

Media, Movements, and the City

A Gathering of Media Activism in Philadelphia

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Report & Photographs by:
Antoine Haywood
Media, Inequality, and Change Center Research Fellow
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania

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The first *Media, Movements, and the City: A Gathering of Media Activism in Philadelphia* was a success! Held at Temple University's Mitten Hall on September 28, 2018, this one-day convening fulfilled its mission, which was to activate a local hub of media makers, activists, artists, and researchers working towards social justice in Philadelphia. This event was the first step toward achieving a larger goal, which is to develop stronger networks of interaction and collaboration in Philly.

The trailblazing *Media, Movements, and the City* was organized as a result of media activism scholars and practitioners acknowledging a need for a city-wide convening. They successfully managed to leverage their resources to make *Media, Movements, and the City* come to fruition, which gave Philadelphians invested in media and social change work an opportunity to do groundwork in a big and meaningful way.

The following are the academic groups that co-sponsored *Media, Movements, and the City*:

- Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication
- The Media, Inequality, and Change Center (UPenn and Rutgers)
- The Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication (UPenn)
- The Media Activism Research Collective (UPenn)
- Jefferson University East Falls Communications Department

Additional resources were generously provided by PhillyCAM and Media Mobilizing Project. Representatives from these two community organizations participated in the event's planning process

Program Overview

On the day of the symposium, over 50 people participated in a variety of community building activities throughout the day. The program began at 9:30am and concluded by 5:30pm. Immediately following the symposium a reception was held at the historic Church of the Advocate.

The core of the event's activities included the following:

1. Welcome and overview of the event's purpose.
2. Memory quilt exercise.
3. Small group conversations that addressed pre-selected topics.
4. Open dialogues in small groups that focused on pressing topics selected by participants.



The objectives that guided participants through the day were:

- Collectively build a “solidarity” calendar of activism events happening throughout the city.
- An opportunity to learn more about the history and future of Philadelphia’s media activist community with an emphasis on previously marginalized voices.
- A focus on decolonizing research by building relationships with academic researchers and institutions that prioritize the needs of social justice organizations.
- Designated time for informal conversation and socializing.

The following sections provide brief descriptions and highlights of the *Media, Movements, and the City* interactive sessions. After each activity, participants regrouped to share what they accomplished in their small groups.



Memory Quilt Exercise

The first activity of the day involved participants working in small groups to create collages that visually represented a moment of transformation in their own lives. Each group created visually vibrant artwork that conveyed moving depictions of the following:

1. When they felt that their community media, art, or activism work was improving the lives of the people in the community.
2. When they felt their work with media/communication changed the terms of the debate and took it in a new direction.
3. When their community media, art, or activism work disrupted a system of inequality and injustice.
4. When they felt that traditionally marginal voices got louder and more powerful because of their community media, art, or activism work.



Within each group, participants talked about what it was like to be in their transformational moment. Some people chose to give and write down the locations where their moments occurred. Here's a snapshot of a few powerful activism moments that were expressed through the quilt designs:

- Young people in a Philadelphia neighborhood seeing themselves in short films about jazz. Observing young people watch films that featured people who looked like them was powerful.
- Radio being used in the rural Hudson Valley area to focus on school-to-prison pipeline issues. The effects of this community media practice reduced the number of kids sent to a detrimental program that ultimately set youth up for incarceration.
- In a North Philly school, a group built a map that was globally interactive and allowed students to tell their own stories. Interacting with this global map helped immigrant students experience closure.
- A video project that focused on a cab driver strike in Philadelphia created an opportunity where two groups developed a strong relationship.
- During the Occupy Philly movement in 2011, a team of media makers documented conflicts between militarized police and protestors. Media activism was a way for people to tell their own story and counter misrepresentations in mainstream media.

Small Group Breakout Session #1

For the middle part of the day, participants returned to working in small groups to address the overarching question: **How can we work together to build and grow a shared communication ecology in Philadelphia?** The groups and topics were pre-assigned by the steering committee. Each group worked on the same set of sub-questions.



The subset of questions that drove these small group conversations were:

1. How do we come to feel that we're working on a common project to inform and represent and empower communities? What are the elements of that project? What does it need to flourish?
2. How can we develop equitable partnerships that don't bigfoot smaller partners?
3. How do we create and share power with communities especially when we are short on resources?
4. What do we need to create and facilitate this kind of relationship going forward?
5. What can we all do in the next 6 months?

These are the themes that were identified and discussed during the larger group dialogue about strengthening the local media ecology.

- Build trust and believe in each other.
- Share resources and values.
- Assess needs to find gaps and create strategies for equitable voice sharing.
- Honor existing groundwork, organizing history, and community resources.
- Define goals, identify interests of collaborators, and establish ways to measure success.
- Excel beyond good will while putting issues and people first.
- Listen deeply and prepare to hear diverse voices.
- Determine a process for accountability and include people in genuine ways.
- Practice transparency, see and break silos, and build with integrity.
- Learn from our mistakes.
- Do collaborative media making that focuses on themes.
- Be compassionate and authentic in our work and relationships.

The following are actions the groups thought should be worked on during the next 6 months:

- Give people tools to reach out to media outlets.
- Follow each other on social media.
- Use our platforms to elevate each other's work.
- Participate in each other's work.
- Promote media activism work via the Philly We Rise online calendar.
- Share existing resources like documents, event information, and media content.
- Host informal gatherings.
- Engage students.

Small Group Breakout Session #2

The fourth and final activity of the day gave participants an opportunity to self-organize around timely topics. Below are the topics small groups chose to address.

- Working for net neutrality.
- Gathering data and accountability.
- Building sustainable funding models.
- Pitching news stories.
- Community radio and podcasting.
- Doing inclusive reporting and facilitating collaborations between newsrooms and communities.



Final Thoughts & Takeaways

At the end of the day, all of the participants reconvened to discuss next steps.

Here are a few observations shared by participants during the day. These telling thoughts expressed the direct impact of *Media, Movements, and the City*.



“Telling stories alone does not connect to power. We must find connections and levers that change power.”

“We are very different but we have a lot in common. That’s very powerful.”

“Hopefully this is the first of many spaces to do things like this. To get together and talk about what we are doing in the city.”

“It’s great to have all people in the room dedicated to making change.”

“We have incredible diversity. I would like to see more events like this. I’ve been to dozens of events, and I just don’t just see people like me. I love looking around, seeing who is here, and not feeling like I’m in the minority.”



Overall, the participants were clear that this type of ongoing community building work is possible and necessary. The group called for setting up communication channels that will serve as go-to resources for timely information on media activism and other social justice campaigns, events, and community actions. A few of the recommended channels were a Facebook group, email listserv, Slack, and community calendar. Philly We Rise was another communication hub recommended. Additional suggestions included a need to engage more journalists of color into the group’s community-building efforts, publicize documentation of the symposium, be involved in major media reforms fights like net neutrality, and attend other network development and skills sharing events like the Klein Camp at Temple University.

