

# From Revolution to Evolution: The Legacy of Grace Lee Boggs

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## [Abstract]

Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015), a Detroit-based social activist and community organizer, argued that social change must start with individual choices and transformation. Boggs called this transformation the evolution of the individual, and believed that such evolution must be the basis of any revolution. This essay argues that Grace Lee Boggs's notion of revolution as evolution is indicative of the shift from leader-focused and group-based twentieth century social movements to community-centered and individual-based twenty-first century movements in the U.S., and posits that Boggs's theory of evolutionary revolution can provide a useful framework with which to understand the structure, effects, and limitations of the Women's March on Washington, Heather Heyer's legacy, and protest movements across the U.S. against Trump and his discriminatory policies. Further, this essay sees Boggs's theory and practices of evolutionary revolution as being at the center of twenty-first century civic struggle in many nations across the world at a time when we are seeing a resurgence of ultra-right nationalism, while simultaneously gesturing towards a cosmopolitan conceptualization of citizenship. Lastly, this essay suggests that understanding of Boggs's social programs, which are practical implementations of her theory of revolution, can offer insights into how to not just build revolution

out of resistance against injustice, but also how to implement and sustain the change central to revolution both locally and globally.

**Key Words:** Grace Lee Boggs, evolutionary revolution, civic engagement, Women's March, Charlottesville

“Women,  
if the soul of the nation is to be saved,  
I believe that you must become its soul.”

- Coretta Scott King

## I. The Revolution Starts Here: The Women's March on Washington

The day after Donald Trump, who had boasted about sexually assaulting women, openly mocked a disabled reporter, and made numerous racist and discriminatory statements against minorities while on the campaign trail, was inaugurated as the 45th president of the U.S.A., about 500,000<sup>1)</sup> people from all over the U.S. marched in Washington, D.C., under the banner of the Women's March, to protest Trump and the misogyny, racism, homophobia, islamophobia, xenophobia, ableism, and other erosions of human rights he represents. Additionally, 673 sister marches were held in 60 countries spanning seven continents (including Antarctica)<sup>2)</sup>, with an estimated attendance of 4,956,422<sup>3)</sup>. According to Marcel Altenburg and Keith Still, crowd

scientists at Manchester Metropolitan University in Britain, the Women's March on Washington was roughly three times the size of the audience at President Trump's inauguration<sup>4)</sup> the day before.

The Women's March on Washington was not only larger than Trump's inauguration crowd, but was also the largest coordinated protest in U.S. history, according to the Women's March website:

On January 21, 2017, people of all backgrounds—women and men and gender nonconforming people, young and old, of diverse faiths, differently abled, immigrants and indigenous—came together, 5 million strong, on all seven continents of the world. We were answering a call to show up and be counted as those who believe in a world that is equitable, tolerant, just and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person is protected and our planet is safe from destruction. Grounded in the nonviolent ideology of the Civil Rights movement, the Women's March was the largest coordinated protest in U.S. history and one of the largest in world history.<sup>5)</sup>

The Women's March stresses that it is a protest that goes beyond a simple resistance to misogyny or a focus on women's rights only, indicating that a stand for women's rights is a stand for human rights, and that a collective “we” formed through allyship of “women and men and gender nonconforming people, young and old, of diverse faiths, differently abled, immigrants and indigenous” will resist any and all threats to basic human rights. The various issues and concerns that the Women's March's platform incorporated are in direct opposition to Trump's stated views and intended policies that aim to restore white supremacy as nation-state policy in the U.S., roll back marriage equality and women's rights regarding health care, and reinforce protections for the top 1% socioeconomic class. Further, the Women's March coalition claims authentic Americanness and legitimacy by invoking the nonviolent

ideology of the Civil Rights Movement and arguing that they are continuing and expanding upon the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, drawing upon the power of the Civil Rights Movement as a worldwide symbol of American democracy.

The Women's March is credited to have been started initially by a November 8, 2016, Facebook post by Teresa Shook, a retired attorney and grandmother living in Hawaii. Shook was so upset by the election being declared for Trump that she "created a Facebook event page calling for a march on Washington after Trump's inauguration. Before she went to bed, she had about 40 responses. When she woke up, she had more than 10,000" (Agrawal). Bob Bland, a New York-based fashion designer who had popularized the "Nasty Woman" and "Bad Hombre" T-shirts fundraising for Planned Parenthood (Felsenthal), also proposed a "Million Pussy March" on Facebook on November 10, 2016, saying "we should build a coalition of ALL marginalized allies + do this" and that "[w]e will need folks from every state + city to organize their communities locally, who wants to join me?!?" (Agrawal). Vanessa Wruble soon joined forces with them, but having "worked for years as a white person in a black space, Wruble quickly recognized that Shook and Bland, both white, could not be the sole faces of the protest they were starting to organize," and pointed out that they needed "to make sure this is led or centered around women of color, or it will be a bunch of white women marching on Washington," which was not "okay right now, especially after 53 percent of white women who voted, voted for Donald Trump" (Felsenthal). Bland and Wruble reached out to "three longtime, New York-based activists to be co-chairs of the national march: Tamika Mallory, a gun control advocate; Carmen Perez, head of the Gathering for Justice, a criminal-justice reform group; and Linda Sarsour, who recently led a successful campaign to close New York City public schools on two Muslim holidays"

(Agrawal).

Creating a diverse board of co-chairs quickly resolved conflict over the march's name. Bland's proposed name, the "'Million Pussy March' perpetuated a slur used by Trump" (Agrawal) and had been discarded early on. Another early name, proposed by Shook (who organized locally but did not join the national leadership for the march), "Million Woman March," "threatened to overwrite the history of a same-name protest by thousands of African-American women in Philadelphia in 1997." When Wruble "proposed that they call it the Women's March on Washington instead, locating their protest in direct lineage with the 1963 March on Washington, the occasion for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech," the new coordinators "reached out to the civil rights leader's daughter, Bernice King, who offered her blessing and shared with them a quote from her mother, Coretta Scott King" (Felsenthal): "Women, if the soul of the nation is to be saved, I believe that you must become its soul" (qtd in Felsenthal). This renaming reflects the positioning of the March's stand in their website introduction, examined above, and is also reflected in the articulation of the March's claim of continuing the Civil Rights Movement's legacy. The blessing and quote from Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s widow, legitimizes both the March and their claim to the Civil Rights Movement, particularly in the face of criticism from some corners that the march was ignoring the Black Lives Matter Movement, while also indicating the imperative driving the march: the nation's soul is at stake, and women, as representative minority figures and as keepers of the family, both private and national, must act to save and preserve the nation.

While women stand in both the march's name and Coretta Scott King's quote as representative American minority, or, in other words, representative not-Trump and anti-Trump, the march's organizers were very careful to make it clear that the march

was not only about women's rights but is also about all human rights, thereby making the connection between women's concerns being concerns about humanity and women's rights being human rights. The intersectional approach of the Women's March's organizers is reflected in their mission statement:

The mission of Women's March is to harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change. Women's March is a women-led movement providing intersectional education on a diverse range of issues and creating entry points for new grassroots activists & organizers to engage in their local communities through trainings, outreach programs and events. Women's March is committed to dismantling systems of oppression through nonviolent resistance and building inclusive structures guided by self-determination, dignity and respect.<sup>6)</sup>

As the language of the mission statement shows, the coordinators stressed diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality, and made it clear that they were working in the American tradition of Thoreau's civil disobedience and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s non-violent resistance. Further, they stressed the connection between home and community as being the foundation for activism that resists Trump and his administration, implicitly placing women at the center of that connection and opening the door to more sustainable local grassroots activism rather than simply focus on a national one-time event.

Reflecting the language of the Women's March's official statements and press releases, participants of the march in Washington, D.C., were speaking of resisting Trump and what he stands for and were using the rhetoric of revolution. For instance, Rabbi Sharon Brous called the march "one of those moments" when "a spirit of resistance is awakened" in a generation, and described the imperative to act by saying, "[o]ur children will one day ask us 'where were you when our country

was thrust into a lion's den of demagoguery and division,” indicating that the responsibility to take a stand was borne both as a person who is a responsible adult in an individual family and as a citizen who is the owner of a country. Madonna, one of the many celebrities who participated in various ways, went as far as to state, “[t]he revolution starts here,” taking the rhetoric of resistance to a call for revolution, noting that the march was “the beginning of much-needed change,” and that change “will require sacrifice” and “will require many of us to make different choices in our lives.” Madonna identified this as “the hallmark of revolution” and called the crowd to action by asking “are you ready?!” (Przybyla & Schouten). These calls were echoed across the U.S. by people in leadership positions as well as ordinary Americans, some who felt it was time they acted upon what they knew about white privilege or civil rights and human rights, others who had never participated in a protest or any kind of activism before but now felt compelled to take a stand. Teresa Shook, the woman credited for having started the march, evaluated the effect of the Women’s March on Washington as following: “I am hearing from a lot of people that it woke them up, and it woke up their activism and their love of their country. A lot of women said they had been quiet, and they won’t be quiet anymore” (Stein). The discourse surrounding the Women’s March at all levels was invoking a revival of civic engagement and suggesting that this revival needs to lead to a revolution.

## II. Revolution is Evolution: Grace Lee Boggs

The revolution called for by the Women’s March, however, was not new, nor was it just beginning. It is a continuation and extension of the revolution that Civil Rights activists had been fighting since the mid-twentieth century. It also embodied in many

ways the ideas, arguments, philosophy, and approaches of Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015), although the Women's March did not evoke her or her work. Grace Lee Boggs, a second generation Chinese American, was a central figure in the Black Power Movement in Detroit for the second half of the twentieth century, to the extent that the FBI file on her identifies her as a 60s militant and notes that she must be AfroChinese<sup>7)</sup>, unable to imagine interracial and intersectional solidarity or allyship. Boggs was not of African descent; she was, as she states in a 1955 interview, "a Chinese American living in an African American community" who saw herself "as a part of and apart from the community" (*American Revolutionary*). Boggs was an activist who understood the need to balance identification with the community at the center of one's activism with awareness of the limitations of allyship when one was not originally from said community, and who understood both the demands and limitations of solidarity in intersectional activism.

Boggs lived her life guided by the belief that "[y]ou don't choose the times you live in, but you do choose who you ought to be and you do choose how you want to think" (*American Revolutionary*). She earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College in 1940 and worked with the West Indian Marxist C.L.R. James before moving to Detroit in 1953 with her husband, James Boggs, and after being active in the African American activist community of Detroit during the 50s, became a central figure in the Black Power Movement in the 60s (Boggs, *Living*). Boggs's understanding of revolution has evolved over the decades. She notes that the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott "was about not only transforming the system, but an example of how we ourselves change in the process of changing the system" (*American Revolutionary*), reminding us that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was not just about challenging and abolishing Jim Crow laws but was also about how individuals came together to create a movement while simultaneously becoming



changed by engagement in that movement.

Boggs's emphasis on personal change during the process of transforming the system reminds us that the Civil Rights Movement's larger goal was to enable individual Americans to gain stronger ownership of their own lives and citizenship as well as become leaders, rather than simply eliminate segregation and discrimination.<sup>8)</sup> Boggs's position also stresses the importance of the relationship between the individual and community. By the 1960s, as she got deeply involved in the Black Power Movement, she began identifying with the African American community not only as an ally but also as a member, including herself in the collective "we," as can be seen in her remarks that the Black Power Movement was grounded in the desire to share ownership of the nation-state as full citizens: "we wanted to become part of the people who took responsibility for the country" (*American Revolutionary*). Boggs's participation in the Civil Rights Movement changed her understanding of her identity and self, and repositioned her firmly as part of the community, rather than only "as a part of" the community who was still "apart from the community" (*American Revolutionary*).

The events of July 1967 in Detroit prompted Boggs to change her militant views on violence and to start to integrate Malcolm X's and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s approaches to civil rights and the achievement of equality. In a June 15, 2007, interview of Boggs by Bill Moyers, Boggs explains to Moyers why he shouldn't call the events a riot, but a rebellion:

BILL MOYERS: Let me take you back to that terrible summer of 1967, when Detroit erupted into that awful riot out there.

GRACE LEE BOGGS: I ask you to think about your calling it a riot.

BILL MOYERS: What would you call it?

GRACE LEE BOGGS: We in Detroit called it the rebellion.

BILL MOYERS: The rebellion?

GRACE LEE BOGGS: And because we understand that there was a righteousness about the young people rising up — it was a rising up, it was a standing up, by young people.

. . .

GRACE LEE BOGGS: And what we tried to do is explain that a rebellion is righteous, because it's the protest by a people against injustice, because of unrighteous situation, but it's not enough. You have to go beyond rebellion. And it was amazing, a turning point in my life, because until that time, I had not made a distinction between a rebellion and revolution. And it forced us to begin thinking, what does a revolution mean? How does it relate to evolution?  
(*Bill Moyers Journal*)

Continuing to speak in the inclusive and collective “we” voice, Boggs points out that the U.S. media, the establishment, and historical narratives often selectively apply the positive term *revolution* to acts committed in defense of white interests yet apply the negative term *riot* to similar acts when committed by People of Color. By asking Moyers to think about why he uses the word riot and by stating that the events in Detroit were a rebellion rather than a riot, Boggs reorients our thinking to examine the conditions in Detroit that prompted such an outburst of frustration, anger, and resistance. Further, Boggs reminds us to look at causes rather than fixate on symptoms, or, in other words, to look at the structures of unequal power and

discrimination rather than try to blame individuals affected by those structures. Boggs shows us how calling a rebellion a riot dismisses exposure of the “unrighteous situation” and attempts to delegitimize “protest by a people against injustice” and thus, justifies continuation of said injustice.

Boggs also shows us that the Detroit rebellion was the beginning of her evolutionary clarification of what a revolution is, and should be. In a 1968 recording, Boggs can be heard saying that “[v]iolence is often very therapeutic for the revolutionary forces. Sometimes it can help to escalate the mobilization of the revolutionary forces” (*American Revolutionary*). She later notes, however, that the contradictions of violence witnessed during the Detroit rebellion, including acts of looting, prompted her to reconsider the validity of violence as a means of revolution, and to gradually move towards an embrace of the approach of non-violence.<sup>9)</sup> Detroit’s automobile industry crisis in the 1970s and Coleman Young, Detroit’s first African American mayor and in many ways a product of rebellion, deciding to work with Henry Ford II and other big business leaders to try to create large production plants as a means of trying to create economic security, in effect carrying on business as usual instead of bringing about change, prompted Boggs “to see that Black Power could not solve the crisis that was developing” (*American Revolutionary*) and to further think about the need for revolution rather than rebellion.

In a 1987 video recording, Boggs can be seen asking, “what changes have to take place, in people, in order to bring about a revolution?” and noting that she realized that “a rebellion is an outburst of anger. But it’s not a revolution. Revolution is evolution towards something much grander in terms of what it means to be a human being” (*American Revolutionary*). This reveals how she has moved from critiquing the racialized and classed implications of the term *riot* to thinking of rebellion as a righteous “protest by a people against injustice” (*Bill Moyers Journal*), and then

again to understanding the limitations of rebellion as necessitating revolution. Looking back on the work done in the *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* study group led by herself and her husband during the 1970s and 1980s, Boggs explains how she came to an understanding of revolution as starting with individual change:

People thought of revolution chiefly in terms of taking state power. But we've had revolutions and we've seen how the states which they have created have turned out to be like replicas of the states which they opposed. You have to bring those two words together, and recognize we are responsible for the evolution of the human species. It's a question of true-sighted transformation and not just the oppressed versus the oppressor. We have to change ourselves in order to change the world. (*American Revolutionary*)

Boggs's theory of revolution starts with the local, both in terms of individual change and addressing local community issues, rather than thinking in top-down paradigms that stress national movements and prioritize centralized national leadership.

Boggs sees top-down paradigms as simply replacing one power group with another without actually changing the power structure. In a January 21, 2009, phone interview with *Democracy Now!* asking her about her reactions to President Barack Obama's inauguration, Boggs says that "[o]ne of the difficulties when you are coming out of oppression and out of a bitter past is that you get a concept of the messiah and that you expect too much from your leaders. And I think we have to get to that point that we are the leaders that we have been looking for." Boggs also reminds us that "[o]ne learns very soon that the changes we need are not going to come from the top by electing somebody else" (*Democracy Now!*), continuing to stress the importance of change starting individually and with ownership. For Boggs,

a new world, a changed world, cannot be created by following leaders; for Boggs, a changed new world has to be the result of changed individuals changing their lives and communities, or, in other words, an evolving aggregate reflection of individual changes.

By stressing grassroots, Boggs's approach to revolution allows her to engage specifically and concretely while also allowing intersectional connectivity and universal solidarity and allyship. Boggs explains that "the best way to begin creating an understanding of the next American Revolution, which I believe is not only the key to global survival but also the most important step we can take in this period to build a new, more human, more socially and ecologically responsible, and more secure nation that all of us, whatever our race, ethnicity, gender, faith, or national origin, will be proud to call our own" (Boggs, *Next*, 52-53) is to engage in "impassioned discussions everywhere, in groups small and large, where people from all walks of life are not only talking but also listening to one another" (Boggs, *Next*, 52). For Boggs, the next American Revolution begins by taking the American tradition of the townhall meeting into the everyday life of citizens in all spaces, and is dependent upon intersectional conversations and understanding that prioritize the human, whatever their "race, ethnicity, gender, faith, or national origin" (Boggs, *Next*, 53). Due to this emphasis on the human, Boggs's theory of revolution is not bound by national borders:

The next American Revolution, at this stage in our history, is not principally about jobs or health insurance or making it possible for more people to realize the American Dream of upward mobility. It is about acknowledging that we Americans have enjoyed middle-class comforts at the expense of other people all over the world. It is about living the kind of lives that will not only slow down global warming but also end the galloping inequality both inside this

country and between the Global North and the Global South. It is about creating a new American Dream whose goal is higher Humanity instead of the higher standard of living dependent upon Empire. It is about practicing a new, more active, global, and participatory concept of citizenship. It is about becoming the change we wish to see in the world. (Boggs, *Next* 72)

Boggs's emphasis on American centrality is not an expression of American exceptionalism<sup>10)</sup>, but to the contrary, a recognition of the harm such American exceptionalism has inflicted on the world and an acknowledgement of the U.S.'s responsibility to the rest of the world. Boggs's theory of revolution links the individual and the local with the collective and the global, in a cosmopolitan framework that brings to mind Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism in which local attachments serve as models for global attachments<sup>11)</sup> Boggs's theory of revolution is not about replacing those at the top of particular power structures, but about redesigning those structures horizontally instead of hierarchically, and organically rather than statically. It is a perspective that sees the national as an extension of the local community rather than as the end of the local, and a perspective that sees the national also as the local of the global world. Boggs's theory of revolution is not goal-oriented but process-oriented, because it is built upon a notion of evolution and evolution is always moving, always changing, and always in process. It is a theory of evolutionary revolution.

### III. Evolutionary Revolutions: Charlottesville and Beyond

The platform of the Women's March on Washington, the grassroots origins and organizing of not just the Women's March on Washington but also 673 sister marches all over the world reflect Grace Lee Boggs's theory of revolution, even if the organizers of the marches and most participants were not aware of that fact or did not care to acknowledge Boggs's influence. The small group of counter-protesters who stood against hundreds of white supremacists and neo-Nazis marching with torches on the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville in a "Unite the Right" rally on August 11, 2017<sup>12</sup>), reflect embodiment of Boggs's theory of the next American Revolution. Heather Heyer, who was prompted by video of the hate march in Charlottesville to action, saying "I feel compelled to go, to show solidarity" (Sheehy) after having earlier decided not to participate in August 12th's counter-protest out of fear of violence, and who lost her life protesting white supremacy the next day in Charlottesville when James A Field, Jr., a white supremacist, deliberately plowed his car into a group of counter-protesters, hitting twenty people, reflects embodiment of Boggs's theory of the next American Revolution. The Charlottesville counter-protestors, including Heather Heyer, embody Boggs's theory of the next American Revolution by backing up their political beliefs about equality and justice with action in spite of the threat of violent harm, evolving through a process that starts with individual change from apathy to action, leads to engagement in local communities that reach across racial and class lines, and maintains a non-violence approach.

Heather Heyer was a 32 year old paralegal in Charlottesville, who, as a white Southern woman, was not directly affected by the racism promoted by the white

supremacists she chose to stand up against, and because of that, was someone who could have chosen to not care, to look away. Heyer's cousin, Diana Ratcliff, describes their family as a typical WASP family, whose white privilege shields them:

My family—we are not the kind of family that is targeted by hate crimes. We come from a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant background with Appalachian heritage. We have never had to be afraid that someone would target us or lynch us because of the color of our skin.

We never had to worry someone wouldn't hire us because of the way we look. We never have to worry that our children might become victims of someone else's prejudice. We've never been told we can't live in a certain neighborhood or attend a certain school because of the color of our skin. Until last week, we had no idea what it feels like to lose someone to hate. (Ratcliff)

Heyer's mother, Susan Bro, however, lets us know that Heyer's personal experiences—being raised by a single mother living in a trailer; working as a waitress in a bar and later as a bartender; being given a chance at a paralegal job even though she only has a high school degree by Alfred Wilson, the manager of Miller Law Group's bankruptcy division, who happens to be African American; and choosing to break up with her then boyfriend when he made racist remarks about her boss, Wilson, who had not only given her a chance but had continued to mentor her (Sheehy)—led Heyer to become aware of the white privilege she possessed in spite of being a working class woman and that such awareness prompted Heyer to transition into the political position of being a progressive Democrat as a white Southern woman. Heyer's life trajectory and the changes in her politics and actions, gradually formed as the result of interaction with people different from her like Wilson that allowed her to see and put humans first, regardless of their “race, ethnicity, gender, faith, or national origin” (Boggs, *Next* 53), and influenced by witnessing the oppressive terror



of the neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, which prompted her to overcome her fear for her own safety and put herself on the line for her community, embody Boggs's theory of evolutionary revolution, which is centered on discussions and engagement with difference and is propelled by self-change and action at the immediate local level.

Heyer ultimately was robbed of her life for becoming a Boggsian revolutionary and for participating in the next American Revolution. Her revolutionary death, however, prompted many in the U.S. to open their eyes and move from simply thinking of resistance or rebellion to actively engaging in revolution while simultaneously also prompting people to ask why it takes the loss of someone with privilege to accomplish that transition. Ratcliff describes a scene from a memorial service for Heyer, where that very question was asked, and details her response to the moral challenge:

People held up pictures of Heather and signs called her a hero. But the moment that will forever be burnt in my memory was when a speaker asked the uncomfortable question. While she hailed Heather's courage, she asked something to this effect: "Why does a white woman have to get killed for you all to become outraged?" All I could think was, "Heather is sitting in heaven right now, shaking her head in agreement."

Why is it that the death of a white woman at the hands of a white supremacist group has finally gotten the attention of white folk? Why have we been turning our heads the other way for so long? How many black families, Latino families, Asian families, Native-American families before us have been left broken from this ugly vein of hatred in our country? Too many. And to my non-white brothers and sisters, I am so sorry that many of us weren't paying attention before Charlottesville.

We need to stop referring to what happened in Charlottesville as a clash between the "alt-left" and the "alt-right." The majority of the counterprotesters

were concerned residents of Charlottesville, not a fringe political group.

(Ratcliff)

Identifying Heyer as a local resident who acted upon her concern for her community, questioning herself about her complacency (and resulting implied complicity), and confessing her newly clarified understanding of intersectional responsibility as a privileged citizen, Ratcliff unknowingly subscribes to Boggs's theory of evolutionary revolution and confirms that Heyer was embodying that very theory.

Heyer's murder influenced many people to become revolutionaries themselves, and as a result, thousands of people came out to march in a counter-rally against a planned white supremacist march in Boston one week later on August 19, 2017, effectively stopping it. Other localities across the U.S. where right wing rallies had been planned also actively organized local counter-protests, leading to the right wing rallies being cancelled across the nation. In the sea of protest signs, one saying "Less Becky More Heather" was notable, illustrating how Heyer's revolutionary sacrifice had indeed influenced many to join the revolution. The intersectional and local grassroots movements were successful in using non-violent means to resist violent protesters and to shape those local movements into a national revolution. Lecturing to young students, Boggs emphasized that non-violence is "such an important, not just a tactic, not just a strategy, but an important philosophy" that is essential to revolution because "it respects the capacity of human beings to grow. It gives them the opportunity to grow their souls and we owe that to each other" (*American Revolutionary*). The non-violence of the initial counter-protestors at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville gave Heather Heyer the opportunity to make the decision to join the activism herself, and Heyer further influenced tens of thousands of people to also take a stand, enacting Boggs's theory of evolutionary revolution.

There have been voices of concern that the marches and counter-protests will be

isolated events or spectacles rather than building toward sustained activism. Controversy<sup>13</sup>) over Tina Fey's "sheetcaking" skit on *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update" on August 17, 2017, in which Fey tells viewers not to attend counter- protests against white supremacists but to stay home and eat cake, reflects such concerns. While those who defend the skit claim that Fey was satirizing white Americans' complacency and apathy, many others criticized the skit, arguing that it legitimized non-action and was an example of tone-deaf white privilege. The question of whether people are actually becoming revolutionaries or are only performing feel-good acts as spectacle to simply assuage their consciences is exactly why Boggs insisted that revolution must and can only start with individual change and growth. Boggs's work again suggests an answer to such concerns. The Detroit Summer Program, which Boggs started in 1992, engages local youth to transform the numerous vacant lots and buildings of Detroit into community gardens and neighborhoods with murals, and in the process teaches them self-reliance and leadership as well as the power of organizing. Programs like Back Alley Bikes and "We the People Reclaiming Our Streets" marches expand the efforts of the Detroit Summer Program to revive local neighborhoods and give young people hope and chances.

Boggs sees this as revolution: "When they [young people] see themselves making a difference, they also become different. That has to be part, an integral part, of the process of revolution" (*American Revolutionary*). Boggs sees addressing local issues and needs as crucial to the process of revolution. Boggs defines being a revolutionary as more than being a resister or rebel: "You begin with the protest, but you have to move on from there. But just being angry, just being resentful, just being outraged, does not constitute revolution. So many institutions of our society need reinventing. The time has come for a new dream. That's what being a revolutionary is" (*American Revolutionary*). The counter-protests inspired by Heyer were responding to

particular and local threats in their communities, unlike the Women's March on Washington, which was more of a general statement and show of force through spectacle; it remains to be seen if they will develop into local programs, engagement, and sustained activism that both is based upon and reflects individual change that is Boggsian evolutionary revolution.

The resistance movement symbolized by the Women's March will grow into a revolution as envisioned by Boggs and called for by the Women's March when the people who were prompted to come out and march in Washington, D.C., and all over the world in January, 2017, or in Charlottesville in August, 2017, or in localities all across the U.S. since, become engaged regularly and long-term in their own local communities in programs and movements such as the Detroit Summer Program and sustain their protests with community building and continued civic engagement. Scott Kurashige, a historian and Asian American activist, says that Boggs transformed from an outsider in the twentieth century into a figure who "represents the uniting of people from different races and different backgrounds in a way that is now defining America" in the twenty-first century (*American Revolutionary*). Boggs's theory and practice of evolutionary revolution are at the center of civic struggles in twenty-first century America as well as in many nations across the world at a time when we are seeing growing resurgence of ultra-right nationalisms, and can offer insight into how to not just build revolution out of resistance to oppression and injustice, but also how to implement and sustain the change central to revolution both locally and globally.

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## Notes

- 1) This turnout estimate was more than double the 200,000 people the march organizers had expected to attend, according to Heidi M. Przybyla and Fredreka Schouten, reporting for *USA Today*. (See "At 2.6 Million Strong, Women's Marches Crush Expectations," *USA Today*, 21 January 2017.) Jeremy Pressman (a professor of political science at the

University of Connecticut) and Erica Chenoweth (a professor at the University of Denver and an expert on nonviolent protest) put the estimated number of marchers in Washington, D.C., at 470,000 to 680,000 (see Kaveth Waddel's "The Exhausting Work of Tallying American's Largest Protest" published by *The Atlantic* on 23 January 2017).

- 2) See the Sister Marches Press website at <https://www.womensmarch.com/sisters-press>.
- 3) See estimates of aggregate Sister March attendance at <https://www.womensmarch.com/sisters>. Also see "This is What We Learned by Counting the Women's Marches" by Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman (*The Washington Post*, 7 February 2017): "From this, we counted at least 653 reported marches in the United States. These involved huge gatherings of well over 100,000 marchers in Washington; Los Angeles; Oakland, Calif.; San Francisco; New York; Chicago; Denver; Seattle and Boston. [ . . . ] In total, the women's march involved between 3,267,134 and 5,246,670 people in the United States (our best guess is 4,157,894). That translates into 1 percent to 1.6 percent of the U.S. population of 318,900,000 people (our best guess is 1.3 percent). [ . . . ] The Women's March on Washington had sister marches in international locales ranging from Antarctica to Zimbabwe. We found at least 261 marches abroad, with attendance totaling between 266,532 and 357,071 people (our best guess is 307,275 people)."
- 4) See Tim Wallace and Alicia Parlapiano's "Crowd Scientists Say Women's March in Washington Had 3 Times as Many People as Trump's Inauguration" in *The New York Times* (22 January 2017) for this estimate as well as comparative aerial photos and maps.
- 5) See the introduction to the Women's March provided on their website at <https://www.womensmarch.com>.
- 6) See the Women's March's website at <https://www.womensmarch.com/mission>.
- 7) See Grace Lee's documentary, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*.
- 8) For a good example of this approach to understanding the struggles and contributions of Civil Rights activists, see Julie Dash's film, *The Rosa Parks Story*.
- 9) See chapters 5 and 6 of Grace Lee Boggs's autobiography, *Living for Change*, for a detailed account of this transition.
- 10) See Deborah L. Madsen's *American Exceptionalism* for a good historical overview of how American exceptionalism has shaped American cultural identity, and Donald E. Pease's *The New American Exceptionalism* for an exploration of how American exceptionalism and its legacy has manifested in the post-Cold War era.
- 11) See Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*.

- 12) See *Vice News*' 22 minute documentary, *Charlottesville: Race and Terror* (14 August 2017), which covers the events of August 11 and 12. In the documentary, Christopher Cantwell, a white supremacist podcaster, tells the *Vice News* reporter, Elspeth Reeve, "I'm trying to make myself more capable of violence!" and that he wants a president who is "a lot more racist than Donald Trump." He also states, "[w]e'll fucking kill these people if we have to," referring specifically to Jews and African Americans and generally to all non-white people. Former KKK grand wizard David Duke tells Reeve, "[w]e're talking about the ethnic cleansing of America and the destruction of the American way of life."
- 13) See articles such as Joe Berkowitz's "Not Everybody Found Tina Fey's 'Sheetcaking' Funny, and Here's Why" (*Fast Company Newsletter*, 18 August 2017), Megan Garber's "Let Us Eat Cake: The Tina Fey Effect in 2017" (*The Atlantic*, 18 August 2017), or Allan Metcalf's "Sheetcaking, Seriously?" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 August 2017).

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## 국문초록

### 혁명에서 진화에 이르기까지: 그레이스 리 보그즈 혁명론의 영향

부 경 속 (서강대학교)

본 논문은 20세기 중반부터 미국 디트로이트의 흑인인권운동가로 활동해왔던 그레이스 리 보그즈가 제시한 진화론적 혁명론을 고찰한다. 보그즈가 점진적으로 비폭력주의를 지향하고 빈민가 복원 및 자립운동을 전개해가면서 저항과 반란에서 혁명으로 전환되는 사회운동 이론을 정립하고 흑인권력쟁취운동에서 흑인인권운동으로 그리고 다시 20세기 후반에는 인권운동으로 시야를 넓히게 된 과정을 살펴보게 된다. 보그즈는 결국 혁명이란 특정 지도자를 따라 이루어지는 것이 아니라 개개인이 먼저 스스로 변화해야 가능하며, 구체적 지역사회에서 먼저 현실적 변화를 일으키고 장기적으로 유지 가능한 변화를 가져올 때에 참된 혁명이 가능하다고 주장했다. 보그즈의 혁명론은 결국 지역적 구체성과 인류애적 보편성을 연결지어 코스모폴리탄적 시민론을 제시한다. 또한 본 논문은 그 진화론적 혁명론에 대한 이해를 바탕으로 미국 45대 대통령 트럼프의 취임식 다음날인 2017년 1월 21일에 미국의 수도 워싱턴에서 개최되었던 여성 대행진 행사, 2017년 8월 11일 샬롯빌에서 벌어졌던 백인우월주의자들의 시위에 맞선 반인종차별주의자들의 반대 시위, 2017년 8월 12일에 샬롯빌에서 백인우월주의자의 차량테러로 숨진 헤더 헤이어의 모범이 2017년 8월 19일 보스턴의 백인우월주의자들의 시위에 대항한 반인종차별주의자들의 반대 시위의 동기가 되는 과정 등을 분석한다. 이어서 워싱턴에서의 여성 대행진의 한계와 지역사회의 사회운동이 보그즈의 진화론적 혁명으로 발전할 여지에 대하여 논한다.

**주제어:** 그레이스 리 보그즈, 진화론적 혁명, 시민참여, 여성 대행진, 샬롯빌

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