

Earlier this Year...

NAZLY HUSSEIN: I'm Nazly Hussein, an Egyptian citizen and activist, if you would. And it's a revolution of everyone. It's really everyone's revolution. And I think a lot of people have made it seem like it's just for the radicals on either side or really a certain party, but that's not true. If you look around, there's everyone. Everyone, everyone, side by side, all with one cause. Women were treated with a lot of respect. I have never been treated with this much respect in Egypt, I must say. I was amazed, amazed at the Egyptian people. They have qualities that I thought they had lost. But no, they haven't.

Tahrir Square, Cairo

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Tahrir has been filled with an ocean of people today. This is the largest protest since this popular uprising began one week ago. It was one week ago, January 25th, when people first started taking on the state security forces of Mubarak's regime. They have owned the streets since then. They have flooded in Tahrir. It's unclear how many people have come, but it is filling the streets around Tahrir. The citizens are taking care of this place. They are picking up the garbage. They are recycling the garbage. They are giving out food. They've set up tents. They've set up a medical center. This is the convergence point in all of Egypt for this popular uprising. Egyptians from all walks of life are here, young and old, rich and poor. We've spoken to lawyers, journalists, men, women, laborers, peasants, actors, from all walks of life. And they're here in Egypt to come to speak with one voice. They want Mubarak to step down. If he doesn't step down, they say they will keep coming here until he does. I'm Sharif Abdel Kouddous in downtown Cairo.

Workin' on It!

**People of Color
Experience Occupy Wall Street**

September 17th

**This has been a tool for recognizing
the practice of Oppression**

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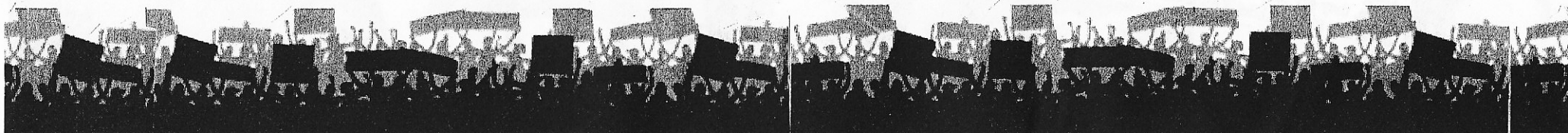
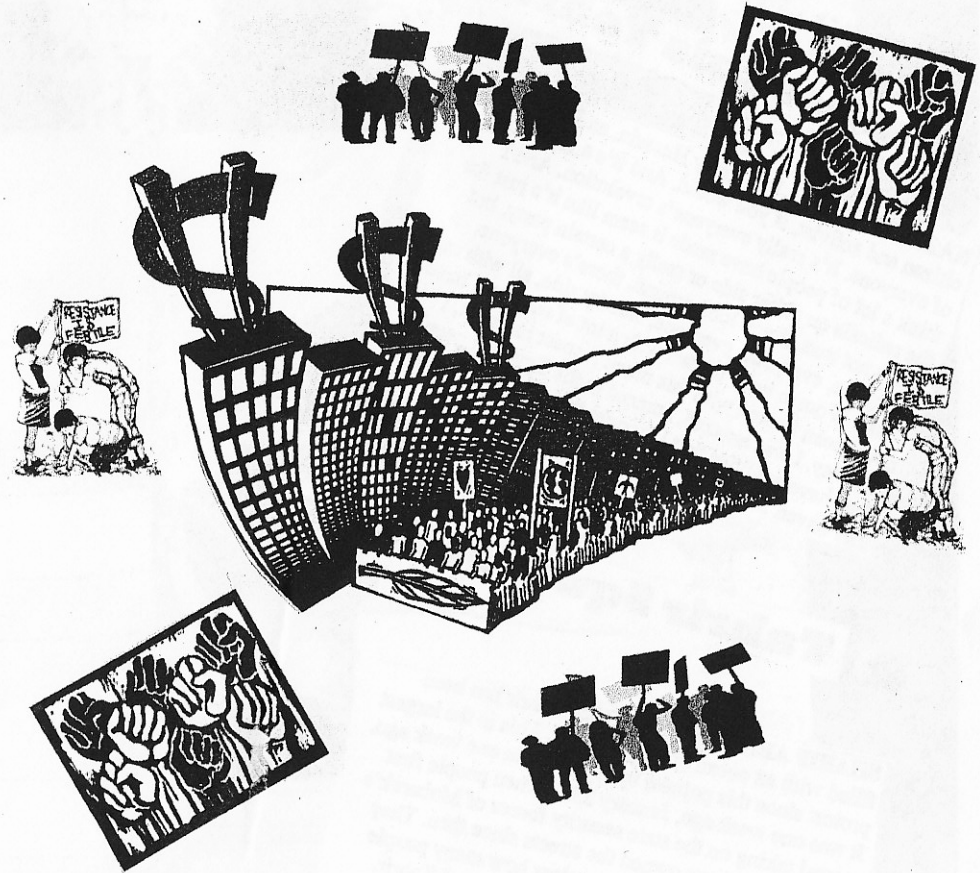
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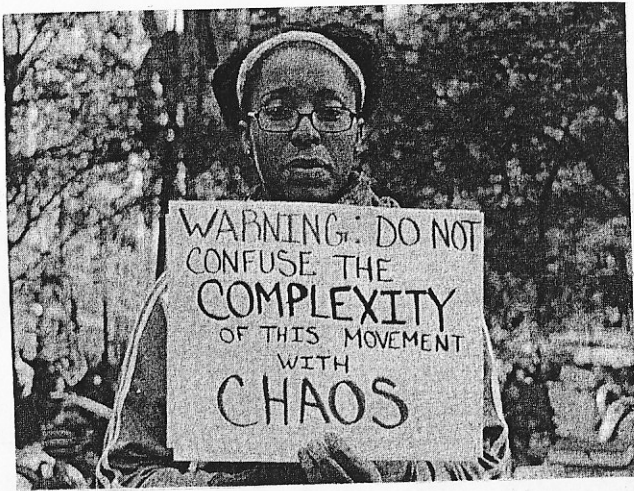
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CALL OUT TO PEOPLE OF COLOR from the #OWS POC Working Group

To those who want to support the Occupation of Wall Street, who want to struggle for a more just and equitable society, but who feel excluded from the campaign, this is a message for you.

To those who do not feel as though their voices are being heard, who have felt unable or uncomfortable participating in the campaign, or who feel as though they have been silenced, this is a message for you.

To those who haven't thought about #OccupyWallStreet but know that radical social change is needed, and to those who have thought about joining the protest but do not know where or how to begin, this is a message for you.

You are not alone. The individuals who make up the People of Color Working Group have come together because we share precisely these feelings and believe that the opportunity for consciousness-raising presented by #OccupyWallStreet is one that cannot be missed. It is time to push for the expansion and diversification of #OccupyWallStreet. If this is truly to be a movement of the 99%, it will need the rest of the city and the rest of the country.

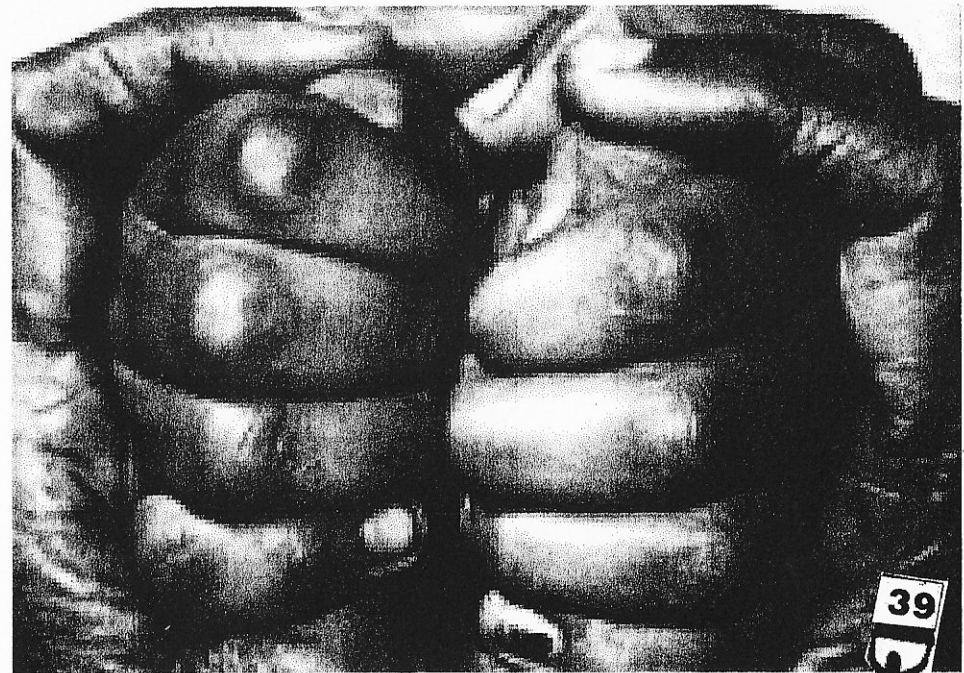
Let's be real. The economic crisis did not begin with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers in 2008. Indeed, people of color and poor people have been in a state of crisis since the founding of this country, and for indigenous communities, since before the founding of the nation. We have long known that capitalism serves only the interests of a tiny, mostly white, minority.



Black and brown folks have long known that whenever economic troubles 'necessitate' austerity measures and the people are asked to tighten their belts, we are the first to lose our jobs, our children's schools are the first to lose funding, and our bodies are the first to be brutalized and caged. Only we can speak this truth to power. We must not miss the chance to put the needs of people of color—upon whose backs this country was built—at the forefront of this struggle.

The People of Color Working Group was formed to build a racially conscious and inclusive movement. We are reaching out to communities of color, including immigrant, undocumented, and low-wage workers, prisoners, LGBTQ people of color, marginalized religious communities such as Muslims, and indigenous peoples, for whom this occupation ironically comes on top of another one and therefore must be decolonized. We know that many individuals have responsibilities that do not allow them to participate in the occupation and that the heavy police presence at Liberty Park undoubtedly deters many. We know because we are some of these individuals. But this movement is not confined to Liberty Park: with your help, the movement will be made accessible to all.

If it is not made so, it will not succeed. By ignoring the dynamics of power and privilege, this monumental social movement risks replicating the very structures of injustice it seeks to eliminate. And so we are actively working to unite the diverse voices of all communities, in order to understand exactly what is at stake, and to demand that a movement to end economic injustice must have at its core an honest struggle to end racism.



active effort to address racial issues from the core of #OccupyWallStreet, the protest will fail.

The People of Color / Unified Communities working group at #OccupyWallStreet was created on October 1, 2011. Their e-mail is unified.ows@gmail.com, their website is pocooccupywallstreet.tumblr.com and they meet every Sunday at 3pm in Zucotti Park. Let's be truly revolutionary allies and firmly support them to bring a racial analysis to the core of one of the most potent people's movement in our country today—before it is too late.



The People of Color working group is not meant to divide, but to unite, all peoples. Our hope is that we, the 99%, can move forward together, with a critical understanding of how the greed, corruption, and inequality inherent to capitalism threatens the lives of all peoples and the Earth.

The People of Color working group was launched on October 1, 2011. Join us at <http://groups.google.com/group/POC-working-group?hl=en>

Some of my thoughts on the Occupation Movement and Occupy L.A.

-Joaquin Cienfuegos

I wasn't too excited about occupyla and the occupation movement in general, it seemed to me like a white middle class movement, and most of the folks leading it, I have doubts about their intention, seems like a "take back america" for the white middle class struggle.

Hearing from comrades all over, just countless stories about oppressed people being excluded.

I think there are some genuine people involved there who want to see change happen and were hoping that this was going to be the revolution and are being duped by the leadership, who is working with the police and the state.

The only way i think it's going to go anywhere is if the oppressed people are in the forefront, and make it about the people (the oppressed) not about their own ego or liberal issue. The revolution isn't going to come from the privileged sectors of society or liberals.

Unchecked privilege in the movement makes it harder for us to achieve our goals.



An Open Letter to the Occupy Wall Street Activists

Thank you for your courage. Thank you for making an attempt to improve the situation in what is now called the United States. Thank you for your commitment to peace and non-violence. Thank you for the sacrifices you are making. Thank you.

There's just one thing. *I* am not one of the 99 percent that you refer to. And, that saddens me. Please don't misunderstand me. I would *like* to be one of the 99 percent... but you've chosen to exclude me. Perhaps it was *unintentional*, but, I've been excluded by you. In fact, there are millions of us indigenous people who have been excluded from the Occupy Wall Street protest. Please know that I suspect that it was an unintentional exclusion on your part. That is why I'm writing to you. I believe that you can make this right. (I hope you're still smiling.)

It seems that ever since we indigenous people have discovered Europeans and invited them to visit with us here on our land, we've had to endure countless '-isms' and religions and programs and social engineering that would "fix" us. Protestantism, Socialism, Communism, American Democracy, Christianity, Boarding Schools, Residential Schools,... well, you get the idea. And, it seems that these so-called enlightened strategies were nearly always enacted and implemented and pushed upon us *without our consent*. And, I'll assume that you're aware of how it turned out for us. Yes. Terribly.

Which brings me back to your mostly-inspiring Occupy Wall Street activities. On September 22nd, with great excitement, I eagerly read your "one demand" statement. Hoping and believing that you enlightened folks fighting for justice and equality and an end to imperialism, etc., etc., would make mention of the fact that the very land upon which you are protesting does not belong to you - that you are guests upon that stolen indigenous land. I had hoped mention would be

In this case, the marginalization was not intentional: a PSA was made to inform people to ensure the rally's peaceful closure. But most racial marginalization is indeed "unintentional." In this case the silenced black woman was going to speak about her close relative, who was killed by police. She was the only person speaking with a personal relationship to police brutality at a level almost unimaginable to the people occupying Zucotti Park, and her voice was not heard.

This unintended marginalization is occurring daily at #OWS. We know this may be hard for some people to understand. Of course, who could expect us to understand what it is like to be reminded of your skin color every time you leave your home? Who could expect white people to understand that the spaces we feel so comfortable in may feel exclusive or even hostile to people of color? After all, we are never told; we are not forced to learn that our skin color is related to our social status; and we are not taught black and brown history, so many of us do not know how we got here—and cannot imagine it any other way.

But as Audre Lorde wrote, it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressors about our mistakes. White people may not be to blame for the privileged position we occupy, but we must be accountable for the liberties and benefits we enjoy at the expense of our black and brown brothers and sisters.

We would like to add our voices to the chorus of constructive critiques coming from communities of color. We believe the white people of #OccupyWallStreet need to understand something: the feelings of economic insecurity, political powerlessness, and lack of support that have brought so many of us to the protests at Liberty Park have been lived by many of the people of color in this country for centuries. Without an



But a quick survey of the movement so far shows that the good intentions outlined do not reflect the reality of the situation. There is indeed an organizational structure and a core group that makes leadership decisions in #OWS (and we think this is a good thing). They are the media team at the media command center, the committee facilitators and the people who have been actually occupying the park for the past three weeks. One only needs to take a good look around to see that the leadership and the core group—which has managed to attract enormous national and international media attention—is overwhelmingly white (and largely male), and as a result the voices and perspectives of #OccupyWallStreet reflect that reality more generally.

Luckily, some people who have felt excluded or erased from “the 99%” have spoken up, alerting us to the notion that the anti-corporate occupation in Liberty Park may not be as welcoming to all as its image of consensus-bound activists, non-hierarchical structure, and free food has suggested to many (see <http://bit.ly/q9q10C>; <http://bit.ly/oABMbQ>; and <http://bit.ly/oTBcfs> for some examples).

One striking example of the marginalization of non-white voices within the movement was seen at the march on Friday against police brutality. Because this march was organized by activist groups in conjunction with #OWS, it was by far the most diverse rally yet. But towards the end of the march, when organizers were speaking to the group at One Police Plaza, a black woman near the speakers was clearly agitating for her voice to be heard. Despite the line of white people speaking before her, a white #OWS organizer spoke to the crowd and informed them that within a few minutes, the march would be over and everyone should leave peacefully. Of course, that meant that as soon as he was finished speaking everyone got up to leave. As the black woman (the lone black voice speaking in a march against police brutality) got up to speak, her voice was lost because by that point no one was paying attention.

made of the indigenous nation whose land that is. I had hoped that you would address the centuries-long history that we indigenous peoples of this continent have endured being subject to the countless '-isms' of do-gooders claiming to be building a "more just society," a "better world," a "land of freedom" *on top of our indigenous societies, on our indigenous lands, while destroying and/or ignoring our ways of life*. I had hoped that you would acknowledge that, since you are settlers on indigenous land, you need and want our indigenous consent to your building *anything* on our land - never mind an entire society. See where I'm going with this? I hope you're still smiling. We're still friends, so don't sweat it. I believe your hearts are in the right place. I know that this whole genocide and colonization thing causes all of us lots of confusion sometimes. It just seems to me that you're *unknowingly* doing the same thing to us that all the colonizers before you have done: you want to do stuff on our land without asking our permission.

But, fear not my friends. We indigenous people have a sense of humor. So, I thought I might make a few friendly suggestions which may help to "fix" the pro-colonialism position in which you now (hopefully, unintentionally) find yourselves. (Please note my use of the word "fix" in the previous sentence. That's an attempt at a joke. You can refer to the third paragraph if you'd like an explanation.)

By the way, I'm just one indigenous person. I represent no one except myself. I'm acting alone in writing this letter. Perhaps none of my own Nishnaabe people will support me in having written this. Perhaps some will. I respect their opinions either way. I love my Nishnaabe people *always*. I am simply trying to

do something good - same as all of you at the Occupy Wall Street protest in what is now called New York.

So, here goes. (You're still smiling, right?)

- 1) Acknowledge that the United States of America is a colonial country, a country of settlers, built upon the land of indigenous nations; and/or...
- 2) Demand immediate freedom for indigenous political prisoner Leonard Peltier; and/or...
- 3) Demand that the colonial government of the United States of America honor all treaties signed with all indigenous nations whose lands are now collectively referred to as the "United States of America"; and/or...
- 4) Make some kind of mention that you are indeed aware that you are settlers and that you are not intending to repeat the mistakes of all of the settler do-gooders that have come before you. In other words, that you are willing to obtain the consent of indigenous people before you do *anything* on indigenous land.

I hope you find this list useful. I eagerly await your response, my friends.

Miigwech! (~"Thank you!")

JohnPaul Montano The Zashnain Daily
Saturday, September 24, 2011



An Open Letter From Two White Men to #OCCUPYWALLSTREET

We—two white men—write this letter conscious of the fact that the color of our skin means we will likely be taken more seriously. We write this knowing that because people of color are thought to be too biased to speak objectively on issues of race, our perspective in this context will be privileged. We write this aware of the history of colonization, genocide, and slavery upon which this country stands, which has created this oppressive reality.

We write this letter to the organizers and participants (ourselves included) of #OccupyWallStreet out of great love for humanity and for the collective struggles being waged to save it. We write this letter because of our support for this nascent movement, in the hopes that with some self-reflection and adjustment, it may come to truly represent “the 99%” and realize its full potential.

#OccupyWallStreet has shown itself to be a potent force. The movement—which we consider ourselves part of—has already won great victories. New occupations spring up across the continent every day, and the movement for true democracy and radical social change is gathering steam worldwide.

According to the main websites associated with #OccupyWallStreet, it is “one people, united,” a “leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions,” and an “open, participatory and horizontally organized process.” In other words, it professes to be the universal protest against the greed and corruption rampant in our society, open for anyone to join and shape.



In fact people of color and white people against racism have not been creating fractures in the perfect unity of the movement but rather are pointing to the fracture lines in its false unity. America is quickly becoming a majority nation of people of color and any movement claiming to represent the 99% will have to reflect that shift. Making minor editions to statements (many of which are already agreed upon by all- i.e., the historicity of occupation and enslavement) and opening up space for dialogue where a diversity of views persists could only prove that this is a movement of a new Spirit with the self-reflectiveness and elasticity to avoid becoming dry and brittle under the winds of self-righteousness, as some movements before it. For organizers in New York and nationwide to hear and learn from these requests (as they already have in some cases and will, I have faith, with greater openness and understanding) would only heighten the movement's momentum. While discerning collective truths in diverse communities is challenging, naming global truth from the location of any one person (or people) is impossible. True "unity" will not emerge alone from a universalizing recognition of God's spark in all people. It will be wrought from a healthy respect that this spark, this equal access to Spirit and Truth, should help us build communities where all peoples are heard in dialogical movements of change capable of making room for one more at the table.

Seven Occupy Wall Street Racial Justice Roadblocks

Posted on 07 October 2011 by ernesto



Already millions of people have been captivated by the Occupy Wall Street protests, as well as the Occupy events that have cropped up in Los Angeles, Houston and dozens of cities. The actions have recently raised discussions about race and how to connect Occupy Wall Street more widely with Black and Brown communities.

There are many ways to advance this conversation. There are a number of disputes with the Occupy Wall Street movement, its approach and politics. Some have declared they have no interest in working with these movements. Others are supporters and see the Occupy clashes with the powerful as a



revolutionary breaking point.

I want to come at the issue from the position as one who believes in the power of people to seek justice, and who wants to assume the best of everyone. I find so many valuable things about the space that Occupy Wall Street has created. Helping to foster popular conversations about capital, profit motives, privilege and class — in some cases for those (white and of color) who do not think of society in those terms — is one of those rare national moments that do not come around too often. I have frank assessments of how Occupy Wall Street and its myriad splinters are tackling the matter of race and, on a larger stage, racial justice. However, all critique is offered in an effort to make movements better.

How does this Occupy movement confront racial justice head on? Issues facing those engaged in, and interested in, the campaign include:

1.) Consciousness of History

As is apparent to many, some communities of color are rightly suspicious of white left activist initiatives. Some whites react with defensiveness or, worse, as if they are at liberty to just ignore criticism because what they do is regarded to themselves as more essential to the world than what disenfranchised people think.

More important than rehashing histories of such indifference or even understanding that people of color are suspicious is understanding why.

Groups that are not sensitive to communities of color are marching up a well-worn hill. Obscuring needs particular to Black and Brown communities needs to also be understood by Anglos as it is perceived by those communities: deflection.

of Africans lay beneath the financial district in New York underscoring, in a historical allegory of biblical proportions, the fact that “American” wealth was built on African blood. I would concur with others that rather than finding hope in reoccupations of Turtle Island by new groups of white freedom fighters, we might find hope in decolonizing land, systems, minds, colonized first by some of the earlier waves of white freedom fighters on this land. I cannot imagine that these ideas are controversial to any of the Occupy Wall Street organizers, though it is possible that their importance was not felt as starkly by them as it was by others. They would have to speak to why they were originally omitted from certain declarative statements and would probably have different insights into the writing and editorial process.

As I have seen it, friendly and modest people of color and white people against racism have been asking for clarifying amendments to the language of the movement to make their perspectives and basic historical facts evident. It is my understanding that the Occupy Wall Street movement began mostly among young white people (Yay for young white radicals! Good idea, pals!) which has meant that it started pre-Occupied by a particular context and set of commitments. Due to a complex set of factors (the relative ease of networking among those of similar race/class, the influence of original organizing strategies, agendas, and language, the concentration of privileges making it easier for some to protest and risk being arrested) the movement is continuing to be led mostly by young white people as it nationalizes. Some have been supportive of the work to end the original pre-Occupation and decolonize the mind of the movement while others are concerned that bringing up such issues will cause it to fracture.



with a faith community of which I'm a part sometime in October.)

As I have seen it, the anti-racist critiques of the movement have been leveled against two aspects of its language and ideology. First there has been concern over the use of the language of a single human race as opposed to the importance of coalition building among diverse peoples in the context of the intersectionality of oppressions. In my experience, it is usually white brothers and sisters who insist that because we are all of equal value, we should be described as one body¹. It is usually sisters and brothers of color who insist that because we have different histories, cultures, relationships with oppressive and friendly bodies (states, religious organizations, ally groups and counter-protestors), agendas, and strategies that we be acknowledged in our multiplicity. It occurs to me that white folks defining what all people are (one race!) and what is good for all people (to be called one race! That's *scientific* and the highest moral good!), even in the name of justice, entangles them in the insidious threads of the powers and principalities which serve to silence non-white voices. I have faith that they are being used by systems of injustice to ends they would not desire to serve, if only they could see the ties that bind them. I have experienced that when they do see those ties and struggle to be free of them, they no longer take that tact. Both perspectives (one and many) are vital to building healthy communities and we should ward against the whitewashing of any one perspective on the basis of unequal power in the community to define who "we" are and what is good for "us."

The second concern has been with the frequent concurrent omission of the fact that Wall Street itself is already on occupied Algonquin land and that the graves of thousands

Even when one comes to politically inexperienced people and seeks to agitate around a line that says, in effect, a particular drive's relevance trumps a community's longstanding needs, such positioning needs to be understood for the problematic relations and tensions such set up. The regularity with which such occurrences go down is a part of why incursions by white-dominated movements get the side eye. People of color are always expected to look beyond our needs, interests and ways we are treated in our seemingly endless toil for the greater good. And a lot of us are tired of it.

Some people of color are open to coalition work and come to these events to do that. Others want to work independently of larger groups. Neither approach needs to be treated by whites as a threat. How groups address this can further be educational, and the Occupy movement needs to be sensitive to the past. Even if none of us are responsible for things that transpired generations ago, privilege and power are passed down and we are obligated to ensure the present isn't one where past truths were denied or un-reconciled.

2.) Credibility Gaps

It's been said in comments on People Of Color Organize! as well as on the streets generally, but it bears repeating, even if it stings. What do people of color gain by staking our credibility in our communities on a group of white left activists, many of whom we do not know, have no history organizing with, or have no knowledge of their personal and political efforts in our communities?

That's not to say, obviously, that the Occupy Wall Street pickets have not been interesting or even valuable. Nor does that say participating and demonstrating discontent isn't



valuable. But these movements need to speak to communities of color and relate tangible gains for involvement, for the truth is (as mentioned before) that people of color have been recruited by white-dominated movement after movement with promises of hope, so there's a lot of skepticism.

It is often unspoken, but people of color who actively go into communities of color to back up white activist friends put themselves politically, socially and culturally on the line in those communities. These movements need to be aware of that reality, and act accordingly.

Accountability is a related subject. One Black organizer I know shared a story of how those leading her city's Occupy protests were, in many past run-ins, openly hostile to activists of color, treating community concerns as "identity politics." Are these really the folks you want us to vouch for? How are these groups addressing internal racism and perceptions in communities of color? Have they asked? If not, how can one reasonably expect people of color to stake ourselves on white people who come in (whether they are responsible directly or not) with a burden of history, but have not done the appropriate work to earn that support?

3.) The Power of Political Trickle Down

Speaking of earning support, some people of color, I have found, engage in movements like Occupy Wall Street, regardless of who is leading things, in hope that "everyone" (people of color) can gain if the majority gains. Call this "political trickle down" after the Reagan Administration contention that gain for the wealthy would benefit the working class by improving the overall economy. It's also known as "the magic of low expectations."



Occupied Movements, Colonized Minds

October 5, 2011 Eda Uca-Dorn

Some of us who watch in awe and delight at the incredible well of energy, perseverance, and hope of the Occupy Wall Street movement are getting word of anti-racist critiques of the language and organizing strategies, particularly around declarative statements released on the Occupy Wall Street website and dispersed to media outlets. It is important to note as the organizers do- that "demand is a process" and the new day voice of the community-in-process emerges continually without necessarily being pinned down by the bulletin board messages of the passing day. The voices of people of color, it seems, are being heard and integrated, though not without the fearless contributions of people of color sometimes in the face of serious resistance. I want to highlight some of the discussion as it is occurring mainly through articles and online forums not, as some might fear, to disparage the movement but rather to learn from the anti-racism discussion in progress.

For the sake of utmost transparency: I am a woman of color who approaches movement work predominantly led by white people with a hermeneutic of suspicion and, while I have gotten some word on the happenings in Occupy Boston, I have not gone to see what's happening on the ground there since it officially started this past Friday. (I do plan to go down there



of them: carefully and slowly spelling out that I as a woman of color experience the world way differently than the author of the Declaration, a white man, that this was not about him being personally racist but about relations of power, that he needed to, he urgently needed to listen and believe me about this, this moment felt like a victory for the movement on its own.

And this is the other thing. It was hard, and it was fucked up that we had to fight for it in the way we did but we did fight for it and we won. The line was changed, they listened, we sat down and re-wrote it and it has been published with our re-write. And when we walked away, I felt like something important had just happened, that we had just pushed a movement a little bit closer to the movement I would like to see— one that takes into account historical and current inequalities, oppressions, racisms, relations of power, one that doesn't just recreate liberal white privilege but confronts it head on. And if I have to fight to make that happen I will. As long as my people are there standing next to me while I do that.

Later that night I biked home over the Brooklyn Bridge and I somehow felt like the world was, just maybe, at least in that moment, mine, as well as everyone dear to me and everyone who needed and wanted more from the world. I somehow felt like maybe the world could be all of ours.

Much love (and rage)

Manissa

But these kinds of approaches would not happen if not for implicit and explicit messaging that such movements and their participants supersede the needs of communities of color.

A good friend and activist puts it this way: "why is it considered an 'opportunity' for people of color to participate in this 'movement'? This epitomizes the arrogance and ignorance of these people in this 'movement' and even other people of color who are in argument that the settler should always be seen as 'subjects' of history as opposed to 'objects' of history. This puts forth a mindset that nothing 'real' or substantial is put forward without the settler's agreement."

While political trickle down is a tendency that should be struggled against (very little historically indicates that the majority's gain will be enjoyed by anyone but the majority in the case of people of color), it is incumbent for Occupy activists and others to actively resist this notion that their message somehow is more important than the needs of everyday communities. Intentional or not, when one talks about the greater purpose when responding to concerns, the message is that one group's objectives are a movement's and indeed an entire country's objectives. Not only can a lot wrong be read into this, but given the Occupy Wall Street movement's pretensions of egalitarianism, it likely may not be what participants want to say to communities of color.

4.) Lack of Leaders Means Leaders Move Covertly

Many Occupy actions are forwarded around the idea of no leadership. I'm reminded of what Jo Freeman wrote about striving for structurelessness: it is useful as it is deceptive, for these ideas do not prevent the idea of informal structures (validated by existing power and relationship dynamics), only



formal ones (which can be voted on).

The rationale for telling everyone that no one is leading is obvious: it is harder for law enforcement to quash protests, for organizations and different political stripes to squabble over power, for media to single out people and so on. But it is naive to think the rest of the world around us is in such denial when a reportedly leaderless group defers in various ways to individuals who clearly have leading roles, but are not accountable or chosen formally to do so.

Inherently, the ideas of leaderlessness in Western countries depend on notions of meritocracy, or the belief that intelligence, education and skill organically bring people to the top. In practice, meritocracy does not address the networking, connections, preconceived notions and assumptions that reside in our world. Without a process and commitment to develop organizers and leaders, those closest to leaders get opportunities to develop. People of color have historically been shut out of these circles, and Occupy activists should be aware of this.

Yet simply choosing people of color (who may be friends, associates, etc.) to participate in organizing does not address the issue; practical efforts must be made to ensure transparency. Organizations still need to prioritize racial justice structurally in organizations and act on disempowerment of people of color, if they want regard from communities of color.

5.) Lack of Agenda

More than a few people have pointed out that the Occupy Wall Street protests will merely be a cover to shore up Democratic Party support in the 2012 elections. With an agenda focused on corporate greed, an occasional campaign stump point during

human race.” But its “scientifically true” he told us. He thought that maybe we were advocating for there being different races? No we needed to tell him about privilege and racism and oppression and how these things still existed, both in the world and someplace like Occupy Wall Street.

Let me tell you what it feels like to stand in front of a white man and explain privilege to him. It hurts. It makes you tired. Sometimes it makes you want to cry. Sometimes it is exhilarating. Every single time it is hard. Every single time I get angry that I have to do this, that this is my job, that this shouldn't be my job. Every single time I am proud of myself that I've been able to say these things because I used to not be able to and because some days I just don't want to.

This all has been said by many many strong women of color before me but every time, every single time these levels of power are confronted it I think it needs to be written about, talked about, gone through over and over again.

And this is the thing: that there in that circle, on that street-corner we did a crash course on racism, white privilege, structural racism, oppression. We did a course on history and the declaration of independence and colonialism and slavery. It was hard. It was real. It hurt. But people listened. We had to fight for it. I'm going to say that again: we had to fight for it. But it felt worth it. It felt worth it to sit down on the on a street corner in the Financial District at 11:30 pm on a Thursday night, after working all day long and argue for the changing of the first line of Occupy Wall Street's official Declaration of the Occupation of New York City. It felt worth it not only because we got the line changed but also because while standing in a circle of 20, mostly white men, and explaining racism in front



attention. And the only reason that I could in that moment was because I felt so urgently that this was something that needed to be said. There is something intense about speaking in front of hundreds of people, but there is something even more intense about speaking in front of hundreds of people with whom you feel aligned and you are saying something that they do not want to hear. And then it is even more intense when that crowd is repeating everything you say— which is the way the General Assemblies or any announcements at Occupy Wall Street work. But hearing yourself in an echo chamber means that you make sure your words mean something because they are being said back to you as you say them.

And so when we finally got everyone's attention I carefully said what we felt was the problem: that we wanted a small change in language but that this change represented a larger ethical concern of ours. That to erase a history of oppression in this document was not something that we would be able to let happen. That we knew they had been working on this document for a week, that we appreciated the process and that it was in respect to this process that we wouldn't be silenced. That we demanded a change in the language. And they accepted our change and we withdrew our block as long as the document was published with our change and they said "find us after and we will go through it" and then it was over and everyone was looking somewhere else. I stepped down from the ledge I was standing on and Sonny looked me in the eye and said "you did good" and I've never needed to hear that so much as then.

Which is how after the meeting ended we ended up finding the man who had written the document and telling him that he needed to take out the part about us all being "one race, the

the 2008 Obama run, but little else, one has to give credence to this worry.

Every community wants to represent their agenda as well as broader interests. But is, in seeking to appeal to lots of people by making no real demand, appealing to only those who will quickly be led a direction by a contingent with a clearer message?

Most noteworthy in the agenda matter is how little we are talking about the role of capital. Corporate greed does not cut it. Nor do CEO salaries. Capital's role intersects many complaints about how things are run, and the hardships people face. Why can't Occupy say it formally? And are people ceding that ground unconsciously so to not alienate particular people, while forgetting others in that decision?

For communities of color, the dangers of no-agenda should be apparent. There are many issues of great importance in our communities. Simply bringing them to a protest, as some Occupy outgrowths suggest, does not substantively address those issues. In fact, just doing that likely would be drowned out by the goulash of grievances and causes that are dominating the platform. It feels like something people of color have been told before: bring it up, but do not expect the majority to take it seriously, make it a discussion point or act as a group on it. Without an agenda that centers racial justice, the Occupy Wall Street fight will be looked at as something that looks to please everyone but please no one.

As we saw with Egypt, raising grievances without a manner for achieving them gives an opening for those who are organized, have leadership and clear objectives to ascend quickly in a political moment. Much was made by U.S. conservatives of the



Muslim Brotherhood's rise during the Arab Spring, but students of history can tell you such uprisings are bound to push forward consolidated resistance forces and always have. Further, Occupy activists must comprehend that movements that do not set their own programs are doomed to have one set for them. This is the nature of Western politics and no degree of idealism can alter how business works.

6.) Occupy Language

Many activists have written extensively about the use of the word "occupy" and how it is used as well as the practice applied historically. Occupation for people of color, many of whom have roots in countries that are past colonial subjects, has a particularly monstrous history. I am sure nobody meant offense or harm by choosing the word, but intent really isn't the issue. Embracing this language is certain to alienate many people.

If the movement is unwilling to change the name or move racial justice up as a priority, what does that communicate to communities of color, especially those who see the word "occupy" and think guns, rape and degradation?

7.) Process Issues

Finally, something has to be said about the utterly stifling and fundamentally anti-democratic format that Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots are using, consensus and its variants.

For those who have not had the joy of sitting through a meeting run via the consensus process, smile. Picture this: meetings of dozens of people, with the ability to completely halt or "block" a proposal, idea or suggestion by as little as one person.

Wonderful if you are a person who completely hates a proposal and just can't work with the majority that favors it. A

But now we were realizing that this was actually a really important document and that it was going to be sent into the world and read by thousands of people. And that if we let it go into the world written the way it was then it would mean that people like me would shrug this movement off, it would stop people like me and my friends and my community from joining this movement, one that I already felt a part of. So this was urgent. This movement was about to send a document into the world about who and what it was that included a line that erased all power relations and decades of history of oppression. A line that would de-legitimize the movement, this would alienate me and people like me, this would not be able to be something I could get behind. And I was already behind it this movement and somehow I didn't want to walk away from this. I couldn't walk away from this.

And that night I was with people who also couldn't walk away. Our amazing, impromptu, radical South Asian contingency, a contingency which stood out in that crowd for sure, did not back down. We did not back down when we were told the first time that Hena spoke that our concerns could be emailed and didn't need to be dealt with then, we didn't back down when we were told that again a second time and we didn't back down when we were told that to "block" the declaration from going forward was a serious serious thing to do. When we threatened that this might mean leaving the movement, being willing to walk away. I knew it was a serious action to take, we all knew it was a serious action to take, and that is why we did it.

I have never blocked something before actually. And the only reason I was able to do so was because there were 5 of us standing there and because Hena had already put herself out there and started shouting "mic check" until they paid



a space safe for everyone. Who said that they had similar experiences and were glad that we were talking about it.

This is important because I think this is what Occupy Wall Street is right now: less of a movement and more of a space. It is a space in which people who feel a similar frustration with the world as it is and as it has been, are coming together and thinking about ways to recreate this world. For some people this is the first time they have thought about how the world needs to be recreated. But some of us have been thinking about this for a while now. Does this mean that those of us who have been thinking about it for a while now should discredit this movement? No. It just means that there is a lot of learning going on down there and that there is a lot of teaching to be done.

On Thursday night I showed up at Occupy Wall Street with a bunch of other South Asians coming from a South Asians for Justice meeting. Sonny joked that he should have brought his dhol so we could enter like it was a baarat. When we got there they were passing around and reading a sheet of paper that had the Declaration of the Occupation of Wall Street on it. I had heard the "Declaration of the Occupation" read at the General Assembly the night before but I didn't realize that it was going to be finalized as THE declaration of the movement right then and there. When I heard it the night before with Sonny we had looked at each other and noted that the line about "being one race, the human race, formally divided by race, class..." was a weird line, one that hit me in the stomach with its naivety and the way it made me feel alienated. But Sonny and I had shrugged it off as the ramblings of one of the many working groups at Occupy Wall Street.

nightmare if you are a person who has worked with others to craft something that virtually everyone else can agree on. The problem with consensus, as you can guess, is that the rest of the world understands the population is composed of people who obfuscate, who harbor prejudices against people and politics, and who are sufficiently incoherent that building support for their positions is next to impossible. In that world, such folks do not have the political capital to halt society because they are not able to grind life to a stop with a single motion.

While I certainly share Occupy Wall Street's opinion that money and other influence can shape majority-rule democracy, we're not talking Iowa here. We are talking relatively small groups, where decisions can be reached by a simple vote. By Occupy activists' admission, their process is slow. But this acknowledgment fails to get to the heart of the matter.

Consensus is not democratic, radically or in any other way. As noted earlier, Occupy spaces often have people with known and unknown biases. Bringing new communities in then asking them to submit themselves to the will of such individuals as a representation of the ideals Occupy activists hold dear seems a surefire way to chase them off.

Conclusion

My last words are directed to people of color interested in these movements. Though most of my words address how largely white activist endeavors should review their approach, activists of color striving for this sort of institutionality are just as culpable.

It is the obligation of people of color who want to be involved in Occupy efforts and wish to see more political investment by



communities of color to organize in a united fashion independent of Occupy actions, and to do community outreach. It is on you to meet with our communities who cannot or will not come out to these events, for whatever reason, hear openly and share their concerns with a movement you clearly wish to support. It is up to you to lead community mobilizations. If you have no relationships or credibility in those communities, beyond your skin tone, it is up to you to be honest about that and mend fences and/or build relationships. It is also on you to remember that having a space created in the Occupy movement, having a spokes or leadership role, being taken seriously, having caucuses or forwarding demands to be adopted by your city's general assembly are not political objectives. These are needs you may personally have specific to a political subculture with little to no bearing on what communities of color coping with American austerity and financial meltdowns are dealing with. Please remember that. It is up to people of color involved in these movements to formulate and forward a political agenda. Black and brown people holding the bullhorn changes nothing, and our focus needs to be on conveying what our communities face. Finally, people of color involved in these movements should remember your political futures and aspirations are only as dependent on the Occupy project as you allow. Too often, people act as if their existence depends on particular causes, but really, one should hang fortunes solely on a single movement.

I am hopeful for the work that is going into the Occupy Wall Street struggle and hope these ideas help conversations that need to be had.

anti-patriarchy meetings, there needs to be a food table and medics, a library, everyone needs to stop for a second and look around for someone's phone. That within this we will keep centrally talking about Troy Davis and how everyone is affected by a broken, racist, oppressive system. Maybe, maybe this is the way?)

I went to the anti-patriarchy meeting because even though I was impressed by the General Assembly and its process I also noticed that it was mostly white men who were in charge of the committees and making announcements and that I had only seen one women of color get up in front of everyone and talk. A lot was said at the anti-patriarchy meeting about in what ways the space of the occupation was a safe space and also not. Women talked about not feeling comfortable in the drum circle because of men dancing up on them and how to change this, about how to feel safe sleeping out in the open with a lot of men that they didn't know, about not-assuming gender pronouns and asking people which pronouns they would prefer.

Here is the thing though: I've had these conversations before, I'm sure a lot of us in activist spaces have had these conversations before, the ones that we need to keep having about how to make sure everyone feels comfortable, how to not assume gender pronouns and gender roles. But there were plenty of people in this meeting who didn't know what we were doing when we went around and asked for people's names and preferred gender pronoun. A lot of people who looked taken aback by this. Who stumbled through it, but also who looked interested when we explained what we were doing. Who listened to the discussion and then joined the conversation about what to do to make sure that Occupy Wall Street felt like

suits, I felt something pulling me back to that space. It was that it felt like a space of possibility, a space of radical imagination. And it was energizing to feel like such a space existed.

And so I started telling my friends to go down there and check it out. I started telling people that it was a pretty awesome thing, that just having a space to have these conversations mattered, that it was more diverse than I expected. And I went back.

On Wednesday night I attended my first General Assembly. Seeing 300 people using consensus method was powerful. Knowing that a lot of people there had never been part of a consensus process and were learning about it for the first time was powerful. We consens-ed on using the money that was being donated to the movement for bail for the people who had been arrested. I was impressed that such a large group made a financial decision in a relatively painless way.

After the General Assembly that night there was both a Talent Show ("this is what a talent show looks like!") on one side of the Plaza and an anti-patriarchy working group meeting (which became the safer-spaces working group) on the other. (In some ways the juxtaposition of both these events happening at once feels emblematic of one of the splits going on down there: talent shows across the square from anti-patriarchy meetings, an announcement for a zombie party right after an announcement about the killing of Troy Davis followed by an announcement that someone had lost their phone. Maybe this is how movements need to maintain themselves, through a recognition that political change is also fundamentally about everyday life and that everyday life needs to encompass all of this: there needs to be a space for a talent show, across from



From Occupying the Financial Districts to Occupying the Goods in Our Hoods

By Bruce A. Dixon

When and how will the street corner "occupations" in progress around the country, mostly consisting of young and newly poor whites, connect with black, brown and poor communities who have been here all along. Our managing editor reports from Occupy Chicago —

The south end of downtown Chicago's LaSalle Street dead-ends at a gray concrete canyon thirty stories deep. Its east, south and west walls are Bank of America, the Chicago Board of Trade, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. At street level, depending on the day and time, you can find anywhere from 20 to several thousand chanting, drumming, sign-waving, caucusing demonstrators, mostly but by no means all white, and mostly again, but certainly not all young. This is Occupy Chicago [4].

I came straight there from the airport the afternoon of October 5, and hung around for an hour or two. There were a hundred or so on each side of LaSalle Street and forty or fifty more facing them from Jackson. Between the chanting and the cars and trucks honking their support, normal conversation was a challenge. At 3PM an organizer with a bullhorn announced their general assembly, and two thirds of the crowd moved to the east side of LaSalle Street.



The corporate media rap on these occupations is that participants are "unfocused" and don't know what they really want. But in the first twenty minutes of this Occupy Chicago meeting they adopted a resolution demanding the withdrawal of all US military forces from outside the borders of the US, and the closing of all the Pentagon's military bases on foreign soil. A local TV station interviewed one young man the following Monday, who insisted on the forgiveness of student loans. A friend who called me from Atlanta told me that Occupy Atlanta was including something about "mass incarceration" in its core demands. Didn't sound that vague and unfocused to me.

On Saturday, not quite a thousand marched from the Occupy Chicago site down to Grant Park and joined a rally at which I spoke observing the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan. They joined about twice that many and stepped off into the sunshine for a two mile walk through Chicago's Loop. The number of marchers grew a little, hitting five thousand by the time we paused for ten minutes in front of Barack Obama's campaign headquarters before returning to Grant Park. Neither the president, who wasn't there anyhow, nor any of his minions came down to greet us.

The event, and Occupy Chicago too, are overwhelmingly white. For a city that's still a quarter black after losing some 200,000 African Americans in recent years, that's problematic. I didn't see any Latinos either. This was less true on Columbus Day, when transit and teachers unions and SEIU swelled their ranks for an afternoon. But the union leaderships in Chicago have been Democratic Party functionaries for a long time. Their clear objective is to take over, or at least take some credit in the eyes of their members and the public, for the protests.

I asked some south side activists about the nature of their disconnect with the people occupying Chicago's financial district.

"We'll see a lot more black people involved in this occupation stuff," J.R. Fleming of the Chicago Anti-Eviction Movement [5] told me, "when we start occupying these thousands of vacant bank-owned homes and apartments. You can take a day to protest downtown, and come back here and you're still homeless or about to be

stairs and watched everyone mill around us. There was the normal protest feeling of people moving around in different directions, not sure what to do with themselves, but within this there was also order: a food table, a library, a busy media area. There was order and disorder and organization and confusion, I watched as a man carefully changed each piece of his clothing folding each piece he took off and folding his shirt, his socks, his pants and placing them carefully under a tarp. I used the bathroom at the McDonalds up Broadway and there were two booths of people from the protest carrying out meetings, eating food from Liberty Plaza, sipping water out of water bottles, their laptops out. They seemed obvious yet also just part of the normal financial district hustle and bustle.

But even though at first I didn't know what to do while I was at Liberty Plaza I stayed there for a few hours. I was generally impressed and energized by what I saw: people seemed to be taking care of each other. There seemed to be a general feeling of solidarity, good ways of communicating with each other, less disorganization than I expected and everyone was very very friendly. The whole thing was bizarre yes, the confused tourists not knowing what was going on, the police officers lining the perimeter, the mixture of young white kids with dreadlocks, anarchist punks, mainstream looking college kids, but also the awesome black women who was organizing the food station, the older man who walked around with his peace sign stopping and talking to everyone, a young black man named Chris from New Jersey who told me he had been there all week and he was tired but that he had come not knowing anyone, had made friends and now he didn't want to leave.

And when I left, walking my bike back through the streets of the financial district, fighting the crowds of tourists and men in



Street. We ended up at Ground Zero and I felt the deep sense of sadness that that place now gives me: sadness over how, what is now in essence, just a construction site changed the world so much for the worse. A deep sense of sadness for all the tourists taking pictures around this construction site that is now a testament to capitalism, imperialism, torture, oppression but what is also a place where many people died ten years ago.

Sam and I get off our bikes and walk them. We are looking for Liberty Plaza. We are looking for somewhere less alienating. For a moment we feel lost. We walk past the department store Century 21 and laugh about how discount shopping combined with a major tourist site means that at any moment someone will stop short in front of us and we will bang our bikes against our thighs. A killer combination, that of tourists, discount shopping and the World Trade Center.

The landscape is strange. I notice that. We are in the shadow of half built buildings. They glitter and twist into the sky. But they also seem so naked: rust colored steel poking its way out their tops, their sides, their guts spilling out for all to see.

We get to Liberty Plaza and at first it is almost unassuming. We didn't entirely know what to do. We wandered around. We made posters and laid them on the ground (our posters read: "We are all Troy Davis" "Whose streets? Our streets!" and "Tired of Racism" "Tired of Capitalism")

And I didn't know anyone down there. Not one person. And there were a lot of young white kids. But there weren't only young white kids. There were older people, there were mothers with kids, and there were a lot more people of color than I expected, something that made me relieved. We sat on the



homeless. When we occupy the goods in our hoods, that will be the occupation that means something to people out here. That will be the occupation that really makes a difference."

That about says it. Different constituencies have different interests. Coalitions are built when differing parties adopt and lend tangible support to each others' interests in order to further their own. If the people on those corners can reach out to the communities out here for who economic insecurity and the prison state have long been facts of life, they could give birth to something truly important.

The student loan bubble, along with the shrinking job market has made newly poor white hipster kids mad enough to stage 24/7 street corners protests in scores of US cities, where they have connected with longtime leftist and community activist types, often older and not always white. These are helping keep them focused on the connections between the warfare and prison states and the unavailability of funding for anything else. Establishment Democrats try hard to co-opt them into narratives that place exclusive blame on those awful Republicans and Tea Party scoundrels blocking our brave president. Toward this end, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have showed up at street corner occupations, and the likes of Warren Ballantine and Michael Baisden have reportedly done segments from the same. The president himself has issued carefully worded statements that those still thoroughly drunk on hope may interpret as endorsing or even taking credit for the street corner protests. Democrats desperately need to contain this protest, to make sure its message of disgust for both the two parties is not communicated to its own disillusioned base (black) voters.

The Occupy Everything Movement's reliance on electronic and social media is problematic too. Late Sunday night I sat across the table from the friend I stayed with while in Chicago, both of us on our laptops. He asked if I received the two emails he'd sent earlier that day.

"Here's one," I told him. "I don't see the other. Can you send it again?" He did. When it hadn't showed up a full five minutes later, he sent it again a second time. I told him to copy my Gmail address



too, and he did that, and sent a third time. Nothing. No message on my end, no error messages on his. I was able to send to him from that email account, though.

"I'm gonna try something...." he told me. A moment later, he asked if I'd received an email from him. "Yeah, here it is right here," I said. He jumped up from the table laughing and went to pour himself a drink. The subject of the vanishing message was "Occupy Chicago" something or other. He had removed the word "occupy" and the message went through. I checked my Gmail account, and they were not landing there either. In the next half hour I had him send to my yahoo, hotmail, gmail, aim.com and godaddy webmail accounts from a variety of addresses, with the word "occupy" present, absent, and misspelled. Gmail rejected all messages with the correct and incorrect spellings of "occupy," whether sent from hotmail, yahoo or AOL, while letting the control messages through. GoDaddy webmail let the control messages through and those in which "occupy" was spelled "ocuppy." But with the word spelled correctly, those messages vanished too. I checked another GoDaddy webmail account, not mine, to which I had access. The "occupy" messages were showing up just fine there.

We both had a drink, and went to sleep.

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SO REAL IT HURTS: Notes on Occupy Wall Street

October 3, 2011

by Guest Contributor Manissa McCleave Maharawal,

I first went down to Occupy Wall Street last Sunday, almost a week after it had started. I didn't go down before because I, like many of my other brown friends, were wary of what we had heard or just intuited that it was mostly a young white male scene. When I asked friends about it they said different things: that it was really white, that it was all people they didn't know, that they weren't sure what was going on. But after hearing about the arrests and police brutality on Saturday and after hearing that thousands of people had turned up for their march I decided I needed to see this thing for myself.

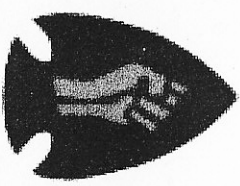
So I went down for the first time on Sunday September 25th with my friend Sam. At first we couldn't even find Occupy Wall Street. We biked over the Brooklyn Bridge around noon on Sunday, dodging the tourists and then the cars on Chambers



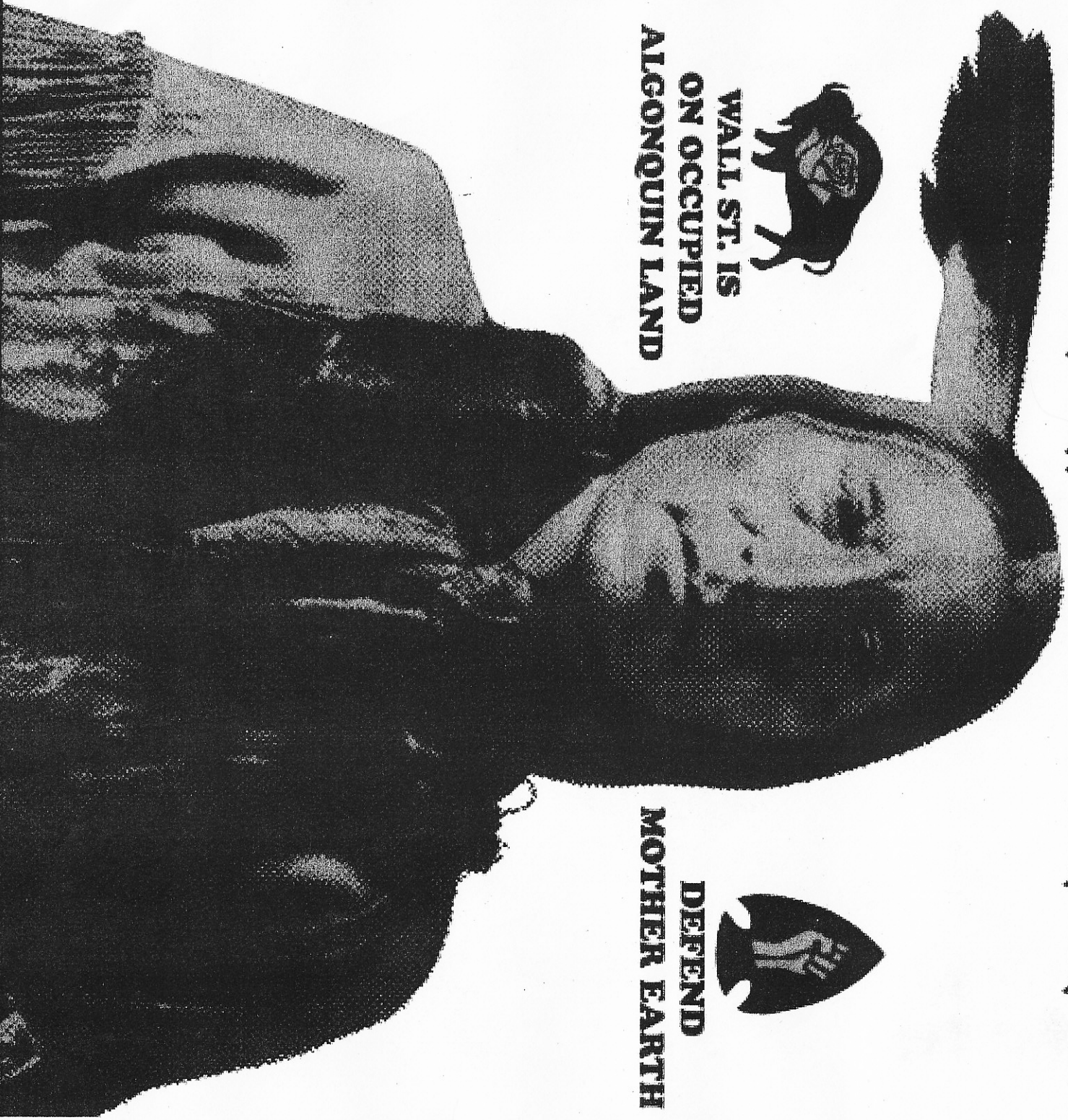
DECOLONIZE WALL STREET



WALL ST. IS
ON OCCUPIED
ALGONQUIN LAND



DEFEND
MOTHER EARTH



DECOLONIZE THE 99%