



Book Review: The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart.

Alicia Garza, One World, 2020.

Monica Pereira

Alicia Garza didn't have to become a community organizer. But she did. *The Purpose of Power* has been over 20 years in the making, and it is clear that Garza's personal transformation has been fueled by her life experiences and the knowledge she gained through her formal education. This potent dialectic has changed the way she thinks about finding the power to build community, and the purpose of that power. This book describes her journey.

The Purpose of Power is divided into three sections, a description of Garza's personal journey, what her organizing experience taught her, and how movements grow. Throughout the book Garza shares some of the wisdom of her experiences, and about the ideas she learned. The significance of how she transformed those ideas and experiences into personal action on behalf of a community is an integral part of her narrative. Working with people across a spectrum of political, religious, and social strata, and learning to listen to those she may not have agreed with are perhaps crucial in the work of creating livable communities.

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi are the three Black women who seeded and nurtured the Black Lives Matter movement. Garza's book is a reminder that Black women have often been made invisible or relegated to supportive positions in social and political movements. Part of her intent with this book is to counter any misapprehension that Black women lack agency in these arenas. For each Black woman's name we might have heard, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Anita Hill, and countless others who have given their energies to creating a different world for us, their contributions are not a substantive part of the historical record of this country.

Garza's book also reminds us that in an era of social media, it is in-person encounters that have the power to change lives, reminding us that "What people are willing to do on social media doesn't always translate into what they're willing to do in their everyday lives" (p. 144). Social media is just one tool to disseminate information, but it cannot and should not supplant face-to-face interaction if the change we work for is to have solid foundations. Working for substantive change requires elbow grease,

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commitment, and a willingness to learn from what makes us uncomfortable. Garza recommends that we embrace discomfort.

The *Purpose of Power* is a persuasive rendering of the value of understanding how governance works, and the importance of engaging with government at local and national levels to design communities that are healthy and sustainable. In retrospect, *The Purpose of Power* is really about growing our ability to discover our own power of purpose as we become the leaders we wish for our communities.

About the Author

Monica Pereira is a librarian at CSU Channel Islands and a member of Educators Doing Justice (EDJ).