

Small Change

Why Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted

Malcolm Gladwell

1. Most of Malcolm Gladwell's readers are familiar with the lunch counter event at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, that catalyzed the civil rights movement. Why then, does he begin by retelling it and providing such detail in the opening section? How does this serve as the foundation for the argument he develops? Consider both what he tells and *how* he tells it.
2. What does he mean when he writes, "Where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools" (para. 7)? Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Explain why.
3. What is the key point Gladwell makes in the paragraph beginning, "Some of this grandiosity is to be expected" (para. 9)? How does he connect his statement "Innovators tend to be solipsists" with the assertion that ends the paragraph, "we seem to have forgotten what activism is"?
4. How does Gladwell define "high-risk activism" (paras. 11-12)? Why does he believe that activism based on today's social media cannot qualify as "high risk"? Consider the contrast between "weak ties" and "strong ties" as part of your definition.
5. What is the purpose of the example of Sameer Bhatia, who found a bone marrow donor through social networking (para. 17)? Do you find it persuasive, or is it too exceptional?

6. What is the distinction between increasing motivation and increasing participation that Gladwell makes (para. 19)? Why is this distinction important to his argument?

7. Throughout this essay, Gladwell relies heavily on expert testimony. He cites scholars and researchers as well as business analysts and State Department officials and security advisors. Choose two examples, and discuss how Gladwell uses one to support his argument and the other to examine a counterargument.

8. In order to make his argument against the belief that the “new tools of social media have reinvented social activism” (para. 7), Gladwell must delineate precisely the central qualities of social activism. What are they? Refer to the specific passages in the text to support your analysis.

9. Gladwell does not entirely discount the power of social media. What benefits or positive impacts does he grant to social media? Do you find the term “digital evangelism” (para. 8) a critical description, a particularly apt one, or simply a colorful one? Why?

10. Gladwell uses many examples from fairly recent history, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and protests in Moldova and Tehran, yet he repeatedly returns to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Why? Does doing so strengthen his argument by adding coherence and depth, or weaken it by over-relying on a single example? Explain your viewpoint.

