



■ Photos: See captions in this section.

On OCCUPY



■ Occupy Oakland protesters demonstrating outside Bank of America near Lake Merritt in Oakland. ©2011 Sandra Garcia

Angela Davis On Occupy

I have had the opportunity to visit four Occupy sites: one in Philadelphia, two in New York, and one in Oakland. There's an enormous amount of energy. There's an enormous amount of excitement. It's quite different from the way we are accustomed to building separate movements and then finding ways to create what we generally call coalitions and alliances. And while the [slogan "We are the] 99%" is a fiction, it's a fiction that is useful, and it is one that we should take up and re-craft. My message to all of the Occupy sites is that it is important that this 99% slogan is inclusive from the outset—that we have to be aware of the extent to which it is shot through by racial difference and economic difference.

The November 2 march to the Port of Oakland was multi-racial, it was multi-generational, it was multi-gender, multi-sexual, multi-everything. It's an

experiment in being together, [but we need to] be attentive to differences. As Audre Lorde said, "It's not our differences that divide us. It's our inability to respect and celebrate those differences." She pointed out that differences should not be merely tolerated, but they should be a fund of polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.

If we assume that the top tiers of the 99% can provide the

strategy during this time, then we are mistaken. It would make far more sense to start with the bottom tiers, and that would help us address racism. That would mean that the struggle to abolish the prison industrial complex would have to be central in this movement of the 99%.

[Another thing] I've been doing at the Occupy sites is to recall the slogans from the uprising in Paris in 1968. One of them was "L'imagination prend le pouvoir," all power to the imagination. And another one was "Soyez realiste demandez l'impossible," be realistic, demand the impossible.

Art drives movements for radical social change. Art helps us to find our way into new dimensions. Art helps to give expression to what might be considered impossible in the world that is. It shows us the possibility of a new world. Art helps us to negotiate our way through dimensions that we cannot yet articulate in the kind of expository language that we use... There are no clear demands. But I don't think there should be any demands right now.

[Consider] the connection with Egypt—Cairo and Tahrir Square. I was reading a message that came from participants in that movement, and there was something very moving included in that message. It said, [People ask] what are our demands? But there's no one left to [ask demands of]. There's no one left to ask for reforms. And so, therefore, we have to create that which we would like to see in the future. We have to create what we want, as opposed to asking somebody else to give it to us.

This is what happened during the era of what is called the civil rights movement. It was much, much more than civil

76

“It is important to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world.”



■ Photos: (Left) The Occupy Oakland encampment. ©2011 Eric. K. Arnold. (Right) Hundreds of people share their “99% story” at Occupy Oakland. ©2011 Christine Joy Ferrer

rights—it was a freedom movement. The most important accomplishment of that movement wasn't necessarily the change in the laws, although that was very important, it was the transformation of the consciousness of so many people who learned how to imagine a very different future.

We never give the black women domestic workers who refused to get on the bus the credit for creating this collective community of resistance. If they had not refused to get on the bus, if they had not boycotted the bus, where would we be today?

So let us also take seriously what it means to transform consciousness. I think that that is something that may be happening now given that so many people seem to be identifying with the 99%. The experience we had walking to the Port on Wednesday [November 2] was absolutely amazing. Cars were blowing their horns and nobody was upset that the march was blocking traffic. There were kids on bicycles who were stopping the traffic so that the march could go through. There weren't any police anywhere. Well, we knew they were around. But we didn't see them.

And everywhere, people were beeping their horns. It was just this amazing, joyful experience and so many people seemed to experience that joy of being together, of being a part of a new community that has the potential of dismantling the economic structures and the racist hierarchies and the gender hierarchies in the future.

I ran into many people of my generation who experienced the movement 40 years ago. Without exception, people were so

happy. They were saying, it's happening. Finally, it's happening!

[But] there are never any guarantees. In the late '60s we struggled passionately, and we thought we were going to make a revolution. We were persuaded that we were going to bring radical transformations to this society. We didn't win the revolution we thought we were fighting, but we did manage to revolutionize society.

So, I would say there are never any guarantees, but it is important to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. ■



■ Angela Davis at the General Strike on Nov. 2, in Oakland. ©2011 Joe Feria-Galicia

Angela Davis is an activist, educator, writer, and a founding member of Critical Resistance. This article is an edited excerpt from an interview conducted by Erin Aubry Kaplan, a Los Angeles journalist, at an event sponsored by the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles (politicalgraphics.org).



■ Photo: Group discussion at the Occupy San Francisco encampment. ©2011 Stephen Lam

Steve Williams On Occupy

78

“Different people who have been disaffected and disenfranchised by this economic system have had a space to come together.”

In a country with a history of white supremacy, colonialism, genocide, slavery, we know that we’re going to encounter some particular challenges around racial consciousness, around the leadership of women, around the role of young people. But what the “We are the 99%” movement has created is an opportunity for us to actually engage in those struggles from a progressive standpoint. The movement is still very new, so the language is all coming together, but in my mind this movement *is* a movement of the 99%. The occupations are a particular tactic of that movement. So, there are a lot of people participating in the movement to confront financial institutions and capitalism that aren’t sleeping out at the various parks across the country. It’s critical for us to figure out ways for people to engage constructively because our organizations that are rooted in working class, communities of color have been doing the organizing

around a particular strata of the 99%. It is important to acknowledge that the petty bourgeois and technocratic professionals who are now disaffected by the way that capitalism is operating—those people should be mad. But we also have to then figure out the programs and solutions and demands that we are all going to fight for that don’t throw sections of the 99% under the bus.

The “We are the 99%” movement has to develop a vision of what our alternative is. The exciting innovation with the camps is that different groupings of people who have been disaffected and disenfranchised by this economic system have had a space to come together. Folks who have had their homes foreclosed upon, folks who are in debt and can’t find a job after graduating from elite universities—are coming together with homeless people and with other folks who have just seen public services cut and attacked over the last few years. And I think what’s happening with that is that people are beginning to develop more and more of a systematic analysis of what is wrong. But ultimately that means that we have to do more, way more, than elect a sympathetic person into office.

We’re really building on a level of organizing, a level of mobilization that puts us in a position to begin transforming what it is that we’ve previously thought of as a liberation movement in this country. ■

Steve Williams is a co-founder and co-executive director of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER), a San Francisco-based group building power for low-wage workers, tenants, and families. This article is an edited excerpt from a roundtable interview conducted by Meaghan LaSala on the Making Contact program of the National Radio Project (radioproject.org).



■ Photo: University of California Davis police officer assaults students with pepper spray. ©2011 Francisco Dominguez

María Poblet On Occupy

People of color who've interacted with the occupy camps [say they don't show] enough clarity about racism, gender inequality, poverty, and issues of class. And I think that critique is right on. I think the challenge before us is: can we lead from a place of unity?

On the national scale now white, working class communities who've been impacted by these measures of austerity and by this corporate takeover, they have a choice between the Tea Party and Occupy. And I want all of them to choose Occupy. It's very needed in this country for people to have a choice that takes them to the left in the face of corporate domination, instead of basically joining the Tea Party and moving to the right and blaming immigrants, blaming people of color. [As] the racial dynamics get handled in the camps, that's where and how we'll see if the movement will be able to proceed in a way that actually builds the capacity to build more unity and move towards a progressive outcome that benefits all communities.

In the more institutional progressive sector, there's the idea that you elect somebody who's a Democrat and then you look the other way and cross your fingers. That has never worked for people of color. In fact, where people of color have won great demands in this country is by challenging the Democratic party with all kinds of tactics, including threatening to

start another party and starting another party. It has to go back to this platform, this list of what we want, this vision of where we're headed. Then we can say to any elected official, "Get in or get out," "Come with us, or don't."

Convergence on joint actions between existing organizations and Occupy is the first step to what we need. Then we can actually move towards something that would be much bigger—like, what if the 99% in the U.S. called for no war, no warming—build the economy for the people and the planet. What if we did that? What would that look like? It would then say—there is one alternative—and we're building it right here, right now, because another world is possible... but also, it's absolutely necessary. And in order for another world to be possible, another U.S. has to come into being. This Occupy movement and the convergence between this and previous generations, and community organizing and other sectors of progressives, this convergence is actually going to make that other world possible. ■

“Convergence on joint actions between existing organizations and Occupy is the first step...”

María Poblet is the executive director of Just Cause::Causa Justa, a housing rights group in the San Francisco Bay Area. This article is an edited excerpt from a roundtable interview conducted by Meaghan LaSala on the Making Contact program of the National Radio Project (radioproject.org).

“If racial exclusion and inequity are at the root of the problem, then inclusion and equity must be built into the solution.”



■ Photo: Occupy demonstrators protest for immigrant rights. ©2011 David Bacon

We must now move from questions of representation to ask: How can a racial analysis, and its consequent agenda, be woven into the fabric of the movement? We need to interrogate not just the symptoms of inequality—the disproportionate loss of jobs, housing, healthcare, and more—but, more fundamentally, the systems of inequality, considering how and why corporations create and exploit hierarchies of race, gender, and national status to enrich themselves and consolidate their power. As the New Bottom Line campaign has pointed out through a series of actions across the nation launched the same week as OWS, the subprime lending practices of Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo have devastated communities of color. A 2009 study found that 85 percent of those hardest hit by foreclosures have been African American and Latino homeowners.

If racial exclusion and inequity are at the root of the problem, then inclusion and equity must be built into the solution. OWS has resisted making specific demands, but local groups are taking up campaigns and actions. The challenge and opportunity of this moment is to put these values at the center of their agenda.

The signs are promising. In Boston, Occupiers joined a march that protested gentrification and financial abuse from a racial justice standpoint. In Oakland, the organization Just Cause::Causa Justa has inserted an anti-discrimination agenda, illustrated by a beautiful poster by artist and activist Melanie Cervantes reading, “Somos El 99%,” which is a prominent feature of the encampment there. (The poster exists in other languages, too.) New

Rinku Sen On Occupy

Bottom Line has asked Occupiers to make pointed, tangible demands of regulators and banks. Occupy Los Angeles has taken up actions supporting homeowners in the midst of foreclosure. A hearty response from other cities would go a long way toward legitimizing OWS as a movement that recognizes the fundamental role of racial discrimination in shaping our economy.

As some Occupy cities are demonstrating, addressing race is far easier when there is already a history of white activists and those of color advancing common goals. In Flagstaff, Arizona, a city where activists have worked alongside Native communities for years, the local Occupy website features calls to resist a fake-snow-making scheme on a mountain sacred to Native tribes, as well as a plan by Senator John McCain and Representative Paul Gosar to reinstate uranium mining around the Grand Canyon. At Colorlines.com, which has covered the role of race in the Occupy movement, one commentator offered the example of Occupy Los Angeles—a city with a long history of collaborative economic justice campaigns with a clear race angle—as a model to emulate. “The LA folks seem to be able to reconcile how to fold [racial], monetary, and social issues all into their messages,” she wrote.

The Occupy movement is clearly unifying. Centralizing racial equity will help to sustain that unity. This won’t happen accidentally or automatically. It will require deliberate, smart, structured organizing that challenges segregation, not only that of the 1 percent from everyone else, but also that which divides the 99 percent from within. ■

Rinku Sen is president and executive director of the Applied Research Center, and the publisher of Colorlines.com, from which this article is excerpted.



■ Photos: (Left) Boots Riley and (Right) Danny Glover in solidarity with the Occupy movement. ©2011 Eric K. Arnold

James Lawson On Occupy

There are three things that are necessary to create a movement which causes the collapse of an authoritarian government. Poland, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and [Chile] fulfilled this. There are three forces. First force we see in such efforts is an escalation of unity of purpose. I told the Boston Occupy group last week that their audience is not capitalism or the corporations. Their audience is the people of America. We need direct civil resistance in America as never before. It must happen. If we speak to the full audience, that unity will develop.

[The] next thing is, there has to be a plan. You can't create revolutionary change without a strategy. It has to be both short-term and long-term. Cairo had that. The solidarity movement of Poland had it. The Chilean anti-Pinochet movement had it.

The third thing is, there has to be the emergence of a nonviolent discipline. That's going on in the Occupy groups. They're trying to care for themselves. They're trying to build a community of care and concern. They're trying to take care of each other. They're trying to keep the camp, the Occupy villages, cooperative, clean. Many of them recognize that the issue's not fighting the police or throwing stones. This is critical because the myth in the United States is that violence is the way you get change.

The violence in our society and of our society—military violence, domestic violence, the continued lynching of people in the prison systems by the police—this system

of violence is causing our society to sink into greater and greater chaos, turmoil, confusion, animosity and division.

The nonviolent discipline is necessary because you cannot beat the enemy with the enemy's theories and practices. You cannot do it. We do not have the power to beat the CIA or the National Guard or the American Military. Therefore, the movement has to be one that will challenge that power with surprise and with our bodies. We have to find ways to create a new power, and the new power is the power of people who get engaged... In a sense that we can have a different world and a different nation and a different Los Angeles, and are willing to work on developing a plan and a strategy to make that happen.

How is it that the American people want housing, education, jobs, transportation, and better communities but we have this atrocious system that is cheating us over and over and over again and pretending that we have the best possible society?

[With] so many great movements in the United States, [why is it] that we, the American people, don't see through this and learn that it's going to take hard work to make the changes, and *we* need to be about that hard work? ■

“You can't create revolutionary change without a strategy.”

Reverend James Lawson is a United Methodist pastor and civil rights leader. He played a major role in the Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968 and was a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This article is an edited excerpt from an interview conducted Erin Aubry Kaplan, a Los Angeles journalist, at an event sponsored by the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles (politicalgraphics.org).

“Women have the longest work-week and do most of the world’s unpaid labor; they are the bulk of the poor both in the U.S. and around the world...”



■ Photo: Port of Oakland. ©2011 Eric K. Arnold

Sylvia Federici On Occupy

82

This movement appears spontaneous but its spontaneity is quite organized, as can be seen from the languages and practices it has adopted and the maturity it has shown in response to the brutal attacks by the authorities and the police. It reflects a new way of doing politics that has grown out of the crisis of the anti-globalization and antiwar movements of the last decade; one that emerges from the confluence between the feminist movement and the movement for the commons. By “movement for the commons,” I refer to the struggles to create and defend anti-capitalist spaces and communities of solidarity and autonomy. For years now people have expressed the need for a politics that is not just antagonistic and does not separate the personal from the political, but places the creation of more cooperative and egalitarian forms of reproducing human, social, and economic relationships at the center of political work.

Why is Feminism Necessary for Occupy?

Feminism is still critical for this movement on several grounds and I am encouraged by the fact that many young women today identify themselves as feminists, despite a tendency in past years to dismiss feminism as merely “identity politics.”

First, many of the issues that were at the origins of the women’s movement have not been resolved. In some respects, the position of women has worsened. Despite the fact that more women have access to paid employment, the root causes of sexism are still in place. We still have an unequal sexual division of labor as reproductive work remains primarily a woman’s responsibility, even when she works outside the home. Reproductive

work is still devalued in this society. Though we are less dependent on individual men, we are still subject to a patriarchal organization of work and social relations that degrade women. In fact, we have seen a re-masculinization of society with the glorification of war and the increasing militarization of everyday life. Statistics speak clearly: women have the longest work-week and do most of the world’s unpaid labor; they are the bulk of the poor both in the U.S. and around the world; and many are practically sterilized because they cannot afford to have children. Meanwhile, male violence against women has intensified, not only at the individual level but also at the level of institutions. In the U.S., for instance, the number of women in jail has increased fivefold since the ‘80s.

I am also convinced that the Occupy movement has much to learn from the egalitarian vision of society that the feminist movement developed in its radical phase, which was also an inspiration for the queer and the ecological movements. Consensus-based decision-making, the distrust of leaders (formal or charismatic), and the idea that you need to prefigure the world you want to create through your actions and organization—these were all developed by radical feminist movements. Most importantly, like the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the radical feminist movement began to address the question of unequal power relations in the movement and in society by, for instance, creating autonomous spaces in which, women could articulate the problems specific to their conditions. Feminism has also promoted an ethics of care and sisterhood and a respect for animals and nature that is crucial for the Occupy movement and, I believe, has already shaped its practice. I have



■ Photos: (Left) On Dec. 6, Occupy and Just Cause demonstrators protest foreclosures. ©2011 Josh Warren-White. (Right) Occupiers move into a foreclosed home. ©2011 David Bacon

been impressed by the tolerance and patience people demonstrate to one another in the general assemblies—a great achievement in comparison with the often truculent forms of behavior that were typical in the movements of the '60s.

Gender Dynamics in the Occupy Movement

I do not want to be unduly optimistic, but it seems to me that feminists are well represented in this movement, though it would be naïve to imagine that this is sufficient to eliminate sexism from it. As a recent article published in *The Nation* on this subject pointed out, “women are everywhere.” They facilitate and speak in the general assemblies, organize educational forums, make videos, run the information center, speak to the press, and circulate information through scores of blogs on the net. At OWS, before the eviction, they created an all-women space, a tent “for women by women,” that functioned as a safe autonomous zone.

What is especially promising is the diversity of women who are active and present in the occupations: this is a movement that brings together white women and women of color, young women and women with white hair. I also see the influence of feminism in the fact that this movement places its own reproduction at the center of its organizing. The lesson of the feminist movement—which is that you cannot separate political militancy from the reproduction of your everyday life; that you must often revolutionize your reproductive relations in order to engage in the struggle—is now being applied on a broad

scale, [in] the creation of free food distribution, the organization of cleaning and medical teams, and the activities of the working groups that are daily discussing not only general principles and campaigns but all the issues concerning daily coexistence.

That OWS is no longer a standing camp after its eviction from Liberty Square does not invalidate this point. Hundreds of occupations are now taking place all over the country and around the world. The loss of the camp at Liberty Plaza in New York is only the start of a new phase of the movement. Hopefully it will be a phase in which the building of reproductive commons will take on a new meaning and dimension. Soon, in fact, the movement must begin to pose the question of how to create a reproductive network outside of the market—for instance, connecting with the existing urban farming projects and other elements of the solidarity economy. ■

83



■ Photo: At the General Strike on November 2, in Oakland. ©2011 Eric K. Arnold

Silvia Federici is a veteran activist and writer who lives in Brooklyn, New York. She is the author of Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation. This interview was conducted by Max Haiven (maxhaiven.com) and published at Znet (zcommunications.org).

Organizing for Community Control in Madison

By Cynthia Lin
and Sangita Nayak

In February 2011, the city of Madison captured national attention when organizers occupied the Wisconsin state capitol building for several weeks to protest Governor Scott Walker's attacks on collective bargaining and key social services. Their rallying cry: "Whose house? Our house!" reflected back to a housing reclamation movement that had begun just a year earlier in the city.

In May 2010, a coalition of people-of-color-led groups had organized to help an African American single mother and her two young children move into a long-vacant foreclosed house. Their actions shifted the public discourse into the critical areas of property, control, and economic justice. It was part of a coordinated nationwide series of eviction defenses and housing takeovers meant to reawaken the nation to the Take Back the Land movement, which is dedicated to elevating housing to the level of a human right and securing community control over the land. Politically, Madison may seem like an unlikely site for a radical people-of-color-led direct action and it took many national organizers by surprise. But the movement continues to grow as its actions challenge the contradiction of "houses without people and people without houses."

As with most action campaigns, the Left would like to see a move upwards in the organizing—from immediate actions towards longer-term and larger-scale shifts in power. But we in Wisconsin assert that we need to shift the organizing downwards to focus on building grassroots literacy about the systems that exert control over people's lives. Because it is only from these foundations of understanding that we can derive the necessary people power to build a sustainable infrastructure for democratic community control of land and economic resources.

Understand the Institutions that Manage Your Life

Among the organizations that form the infrastructure of Madison's Take Back the Land movement is Freedom, Inc., whose work is "Helping our communities assess what they control," says Co-Executive Direc-

tor Kabzuag Vaj. "You can't take control if you don't understand what you are taking control of. By taking on issues of housing, land, and food justice that our communities are already grappling with in their day-to-day, we help people understand the institutions that manage their lives."

Freedom, Inc. organizes youth and communities of color around the root causes of violence, drawing from the same vein of popular education work documented by Paulo Freire in Brazil and pioneered by Myles Horton in Appalachia at the Highlander Folk school. Freire, as well as the Highlander Center, found that centering on literacy—whether it involves reading and writing or voter education through citizenship schools—creates key opportunities for engaging communities in critical questioning that leads to organizing.

Working with its partner organizations Operation Welcome Home and Take Back the Land-Madison, Freedom Inc.'s first priority is to build literacy about systems of power, starting with what communities see and experience. Engaging African American families in actions around housing gets down to the everyday concerns of people and helps to build a collective analysis of the root causes of institutionalized economic violence. Engaging Hmong elders from Madison's low-income housing units around food access and gardening space becomes political education work that links to a radical analysis of land ownership and control. Take Back the Land-Madison understands that self-determination begins with decolonizing. If power concedes nothing without demand, then communities need to know what is within their right to control, in order to be able to assert their demands.

Creating Mechanisms for Sustainability

Take Back the Land's efforts in Madison are grounded in literacy-building political education that is propelled by one defense, one takeover, and one action at a time. From this foundation, Take Back the Land-Madison and its partners scale up the organizing by building in local and regional mechanisms for authentic and sustained control.

For instance, Freedom, Inc. is helping youth and community members create ways to affect land use decisions made at the neighborhood scale. "Not only are we demanding that people who have decision-making control receive input from community members, but we are actually creating advisory councils in our communities to tell management what to do," says Vaj. "Having a seat at the table builds people power. And people power counters system power."

In addition to advisory councils, communities are also pushing for transparency and accountability at the local level. Operation Welcome Home's 'Housing is a Human Right' resolution was introduced in the Madison City Council this September with a county-level resolution to follow. The city resolution, which has garnered significant support from Mayor Paul Soglin and a critical mass of city alders, institutes "comprehensive plans that call for the availability of safe, decent and sanitary and distinctive housing for all residents as well as the objectives and policies that accompany that goal."

The resolution helps create the tools and build a platform to push for further specific policy changes towards community control of land. The 'Housing is a Human Right' resolution has helped Operation Welcome Home build relationships with families of color in neighborhoods beyond those it was initially working with, as well as build power by gaining the support of a local Poverty Coalition and the Wisconsin Association of Tenants Rights.

Finally, Freedom Inc., Operation Welcome Home, and Take Back the Land-Madison have been involved in developing more democratic regional structures for agenda-setting and decision-making. The Wisconsin Communities of Color Agenda (WCCA) is a collective of statewide people of color-led organizations that coalesced in response to asserting a racial justice agenda



within mobilizations against Walker's austerity measures. WCCA is a mechanism for creating a shared long-term political agenda for communities across the state.

From the Margins to the Center

Mainstream coverage of the Wisconsin Uprising mainly focused on white, middle-class Wisconsinites in heartfelt defense of collective bargaining for workers rights. The voices and the work of communities whose very survival depends on lifesaving services, such as Wisconsin's public health care and food stamp systems, were missing. Also missing were mention of the challenges to the exclusion of people of color using Voter ID, the fight to save public schools from defunding, and the efforts to preserve in-state tuition for undocumented students. The fact is, people of color and poor white communities have been struggling against austerity and budget attacks for decades.

As Kimiyana Johnson of Operation Welcome Home pointedly notes: "We haven't had folks gathering at the capital in droves to protect these issues before because it only affected folks who were mostly invisible to dominant society. Now that Walker has been cutting folks down at the knees with all of his 'power' moves, many working class, middle class, and 'once-considered-middle class' people are being forced into dealing with real poverty issues."

While questions about where the Wisconsin mobilizations will lead us are still up in the air, there is no doubt that the legacy of organizing for self-determination is a critical one for moving from the margins to the center. Gaining democratic control will require further action and the grounded presence and voice of the people most affected by the issues at stake, not to mention the radical imagination of visionary solutions. Or, as the sign held by a Freedom, Inc. member read: "If the middle class is hurting, the poor will die!" ■

Photo:

Madison protest in opposition to Governor Walker's "budget repair bill," which would strip public unions in Wisconsin of their right to collective bargaining.

©2011
Shane Glenn

Cynthia Lin is an educator and scholar focusing on community-based and participatory action research. Sangita Nayak is an experienced organizer, communicator, and public school teacher grounded in effective movement practice.