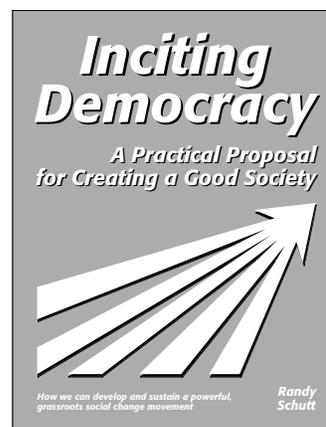


Chapter Summary of *Inciting Democracy*

A Practical Proposal for Creating a Good Society

*How we can develop and sustain
a powerful, grassroots social change movement*

by **Randy Schutt**



The **Preface** explains why I wrote the book, lays out a brief description of the proposal, and briefly summarizes each of the chapters.

Chapter 1 describes how my personal experience as a progressive activist and my study of historical social change campaigns led me to believe it is possible to create a truly good society. I argue that people are sufficiently intelligent and humane to live in a good society and that there are enough resources to support one. I further assert that there are viable solutions to all of society's worst problems and back up this assertion with a list of several seemingly impossible problems that actually have solutions.

Chapter 2 clarifies what constitutes a "good society" by detailing some essential elements. Built on the foundation of the Golden Rule, these include:

- Rudimentary democratic consent — Everyone must at least passively endorse the society.
- Universal access to human essentials (air, water, food, protection from harsh weather, and safety).
- Access to at least some other desirable items (good housing, running water, electric lights, meaningful work, fulfilling relationships, bicycles, computers, health care) and some luxuries.
- Freedom and liberty — Everyone is protected from oppression and can do what they want as long as it does not infringe on others.
- Equity and fairness — Everyone has equal opportunity and roughly equal access to societal resources.
- Environmental sustainability — Society is in consonance with the natural environment.
- There is balance between conflicting wants and needs (such as security versus liberty).

This chapter also describes some additional elements that would characterize a good society. It would be: humane and compassionate; democratic and responsible; tolerant and wise; and fun.

The chapter then presents a number of examples of various aspects of a good society.

Chapter 3 describes the five main obstacles that stand in the way of creating a good society:

1. Adverse power structure — Society's institutions and structures entice and coerce everyone into acting to perpetuate these institutions and social structures and to resist progressive change.
2. Destructive cultural conditioning — Harmful traditions, customs, religious practices, prejudices, and advertising images impede progressive change.

3. Dysfunctional emotional conditioning — Emotional traumas condition people to act in rigid and dysfunctional ways (irrational behavior, inhibitions, compulsions, phobias, addictions, depression, low self-esteem, et cetera).
4. Widespread ignorance — Most people have a limited understanding of the workings of society. Few people know about progressive ideals or change methods.
5. Scarcity of progressive resources — Most progressive activists are financially poor and receive meager personal support.

Chapter 4 briefly evaluates various historical strategies for overcoming these obstacles and transforming society: violent revolution, historical materialism, a vanguard party, countercultural transformation, alternative institutions, mass advertising, technological advances, conventional electoral politics, mass social movements, and incremental change. This exploration uncovers eight crucial characteristics of fundamental change efforts. To be both progressive and effective, these efforts must be:

- Powerful and inspiring enough to overcome strong opposition.
- Focused on broad, fundamental, and enduring change (to transform individuals, institutions, and the culture enough that they do not revert to the old ways).
- Reliant on ordinary people (since elites usually will not help).
- Democratic and responsive — not dictatorial.
- Focused on ending systemic oppression, not toppling individual oppressors (since anyone has the potential to become an oppressor).
- Nonviolent — not oppressive or destructive.
- Moral, principled, true to ideals, with means in harmony with the ends (so efforts do not go astray).
- Direct and personal (so they can deeply touch and transform people).

Based on this analysis, the only viable way to bring about fundamental progressive change is to educate and liberate the imagination of every person in society so that everyone can collectively and democratically choose to create a good society. To transform all of society also requires powerful social change movements capable of challenging entrenched power.

Such a strategy, based on mass education and social change movements, must include six essential components:

1. Clear conceptions of progressive change including
 - A clear vision of a good society
 - A comprehensive and feasible strategy for change
2. Widespread education in which people can
 - Learn how society actually functions
 - Learn to practice democracy and cooperation

- Learn to overcome destructive cultural conditioning
 - Learn to change society
3. Widespread emotional therapy
 4. A supportive community for progressive activists
 5. Large numbers of progressive activists working simultaneously for change
 6. Concerted change efforts continuing for many years

Chapter 5 describes a four-stage strategic program for creating a good society that incorporates these characteristics and components. Progressive activists would:

1. Lay the groundwork
 - A. Find other progressive activists
 - B. Educate themselves — learn how human affairs are organized and other ways they might be organized
 - C. Learn and practice change skills and overcome destructive and dysfunctional conditioning
 - D. Form supportive communities with other people of goodwill
2. Gather support
 - A. Raise others' awareness about the possibility of creating a good society and the means to do it
 - B. Build powerful political and social organizations
3. Struggle for power
 - A. Vigorously challenge the power structure and destructive cultural norms through conventional political and legal methods
 - B. Illuminate domination and oppression using various methods of nonviolent action
 - C. Resist oppression using nonviolent action
 - D. Develop appealing alternative institutions based on progressive ideals
4. Diffuse change throughout all of society

This chapter also outlines a democratic, bottom-up change movement structure in which a small number of dedicated activists would personally inform, support, and inspire a larger number of steadfast activists. These activists would, in turn, inform, support, and inspire a much larger number of progressive advocates. Together, these activists and advocates would inform, persuade, and inspire everyone in society.

In this model, the most skilled and experienced activists would constitute a stable and reliable core. These experienced activists could support other activists, broaden their understanding of society, suggest innovative and effective ways to tackle difficult problems, and continue doing tedious or grueling work when other activists faltered. This would help to ensure that progressive organizations would grow and prosper, not go astray, stagnate, or erupt in infighting.

This chapter concludes by explaining the dynamics of nonviolent struggle since nonviolent action would play a crucial role in the project and is often misunderstood.

Chapter 6 outlines a specific project — the Vernal Education Project — to implement this strategic program and especially to launch the first stage. This project would establish a yearlong education and support program for dedicated progressive activists. Designed to be practical and inexpensive, it would include these main components:

- Student-run study groups
- Internships with existing social change organizations
- Independent social change work
- A small amount of social service work
- Self-study of current affairs

- A series of five ten-day, staffmember-facilitated workshops
- Student-run emotional support groups or individual therapy
- Social events that enable students to connect with others

This program would offer activists a chance to experience and learn direct democracy, cooperation, emotional therapy, personal support, and a variety of social change methods while building strong bonds with other nearby activists. Students in this program would be encouraged to work for fundamental progressive change at least twenty hours per week for seven years after they graduated.

This chapter also describes how this education program could be replicated across the United States to fifty communities so that eventually six thousand students could attend a program every year.

Chapter 7 shows how this education project could greatly bolster and support progressive change organizations. Based on reasonable assumptions about the growth of the project and the number of activists who might participate, after twenty-five years there would be 25,000 graduates of the education program working at least twenty hours per week for fundamental change. There would also be 150,000 other steadfast activists working at least three hours per week and an additional 900,000 progressive advocates working a few hours per week. Together, they would constitute an unprecedented force of over one million progressive proponents.

This many activists — most of whom would have much greater knowledge and skill than activists today — could generate an effort perhaps three or four times more powerful than current efforts for fundamental change. Dispersed all across the country, they could create an immense and sustainable movement for progressive change.

Chapter 8 tells a story that illustrates some ways the Vernal Project could inform, support, and inspire activists.

Chapter 9 first describes the unique dynamics of social change and then shows how the Vernal Education Project could affect those dynamics and actually bring about fundamental transformation of society over eighty years.

Graduates of the education program — working with and supporting hundreds of thousands of other progressive activists — could influence most people in the United States to adopt a more progressive perspective and help them to become more responsible and active citizens. After about fifty years of sustained struggle — with a majority of the public favoring fundamental progressive change — transforming society would then begin to be easier. The change process would accelerate and could be largely completed in just thirty more years.

Chapter 10 lays out a specific timeline for implementing the Vernal Education Project, especially the tasks required to launch it and carry it through the first five years.

Chapter 11 summarizes the main points of the book and responds to critics' questions and concerns.

Chapter 12 is an annotated list of useful books, articles, and other resources on progressive change including all those specifically referred to in the text.

Appendix A outlines some near-term policy changes that could move the United States closer to being a good society.

Appendix B contains additional figures that show that this educational project is workable and financially feasible.

Appendix C contains additional figures that support the analysis in Chapters 7 and 9.

For more information, see <<http://www.vernalproject.org>>.