

Community Organizers of Distinction

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 can change history.

Many candidates had focused solely on the existing electorate and how they could best market themselves to it. But not Obama, who worked to expand the electorate by creating an army of grassroots volunteers who registered new voters, many of them young or minorities, in droves.

Accomplishing this Herculean task used new media, which allowed Obama to strengthen connections with his supporters and create new ones.

Shortly after he was elected, the Guardian's website posted a blog entry entitled "The first election the Internet won."

In 2004, Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's presidential campaign used some of the same Internet tools to quickly pick up steam, before fizzling out.

Obama enlisted Chris Hughes, the founder of the highly popular social-networking site Facebook, to create my.barackobama.com.

The website allowed users to create profiles, and helped connect them to local events, get training in community organizing, and talk to each other. The platform allowed Obama to efficiently reach his most fervent supporters, and create new ones, while raising gobs of money that helped him clobber GOP candidate John McCain in the general

election.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project released a report shortly after Obama took office that showed that most 55 percent of adults used the Internet for political information, and that Obama used this new tool to communicate with voters and help supporters organize.

During the campaign, Obama had to ward off constant smears concerning his religious background, his work as a state sena-

tor in the Illinois General Assembly, and ties to controversial people.

Instead of relying on traditional media to fact check such rickety claims, Obama was able to directly reach people through his website and the You Tube.

Obama ate Clinton and McCain's lunches in both the primary and general elections, respectively. He won states that were thought to be out of reach for a Democratic presidential

candidate, including Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia—which once housed the capital of the confederacy.

But he also changed the way political campaigns are run, and brought in legions of people who might not have ever been involved in politics.

Both King and Obama changed the course of nation with a grass roots approach to community organizing. Who know where it will lead next?

Civil Rights Era Leaders:

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Harvey Milk (1930-1978): politician, gay rights activist

Robert "Bob" Moses (1935-): leader, activist, and organizer

Diane Nash (1938-): SNCC and SCLC activist and organizer

James Orange (1942-2008): SCLC activist and organizer, trade unionist

Rosa Parks (1913-2005): NAACP official, activist

Alice Paul (1885-1977): women's suffrage/voting rights leader

A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979): socialist, labor leader

Amelia Boynton Robinson (1911-): voting rights activist

Bayard Rustin (1912-1987): civil rights activist

Bobby Seale (1936-): activist, Black Panther leader

Al Sharpton (1954-): clergyman, activist

Charles Sherrod (1937-): Civil rights activist, SNCC leader

Fred Shuttlesworth (1922-): clergyman, activist

Gloria Steinem (1934-): writer, activist, feminist

C.T. Vivian (1924-): student leader, SNCC activist

Wyatt Tee Walker (1960-1964): clergyman, activist; NAACP and CORE in Virginia, Executive Director, SCLC

Ida B. Wells (1862-1931): journalist, women's suffrage/voting rights activist

Walter Francis White (1895-1955): NAACP executive secretary

Roy Wilkins (1901-1981): NAACP executive secretary/executive director

Robert F. Williams (1925-1996): civil rights organizer

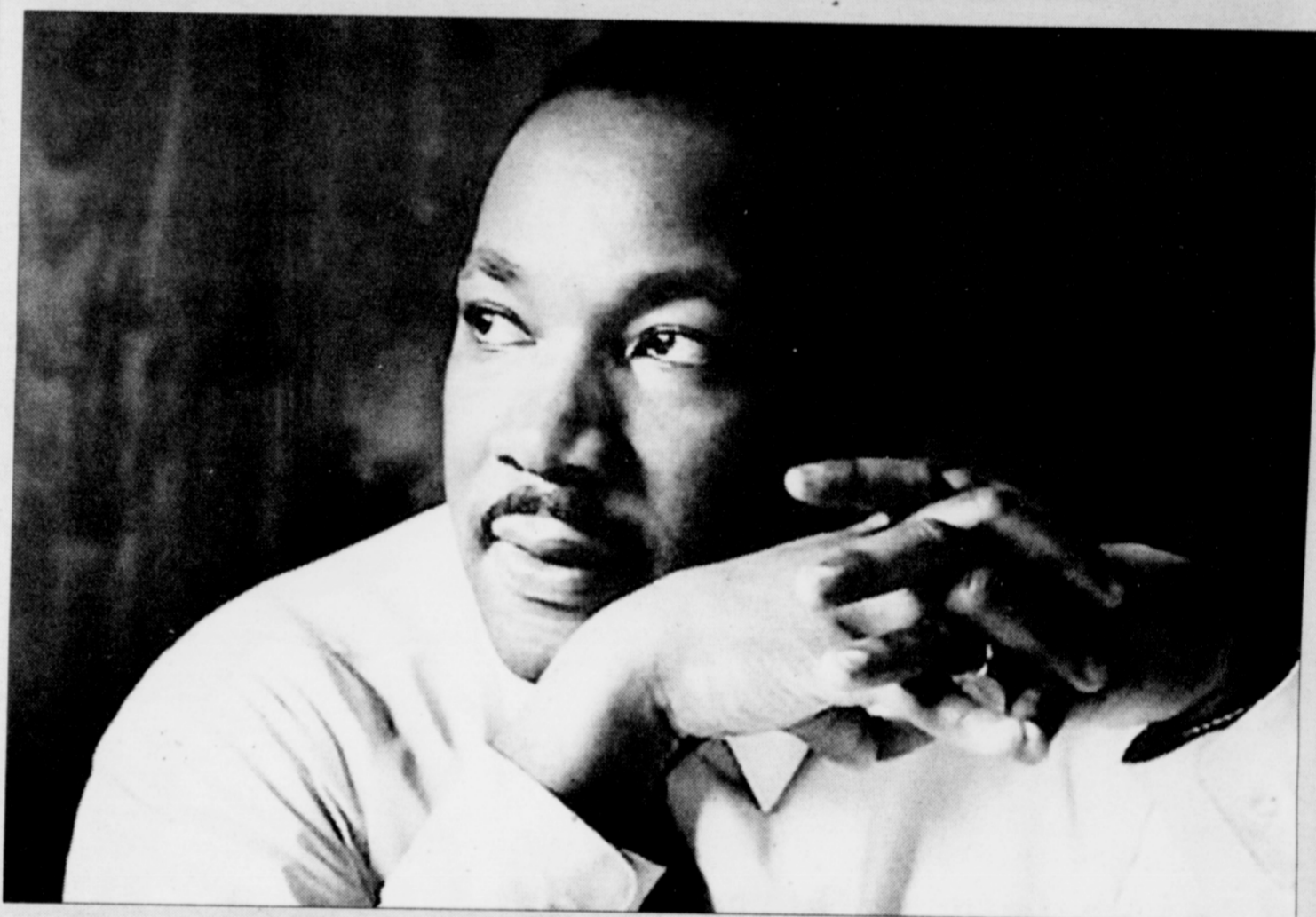
Malcolm X (1925-1965): author, activist

Andrew (Andy) Young, Jr. (1932-): clergyman, SCLC activist and executive director.

Whitney M. Young, Jr. (1921-1971): Executive Director of National Urban League; advisor to Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon

Saluting Martin Luther King Jr.

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