

Spring, 2018:

This semester's theory of social change aimed at situating who I was going into the project in regards to why I ended up wanting to contribute to social change in the community engagement realm. I discuss how my dad's side of the family has always been interested on making the biggest profit while my mom's has been much more invested in social work. I felt like a product of the two as I still wanted to be successful financially, but also had a interest in wanting to do work that was beneficial for more than just myself. I use this idea of being a mix of "profit focused" with a hope of doing social good to justify my passion for urban planning. I go onto say how urban planners have been exploiters as well as empowers in urban settings and the work I do hopes to be one that empowers. I end on a quote by Paulo Freire in his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" that states, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (Chapter 4, Freire.) I use this quote to place emphasis on the point that urban planners are in positions of power and utilized in the wrong way can lead to the perpetuation of oppression that urban marginalized populations already face.

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A year later, I still have difficulty conceptualizing my theory of social change. Last year, I thought about it in a "professional way." That is to say, I thought about my agency in enacting social change through my professional goals. Now, I am thinking about it in a way that captures the present rather than how my future self can incite change. This past year at Centro, I had the opportunity to witness social change on a smaller and more regular scale. Maybe this was a family receiving a financial literacy course or a single grandparent strengthening their joints

through a free dance class. Maybe these are small moments and maybe not even clearly contributors to social change, but I have come to think over the past year that a crucial step towards social change are these moments that empower. The change in my thinking is not that I don't want to still be an urban planner or that the power within that profession is important, but that I don't need to wait until then to support efforts that encourage social change. This could be considered an obvious conclusion as you're constantly told to recycle or donate to reputable causes, but there are a couple of ways in which my time at Centro has shaped my ideas on social change to be more "present" based. The first is the people aspect of the organization. The interactions and effects of the work are with people whom you are building relationships with and or are seeing daily. When something goes wrong, you see the effect just as much when you get it right. If I don't recycle, I don't see who it affects, just the bottle in the trash can. This brings me to my second point. Working at an organization where the people that are being served are the face of the organization makes it harder to be ignorant and disregard my own privilege. In contrast to not recycling, it's much harder to ignore someone struggling up the steps to pick up their weekly food pantry package. Therefore, part of the reason I think that I conceptualized social change as something I did in my future is due to ignoring the action I could be taking daily to empower and contribute.