no longer stay the same, whether that's because of climate crisis or other things.

M Adams:

I think we are in a unique moment in history. And so for people listening, if they feel doubtful, if they feel unsure, or if they feel like, 'Well, nobody ever, I don't know where to go, nobody ever invited me.' consider this your invitation. Consider this your invitation into movement. We want you, we love you. There's a place for you. If you have not always been on the right side of this issue, that is okay. We will take you today. As long as you are committed to doing the work of freedom work. And so I just want to say that to folks that this is ongoing and there's a space for everybody and we want everybody.

Makani:

Ashay. Ashay to all of that. I'm so grateful for you and to you, M, thank you for your time for your brilliance, today and always.

M Adams:

Thank you.

[music]

Defund the Police Rap:

So what you really sayin' is,
Defund the Police,
Relative to other services,
Defund the Police,
Invest in your communities,
Create your own peace,
Take control of policy and
Take your money.

TRANSCRIPT PART II (start 26:15)

Makani:

Lori Dorfman is a professor in public health at UC Berkeley and Executive Director of the Berkeley Media Studies Group, an organization that has been supporting movements and better understanding of how to shape media coverage to advance health policy. A researcher, educator, and activist in her own, right, she always has a fresh perspective that's grounded in her more than 30 years of work in the field.

Lori Dorfman:

Hi!

Makani:

Dr. Lori Dorfman.

Lori Dorfman:

Only my father calls me that.

Makani:

I love that. I love that. I love the fact that only your dad calls you that. And that calls you that, that's pretty awesome. So we are here. We've been a part of this project that is sort of nicknamed 'Beloved California' to explore and help others explore narrative power. And what I love about the fact that we're talking together. There's many reasons. One, because it's always fun to talk to you and we've been talking for about 30 years now. I think it's almost 30 years. When I started, it started at the Marin Institute April 1st, 1991, and we had offices next door to each other.

Lori Dorfman:

Yup.

Makani:

And so, and a lot of time plotting and thinking, and here we are 30 years later.

Lori Dorfman:

Pretty amazing. We wanted to drill a hole in the wall so we could just talk to each other from our desks.

Makani:

Right. Without having to open the door. It's pretty awesome. So I feel really thrilled and excited about being able to talk to you today. One of the many adventures we had together was thinking about this issue of, we didn't call it narrative power then, I think we just called it winning. This idea of how folks in public health who are faced with battling industry battling racist perceptions of the people we tend to organize and want to support, all of these things have happened in public health. So the first question I want to ask you as a public health person, and you're also a professor at Berkeley in the School of Public Health on top of all the other things that you do and an artist as well. So the first question would ask you is, before we get into a little more detail about narrative power and some specifics, is why do you think it's important for public health folks to think about this and to lean into this idea?

Lori Dorfman:

Lean into the idea of narrative power?

Makani:

Building narrative power as part of their practice as public health practitioners.

Lori Dorfman:

You know, I think it's enormously important that public health, as a field lean into narrative power, because the results of all that public health research will go nowhere, unless there are powerful voices behind it, bringing it to bear in the situations where it can make a difference. And those situations aren't just in peer reviewed journals. Those situations are on the streets, in the halls of Congress, in institutional boardrooms, in all the places where the decisions are made about what structures the communities that we live in and the lives we lead. And it's hard sometimes I think for public health folks to voice that, partly because when people come to public health, they're attracted to that field like I was, because it's a way to change the world. It's a place where you can bring people to the table who might not otherwise be at the table.

Lori Dorfman:

Like when we first started doing work on violence as a public health issue, that meant you had a different group at the table thinking about what to do about something then just the criminal justice folks, then just the police. It meant you got to think about solutions and about how things got that way and how to prevent them. And so when people walk through the door into the field that way, sometimes they then focus so intently on the science, which they have to, do that they forget that they also have to communicate about the science. So that's why our work has been about linking those things and helping people have not just the courage of their convictions, but have the influence that they want to have in the places where it's going to make the biggest difference.

Makani:

And thank you for that. I think that's really important. And that feels like a really good segue way into the story about tobacco control, right. So here was a huge industry. I imagine the images of all the CEOs lined up with their right hand in the air, taking the oath for the congressional hearings, right.

[congress clip:]

[speaker 1]

Just yyes or no. Do you believe nicotine is not addictive?

[speaker 2]

I believe nicotine is not addictive. Yes.

[speaker 1]

Mr. Johnston?

[speaker 3]

Congressmen, cigarettes and nicotine clearly do not meet the classic definitions of addiction. There is no toxicity.

[speaker 1]

We'll take that as a no.

Makani:

And, you had these folks who, you know, not a lot of money compared to the tobacco industry, but taking on, you know, and also tobacco industry tended to speak in science and control the science. I mean, my mom was told to smoke so she could have smaller babies, that her doctor actually told her to smoke. So I'm hoping maybe you can tell us the story, cause I know you were involved as well. What do you think we did right in terms of building narrative power and infrastructure to change public perceptions around tobacco and not only change public perceptions, because that's in some ways fleeting, but as a part of policy. A little bit about like the comprehensiveness of the work and the strategies and the relationship to building narrative power, to all that, and what you saw we did right.

Lori Dorfman:

That is a great question. Because we did a lot right. And I use that we in the royal sentence. I had only a peripheral role really, if you think about the people who've dedicated their whole careers to tobacco and controlling it. I, as a public health person, I get a lot of strength from the sea change in how people understand tobacco now. It used to be, as my friend, Liz McLaughlin said the air belonged to the smoker. Now the air belongs to the non-smoker. So your question is really how did that happen? And I trace it to the 1980s, late 1980s when people who were working in tobacco control, two of my heroes, Mike Perchik, and Larry Wallack among others who were looking really closely at what was being said and done in tobacco control. And I think getting frustrated with not passing the policies that they knew would make a difference.

Lori Dorfman:

And they started to compare how people in public health talked about health and tobacco and how other people, consumer advocates in particular like Nader's Raiders were talking about the issues that they wanted to see change in the world. And the difference was, and this really, I think, goes to the core of narrative power and narrative change Makani. The difference was that in public health, people were really focused on trying to convince individuals that they should make better decisions about their behavior. And that's important. And some people can do that. And in fact, a lot of people did that when the first Surgeon General's report came out in 1964 and said smoking was linked to lung cancer—for the first time, really definitively said that. A lot of people quit smoking, tons of people quit smoking, but not the most addicted and a lot of people didn't.

Lori Dorfman:

And so the information was important and useful and necessary, but it wasn't enough. And the people who are looking around at other strategies were noticing what the consumer advocates were doing. And

they were using communications much differently than people in public health were. People in public health focused on getting good messages in the right way to the right people. But the consumer advocates were using media in a much more powerful form. They were getting news attention. They were putting issues on the agenda. They were framing the debate in terms of their values and they were demanding attention from policymakers. So that was an important thing we did right. That was one thing. Another thing that goes hand in hand with that is knowing what the policies were, and figuring out what they were, and figuring out how to enact those. And I think initially people wanted to go to the national level, but we didn't have much success at the national level because the tobacco industry was so strong there.

Lori Dorfman:

And so kind of, maybe inadvertently, what happened was people had to look to the local level. So we ended up doing that right too, because people in their own communities got to dictate what was important, what needed to happen. And you had places like bars and restaurants where workers were exposed constantly to tobacco. You had other places in the community where people could make the case and they could make the case in their own voice with support from people who were studying it, the scientists and the people who were supporting the communications. And at the local level, you could really tell when the tobacco industry showed up in town. It was not like the halls of Congress, which is really distant from a lot of folks. Here in California and in other states, this happened in places like Ukiah. Ukiah was the first place in California that had a clean indoor air law.

Lori Dorfman:

So that kind of local action and the support to know how to talk about it. And the connection between people was really important. Do you remember, what was it called? The bulletin board? This is the early days of the interwebs.

Makani:

Scark

Lori Dorfman:

Thank you. All right. Scarknet. And what was fabulous about it is that people all over the country could talk to each other. And they could talk to each other about what was happening, about what happened when the industry showed up, what arguments were made, how they countered those arguments. People on the ground, in small communities, everywhere had access, direct communication with the top researchers in the world. It was really an incredible moment and people took it seriously and ran with it.

Makani:

You talked some about how the internal infrastructure, you know, having this capacity to talk to each other, to plan together, to build together, to figure things out, which of course was important. But I also want to talk about the kind of narrative infrastructure, right. That got built. So I remember the meetings that started that actually CDC helped support with screenplay writers that happened in Southern California and other places. I'd love for you to sort of reflect a little bit on that, because I think that that feels like the lesson, some of the lessons that get lost oftentimes.

Lori Dorfman:

Right. I remember Stan Glantz, who is a tobacco control leader. As many people know and was a professor at UCF of statistics and wrote a statistics textbook. And in the examples he used, the examples were about clean indoor air. There were curriculum about—remember the thing called media literacy? I think some people still do that. There were media literacy curricula for classrooms, elementary school classrooms to help them teach kids about where the information they see comes from. This is more complicated now with the interwebs and all the digital marketing and stuff, but essentially to help people, help young children really look behind who's sponsoring a billboard and what, why would they do that? And what does it say? And that was all over the country, actually, that was really strong in Canada. And fortunately came over, you know, the Northern border to help kids in the U S too.

Makani:

As you think back, are there any other examples of narrative infrastructure that we still have and hold in in terms of tobacco control, whether it's in film or, you know, or in class in the cloud or other places.

Lori Dorfman:

You know there are. I think it's interesting because I think a lot of the narrative infrastructure that got pioneered with tobacco control, at least in public health is now de rigueur with all kinds of issues where, you know if you're going to, if you're going to try to change minds and change policy, you need to have your ducks in a row. You need to know what to do. That means you need to have, and you need to know how to talk about, so you have to have fact sheets and you need to have the research and you need, now these days you have to have a website and you have to have all these things. And tobacco control early on developed, like from the Advocacy Institute, briefs and things that were designed for specific states, but got used around the country that really influenced how people talked about issues.

Lori Dorfman:

And I think on the more cultural side, an example of this is the smoke-free movies project, where it began kind of as a fluke with some RWJ funding again to UCF. And what they did was bring people together to design a policy for the movie studios and are pressuring them to keep smoking out of movies. Because we know now, the research is solid on this, that that's what attracts kids really more than anything else at this point. And that lives can be saved if smoking is not in movies. And so what they've done is asked that any movies that contain smoking have an R rating. Well, the strategy there is that if they have an R rating, they're going to have fewer eyeballs in the theater and that's not where they make their money. And so if you can keep it at one level lower that and keep the smoking out of it, then you're going to, the studios will make more money and fewer kids will get exposed.

Lori Dorfman:

And the pressure to do that though, you know, the general public may or may not know about that project, but the movie studios know about it because people including lawmakers and scientists have been pressuring them and using full page ads and things like that to put the pressure on the individuals. So they take actions that are actually gonna affect a whole population, whether or not that population has any inkling of the fact that smoking is, or isn't in the movie that they're watching. One thing that, that made me hopeful, this is now I'm drawing back into 2016. One of the first things Trump did was do the Muslim ban, right. And the thing that blew me away about that was that people just spontaneously went to airports all over the country. My brother-in-law in Minneapolis, went to the airport and that kind of action and how fast it happened. That's a legacy from the sixties. That's people believing that when they joined together, they can make a difference and they did make a difference. And that's the kind of thing that gives me hope.

Song "Get Together":

Come on, people now
Smile on your brother
Everybody get together
Try to love one another right now

Makani:

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