

Perspectives on Power: Big Paper Quotations

Quotation 1:

Jill Suttie

Psychologist, writer for Greater Good magazine

“On the one hand, having power can decrease our ability to take another’s perspective and lessen our compassionate care. This can lead us to objectify others and think of them only as a means to benefit ourselves.

On the other hand, having power also makes us feel less distressed in social situations and more resilient if we are rejected. It also can make us more attuned to others—if we have a kind and helpful orientation in the first place—and make us feel more authentic, attract friends, and, of course, have influence.”¹

1 Jill Suttie, “Why Powerful People Need to Cultivate Compassion,” Greater Good Magazine, May 3, 2019.

Quotation 2:

Winona LaDuke

Anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe) enrolled member of the Mississippi Band Anishinaabeg, author, and environmental and Indigenous rights activist

“Power is not brute force and money; power is in your spirit. Power is in your soul. It is what your ancestors, your old people gave you. Power is in the earth; it is in your relationship to the earth.”²

² Leon Thompson, “Winona LaDuke Inspires Audience at Greenfest,” East County Magazine, May 2, 2015.

Quotation 3:

Eric Liu

Author and CEO of the nonprofit Citizen University

“And the problem we face today, here in America in particular, but all around the world, is that far too many people are profoundly illiterate in power—what it is, who has it, how it operates, how it flows, what part of it is visible, what part of it is not, why some people have it, why that’s compounded. And as a result of this illiteracy, those few who do understand how power operates in civic life, those who understand how a bill becomes a law, yes, but also how a friendship becomes a subsidy, or how a bias becomes a policy, or how a slogan becomes a movement, the people who understand those things wield disproportionate influence, and they’re perfectly happy to fill the vacuum created by the ignorance of the great majority.”³

3 Eric Liu, “Why Ordinary People Need to Understand Power,” TED video (2013), 17:06.

Quotation 4:

Dolores Huerta

Co-founder of the United Farm Workers union, labor activist, and leader of the Chicano movement

“We just have to convince other people that they have power. This is what they can do by participating to make change, not only in their community, but many times changing in their own lives. Once they participate, they get their sense of power.”⁴

⁴ “Interview: Dolores Huerta Discusses Grassroots Activism and Weaving Movements,” The San Diego Foundation (August 11, 2016).

Quotation 5:

Toni Morrison

Award-winning author, playwright, and essayist

“I tell my students, ‘When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.’”⁵

⁵ From Pam Houston, “The Truest Eye,” O Magazine, November 2003.