

FREE

THE RAGING PELICAN

JOURNAL OF GULF COAST RESISTANCE

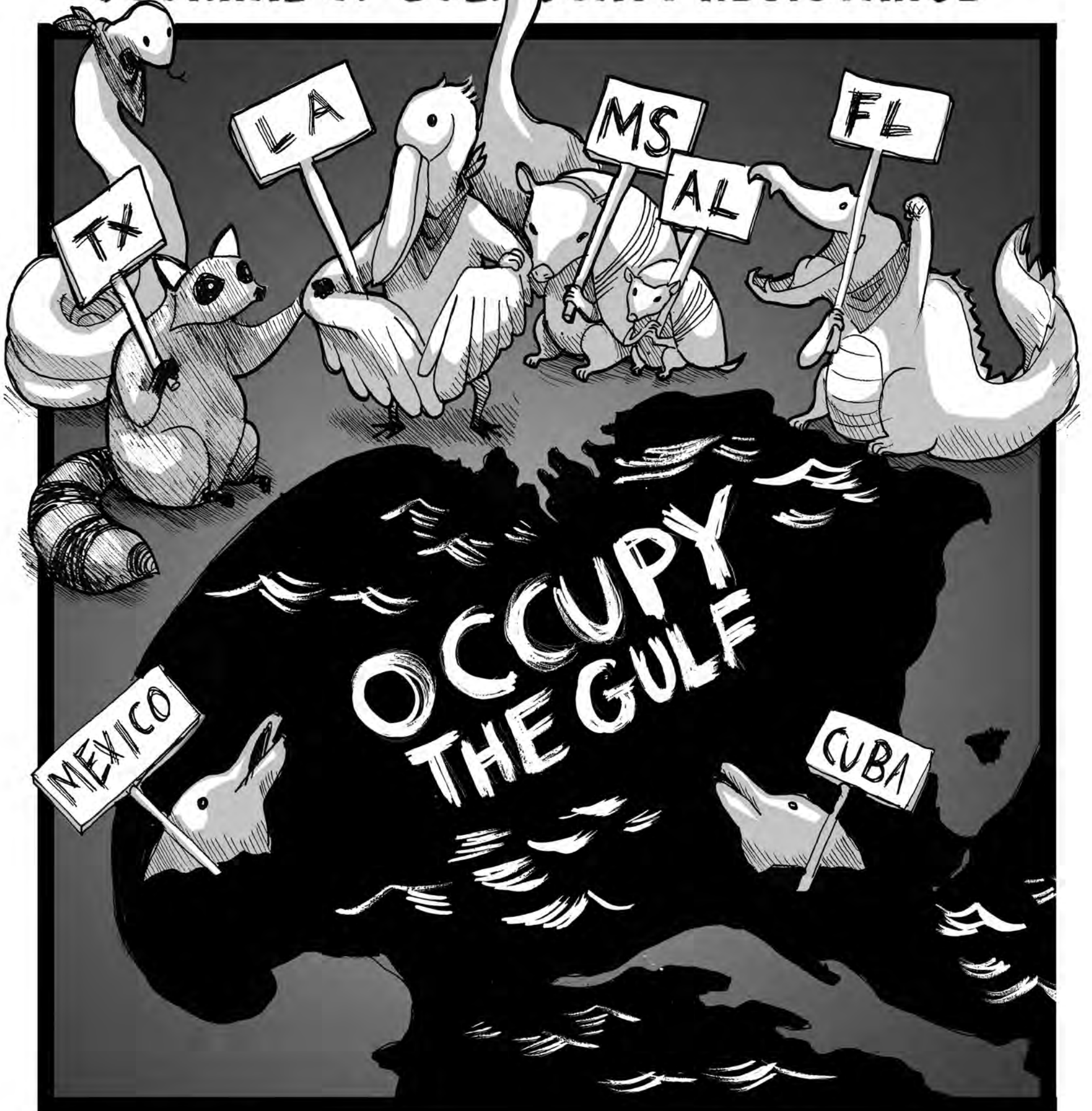


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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the blockbuster third issue of the Raging Pelican. This all-volunteer grassroots newspaper, free of advertisements or backing from corporations and compromised “non-profits,” is paid for entirely by its contributors and members of the community. We rely on personal donations, and our freedom from the taint of big money is what allows us to remain honest. It is a labor of love.

This issue focuses in part on the “Occupy” movement and what it might have to offer our communities along the Gulf Coast. As seen across the South, the Occupy movement is exciting and frustrating, full of problems and even more full of potential. It’s as delicate as a soap bubble, vulnerable to deliberate or accidental sabotage, and yet as strong-- and yes, resilient-- as the brave people who participate. In the right light, its possibilities are dizzying; it feels like the revolution.

But while I realize everything’s interconnected, I don’t really give a shit about Wall Street. I care about our homes and lives in South Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, our peoples, culture, traditions and ways of life, all of which are being destroyed. The courage and strength seen in Oakland’s General Strike and across the country should fire us up, but regional problems require regional solutions. Though they may wish to aid us, New York City can’t save us. Washington DC and our state “elected leaders” won’t save us, no matter how much we give them in taxes, fees, liberty and land. We must

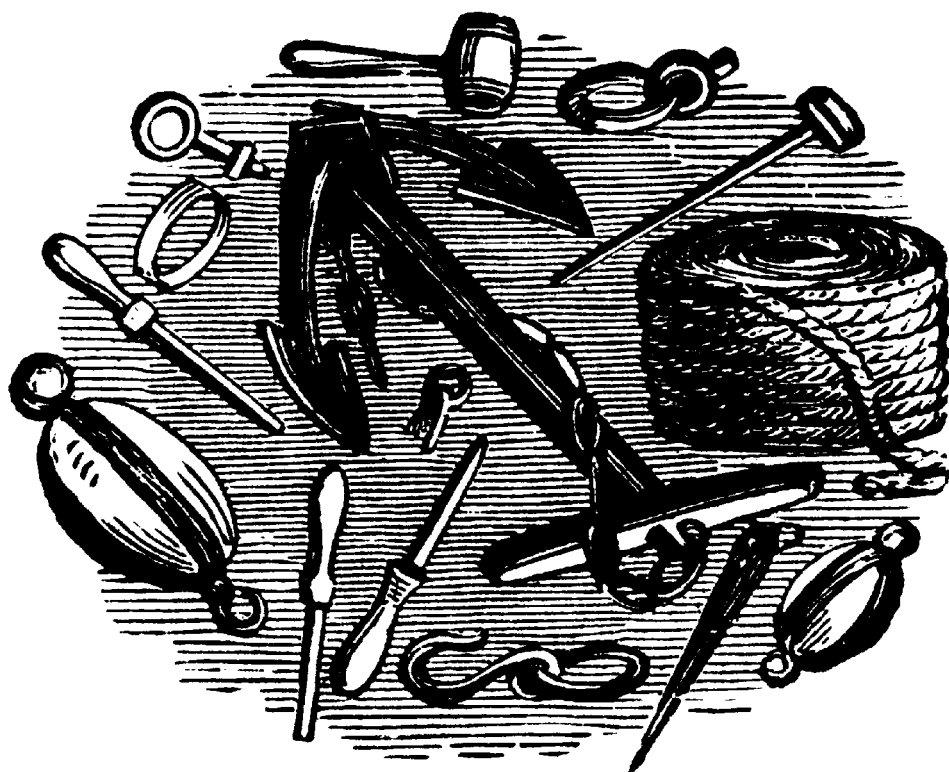
save ourselves, if we are to survive at all. We can draw ideas and solidarity from elsewhere, but at the end of the day the people we most need to work with and listen to are our neighbors down the street, downriver, and down I-10. If “Occupy” is a way towards that, then it’s a way forward.

In A People’s History of the United States, historian Howard Zinn wrote, “In every period of history, people have found ways to help one another-- even in the midst of a culture of competition and violence-- if only for brief periods, to find joy in work, struggle, companionship, nature... There is a chance that such a movement could succeed in doing what the system itself has never done-- bring about great change with little violence. This is possible because the more of the 99% that begin to see themselves as sharing needs, the more the guards and the prisoners see their common interest, the more the Establishment becomes isolated, ineffectual. The elite’s weapons: money, control of information, would be useless in the face of a determined population...”

We are already the Gulf Coast’s “occupants,” all of us who live here. We must be determined, or we will be removed. Our inescapable reality is the monstrous destruction wrought by BP and the oil industry, guarded and abetted by the government, concealed from the larger world by lazy, paid-off media. Our strength is one another, united by geography, community and necessity. The fight is at hand.

SEASON OF BLACK PEARLS

By: Linda Lee-ung



Oh Say Can You Mourn?
The Wet Lands of LA.

When So Proudly We Cast
Nets To Receive Its Bounty

Whose Gulf Floor Wound Gushes Black
Thru The Perilous Fight

O'er The Ramparts We Watch
Wild Life Sadly Striving

The Oyster Beds Black End
Pelicans mired in oil

Yield Proof of LA...ment
From the Author of Life

Oh say Lou oui si an na
All yet To Re Claim

O'er the Land of Free Fowl
In Sea Son – of black – Pearls !

A LETTER TO THE SOUTHERN AMERICAN WORKING CLASS

By: Sasha

DEAR NEIGHBOR,

As you read this, news agencies all over the country are working diligently to downplay and discredit the Occupy Wall Street movement. Their attempts to do this are nothing less than class warfare. In actuality, the mainstream media is simply a tool used by the ruling elite to wage class war against the vast majority of us every single day.

The moment in history through which the United States is now passing may be characterized thusly:

We are experiencing a global outcry from the lower socioeconomic strata-- people rising up and telling their bankers, bosses, and politicians that they've simply had enough. For the past few years we've seen a steady growth in revolutionary activity in many nations in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe, not to mention similar ongoing revolutionary movements in Latin America. To establish the importance and relevance of all these events to us as Americans, it is necessary to define two terms right now. They are as follows:

1. WORKING CLASS -- *Those of us who do the real work of the economy, without CEO pay or global power: the 99%*

2. SOLIDARITY - *Union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests, as within a class*

It is imperative that we, the working class of the United States, first and foremost acknowledge our position in society. We must understand that all those who exchange their labor for a wage are no different from us. We must also understand that the ruling elites have created elaborate chains to bind us. Those chains start with television and the mainstream media where knowledge of the real world is funneled and contorted in order to minimize our exposure to the atrocities the U.S. and other nations commit daily worldwide.

This media smokescreen does away with any need to feel or react on our part, as we have zero exposure. Adding more links to the chain, our rulers replace what's important with what's normally called "infotainment"-- sensational stories of sextuplets, balloon boys, and celebrity gossip etc... and that's only if we watch the news. The vast majority of mainstream media makes little claim to emulate or document real life; it is mostly sitcoms, designed to keep our attention just long enough to show us another commercial.

That is the heart of the mainstream media, and of course more links in the chain. As in all capitalist ventures, money is the driving force behind corporate broadcasting.

FOX and NBC don't make money by entertaining us. They make money by selling us things we don't need, most notably the shackles at the end of our chains. The mainstream media works night and day to convince us that we should strive to "keep up with the Johnsons," so to speak. They tell us that we must work terrible jobs to buy and make payments on a house in the suburbs and to drive a flashy car to establish our place in society with a false image of success. This alienates us from other members of the working class, and generally works to pit us against each other. All the while, the ruling elite, the bankers who both empower the corporate media and own our cars and homes, laugh at our naïveté and rake in billions of dollars in profits.

This brings us to our second defined term: Solidarity. Solidarity is absolutely necessary should we have any hope for real change. The mainstream media will tell us that this is our country and that we can vote to change things at any time. In reality, voting changes absolutely nothing because when we vote, we work within a confined set of parameters set forth by the ruling elite to ensure they maintain the capitalist power structure. We can't vote corporate power out of the political system because it's impossible to tell where the government stops and private corporations start. The two are inherently intertwined.

Such is the nature of capitalism.

This is why it is absolutely necessary for us working people to stand together in defiance of this power structure and to demand, no, FORCE a real change in the system-- a change that shifts the power structure in our favor. A change that will provide us with jobs, food, housing, high quality public education, and all that is necessary to live. We must make the same demands that our brothers and sisters are making worldwide. We must stand in SOLIDARITY with them and with each other, regardless of race or creed, for these common goals, while also addressing historic and current differences in the ways the power structure treats each of us.

Before we conclude, I would like to add one last word to our list. That word is revolution. It means fundamental change. Let me make it clear that YOU are a nameless, faceless member of the working class. You can try to stand out with a fancy car or fancy clothes, but when Monday morning rolls around and you punch the clock, you are at the mercy of your boss. You are also at the mercy of his boss, the owner... and ultimately you are at the mercy of their bosses and yours, the bankers. I'm tired of that power structure. That's why I am occupying Mobile, Alabama, and that's why I hope you, the working class of the Gulf Coast, will stand in defiant solidarity with me against these ruling elites.

VIVA LA RESISTANCE,
Sasha



Satirical 1% "Counter-Protesters" at Occupy Mobile

AGAINST THE WIND

COLONIAL LOUISIANA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By: T. Mayheart Dardar

On April 30th, 2012 there is going to be a party in Louisiana, a celebration marking the state's bicentennial: two hundred years of U.S. statehood. As the signs and banners go up and the commemorative license plates are installed, the preparations build towards the kind of party only people in Louisiana can throw.

As the date approaches I can't help but contemplate what all of this should mean to the original people of Louisiana and to my tribe, the Houma, specifically. What should our view be of American statehood? What can we learn from the history behind this event, and how is that history relevant to us today?

TRADE, COMMERCE, AND PROFIT

At the end of the eighteenth century the infant U.S. American empire set itself on a path that would come to be articulated as Manifest Destiny. As it sought to expand its economic base and political influence, the newly United States quickly set their sights on the economic jewel of the continent, New Orleans. The geographic location of the "Isle of Orleans" gave New Orleans control of the commerce of the lower Mississippi River and access to the vast markets of the Caribbean.

In 1795 the United States and Spain (who had controlled Louisiana since 1763) signed the Pinckney Treaty which gave American merchants the "right of deposit" in the city, allowing them to store their goods there for export. The treaty also gave them the right to navigate the Mississippi. With these rights in place, the fledgling American economy expanded and the wealthy business class began to consolidate its base.

For almost three years this merchant class saw their fortunes rise to new heights, 'til 1798, when new Spanish officials suddenly slammed the door by revoking the Pinckney Treaty. Though Spain would restore the treaty in 1801, the U.S. would not soon forget the economic price paid for its inability to control New Orleans and the trade that flowed through its port.

Thomas Jefferson saw an opportunity when he learned that Spain had transferred Louisiana back to France with the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1801. He quickly sent a representative to Paris to begin negotiations with Napoleon's government for the purchase of New Orleans. To the surprise of many, after months of talks, Napoleon offered to sell not just New Orleans but rather the entire Louisiana Territory. The process came to a close on April 30th, 1803, when the Louisi-

ana Purchase Agreement was signed in Paris. For fifteen million dollars the United States acquired over eight hundred thousand square miles, effectively doubling the physical size of the American empire.

For the population of Louisiana the visible reality came in December when the French tri-color was lowered for the last time in the Place d'Armes, and in its place was raised the stars and stripes.

AMERICAN INDIANS?

The original colonial claim on Louisiana was made by France in 1682 when Rene-Robert Cavalier Sieur de La Salle, standing on the banks of the Mississippi near its mouth, expressed ownership in the name of his king. When the United States wrote a fifteen million dollar check for the same piece of real estate one hundred and twenty-one years later, there was one common denominator between the two events: nowhere in the process were the people of the land, the indigenous people of Louisiana, consulted, nor their opinions or concerns considered.

For the Houma the early territorial period brought a new colonial reality and new challenges. In 1806 and 1811 Houma chiefs met with W.C.C. Claiborne, the U.S. Territorial governor. Gifts and pleasantries were exchanged, but the Americans would make no guarantees of Houma sovereignty or land rights. Attempting to navigate the new colonial system, the Houma sought to secure their survival through a variety of efforts. While Houma warriors were fighting with the privateer Jean Lafitte to defend New Orleans against a British invasion force in 1815, the tribe was also fighting its way through the U.S. territorial bureaucracy.

Houma leaders understood that the Louisiana Purchase Agreement obligated the United States to respect the preceding relationship between the tribe and the colonial governments. So, in hopes of securing the land base that had been respected by both the French and Spanish, the Houma filed a claim for twelve sections of land adjacent to the village at Pointe Ouiski (located near the modern-day city of Houma, Louisiana). In response, the federal land office refused to recognize the tribe's rights to the land, a status of non-recognition that continues to the present day.

Louisiana statehood did little or nothing to secure the rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Louisiana; for the Houma those ghosts of colonialism would haunt the present and the future.

THE COST OF COLONIALISM

In 2005 the Houma community was impacted by two major hurricanes, Katrina and Rita. Over half of the tribe's 17,000 citizens were affected by one or both of the storms. As the tribal government struggled without direct federal assistance to aid their people in recovery, one question was asked of us over and over again by people unfamiliar with the tribe and its history: "Why do your people live in communities so at risk from the forces of nature?"

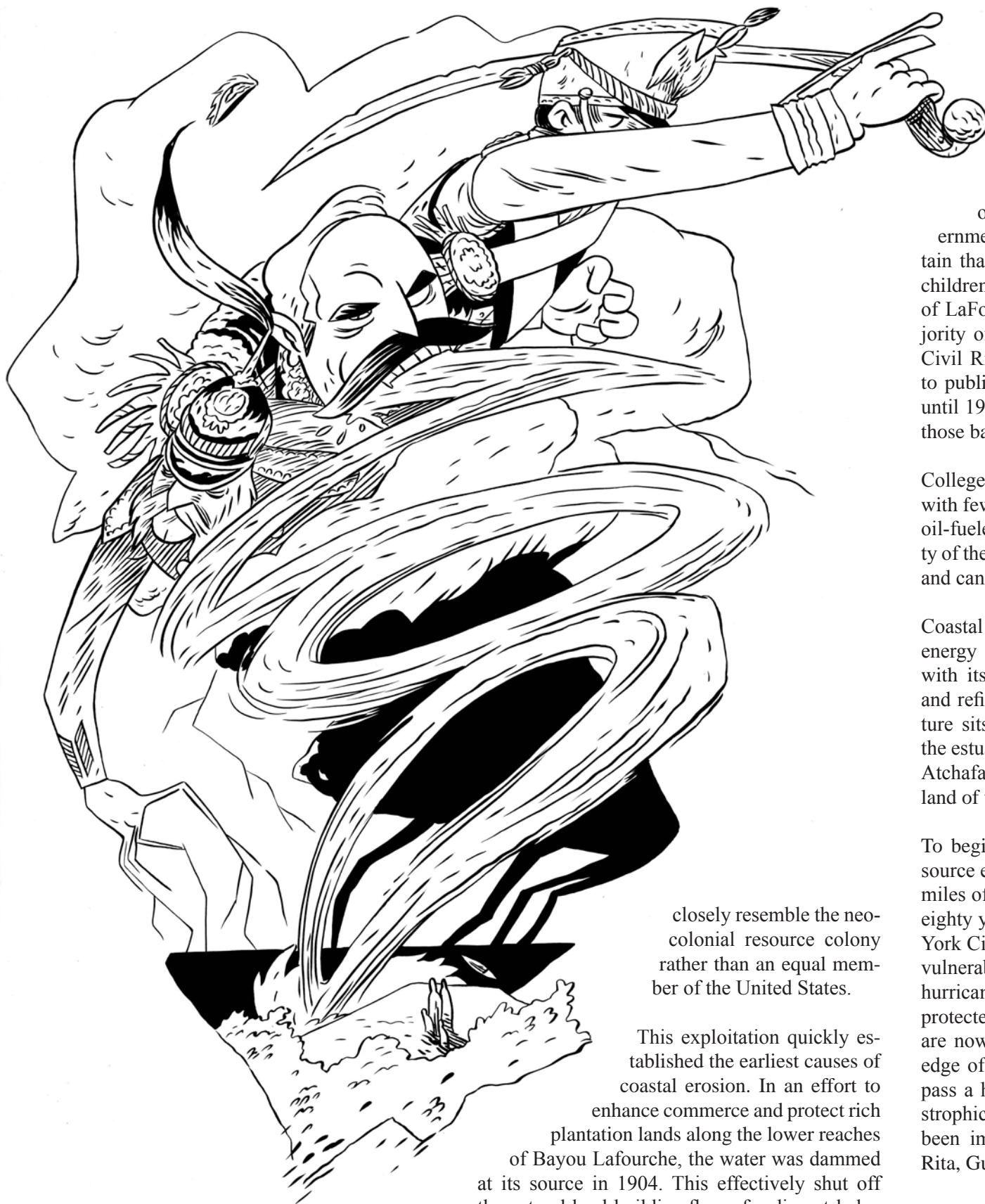
The answer is both simple and complex. The simple answer is that the effects of coastal erosion have left the Houma communities along the south Louisiana coast at risk from any storm that enters the Gulf of Mexico. Louisiana, as a whole, has lost nearly 2000 square miles of coast since 1930, and a large part of that has come from the lands of the Houma.

The complex answer goes to the root causes of this dilemma and examines the motivating forces that perpetuate the problem. Much of this has been debated for years, and the blame has been categorized and fractionalized, but for the Houma the answer is quite clear. Our homeland has been subjected to a century of unchecked "economic development." The pursuit of profit that motivated the American traders at the end of the eighteenth century energized itself with twentieth century technology and began to devour the resources of the land.

Neo-colonialism is a twentieth century term used to describe the relationship of former colonial powers to their former colonies. The term examines how resource colonies continue to be subjected to imperial aggression and control, even after their declared independence. The term has great resonance here in the fast-disappearing marshlands of coastal Louisiana.

"The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world." -*Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism. Kwame Nkrumah, 1965*

The early years of statehood saw the Houma forced out of their village at Pointe Ouiski by the expanding settlement that would become the town of Houma in 1834. Ironically the settlers named the town after the band of Indians living at Pointe Ouiski while they were in the process of forcing them to surrender their land.



The Houma moved south to their seasonal villages in the lower bayous and found a degree of security in the swamps and marshlands along the coast. In relative isolation the tribal population rebounded and grew strong as hunters, trappers and fishermen. The twentieth century dawned on a Houma tribe occupying settlements from Mauvais Bois in the west to lower Bayou Lafourche in the east, all within a twenty-five mile radius of the central settlement at Point Barre.

With the twentieth century came first the academics (ethnologists, anthropologists, etc.), then Protestant missionaries, followed by land speculators, and finally the oil companies. The economic exploitation that would come to be defined as neo-colonialism was as much at home in South Louisiana as it was in post-colonial Africa and the Middle East. The second century of statehood would continue to see coastal Louisiana more

closely resemble the neo-colonial resource colony rather than an equal member of the United States.

This exploitation quickly established the earliest causes of coastal erosion. In an effort to enhance commerce and protect rich plantation lands along the lower reaches of Bayou Lafourche, the water was dammed at its source in 1904. This effectively shut off the natural land-building flow of sediment-laden fresh water that had replenished the swamps and marshlands for centuries. By the 1930s the exploration of oil had begun, and the industry began digging a massive network of canals into the south Louisiana coast to facilitate access for their drilling equipment.

The effect was predictable: the loss of fresh water and sediment along with the introduction of marsh-killing salt water which poured in from the Gulf through the access canals began to eat away at the fragile estuaries. Added to this toxic combination was the industry pulling billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of gas from beneath those same estuaries. This caused a level of subsidence that scientist have only recently begun to acknowledge. For the Houma, the result is the land beneath our feet literally washing away as the days go by.

We've lived in our coastal settlements for generations; most of our people still make their living as commercial fishermen. When the land speculators and oil drillers came to our lands, they found an indigenous population that was illiterate in English and uneducated in the ways of American society. Indeed, local governments had made a concerted effort to maintain that imbalance by refusing to allow Indian children to attend public school in the parishes of LaFourche and Terrebonne (home to the majority of the Houma people). A lawsuit and the Civil Rights movement finally opened the door to public education for the tribe, but it was not until 1964 that the first Houma student breached those barriers.

College educated leaders were generations away; with few rights and little resources, the effects of oil-fueled neo-colonialism were beyond the ability of the tribe to stop. It continues into the present and can be easily seen-- if anyone cares to look.

Coastal Louisiana provides nearly 30% of U.S. energy production and transports nearly 40% with its network of pipelines, transfer stations and refineries. A large portion of this infrastructure sits atop the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary, the estuarine system between the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River basins that has been the homeland of the Houma for centuries.

To begin calculating the price paid for this resource extraction, consider the nearly 500 square miles of land lost in this estuary alone in the last eighty years, an area of land comparable to New York City. With the loss of land comes increased vulnerability to the effects of tropical storms and hurricanes. Healthy marshlands that had once protected Houma settlements from storm surges are now gone and our people now exist on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. Storm centers that pass a hundred miles away can still bring catastrophic flooding. Since 2005 the Houma have been impacted by four major storms: Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike.

This situation also leaves portions of the oil industry exposed as well. In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Rita damaged pipelines and platforms and caused numerous spills totaling millions of gallons of oil. The industry claims the loss, collects their profits and rarely pays any compensation to the people of the land.

This was amply illustrated on April 20th, 2010, when the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig off the Louisiana coast initiated the largest oil spill in U.S. history.

BP'S WORLD

For those who take the time to look and examine carefully the words and actions of the U.S. Government and the oil industry during the heated days of the summer of 2010, the reality of "Colonial Louisiana" in the 21st century is easily seen and understood.

Louisiana politicians were in quite a dilemma in those days. With the effects of the BP spill multiplying by the minute and the population of the Gulf Coast becoming more desperate, state and local leaders were caught between opposing camps: they had to face up to the real needs of their constituency without alienating the largest source of campaign funding available to them.

If you lived outside of the region you may have had some difficulty understanding the scope of their problem. Most people in this country have a basic understanding of elected officials' responsibility to those they're tasked with representing. What's hidden from sight is the other side of the equation, the level of influence and control that big oil exerts on Louisiana's political structure. If we lived in an open and honest society, Louisiana politicians would be forced to decorate their clothing to the level of their corporate sponsorships. They'd look a lot like NASCAR drivers.

In the real world they go out of their way to disguise their financial motivators, which in turn gives us some interesting mental exercises and verbal acrobatics. Watching politicians who both opposed and defended big oil simultaneously was quite a show.

Consider the rhetoric of Michel Claudet, President of Terrebonne Parish. As the tentacles of oil slowly crept into the bayous below Houma, threatening the fishing grounds and settlements of the Houma People, his major focus seemed to be on the economic impact of the drilling ban proposed by the Obama administration. According to Claudet, commercial fishing accounted for only 20% of the parish economy, while oil and gas brought in 60%. In the press he was adamant about the economic benefits brought to the parish by big oil.

This of course was an interesting point of view expressed by an administration that filed suit against 29 oil companies in August of 2009. The suit alleged that the companies failed to report the ownership of tens of millions of dollars of property resulting in a loss of tax revenue to the parish. The parish is seeking the payment of delinquent taxes as well as penalties and interest accrued. The parish had also filed suit against BP for projected damages from the Deepwater Horizon spill. Any awards from the suit were slated to be split between the State Conservation Fund and the Terrebonne District Attorney's Office.

Despite the expressed appreciation of the oil economy, there seemed to exist a great degree of mistrust and animosity between the industry and local government.

On the state level we were subjected to an unending string of photo ops and press conferences by Governor Bobby Jindal. He had been from Venice to Grand Isle and back extolling his own ability to understand the severity of the problem and the Obama administration's ineptitude. From helping to deploy oil boom to operating an oil suction truck he endeavored to prove he was

a "hands-on" guy. Walking that same political tightrope, his sound bites were full of condemnation for Democratic opponents and light on real criticisms of big oil. Most of his venom was reserved for the proposed ban on offshore drilling.

On the federal level we witnessed a U.S. administration providing an amazing amount of cover to a "foreign" company, to the extent that Homeland security personnel were physically restricting press access to contaminated areas, not in the interest of U.S. security but because BP wanted to protect its public relations front.

As to the drilling moratorium, there was some truth to all of their economic arguments concerning the ban. It had a detrimental effect on employment in the local oil industry, but the story is not as simple as it was portrayed. The American Petroleum Institute (API) estimates that nearly 50,000 people are directly or indirectly employed by the offshore drilling industry on the Gulf Coast. U.S. Government figures were estimating that as many as 150,000 people nation-wide could be affected in some form by the proposed moratorium on offshore drilling. The other side of the argument was that the federal government wanted a six-month moratorium to determine if the industry was in compliance with current safety regulations in hopes of preventing another Deepwater Horizon-type accident.

Under the surface of this supposed conflict between government and industry lies the reality of neo-colonialism in the heart of Houma Indian territory for almost a century.

As in all poor and indigenous communities dealing with economic exploitation, the magic cure for everything is money and jobs. Living amidst a depleted ecosystem, we are cautioned to value the employment the oil industry brings. Politicians like Claudet, Jindal and others, both Democrat and Republican, extol the economic benefits the state enjoys from big oil.

We must understand that to the neo-colonial politics of big oil we are pawns, a tool in their efforts to control government influence of corporate finance. Every attempt made by government to control the industry is met by the same response: it will cost jobs and raise fuel costs. The moratorium was a perfect example of this principle; though it affected only a fraction of the activity in the Gulf, there was disproportionate layoff of personnel and raising of gas prices. The layoffs, of course, were not of people employed directly by Exxon, BP, Shell, etc. but primarily of support industries-- lower-paying jobs, for the most part. This is not to say that there was no real economic downside to the moratorium, but rather that the industry did its best to magnify the effect for political gain and cover its real neo-colonial relationship to coastal Louisiana. So, for the families dependent on a job at the fuel dock or in a fabrication yard, their financial stability could fail because of an ongoing power struggle between Washington, Wall Street and the Energy Corporation boardrooms.

A year after the spill corporate profits were in the stratosphere and the propaganda machine was telling the world that the oil is gone: a neo-colonial economic happy ending. For the Gulf Coast and the Houma communities the reality is, of course, not so neat and tidy.

THE ENDGAME

For the Houma People this is more than just an academic exercise or a political critique: this is a sober assessment on where we are as a people and what this century has in store for us.

We have survived three centuries of colonization and we still exist as an indigenous community despite all that we have endured. I have the greatest confidence in the strength and tenacity of Houma People, which fuels my hope for the future. But to face that future we have to acknowl-



edge the harsh realities of the present so that we may clearly see the path ahead. We must face the consequences of neo-colonialism and understand what it has done to our homes, our families, our communities, our homeland, our tribe.

After decades of oil exploration and production, the 3rd Congressional District, in which all of the major Houma settlements reside, ranked 403rd out of 436 U.S. Congressional districts according to the Human Development Index. This is not the American dream, but the colonial reality. It would seem that for all of the billions of dollars extracted from the land, there is not much trickling back down to the people of the land.

As the resources continue to be consumed, the land is leaving with them, washing away at an ever-increasing rate. A couple of years ago a coastal scientist drew a horizontal red line across South Louisiana and proclaimed that if the economic and political will could not be summoned to tackle the problem of coastal erosion, everything south of that line was in danger of disappearing in the coming decade. This statement drove deep into the heart of the Houma People; every major Houma community is below that red line.

What about the industry at the center of the coastal erosion controversy? Has the BP spill and the drilling moratorium it inspired shown it in a more critical light or highlighted its responsibility to the land and people? If we look to the recent past there is little to inspire hope. Less than four percent of the oil and gas permits issued require the companies to perform any mitigation to offset

the damages caused by their activities. Between 2005 and 2009, some 4,500 permits were applied for and not a single one was declined-- indeed over one hundred were issued after the fact. Neo-colonial resource extraction continues unabated.

For the Houma who continue to live in the traditional communities, existence becomes more and more difficult. The penalties for coastal erosion are not allocated to the industries that bear most of the responsibility, but rather to the people of the coast who can little afford to pay them. They come in the form of skyrocketing insurance rates and the inability to get financing for a new home or the cost of elevating an existing home, all of which continue to rise above the means of a Houma fishing family. Though the Houma have done nothing to cause the ecological devastation that surrounds them, and have not profited from it, they must continually absorb its costs.

Houma communities are edging towards extinction as businesses leave and local governments transfer resources north, effectively abandoning the Houma families. Between 2000 and 2010 the town of Dulac, which has the largest concentration of Houma people, lost 40% of its population. Houma fishermen contend with ever-decreasing prices for their catch and ever-increasing cost for fuel and supplies. Added to this are the lingering effects of the BP spill and the unknown long-term damage the five million barrels of oil released into the Gulf has had and will have on the already fragile coastal estuaries that are the foundation of the Houma life-ways.

The parameters of the Houma situation have a closer resemblance to the predicaments faced by the Indigenous Peoples of the Nigerian delta or the Ecuadorean Amazon than to those on the list of tribes seeking federal recognition from the U.S. Government.

The answers for the Houma will be found when they begin to acknowledge this common ground with international indigenous struggles and stop looking for salvation from the potential largesse of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

After two centuries of living within the borders of the American state of Louisiana, we are still on the outside looking in. The Houma exist today in the same state of federal non-recognition that we were assigned in the early years of the nineteenth century. My people would do well to heed the admonition of the great anti-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon:

“He who is reluctant to recognize me is against me.”

T. Mayheart Dardar was born in the Houma Indian settlement below Golden Meadow, Louisiana and served for sixteen years on the United Houma Nation Tribal Council, retiring in Oct. 2009. Dardar currently works with Bayou Healers, a community based group advocating for the needs of coastal indigenous communities in south Louisiana: <http://www.bayouhealers.org>

MADE WRONG, MADE WRONGER

By: Pauline M. Alvar

Only \$5 billion of the \$20 billion “set aside” for victims of the BP oil disaster has been paid out, news met with enthusiasm by shareholders when announced in the summer of 2011. Thousands of claims, including from some of those hardest hit, have been denied, and BP has not paid ONE health-related claim, despite the ongoing health issues of coastal residents, clean-up workers, volunteers, and fisherfolk exposed to the dispersants and oil.

New Orleans-based Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (ehumanrights.org) released a report illustrating the divergent approaches Oil Spill Compensation Czar Kenneth Feinberg used towards oil spill illness claims vs. claims for the 9/11 Victim’s Compensation Fund, which he also managed. The 9/11 Fund required the claimant only prove s/he was in the “vicinity where harmful chemicals were present and had a medically



diagnosed illness or disability.” Why a different standard for Gulf Coast oil disaster victims? In October 2011, Waterkeeper Alliance (waterkeeper.org) released a report illustrating that the spill’s environmental impact will persist for decades, as three-quarters of it still lingers on the Gulf floor. In the same month, BP received the green light to drill four new exploratory wells 200

miles off Louisiana’s coast. Of course BP is “in compliance with the heightened standards that all deepwater activities must meet,” but assurances from a government that cannot enforce even the weakest safety and environmental standards is little comfort, especially when politicians aren’t willing to increase the cap on oil companies’ liability in the event of a spill. It’s no coincidence that politicians on both sides of the aisle are cozy with and receive large campaign contributions from the oil industry.

Paying every claim, providing care to all people sickened by exposure, and cleaning up the Gulf’s fragile ecosystem would be a good start... but would it be enough? BP has no intention of making it right; there is no way any oil company could possibly “make right” the massive and complex system of exploitation our region has endured.

BUILDING SOLIDARITY AT DUNCAN PLAZA

By: R. Shoalgrass



It was early Saturday morning the first week of the New Orleans occupation. It was the first morning we had hot coffee at the camp. I was sipping on a cup and having an awkward half-awake chat with my new crush who I met after the first General Assembly when I heard the security report from the night before. "There was a guy masturbating on another guy while he was sleeping." Hearing of an assault at the camp was heart-breaking enough, but added to that was the discomfort I felt hearing the emphasis that was placed on "another guy."

The morning meeting started and when the issue of the assault came up, I spoke up and mentioned that whenever there is a male-on-male assault I become concerned about the reaction being framed in a homophobic way, and how that would affect my and other queer people's comfort in the space. I looked up, and the man who worked security, the one who put the emphasis on "another guy", was twinkling his fingers in agreement with me. After the meeting he came over and apologized for the way he spoke, introduced himself, told me how much he was learning at the occupation, how it was all very new to him. He spoke with a radical humility, with all defensiveness and ego dropped, and then he gave me a hug.

Hugging another man is pretty much against the rules of our hetero-centric, homophobic society. Hugging a gay man is completely against the rules. By listening, by being self-critical, by

expressing a desire to grow, this man stood up against homophobia and patriarchy.

A problem some people have with the occupation is that there isn't enough action. "The point isn't to camp in a park," is one common complaint. While I also am excited to see this movement take bolder steps in confronting systems of power, capital, and inequality, I know that a prerequisite for that is Solidarity. Solidarity is the knowledge that the people we are with have each others' backs, not just against a police line, but at

in public space with strangers forces us to work harder at finding and building solidarity.

When the 99% leave their homes to unite around what makes us the same, we will find there are deep and glaring differences. For instance, one tension that's arisen at the occupation is the difference between people who have homes to go back to and those who have lived on the streets and in the parks of the city for some time. This latter community has boldly and bravely asserted their humanity to others in the space, creating

"WHEN THE 99% LEAVE THEIR HOMES TO UNITE AROUND WHAT MAKES US THE SAME, WE WILL FIND THERE ARE DEEP AND GLARING DIFFERENCES."

work, at a picnic, on the street corner, and over morning coffee. Solidarity is the antithesis of the alienated life handed to us in late-capitalist society. It is the antithesis of walking by people on the street and never stopping to find out about their lives and struggles and joys. It is the antithesis of politely and quietly ignoring acts of oppression so as not to make a scene-- whether those acts are physical, verbal, sexual, symbolic, or otherwise. The occupation has been noticeably different to me from other activist work in that attempting to live, eat, discuss strategy, shit, work, and relax

conversations around class that many of the more privileged young people in the park have never had before. The solidarity built between me and this other man started with an acknowledgement of different experiences. This process, however slow, is a quiet but unequivocally important step in the right direction, and for that reason I urge all people with a desire to see change to celebrate slowness; it is absolutely necessary for thoughtfulness. This slow thoughtful building of solidarity is, in fact, a building block of revolution.

PENSACOLA WILL BE OURS

By: landon brooks

Dr. King stares down park where we have gathered
from a place non high
with flowers draped around his neck.
A statue, commodified and left to sit, forever still.

Occupation day 9, full of lust and confusion and coffee.
There is talk of "revolution", but very little
to atone for such big words.
Some seek to have us all continue
begging the apparatus to behave.

As if we don't tire from begging,
looking up to our masters with blood in our eyes,
a fire in our palms.
Somedays i feel the sidewalks under my feet,
the wind on my face and the burning hate for all this
surrounding me and suffocating me.

City hall is not reserved for us.
This system is not in place to benefit us.
It holds us all like a jealous father.

I have scraped my knees against my irresponsibility
and come clean with everything.
Naked with conviction, defiance, caffeine.

Two weeks ago I walked away
from a job and a lease and an entire way of living
that had me in shambles.
Today i wake up and walk here to this park,
where we have liberated this space.
Capital moans and groans with childish fear.

Here, when the sun goes down,
enthusiastic youth march through downtown streets
tearing their throats apart screaming,
feeling all this hope.

Yet, the spectre of pacified reform is haunting:
some pathetic spirit made of dust,
talking pretty to politicians.
My heart is full of rage and piss.

I am weary of talk, small, petty talk. A fuckin' rabble.
We need sidewalks not overtaken by workday feet,
but empty
because we're all in the streets.

Pensacola is ours.

1 By: Devin

MY revolution begins at home--
behind closed doors &
within these four walls,
i fight the ghosts that haunt my dreams;
wake up in cold sweat,
and the smoke from my sage
devours these demons,
temporarily...

...even just long enough
to graze this painted wood floor with my toes.
smoke rising,
my anchors pulling me closer to the ground.

these walls, i recognize,
are a privilege--
but who are you to tell me what i should be doing?

my revolution begins at home,
now that i've got one--
not among a blur of mostly white faces,
speaking in imperialist tongue,
asleep in tents in a park
i had no choice but to sleep in when i was young.

and you might call me cynical,
talk about how i've "given up"....
but my reply will always be
that i stopped trying to feed myself on idealism
when i remembered how it felt to be HUNGRY.

NOTES FROM TAMPA

By: Daiquiri

I shook in the rain as the cops arrested three
friends of mine for false charges, the same day
I was arrested for what I see as illegitimate rea-
sons. They take our belongings, break our tables,
wake us up at six in the morning, and still most
of the mainstream media paints us as criminals.

We have been harassed and yelled at, sunbeaten
and many of us overburdened. We prepare for
the bigger confrontations as we stand in solidar-
ity with New York, Oakland, and many others.
We receive a lot of support and applause, and i
have met courageous and inexhaustably interest-
ing people. Days have never been this slow or so
strong. If you can't come out, spread the word,
find someone who can.
All Night, All Day, Occupy Tampa Bay!

OCCUPY? WALL ST.?

By: John Clark

When Occupy Wall St. burst unexpected on the scene a mere month ago, many (and especially many in the mainstream media) had no idea what to make of it and treated it as an incoherent outburst. We need to consider why this phenomenon was so perplexing to some, while so inspiring to many others. We need to see that the Occupy Movement does have a deep significance, yet we also need to be careful not to attempt to pin down its meaning too rigidly at this early point in its development.

It is crucial to understand that “Occupy Wall St.” is a floating signifier. This means that although it may have a common core of meaning for many, it also means many different things to many different people. There is simply no way to pin down what it “really means.” What it really means is everything it is, and everything it will become. Its various meanings at this stage of its evolution sometimes overlap and sometimes conflict.

This ambiguity should not be surprising. The most firmly-established political signifiers (Freedom, Justice, Democracy, etc.) have widely divergent meanings and have long been a battleground for contending factions, and signifiers for new social tendencies that spread rapidly through society are always immediately claimed and contested by diverse currents. This is what occurred with “the Movement” in the 60’s. It happened again with the various post-USSR “Color Revolutions,” and it is being repeated with “Occupy Wall St.” now.

It is also not surprising that when Occupy Wall St. emerged, established political forces and mainstream media had no idea of what to make of it. These conservative apparatuses specialize in containing divergent forces and reintegrating them into the established universe of discourse. Thus, the dominant media were unanimous in proclaiming that the Occupation Movement (if, indeed, it even was a movement!) was unclear, and even hopelessly confused, about its goals. One heard over and over, “What do they want?” “What’s their point?” “What are their demands?”

The problem wasn’t that Occupy Wall St. wasn’t making coherent demands, but that it was speaking a language these media were incapable of understanding. The problem wasn’t that Occupy Wall St. had no goals, but that its goals exceeded these media’s impoverished conception of the meaning of a goal. The response of the mainstream media, in all its usual brilliance and eloquence, came down basically to “OWS? WTF!”

Compare this to the typical response of these media to reactionary demands-- the most incoherent

statements are accepted as crystal clear. When the forces behind the most powerful technocratic state in the history of the world, the forces that continue to expand a huge global military-industrial apparatus, say “we want smaller government,” this is never questioned. The absurdity is merely passed on to the public. The right-wing is in favor of minimalistic global domination. They like very tiny totalitarian power. No problem there.

No one from Fox News to the New York Times will suggest that there might be even some minute little contradiction in such monumental absurdities. But when the Occupation Movement says that it wants to destroy political and economic domination by the corporate elite, or that it wants to create participatory democracy, the media establishment is completely confused. What do they want? Why don’t they have any real demands? Will they ever figure out what they’re trying to do?

On October 14 NPR interviewed Eduardo Martinez, a senior at Florida International University, about the ideas of the Occupation Movement. He said, “We wholly embrace the notion of horizontal systems of democratic government, not vertical systems of hierarchical domination.” This statement is clear, well-formulated, and radically critical of the established system. However, the NPR reporter helpfully transformed it into something vague, innocuous, and (let’s be honest) stupid, for the benefit of NPR’s presumably gullible audience. He said: “translation: average Americans, not Wall Street and the banking industry, need to be heard now.”

Note that the reporter admits explicitly that he is translating this perfectly clear and coherent statement for NPR’s listeners, who are presumed to be too politically-challenged to understand the original. According to the translation, it’s all about being heard, about “speaking truth to power” for the millionth time, rather than about smashing that illegitimate, hopelessly corrupt power and replacing it with a qualitatively different form of power. It should be noted that during the report, we can hear in the background protesters chanting “support education, not world domination” Yet, there is, of course, no mention of the issue of “world domination” by the dependable reporters of Nationalistic Puppet Radio.

But let’s get back to our floating signifier. In “Occupy Wall St.,” what does “Wall St.” signify? It signifies at least four overlapping things. First, for a significant number of activists in the movement, those with the most coherent analysis of

what “Wall St.” presupposes, it signifies the global capitalist system. They see it as an immoral and irrational system that imposes hierarchical power on humanity and exploits the labor of the vast majority to deliver disproportionate benefits to a small minority. They take note of significant facts: that it is capable of keeping over a billion people in absolute poverty in a world of abundance and affluence, and that it is in the process of pushing the biosphere toward ecological collapse, even while there exist the means to fulfill all our material needs in a sustainable manner.

For many other activists “Wall St.” signifies the global system of “corporate capitalism.” The target in this case is not capitalism in general, but the dominant form of economic organization in late capitalism. Many of these activists have not thought through the question of whether the ills of capitalism can be separated from its corporate forms, while others think explicitly that it can be reformed or kept under control if corporations can be tamed. The basic assumption of the anti-corporate faction is that the economic dominance of corporations must be ended. Anti-corporate activists often support cooperatives and small businesses as an alternative to large corporations. Their critique is formulated in terms of size and scale, centralization vs. decentralization, rather than as an analysis of capitalist exploitation of labor or appropriation of value.

A third group of activists means by “Wall St.” an economic oligarchy that dominates both the economy and the political system. The oligarchs are the very rich and the super-rich, the famous “one percent.” This group does not formulate its goal as the abolition of capitalism or even the dominant corporate form of capitalism, but rather as the overthrow of the power of the economic oligarchy and a reversal of the trend toward greater and greater concentration of wealth in its hands. The members of this faction support a democratized political system in which capitalism, including the existing form of corporate capitalism, can be controlled better so that it can operate within limits defined by the public good.

Finally, there is a smaller minority of activists who mean by “Wall St.” some particular devious or mysterious cause of economic crisis and decline. This diversified fringe of the movement projects on to our convenient floating signifier all its objects of hatred, resentment, paranoid fantasy and conspiracy theory. For Ron Paulite econocranks, it is the Federal Reserve Bank. For closet anti-Semites, it is the International Bankers. For diverse conspiracy theorists, it is the Bilderbergers, the Trilateral Commission, the Coun-

cil on Foreign Relations, or the Lizard People. What the fringe members share is that each has its own Great Satan, so that systemic understanding and critique of the capitalist economic system or the economic oligarchy is not necessary.

The future of the Occupation Movement lies in the interplay among the first three tendencies. The degree to which it will become a reformist, a radical, or a revolutionary movement depends on the balance between these perspectives, and the extent to which each can express itself in the thought and actions of the developing Movement. Those within the final category tire quickly of the Movement's interest in social and economic justice, and the vast majority of the Movement tires quickly of them.

A large part of the significance of the Occupation Movement, is that, in focusing on capitalism, corporate domination, and the economic oligarchy, it can help bring the issue of class back to its rightful position in oppositional politics. Over the past few decades, we have made huge advances in incorporating issues of patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, nationalism, imperialism, and the domination of nature into radical politics (though we are obviously far from solving any of these problems). We need to continue to develop our analysis and practice further in all of these areas, but we also need to return with much greater seriousness to the necessary moment of universality that is embodied in class politics. The Occupy Movement gives us an ideal opportunity to do so.

Capitalism is a system of domination in which the vast majority of humanity is exploited and disenfranchised for the sake of the power and wealth of a minority of humanity. Even in societies in which formal political democracy exists in some degraded form, the economic system is an open dictatorship. This system was classically called "the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie," a term that has mystified many. However, it is a very clear and coherent concept. It means simply that the great majority has no democratic voice concerning how we work and what we produce through our labor. It means that a small unelected minority dominates the economic system.

In other words, it means something that is blatantly obvious to anyone whose mind is not poisoned by ideology. It means that the economy is a dictatorship and you and I are not the dictators. The export of jobs under globalization and the decline of membership in labor organizations in general and radical unionism in particular have drastically reduced the ability of working people even to moderate the functioning of this dictatorial system. Thus, the revival of class politics becomes ever more relevant in late capitalism. The Occupation Movement, with its emphasis on "corporate greed," the dominance of "the 1%," and the evils of economic inequality, brings class analysis back into American politics to a degree that we have not seen perhaps since the 1930's.



We come next to the other half of our floating signifier. What does "Occupy" signify? Once again, it signifies many things to many occupiers. It is important to consider not only the things that this powerful concept already signifies, but also what it is beginning to signify and what it is capable of signifying.

"Occupy," above all, signifies a rejection of conventional American politics and the embracing of a new politics of direct action. It signifies a revolution of Do-It-Yourself politics, an affirmation of self-expression, self-determination, and self-management of social change. This does not mean the acceptance of the naïve cult of immediacy that pretends that there can be social action without any mediations and without any forms of representation. What it means is an explicit rejection of the destructive, disenfranchising, immobilizing forms of mediation and representation that that dominant system of power imposes on us. "Occupy" is a rejection of the reigning politics of resignation, reformism, and retreat.

The Occupation Movement is an affirmation of the possibility of the Social Act. It is a practical

refutation of the ideology of TINA, "there is no alternative." We know that there is an alternative because the Movement itself embodies that alternative and thus proves that it is possible. The Movement is a performative statement of its own ideals. It states the ideals in the form of beginning to put those ideals into action. The strongest argument for the possibility of a phenomenon is the actual existence of that phenomenon.

In its most visionary sense, the Occupation Movement is a reoccupation and liberation movement. It consists of the community taking back the territory, reoccupying that which has long been under occupation by the forces of domination. This is why "Occupy Albuquerque" just decided to rename itself "Unoccupy Albuquerque." This signifies a growing awareness that our land has been occupied, our communities have been occupied, our minds have been occupied, and our bodies have been occupied. They have been occupied by the state and capitalism and need to be liberated from that occupation. The promise of the Occupation Movement is that it will become a movement of reoccupation and liberation of our own lands and communities, our own sacred places, our own minds and bodies.

We cannot know how far the Occupation Movement will ultimately take us in this direction of collective liberation, but we do know that it is already a major liberatory advance in the political culture. Given the crushing force and addictive power of the dominant institutions, the dominant imaginary, the dominant ideology and the dominant ethos, the very fact that the ideas and practice of the Occupy Movement have exploded onto the scene in over a thousand places seems almost miraculous. It is an indication that unimagined liberatory processes have been going on beneath the surface of this occupied continent. It means that in a multitude of places scattered across the United States of Amnesia, people are beginning to remember how to think and to remember what life and human community are really about.

In a time of oppressive occupation, such as the Nazi occupations during World War II, certain truths become clear to everyone. One of these truths is that under a system of domination, all political perspectives (including a supposed "apolitical" one) reduce to forms of two basic orientations. Each person who lives under that system is either a collaborator or a resister. This is not to deny that some collaborators inadvertently do much to undermine the system, or that some resisters do much to reinforce it. Nevertheless, each person, whether through an act of choice or by default, adopts the standpoint of either resister or collaborator. Either one goes through a crisis of conscience in which she or he recognizes that the system of domination is intolerably evil and goes on to oppose it actively, or one remains, by decision or indecision, an agent of that system.

Abolish mental slavery! Occupy!

THE ELEPHANT OF COLOR IN THE ROOM

By: Ben Last

I've been involved with Occupy NOLA since several days before the first GA in Washington Park. I slept there every night of the first week on my weird Mexican poncho. Every step of the way I've enjoyed participating in a totally different effort from what I'm used to. It's brought all aspects of working to create an autonomous free society to one place. Rather than sneaking around with like-minded comrades, I've discussed my views and tactics with folks with all sorts of positions in broad daylight. Above all else, the experience has been enriching and, for the most part, inspiring. There has been a nagging worry in my head however: the issue of race is a huge elephant of color in the room.

I grew up an ambiguously brown kid in a white-as-a-sheet town in New England. I'm almost equally comfortable with white and black people; increasingly, I find this a rare position to be in. In our occupation there seemed to be a tension along race lines and a high resistance among both sides to address it. Some of the older black guys who had participated in the previous occupation of Duncan Plaza by the homeless told me secretly they didn't feel totally welcome in this more recent "occupation." Left unaddressed, I believe this issue may be the key to Occupy NOLA's failure.

In reaction I helped in the formation of a "people of color" caucus. That group, along with a much larger Anti-Racist Action Committee, proceeded to discuss the nature of tyranny baked into the system that runs our city and nation with a focus on racism, how these dynamics manifest themselves in Occupy NOLA, and how best to work past them. All over the country virtually every occupation contains groups with the same intentions.

Several folks, however, some of them black, felt these were unnecessary or superfluous in our occupation. One woman accused me of trying to segregate the occupation. All over the country and here in NOLA the occupy movement has been actively critiquing our economy and the way we're governed. However, the attitude around the camp seems to suggest

that institutional racism in and outside of the occupied area is either irrelevant, non-existent, or will simply fix itself. This is apparent by the lack of contact with long-time community organizations and individual organizers in the days leading up to the first march here in New Orleans. Since day one there has been little to no input sought or presented from these same key allies. Beyond mere representation, I think that Occupy NOLA can only become a locus for a revolution against tyranny if all constituencies of our city combine their efforts here; until that happens, we will fail to make a difference.

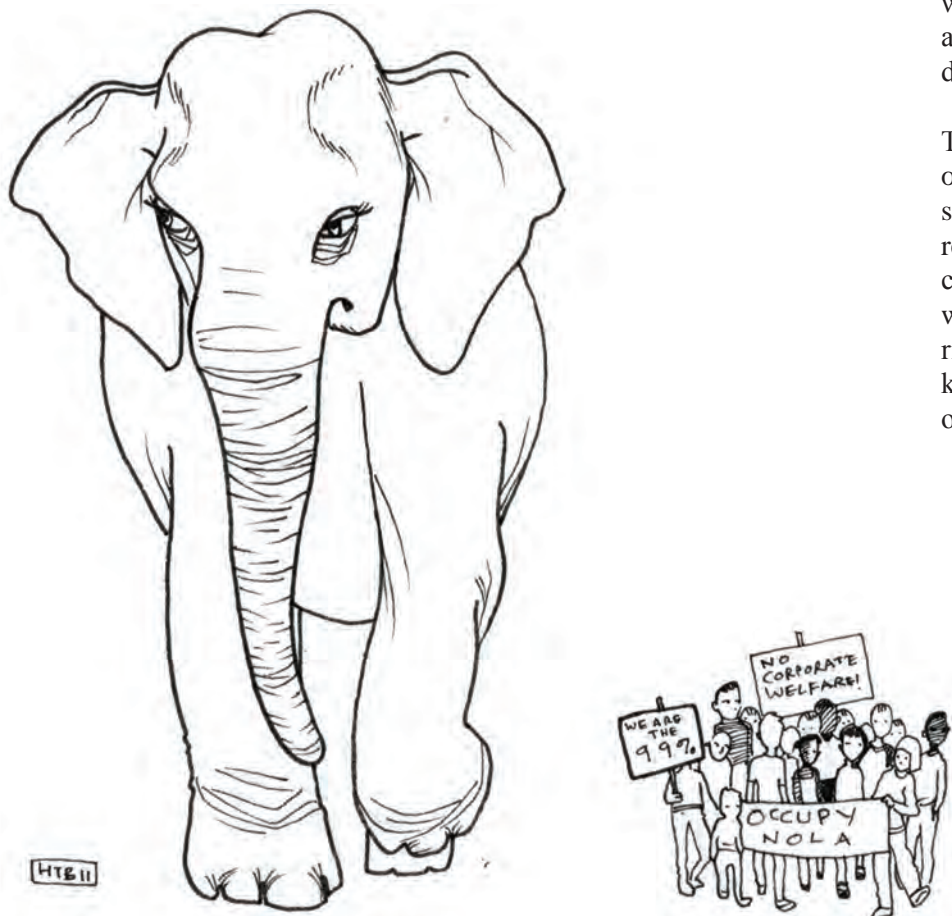
"FOR ME THIS RESEMBLES REVOLUTION, BUT FOR OTHERS IT MAY RESEMBLE SKID ROW."

Like all relationships, our interactions between race on the individual and community levels are heavily prescribed. Stereotypes are either taught or gleaned through a individualistic, fearful lens placed on us by our capitalist, top-down, sexist, racist system. In trying to create a truly free society with its equivalent individual relationships we should not forget the baggage we bring in. This is true equally for concepts and actions we deem positive, negative, or neutral. It's important we disregard irrational fear of the unknown, but also that we be open to the idea that the image and logistics of liberation are different along color lines. To put it simply, many people may not feel a freedom in sleeping on the ground, eating outside from pots, and painting declarations on cardboard. For me this resembles revolution, but for others it may resemble skid row.

So our space at present doesn't feel totally inclusive or welcoming. I would not suggest that this majority-white occupation try to anticipate what attracts people of color. A quick recall of UPN in the 1990s will show the inevitable insulting calamity that kind of thinking brings. There are some things we can do to the space to make it seem more welcoming, however, and we should also welcome people to fully participate and share their views even if they don't wish to sleep in the park. In a society, people should be allowed to participate as best they can, without risk of being called out as not really being "totally down with the movement."

The key to the total smashing of an alienating environment rests in successful outreach coupled with keen self-awareness. Thus far our collective attitude seems to be that the onus rests on individuals to get involved, but we have to recognize that we are not viable without the rest of the 99%. For people of color all over the country and all over this city the issue of systematic racism, which encompasses inequalities around housing, education, wages, workers' rights, judicial practices, prisons, medical treatment and nutrition, remains a key demon to be cut down. Our negligence in recognizing that has held back our movement from resonating with the majority of New Orleans' inhabitants.

How do we move forward, given what I have said? The good news is that a lot of work is being done currently by several working committees, including Anti-Racist Action. This work should be supported. We must work to be a strong and reliable ally. We must extend our hand as comrades and never presume to tell hard-struggling peoples how to fight; they already know. As individuals we have to go about the business of evaluating our own prejudice, where it comes from, and how it limits our ability to wage change. This issue speaks to a problem within our movement and should always be kept in mind as we go forward towards a free and truly democratic society.







MURAL ON PIETY ST. AT CHARTRES, NEW ORLEANS

FEMA TRAILERS- A DEADLY LEGACY

By: Matt W Robinson

Since Hurricane Andrew hit North Carolina in 1992, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has relied on portable housing units to provide temporary shelter for survivors of natural catastrophe. As recently as 2008, when Hurricanes Ike and Gustav pummeled the Texas and Louisiana coasts, FEMA deployed thousands of temporary housing units (THUs), manufactured structures designed for short-term occupancy, to assist displaced populations in their return home.

Most infamously, FEMA also relied on manufactured housing after the record-breaking storm season of 2005. To provide shelter to tens of thousands of displaced families, FEMA cobbled together a fleet of 150,000 mobile homes, park-model “Katrina Cottages,” and travel trailers, commercial campers designed for use off-the-grid. The units were sent throughout the region.

Thousands of mobile homes were never used, though, due to federal flood-plain regulations, and the Katrina Cottage program was slow to get off the ground, so the bulk of THUs provided for the 2005 housing mission were travel trailers, bought off dealer lots at first but later built to FEMA specifications under manufacturer contracts.

Almost as soon as the shelters reached disaster zones the trailers became a public health nightmare and a threat to the very occupants the program was meant to serve. Children in the trailers began to suffer an odd array of symptoms, from headaches to nosebleeds, and allergies developed in children and adults alike to household and dietary products that had never been a problem before. Hair spray, disinfectant, processed foods, food with red-dye coloration, and a host of other innocuous things suddenly triggered allergic reactions among families seeking refuge in the trailers. As reports of sick families mounted, FEMA field agents tried to assess the problem and, largely due to the work of the Mississippi Sierra Club, formaldehyde was identified as the likely source of illness.

Added to this was the frightening number of fires and explosions that destroyed the units and

injured or killed occupants. In the first two years of trailer use, scarcely a month passed without one or two electrical fires or propane-related explosions somewhere along the Gulf Coast, causing injury or death, destroying whatever property had been salvaged from the storms, and bringing even more grief to survivors.

FEMA’s response to these problems was first to deny the problem of formaldehyde exposure by ordering field agents to cease their efforts to get to the bottom of the developing crisis. Second, the agency attempted to bureaucratically disown the situation through a year and a half of foot-dragging. When the toxic exposure continued to be reported, the agency ordered a study of indoor air quality-- at the behest of an outraged Congressional committee that revealed FEMA’s duplicity in the matter through internal emails. When released, the study was roundly criticized by an array of doctors and scientists who questioned its sloppy methodologies and the conclusions it drew.

Further studies confirmed elevated levels of formaldehyde fumes found in almost every type of trailer. Ultimately, a series of lawsuits against manufacturers was resolved mostly in the manufacturers’ favor, despite well-documented evidence of the dangers occupants faced. Explosions and fires caused by a combination of occupant unfamiliarity with the units and poor-to-no maintenance of the leaky structures continued into 2008. Investigators found evidence of faulty installations and improper servicing of the units. Specialized electric wiring and propane systems

were often overlooked by contractors with little to no experience in travel trailer upkeep. Initially, four major engineering firms – the Shaw Group, Fluor, CH2MHill, and Bechtel – were tasked with the installation and maintenance of the trailers, but when smaller local businesses loudly complained about the no-bid contracting process, FEMA relented and handed out contracts to three dozen small businesses.

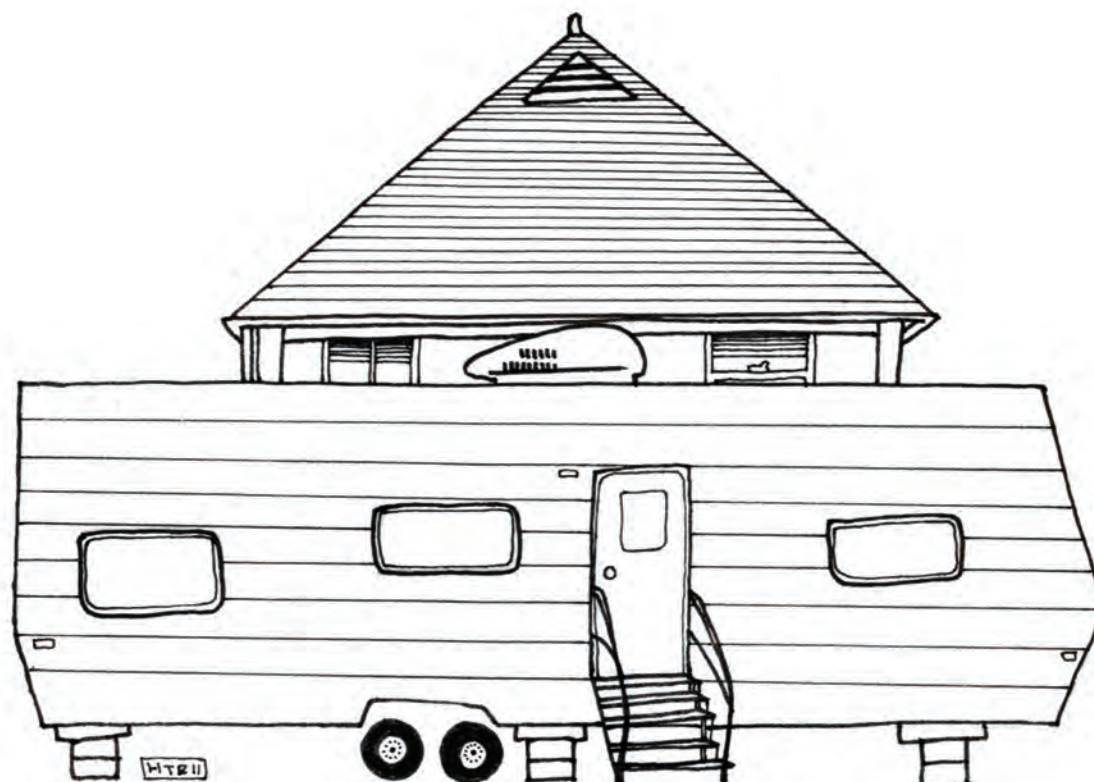
Not all were equal to the task. Politically connected companies, including one owned by Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour’s niece, received contracts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars despite their lack of expertise, as did janitorial service providers, a roofing repair company, an accounting firm, and even a scuba-diving business. The results were seen in plumes of smoke and the charred remains of the boxy units that littered neighborhoods of New Orleans and many other places from Texas to Florida. Several of these companies have been investigated and found guilty of fraud in their actions. More trials are yet to come.

FEMA would argue today that the agency learned from its mistakes in the 2005 recovery. Limits on formaldehyde levels were put in place, and now all units approved for use have, theoretically at least, levels of the chemical not thought to pose a threat to occupant health.

FEMA also banned the use of propane in its THUs, and demanded that electric systems be upgraded to household current, rather than using 12-volt battery systems traditionally installed

for off-the-grid use. Units issued for emergency housing in recent years are largely designed for handicap-accessibility, and are the larger park-model type trailers rather than the notoriously cramped travel trailers.

FEMA’s contracting procedures for emergency housing have improved since 2005, but the agency hasn’t had to meet the same scale of challenges since. The hundreds of thousands of Americans at risk in dozens of vulnerable cities across the country can only hope that these lessons of the past have been taken to heart.



"IF I CAN'T KEEP MY WHITE MALE PRIVILEGE..."

By: Mona Landsberg

"If I can't keep my white male privilege, I don't want to be part of your revolution."

Sleepaway camp suucked, y'all. Must be all the hormones, that pesky uterus of mine whispering mean somethings in my ear: "These fuckers would rather ejaculate on the steps of the federal reserve..."

And all the other ladies who felt unsafe, silenced? Our menstrual flows must have synched up, because certainly no person in their rational mind would turn away from Duncan Plaza as it stood, filled with drunk, shirtless men bursting at the seams with The Right Answer.

The right answer seemed to be verbal attacks on banks, congress, dysfunctional schools-- caricatures that represent oppressive power to the mainstream. But when a woman points out a strange power dynamic that plays out in her conversation with a man in camp and asks him to check himself, the defensiveness sets in. And sometimes, as took place at a specific General Assembly, a woman's got to yell in order to be heard. With what quickness the confrontation became two-sided in the eyes of the campers! "She shouldn't have yelled at him, we agreed this was a non-violent space." Well, then. It is too convenient that this space, a space in which a sexual assault or harassment is actually viewed as commonplace, should suddenly become vehemently defended in terms of non-violence the moment that ladies start yelling.

Over the years, various men have taken "my best interest" on as their area of expertise. There is nothing less surprising to me than a group of menfolk who fancy themselves the gatekeepers to the land of revolution also taking on the

hefty responsibility of, um...which bills may be posted to said gate. Post no bills that reference race or gender, please!

They are intimidated, you must understand. Be sensitive. You are asking that they let go of their power and that frightens them. Be kind. Remember ladies, make revolution with a smile. The cuter the revolution the better. (Please google Hot Chicks of Occupy Wallstreet)

"I'm just worried that you may be pushing away the people who are really on your side." This warning from an "ally" after I defected, alienating him with my anger. My side?

How can I describe my side without you thinking I'm running away, tampon tucked between my legs?

I _____(name) don't give a shit about the federal reserve.

Stuff I think would make a real revolution possible: stop raping people.

My side? I want to stand with you! And no, no one delegated secretarial tasks to the ladies, but when our problems are not viewed as primary, then here we are again, like in every lefty movement, playing a supporting role. Please understand that your economic status, your debt, your level of unemployment don't mean shit to me when my best friend was hog-tied and raped at gunpoint by three masked men in her own home. I'm not trying to be dramatic, this is real life for women every day. Show me that this scares you as much as it scares me. Then we can chill together and plot the decline, etc.



TAHRIR HERE

By: Joseph R. Jones

The following selections are excerpted from a longer essay, "Fighting Together and Going it Alone," which can be read in its entirety at <http://ragingpelican.com>

As the Occupy movement kicked off on the Gulf Coast, I visited Jackson, MS and New Orleans, LA, as well as the planning meetings in my hometown of Biloxi, MS. I received regular communications from an affinity group in Pensacola, FL, and browsed the Internet for reports of activity elsewhere. Everywhere I went there seemed to be a divide between professional activists and experienced radicals on what should and shouldn't be the strategy, tactics, and final goals of the movement, with the minds of the previously apolitical attendants hanging in the balance.

In our lives there are two differing conceptions of democracy, both of which can be seen in every Occupy group across the United States. In one conception, a small group of people claims to know what is best everyone, and attempts to set the boundaries of debate and action around the goals that its small cadre has pre-decided. They will attempt to depict themselves as reasonable or moderate, and paint others as being immature, irresponsible, unreasonable, or too impatient. Completely ignored by these small cadres is the idea that they conceived the objectives and rules of what is supposed to be a democratic movement without consulting any of the movement's other participants. Once that small group has established its rules, the rules are beyond question, and they set up an apparatus of enforcement to ensure that it is so. This method of democracy is similar to the one that governs our daily lives: a ruling elite sets the rules, and if the rest of us expect to participate, we must abide by them. Otherwise, we are "irresponsible, immature, unreasonable, or impatient," and as a consequence are jailed, shamed, or removed from the vicinity of the "reasonable" and "responsible" minority.

In another conception of democracy, that supposedly being represented by the Occupy Movement, everyone in a given community gathers together to decide as a large group what their desires are and how to achieve them. They do away with the conventional wisdom of normal protest tactics and civil society, thinking not of what is "realistic," but what we want and how to get to it. All rules made by these groups are subject to constant scrutiny and revision, while others are allowed to act and participate outside of the established framework. Not only does this do away with the tyranny of minority rule by allowing groups and individuals participating in the greater assembly to act on their own ideas and power, but an apparatus of enforcement becomes unnecessary because the decisions of the group are arrived at through a process of negotiation that leaves everyone content to abide by the rules that they themselves created.

THE STARTING PLACE OF MINORITY CONTROL- THE CALL TO ACTION

Typically an occupation is initially called for by a small cadre of individuals. Many of these cadres are composed of professional activists, and many take it upon themselves to pre-emptively declare that the protest will be non-violent and will remain respectful towards police officers. These organizers closely define the boundaries of what the occupation will be about and constantly encourage everyone on the camp site to "stick to the issues at hand." In many cities, these initial organizers have also tightly retained non-democratic control of their city's Occupy-related Facebook and Twitter accounts, ensuring only their narrow message is heard and others' voices can be silenced. By taking this approach to organization, these cadres ensure that the energy of the protest remains fully under their rules and control. The democratic principles they are supposedly protesting in favor of are almost completely forgotten.

Nowhere are the long term effects of this approach clearer than in the Occupy Denver encampment. The Occupy Denver encampment was called for by a

small group who then pressured those in attendance to stay on the sidewalk during marches, not be rude to police officers, and not break any laws during marches. Having those principles is fine, but they tried to force the entire encampment to abide by them, going to so far as to use a megaphone to point out those breaking their rules and accuse them of being agents provocateurs.

Three weeks into their occupation, on October 13th, it was made clear to the occupants of the park that the police were being sent to remove them. The initial cadre and their reformist partners were inclined to stay within the perimeter of the law and remove all of the things they had spent three weeks building with the more radical members of the occupation.

The majority of Occupy Denver's group on the ground wanted to stay, but a few of the initial cadre of organizers insisted that this would force the police to get violent. To those initial organizers, not following laws was violent (or at least not nonviolent). The point made by the other occupiers was that there's nothing violent about civil disobedience. They explained that everyone has a right to be on this land, that the group calls itself an occupation, and there was a need to stay and fight for Occupy Denver's structures. Fearmongers stood up and warned participants they were certain to face time in prison, huge fines, and a record that would follow them around for their entire lives. Some responded by explaining that each person has a choice and that no one would need to stay if she or he didn't want to, but that those who chose to stay should know the consequences.

In the end, the police stormed the park, tearing down sixty tents and making twenty-four arrests. The initial cadre that organized Occupy Denver was nowhere to be seen during the arrests or the legal process that followed; the Denver Anarchist Black Cross was the organization that came to the defense of the protesters. The rebuilt encampment is now divided between those who would obey the law at all times, no matter what the consequences, and those who will break it in order to defend the principles that they stand for. This has left the movement in danger of a major split on a local level. If the groups who make the initial calls to action are unwilling or unable to allow others in the occupation to decide the rules and conditions of occupations, then they should be similarly prepared to face opposition to their anti-democratic decision-making process by those who wish for more than what they offer.

PERMITS AND PACIFISM- A FALSE HISTORY

Another disturbing trend in the movement thus far has been the tendency of those in the movement to insist upon getting permits for occupations and marches, and to insist that everyone within the Occupy Movement remain law-abiding. This is particularly troubling because the initial call to action cited the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt as its inspiration. The occupation of Tahrir Square was not only illegal, it forcibly resisted all attempts at eviction. The story of the revolution in Egypt has long since been whitewashed by the corporate media as being "non-violent." However, the facts and footage of the day fly in the face of this false historical reporting.

One particularly interesting piece of evidence is a protest pamphlet that was distributed in Egypt during the uprising entitled "How to Protest Intelligently." This pamphlet asked for protesters to bring a hoodie (to protect themselves from pepper spray and tear gas), a scarf (to block tear gas from entering passageways), insulated gloves (for throwing back tear gas canisters), goggles (for preventing the entry of pepper spray and tear gas into the eyes of protesters), the lid of a steel pot (for protection against rubber bullets), a pair of good running shoes, and a can of spray paint to be sprayed over the visors of riot police in order to take them out of the fight. Protesters were also asked to carry a rose, to symbolize that they wished to accomplish their goals as peacefully as possible. All of these tools were necessary because the Egyptian government tried to end the occupations of public space with use of overwhelming force. If Tahrir Square is truly

the inspiration behind these occupations, then why are occupiers asking for permits and accepting arrest with a calm, peaceful demeanor?

The effectiveness and purpose of permitted, law-abiding protests and lobbying can most easily be demonstrated by the Anti-War Movement in the United States from 2003-2006. Liberal march organizers forbade illegal action including unpermitted marches and civil disobedience in this movement, keeping complete control of the movement from its birth to its death, even going so far as to call the police on radicals who were planning illegal actions. On February 13, 2003, they turned out in record numbers for protests worldwide, with millions marching against the Iraq war in major cities around the globe. They continued this trend of marching, sign holding, and lobbying for politicians through to the Congressional elections of 2006. The Democrats ran on a strong anti-war platform, taking advantage of discontent with the war to take control of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Once elected, however, the Democrats immediately fell back into pro-war sentiment. All funding cuts and troop withdrawals were opposed as unpatriotic, because they put the troops that were still occupying Iraq in more danger.

The United States must be strong, the war hawks said, because we could invite more terrorist attacks with a policy of appeasement. Soon the Democrats fell in, saying that war in Iraq was necessary to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States. Three years of effort by the movement was lost as both parties refused to hear anti-war sentiments as realistic. The war has continued to the modern day, with declarations that the troops will soon withdraw. What



has not been as widely reported is that five thousand soldiers are necessary indefinitely to defend the new U.S. embassy in Iraq. There are still talks of permanent military bases in country, and numbers of private mercenaries involved in the conflict are steadily increasing as U.S. troops withdraw. On top of this, the State Department's security detail now includes hundreds of soldiers as well as tanks and black hawk helicopters. The war goes on under a new name, and the U.S. population is pacified with the television image of troop withdrawal.

Asking for a permit for an occupation poses other serious problems. The first is that a permit may allow for the space to be occupied for a certain period of time, but inevitably the permit will expire, leaving the occupation vulnerable to a legally sanctioned police attack. You cannot get a permit to occupy indefinitely. If you decide to reapply for a permit on a regular basis, then your occupation will be vulnerable every time the window between permits opens. If there is no window between permits, then your permit can still be denied based on sanitation and safety concerns, or by saying that other groups now wish to use your permitted space. Not only is this possible, it is completely legal. The police will then have a perfectly legal reason to evict you, and your ability to counter their logic in mass media will be limited as the police blast their reasons for the eviction through local and national news outlets before, during, and after their attempt at eviction.

The second permit-related concern is that a particular person's name will go on the permit for the occupation. A name will also have to be placed on all marching permits. This means that the person whose name goes on the permit will be held legally liable for all incidents that involve breaking the law at the march or occupation during the duration of the permit. This may also result in that person's trying to establish control over all behavior at the protest, possibly establishing his or her own policing apparatus for doing so. Making one person legally responsible for the behavior of dozens, if not hundreds or thousands, of other people undermines the democratic decision-making process. If Tahrir Square is to be our inspiration, then we must become as aggressive and unmanageable as the people of Egypt against our own corrupt government system.

REALISTIC REVOLUTION

The idea of revolution against big business and big government by the ninety-nine percent seems a bit far-fetched to most people. "It will never happen," they say, "and even if it does, there's no way people are intelligent enough to determine their own destinies. It would be chaos!" Even a passing examination of this attitude shows that it is based purely on cynicism. It is commonly said that behind every cynic is a disappointed dreamer. So I ask you, dear reader, to see this attitude as what it is: the despair of the dreamer in you! We have shown our capacity to organize our own lives through these occupation and general assemblies. We will continue to hammer out the process and become better organized with time, so long as we keep working on it. We aren't doing this for some other people half a world away. We are organizing to make our own lives better, and we should expect resistance. So, now I must ask, what would it mean for us to reject the life that has been offered to us by fate and make for the horizon?

Imagine our current society was created by an invading force. If Nazis or other fascists invaded the United States, what would you do? What would you do if they integrated Mussolini's definition of Fascism? "Fascism should be more accurately called corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power." What if this occupied country called itself a democracy, but almost everyone understood elections to be shams, with citizens being free to choose between two opponents from the same pro-corporate party? What if anti-government activity was opposed by stormtroopers and secret police? Would you fight back? If there already existed a resistance movement, would you join it? Would you resist if the fascists irradiated the country side, poisoned the food supplies with oil and other cancerous chemicals, and made the rivers unfit for swimming, so filthy that you wouldn't even dream of drinking from them? If fascists systematically gained control of the continent, would you join an underground army of resistance, to defend your neighborhood, and head from there to the boardrooms and the halls of their Reichstag to pick off the stormtroopers and most especially those who give them the marching orders? Give me a point; give me a threshold where you will finally make a stand. Is there one? Aren't we there?

SPEAKING UP AND LISTENING FROM WALL STREET TO NEW ORLEANS

By: Amy Wolfe

In the past few days and for the first time in my life, I simultaneously lost and found my voice. I've never had laryngitis before. Usually it is hard to hear what I'm saying, because I've got a low, mumbly voice, and when I stand up in front of people and talk, I start blushing fast and my hands shake. Counter to this, I am also a very argumentative and opinionated person. The past few days I've had occasion to do several things that scare me in front of a whole lot of people, and there's something about having a raspy, scratchy, squeaky voice that has made it so much easier. Last night I told my roommates, "I feel tougher! Like, this is how I actually sound on the inside!"

And the past few days have felt like months. Occupy Wall Street is gathering supporters faster than anyone can believe, and here in New Orleans we're just starting up. I write this on Friday, October 7th, 2011, the eve of Yom Kippur. Five days ago was the first general meeting to start up Occupy NOLA. I knew something important must be going on, because it drew two hundred people to a sunny park at noon during a Saints game. Yesterday was the first march, and the beginning of the Occupation in Duncan Plaza, across from City Hall. This feels like déjà vu to a lot of us; in 2007, a group of people fighting for public housing and homeless rights occupied

"IF WE ARE TEARING DOWN THIS SYSTEM AND BUILDING SOMETHING BETTER, WE REALLY NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHO'S SPEAKING FOR US, AND WHO'S DECIDING WHAT WE REPRESENT."

Duncan Plaza for about a year before they were forcibly removed by the police. In that time, what began as maybe six tents, became three or four hundred people. The plaza is beautiful, in a very city-specific way. It has a huge gazebo in the middle, winding paths all around, and several rolling green hills. It is between the city hall, the large public library, and Tulane Avenue, all within the shadow of the locked and empty Charity Hospital, where all of New Orleans' un-insured and under-insured got their healthcare Pre-Katrina. The plaza is often full of all sorts of characters and law enforcement types, like most city parks I've known.

This time, I cycled through the emotions of planning a political action (excitement, criticism, panic, despair, doom, resolve, hope) faster than anyone has reason to. It was clear to me early on that, as in NYC and other cities with an Occupy movement, no one reached out to street medics

or other medical support to make sure someone is on top of keeping people safe. I'm certainly no expert, seasoned medic, but I have training and lots of experience in healthcare and in organizing, and this lack of planning rattled me. The values of street medicine are as strong to me as are antiracist principles- for the first, do no harm, know your limits, always have a buddy, get consent first, fight the power, and don't depend on the health system unless you have to. For the second, learn from history, listen when people of color tell you about their lived experiences, believe them, be accountable and do what you say you're going to do, think about the actual impact much more than the intention of your actions, fight racism in person and in public.

A young woman I recently met said to me the other day, "Life starts at the edge of your comfort zone, baby!" I have to admit that she's right. As terrifying as it was to take on organizing a health and safety training before a big protest where we had every reason to expect police violence (given the recent history of the NOPD and what's been happening in other cities), it was powerful. I really don't like to be in the spotlight, for several reasons: I'm a woman and I'm scared of getting shut down for being visible, I'm white and I'm used to being able to be invisible when I want to, and

I'm just plain shy, as well. From the hindsight of a couple days, I can see that it was important to stand up for what I believe in, which is creating a culture where as many of us as possible take responsibility for taking care of each other, without waiting for someone else to do it.

And I never would have expected to speak up in front of the several hundred people gathered for the first real General Assembly last night. It was starting to be twilight, the crickets were loud, and mysteriously, in a classically New Orleans manner, the long grassy hill on which we all sat was the only place in the park where the street lights didn't work. Ambulances, sirens wailing, went back and forth every few minutes from University Hospital to the rest of the city. The facilitator was a man who had just flown in the night before from NYC to visit his family in the South, and to help get the process rolling in New Orleans. As the meeting started he explained to us about

all these newfangled activist hand signs to keep things orderly. The fingers wiggling up, the fingers wiggling down, the thumbs and index fingers steepled, and then some sort of an index finger point-and-swirl that I'm still unclear about. Just for pizzazz? Anyway, he taught us about the process of "people's mic." It is incredible to experience in person. When people want to speak, they stand up if they're able to, and say about three words. The people nearby repeat them, and then the speaker says another three words, and so on. It feels so incredible, because in a funny way, the words are out there in the world and you're acting as a microphone to say them, so it doesn't matter if you agree or disagree. You own those words. By extension, you are responsible for the person who says them-- it becomes much harder to distance yourself from the human emotions and opinions that you're repeating. At least until someone says something that makes you really mad, and you stand up, and then you have to hear your own scratchy voice amplified by two hundred people.

What made me mad enough to stand up last night occurred during a discussion about non-violence and how we would like to identify our movement. We talked about internal and external violence and about the use of self-defense. When someone from the crowd asked, "Are we considering property destruction violence?" the facilitator from NYC responded, "For the purposes of this discussion, yes." Y'all, I'm not out there lighting cop cars on fire, (though I am full of huge compassion for the anger and frustration of the people who are), but it made me mad because one thing I can't stand is when facilitators, who have a responsibility to guide the process of collective decision-making, get confused and think their responsibility is to call the shots. It's an easy mistake: you're up there, in front of a lot of people, with almost everyone listening to every single thing you say, and following your directions. I understand that it can be confusing. So I stood up and said, with my voice shaky and my face all red in the dark, "So, if we're going to stick to this process: when someone asks a question, like, 'Do we consider property destruction violence?' it's not appropriate for a facilitator to say 'Yes' or 'No'. This is a group decision about definitions, and it's really important."

I know this is what I said because I read it in the meeting minutes this morning. Otherwise I really wouldn't be sure; I was that nervous. If you're an extrovert, it might sound like a small thing. For me it was a big thing, because I really, really don't like to get up in front of people and do anything. And if I had a hard time speaking,

I can only imagine the alienation people would feel who have had their voices shut down and their realities dismissed for much of their lives. A little while later, once we moved to a part of the park with the lights on, the facilitator apologized and said that he thought we might do things differently in New Orleans, but he would step back so we could do things the way we needed to do them. After that, three women co-facilitated the rest of the GA. Would that have happened as easily if a group of radical South Asian activists in NYC hadn't fought to get language in a central document changed, and then hadn't written about it publicly? I think that we're seeing the ripple effects of them holding the NYC process accountable for history and language, and I think we in New Orleans can take that and run with it.

Because, if we are tearing down this system and building something better, we really need to be careful about who's speaking for us, and who's deciding what we represent. This process is a lot of things: boring, painful, silencing, alienating, exhilarating, creative, new, and totally wild... but whatever happens, it has to come from us.

All this is to say, we are already in a position in New Orleans to learn from Occupy Wall Street, after less than three weeks. Because of how fast this thing is taking off, and how many new cities are getting involved every day, there are already lessons we can learn: Lessons about planning for medical support as soon as the idea to organize something big leaves your mouth and goes to the ear of another fired-up person. Lessons about not

ignoring the concerns of people of color, because all of a sudden it "Holds up the process." (Seriously? The most time-consuming process in the entire world is consensus, but when someone wants to call out the racism in a collective document, moving on in a new and important "timely manner" is more urgent?) Lessons about police infiltration, police violence, and taking ourselves, our collective power, and the threat we pose to the system seriously enough to be ready for whatever happens. And lessons about how, when the issues at hand are relevant to enough people's lives, and when the resistance feels life-giving and fun, people will show up by the thousands.

When I moved here from my home of NYC in early 2006 to help with the post-Katrina relief effort, I never expected to stay. But there were so many new challenges in organizing for justice here, and for the first time in my life, there were so many people willing to teach me. Because of what's happened here and what we've learned from it, many people in this city know how to transform sexist and racist group dynamics that shut so many people down, and that keep our campaigns small and ineffective. Many people in the city know how to handle charismatic, disorganizing activist leaders. Once I reached out, medics in other parts of the country offered advice and resources to pull things together quickly for effective training. People of color here have created alliances between communities, from undocumented Latino workers to Black New Orleanians to Vietnamese youth, on all kinds of issues, from workers' rights to LGBT justice to

police brutality to fighting environmental racism. My intergenerational, white antiracist community has been responsive, supportive, and critical in the best way, and has truly been showing up to help each other do this work and stay engaged.

So I want to see this be a movement where, instead of someone saying, "How can we acquire more diversity?" almost everyone is saying, "Who isn't here? Who doesn't have a voice in this movement? And if they're not making decisions with the rest of us, are we fighting for their rights as hard as we're fighting for our own?" We need to talk about racism and antiracism, not in a way that centers whiteness, not in a way that's about activist street-cred, not in a way where whoever is more critical wins, but in a way that makes the Occupy movement as relevant as it should be.

In New Orleans, this could be the movement that reinvigorates the struggle for the right to return of folks still displaced more than six years after Katrina, the right to public and affordable housing; the struggle that undoes the gutting of the public education system, that adds supporters to the fight to end to the highest incarceration rate in the world and one of the most brutal police forces documented, and that builds the kind of healthcare that actually addresses health disparities and helps people and communities get better. I want to see us acknowledge that systemic racism is real, that even if our economics look the same, our lived experiences can be so different, and I want us to stop letting our wish for sameness erase the voices that can tell us how to fight.

So tonight, at a synagogue in uptown New Orleans, I was struck once again, as I am so often, by the radical content of a central prayer in Judaism. The Amidah literally means "standing", and it offers praise to God for supporting those who are falling, healing those who are sick, freeing those who are bound, and keeping the faith with all those who sleep in the dust. These are the rights that we're fighting for. This is why we need to redistribute the wealth in this country so badly. To do all of these things, you need to be able to hear it when someone tells you they're suffering, that their life is different from yours. Right now in Occupy NOLA we are just at the very beginning. We know what we're fighting against, but we're only just starting to articulate what we're fighting for. We have so much potential, and I hope we can keep our minds and hearts wide open for the long haul.



FOURCHON

By: Dr. Antoine Schlumberger

We were out with the landowner of Fourchon Beach, discussing BP's role in oiling this barrier island west of Grand Isle-- its low profile, its long history of hemorrhaging sand pre- and post-Katrina, because of its position, because of the port breakwaters, as well as its disintegration by the cleanup crews BP sent down to remove some oil and ignore other oil. The storms that had built and destroyed the beach had now layered BP's oil thoroughly into the fabric of the island itself. After April 20th, 2010, the island's destiny was to serve as a toxic landfill, rather than one of Louisiana's few beaches. Oil and tar from under the seafloor of the Mississippi Canyon was now a core component of the mass of the island.

"Wait, a dolphin," someone yelled over the grumble of the motor, and we stopped the UTV to find an 8-foot mammal stranded in the sand. The land manager got on the mobile to the local fish cops, LDWF, on the next island over. They were in charge of processing dolphins and whales suspected of dying by BP's oily disaster. i had spent all last summer in a kind of denial that the oil was happening, and so instead had volunteered in LDWF's new, giant air-conditioned facility to stuff sampling packs with the kind of gear biological staff would need to scrape oil from the dolphins' skin, and to sample and store

animal tissues for genetic identification. At the time i questioned whether my packs would ever be used; now i knew it would be better if they all sat on a shelf until the Gulf of Mexico swallows us all.

If we were lucky, the animal could be autopsied, and maybe we'd be able to receive confirmation that it was autopsied, if we called three or four staff once a month for a few months, asking and asking again. Ten to twenty years from today, when the lawyers were done arguing the matter, 20 years from our phone call-- maybe then we could find out the results of the autopsy, and whether this animal had been legally confirmed killed by BP.

i felt its smooth trunk, and searched for a pulse with my fingers. How do you feel for a pulse on a dolphin? Can you? It was warm, and i checked its blowhole for movement or reflex or response, figuring that this mammal would be like us in that regard-- if it were alive, it'd be breathing air. But it was dead. i felt i saw its soul struggling out of its carcass, but it was only the ebb and flow of the waves, pushing and pulling the animal like a marionette, moving its muscles and tendons in a slow pantomime of the struggle for life. i let myself know what the animal's grey eye had first told me: there was no life here. The scratches

over its face and body told of an animal vigorously scratching itself against a reef, struggling to get out of its skin before it died. i tried not to think about it.

It was freshly dead, so i thought it was good that at least we were there. It had a chance to be counted as a criminal charge against a set of assholes so evil i shook with the desire to lead them by the eye sockets and to stuff them into the deepest darkest coldest hole known to man. A deepwater oil well, even. Or maybe their own assholes.

Having grown up in the city, i've seen a body or two lying in the street. There's a moment you face of wondering whether it's worth it to get involved; although i usually have, i now recognize how much privilege i was born into to be able to contemplate the question. My attraction to the dolphin didn't seem all that different from the time i saw Ms. Wynn sprawled out on the road, dead from a motorist who didn't care for her cycling.... or from the more regular sight of strewn bodies of the wasted, rank not from rot but from drink, dead only in their souls, their breath all too active... from the cry of a prone old woman on Music St., her body unresponsive to her commands, her head bleeding profusely. What makes one act for his fellows? Why was this dolphin calling to that same instinct to help and triggering that fear of involvement?

i stood there staring into its clouded eye wondering how the hell was i born into this mess, contemplating the cost of my existence. i was the true grandchild of an oil geologist who talked in hushed tones about the job he did watching mud pumped out from under the marsh, making the money for my grandmother to raise children, my father, in a middle class family, now leaving me the task to clean up the mess that seems the price for my existence.

"Fight corporate power. Water is worth much more than gold. Don't let the bastards grind you down."

If only it were that simple. All the land in this conservation easement, this vanishing preserve for birds where i stood, was purchased by the black revenue flowing beneath the surface in a cold metal pipe feeding America a tenth of its supply. The birds nesting on the restricted-access beach all around me were dependent upon that revenue, flowing beneath me in a stupid metal pipe like America's central line.

My father would not have been born without that dark revenue. i would not have been conceived without its dark power. i felt junk sick for Loui-

"HOW NOW DO I HOLD LOUISIANA DOWN AS IT IS KICKING AND SCREAMING TO KILL ITSELF?"



siana. i felt its subterranean power like a pulsing muscle under me, over me, i felt like a fragile child that must cling to its stalwart mother to stand. The island had already been restored, patched together, and would be again, with taxes on oil revenue. Oil and oil revenue moved the men to move their oil-fueled machines to pump sand back onto the island, in a desperate dance to replace what the river used to do with great floods. The very ground beneath my feet was sustained by that black flow who demanded this dolphin, this distant friend, this water mammal, as sacrifice to the economic security of the land mammal that stood above it, dumbly witnessing its lack of pulse, its undead movements in the surf rising and falling around it.

When i was nineteen i gave my heart to a dead hilarious and deadly intelligent woman who got me high and screwed me, who became a heroin addict when i left the country for a semester at Oxford across the pond. When i came back to our sleepy college town, i tried my best to help her kick dope, which took the form of a two-week-long willing imprisonment in her apartment. i was her warden, and i chafed at the role she had chosen for me. Why should i even care? She was sleeping with another man. But she was mine. She was me. She was my miserable, pitiful life. i cared.

She asked me to hold her down one night when she felt the deep need for the drug. At her previous request i held her down in the bed while she thrashed her legs and cursed me and moaned in her junk-sick pain. She told me, "This is why they call it 'kicking.' My body is dying, i am dying." i held her, i said i loved her, as if that meant anything to her fiending. i made up a story that, as her old body was dying, her pain was the birth of her new body, her new cells were thriving, cells that knew nothing of dope, did not know its thrall, cells that knew only now of the thrill of fresh blood pumping into them from her thrashing and screaming and living all over me, under me, against me. Her fist hit the small of my back repeatedly. Later that month she would flee town with her junkie partner in his van. Later that year she would threaten me with paternity of a previously untold miscarriage. Later that decade, she would clean up, graduate, marry and become a mother to two beautiful children.

So somehow i hold hope we can be reborn. But when i think of the dolphin sacrifice, all i can think is: How now do i hold Louisiana down as it is kicking and screaming to kill itself? "Private property! Drill! Drill!"



All of our state and parish officials recite their lines in support of the industry while the industry reps watch them silently, out of camera shot. In Houma, in a venue where those industry reps would not show, i listened to these public officials presenting to community leaders their plan for leveeing off the degraded marshes to "protect" them from tides, and building great pipes from the Atchafalaya to move sand to fill in other holes and channels in the delta's marshes, holes made by the oil industry over 30 years ago. No official spoke of who made the holes we all now must pay to fill in, or who benefitted from destroying the marshes that have fed and sheltered us, or how it came to be that we all face this doom. i think it's called "buy-in."

"Port Fourchon is the only reason the Feds listen to our coastal restoration needs...The oil industry has granted Terrebonne the lowest unemployment in the nation...We arrived here three hundred years ago, and honestly, we may only have three hundred years left...Without the oil industry, no one would live in Terrebonne Parish."

Expecting anger or sarcasm in response, i turned to the locals and Native People in the audience to see what their reaction would be. There were a roomful of glassy eyes to respond to the white men's talk. i could only imagine what they were thinking, how many times they had heard this. Did they dream of dignity behind their clouded eyes? One mother spoke angrily to the need for cleaner, less risky industrial work in the face of a destabilizing climate and a negligent industry, to replace the oil rig work that threatened her husband every time he left for offshore. Another

churchwoman spoke against the miles and miles of messed up marsh the industry has left behind just outside Houma, and against tax breaks for these same industries.

"I'm with you, but if we don't give them tax breaks, they will walk...I couldn't agree with you more...but it's hard to convince a company worried about the bottom line...it's hard to make a company see that spending some money for the benefit of others is the most business-savvy approach."

Thus the men in charge tell us to lie back and die. Even they do not believe the words from their mouths, when they argue that the business plans of the companies weigh heavier in their mind than the people who have thrived on the Good Earth for generations. Because it's "too hard" to rewrite those plans, and not "savvy." Our lives are small. we are but bodies-- corpses; and they, the necrophiliacs.

So these holes and channels remain, decades after all the oil has been brought to the surface, the money all gone to Houston. The party is over, but our veins remain open, just in case. Just in case numbers come in that make it worth it to suck the last bit of bitumen out of these collapsed plays, busted zits miles underground, long popped. Industry still waits to squeeze them.

The old track marks are still fresh. Louisiana is still bleeding sand out her every pore. The other states curse us for a junkie. What can people even do? Was there ever a time when Louisiana was a place of dignity? Like this dolphin, i fear we are already dead.

FROM THE MOVEMENT OF OCCUPATION TO THE COMMUNITY OF LIBERATION

By: John Clark

Just over a week after Occupy New Orleans was founded, a message appeared on the local discussion list stating that “the whole movement is stagnant, “that there is “no passion, just process,” and that “it is losing ground fast.” Someone accused the writer of being an agent provocateur. However, similar views were expressed by other members within the Movement; it did not have to be introduced from outside.

Disruptive agents are always lurking around, but they are far from the greatest threat to our Movement. We suffer from certain tendencies that are widespread throughout contemporary culture, and that disrupt our work much more effectively than can any paid forces of disorder. Fortunately, we have a great deal of control over whether we lapse into dissent and disillusionment, or whether we become the vital, growing community of liberation and solidarity that we are capable of being.

I recently heard an interview with a Libyan activist who talked of the death of his father, who was a martyr for democracy over twenty years ago. He said that many times he wondered, as he saw little progress over those many years, if his father’s life had been thrown away. But he always kept faith. Then, decades later, he saw masses of people revolting in the name of democracy, and his father’s own words were quoted in mass demonstrations, as the dictatorship crumbled. Fortunately, he had not dismissed the value of his father’s sacrifice after a week or two.

We should think about what it means, on the deepest level, to be part of a movement. It has nothing to do with immediate gratification and egoistic satisfaction, which are the superficial and false promises of our sick consumer society. Fundamental social transformation and authentic liberation demand patience, dedication, compassion, and solidarity. The rewards are deep, not superficial. Some are long-term, but others come relatively quickly, if not instantaneously. The greatest of these is to be part of a community of solidarity and liberation, what Martin Luther King called “The Beloved Community,” in the process of its own self-creation. Freud may have been off on many points, but one of his most incisive insights was the idea that what ultimately makes our lives worthwhile is the presence of love and good work. The Beloved Community is a community of people doing good work in the name of, and through the practice of, love and solidarity.

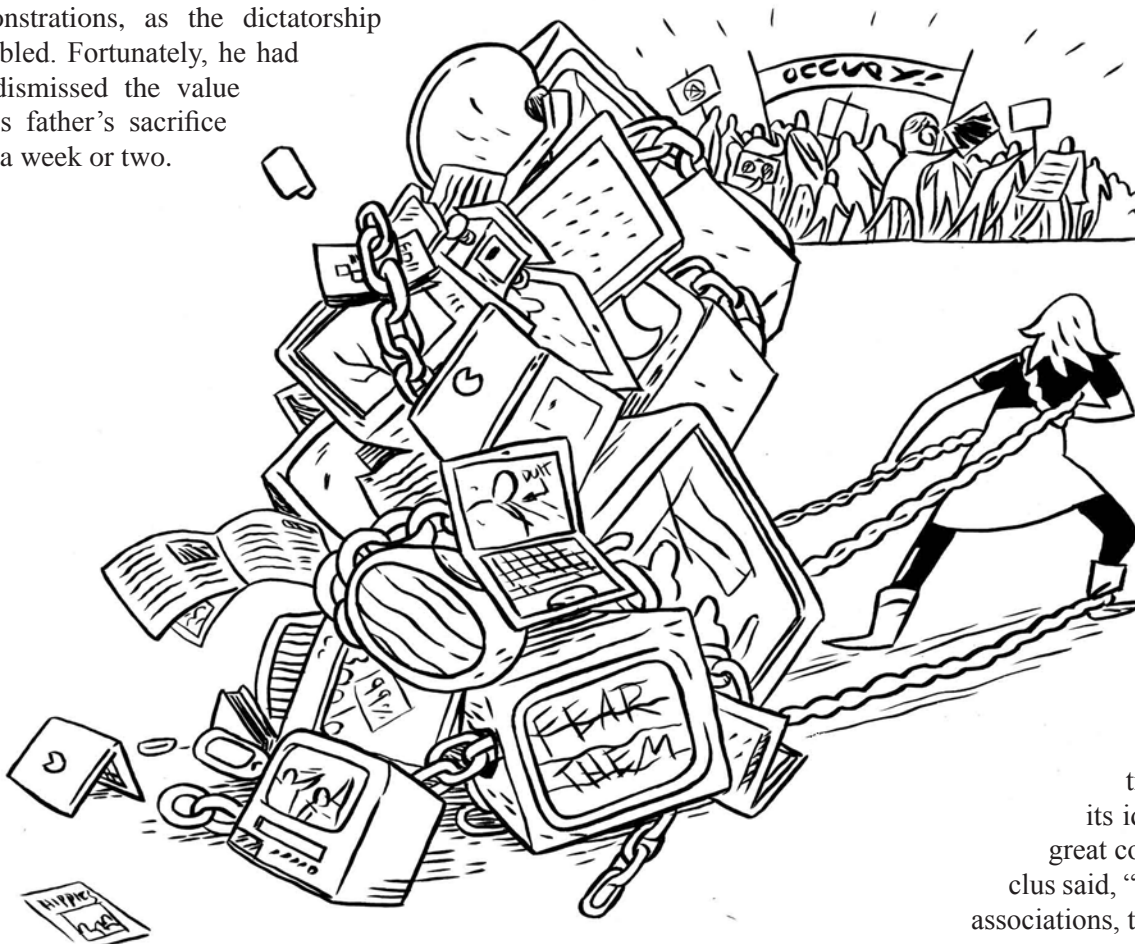
If this is true, then many of the most important goals of the Occupation Movement do not have to wait for the overthrow of the global economic order and the establishment of that “other world” that is possible in the future. It was once said of the early struggles of the working class that “the real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of

the workers.” We might say that the real fruit of our struggle lies in both the immediate and long-term results, that is, in the ever-expanding self-realization of the free community. Our means are one with our ends.

Sometimes, we get trapped in a world of false immediacy. Sometimes we put our own “pre-occupations” above the community’s occupation. We need to strive against obsession with winning non-essential votes or getting our way in the short run, when the basic character and values of the Movement are not at stake. We need to take satisfaction in the immediate good that we are achieving. We need to be able at times to disagree strongly with the majority and then take great satisfaction that in “standing aside” and refusing to block consensus, we are contributing to the needs of the community. We need at times to be able to experience the joy of sacrifice. When we achieve a consensus on some flawed, imperfect proposal that realizes some, but far from all of our hopes, this immediately fulfills what is perhaps our most important aspiration. It realizes our hope that we (flawed, imperfect beings) can practice direct democracy, and build a cooperative community. We can do something extraordinary.

Everything we do in our meetings and organizing needs to be evaluated in the light of what it contributes to the self-realization of our community. To the extent that our Movement embodies, here and now, the community of liberation and solidarity, we will win over more and more others to our cause. In everything we do-- in our participation in general assemblies, in our work in committees, in our messages to lists, and in our informal contacts-- we need to ask if our mode of interaction will make others want to be part of our community. This seems obvious, yet we must remind ourselves of it constantly, since the obvious is often forgotten in the heat of controversy, or lost in the minutiae of issues. If we practice love, solidarity and respect for one another, those who come in contact with us will want to join us.

When a transformative movement is in the news and is growing, curious people often wander into meetings and events, or check out discussion lists and newsletters, mainly to see what the commotion is about. They will come under the spell of the transformative community, if it consistently expresses its ideals of justice, love, and solidarity. This is what the great communitarian anarchist thinkers taught. As Elisée Reclus said, “it is step by step, through small, loving, and intelligent associations, that the great collegial society will be formed.” Gustav



Landauer predicted that when free, cooperative communities begin to spread across the land, many will observe “their joy in life, in its inexpressible though quiet manner,” and yearn to be part of such a community.

Such experience was part of my own personal transformation. When I was in my late teens, a friend and I went to a civil rights meeting at Xavier University. Neither of us was sympathetic to the cause, but we wanted to see what was going on. We had been indoctrinated with conservative and racist ideas, and reactionary conditioning still had a great influence on us. However, we were curious, and, for some strange reason, open-minded. So we checked out the meeting. It turned out that we were both deeply impressed by the extraordinary spirit of the group, by the humanity, sensitivity, dedication, and enthusiasm of its members. The event was a turning point and had a lasting effect on both of us.

In large part as the result of this experience, my friend decided to join an interracial exchange program. In the program, black youth from northern cities spent time with white families in the South, and white youth from the South stayed with black families in northern cities. He lived with a black family in Detroit and had a teenager from the family as his roommate. This more or less completed the conversion process that had started at the meeting at Xavier.

The experience also contributed to my own transformation. I was impressed not only by the good points the members of the group made, but above all by what good people they were and how well they interacted with one another. They were joyful and hopeful, and cooperative and respectful to one another, in addition to being dedicated to the cause. This encounter with charismatic community, a kind of positive trauma, quickly demolished all the indoctrination I had been subjected to. I had had a small taste of what “the Beloved Community” was all about and discovered that this was a powerful antidote to the poison of racism and prejudice. Before long I was caught up in the quest for such a community, and I still am.

I have always taken this experience, and a number of similar ones (for example, work with an inspiring and exemplary Tibetan refugee community in India), as a standard by which to judge organizations and movements. Do they engender forms of community in which we can, in the famous phrase attributed to Gandhi, “be the change

fulfillment in a community of liberation and solidarity.

Of course, we need to communicate our ideas, to explain the meaning of consensus and other cooperative, communitarian processes. But above all, we need to learn how to practice communal solidarity among ourselves. We need to learn how to be more successful in the struggle against our own individualism, egocentrism, and narcissism. We are in many, sometimes obvious, but often subtle and devious ways, products of the system of domination we want to destroy. To paraphrase Dorothy, Isabella Rossellini’s character in *Blue Velvet*, “It has put its poison in us.” We should never be complacent about the ways in which that system lives on within each of us. We must work from moment to moment to resist its manifestations. Resistance is a continuous practice, for both the community and the person.

Our greatest enemies in this struggle are the forces of occupation of our own egos by the system of domination. We aspire to be occupiers, but we are also the occupied. Some of these forces are particularly destructive of community, mutuality, and cooperation. They include egocentrism, self-indulgence, impatience, inattention, impetuosity, insensitivity, defensiveness, resentment, anger, and disrespect, to mention a few. We succumb to them quite naturally, because so much in our social environment has, throughout our lives, reinforced them. We can only avoid them successfully if we make a conscious and diligent effort to develop a cooperative, communitarian practice of solidarity, mutual aid, patience, mindfulness, sensitivity, openness, generosity, respect and compassion.

Above everything, we need such an all-encompassing practice. We need to work diligently on confronting the ways in which individualistic and narcissistic tendencies emerge in our meetings and events. There are some cases that are probably hopeless, such as the machistic person who comes to the General Assembly primarily to mock its processes and show off his own arrogance. But there are difficulties with well-meaning people also. The topics of not “silencing” people and the need for a more diverse movement often come up in the General Assembly. But ironically, some have spent more time talking about the problem of “silencing” than the majority of assembly members have spent talking about anything at all. The real need is not more expression of concern about “silencing,” but more dedicated,

Participation in the General Assembly sometimes takes a disruptively individualistic turn. Anger and resentment take over at times. Some seem to turn their interventions into attempts at personal performance, with greater or less success. Admittedly, all interventions are in a sense a kind of performance. The question is, what kind of performance? The old cliché says, when in doubt, “count to ten” before speaking or acting. This is not a bad idea, but we might instead use some of that ten to ask ourselves how what we are about to do or say will contribute to the good of our community and the realization of its goals. We might ask ourselves not only whether we have a good idea but whether our mode of presentation not only helps us reach a good decision, but even more importantly, helps us create the good community.

At one extreme, one’s performance is the performance of a service to our common good. It constitutes a special effort to serve the community to the best of one’s ability. At the other extreme, it is a form of self-indulgence, in which the community is used as a means toward ego gratification. Given the ways in which we are conditioned by the dominant society to be egocentric and self-indulgent (and militantly defensive of our egocentrism and self-indulgence), we can only expect the former tendency to win out over the latter if we undertake collectively a process of re-education and re-socialization in which we learn to be good community members. Once again, the overriding need is for a communitarian practice that we undertake diligently and collectively.

Our commitment to consensus is one of the strongest aspects of the Movement, but it also poses daunting problems. We have done rather well in upholding our basic principles while recognizing the demands of practicality. The process of seeking consensus in good faith, allowing adequate time for dissenters to comment, and then, if necessary, resorting to supermajorities of up to 90%, is a very large recognition of the importance of each person in the group and of the need to consider all points of view carefully.

At times, however, a few individuals have undermined our processes by taking up so much time in expressing dissent or pursuing perfectionism, usually on non-crucial matters, that little if any business could be completed. This is irrational and self-destructive. It shows a lack of respect for the needs and the good of the community. There is a point at which certain essential decisions

"WE ARE PRODUCTS OF THE SYSTEM OF DOMINATION WE WANT TO DESTROY."

we want to see.” In all the work we do together, we need to think about how each word and each action can help create this community that we yearn for. We need to train ourselves in the mindfulness, dedication, perseverance, and patience that this requires. We need to learn how to reach out actively to those who might be ready to find

skillful efforts to broaden active participation by those the assembly. The real need is not for a few to speak for and represent the diverse members of the larger community, but rather more dedicated, skillful efforts, inside and especially outside the Assembly, to bring together the Movement and the larger community.

must be made if the Movement is to be actively engaged in the community, if it is to be not only a movement to “occupy” but a movement for “New Orleans.” When this point is reached, and a decision is made, all can, whatever the decision, maintain their diverse convictions, discuss matters outside the assembly, and propose recon-

sideration of the issue in the future. It must be recognized that if a small minority destroys the possibility of action, when the vast majority is prepared to act, that small minority has imposed its authority on the vast majority.

Furthermore, continually ceding to single hard blocks is dangerous in a world in which there is a certain likelihood that government and corporate agents, sectarian dogmatists, and pathological narcissists may appear. Even if they are not present, the same dangers can be posed by well-meaning, quite sane people who get caught up in the immediate issues and fail to place those

humanitarian impulse is not only justified, but is by far the most essential aspect of our Movement. Creating a community of liberation and solidarity is the most important thing that we can possibly do, if we want to get beyond the folly of single-issue politics and move on to the creation of a new world of freedom and justice. The greatest contribution the Occupation Movement can make is to contribute this endeavor.

The bane of American oppositional politics has been its character as an incoherent collection of “issue” and “protest” movements. Whatever its failings, and there were certainly a multitude of

its own forms of art, music and design, its own language, its own ideas and theory, its own communal rites and rituals.

It is tragic that such great developing movements for communal liberation could be displaced by an incoherent and largely conformist coalition of interest groups claiming to share the uninspiring quality of being vaguely “progressive.” When we are marching resolutely toward the edge of a precipice, as we are now, the last thing we need is a movement that promises to help us progress more quickly and efficiently toward the looming abyss. We need, instead, a historic reversal of direction, a reversal that we are finally perhaps beginning to see in the Occupation Movement.

James Joyce famously described history as “a nightmare from which I am trying to wake.” Awakening from that nightmare would mean reawakening to the great dream of history. This age-old dream has been a vision of liberation from the nightmarish system of domination that has oppressed humanity and nature for millennia. It is the dream of a world of love and solidarity, a world in which the great community of humanity and nature will finally be free to live, to realize itself, and to flourish on this planet. This must be the guiding vision of our Movement, and must guide our practice from moment to moment.

"SOMETIMES WE PUT OUR OWN 'PRE-OCCUPATIONS' ABOVE THE COMMUNITY'S OCCUPATION."

issues in the context of the larger interest of the community and the Movement. At times, the early Green Movement adopted a process for large assemblies in which a certain minimum number of blocks were necessary for a proposal to be defeated. This is a reasonable approach to balancing the need for consensus against the need for action. It is important to consider the difference between one person disagreeing in a small group of ten people (an affinity group or action group) and one or two disagreeing in a large assembly of fifty, a hundred or many hundreds of participants (a General Assembly).

This is not to deny that the slippery slope is sometimes a real threat. There are certainly dangers as a group moves step by step from unanimous consent, to allowing action when there are some blocks, to supermajority decisions by 90%, etc. The greater ease of decision-making in less consensual processes reinforces further steps toward less participatory and less democratic processes. With each step, it becomes easier to overlook the less conspicuous problems in the less consensual forms. Yet, this danger can be recognized and balanced against the need to act quickly and decisively in some pressing situations, and the necessity merely to act on some crucial issues of principles and organization. We could wait to act until we have achieved ideally perfect consensus to act in an ideally perfect way. However, by that time the sixth great mass extinction of life on earth may very well be over.

This debate over issues of consensus relates to an underlying tension (a quite necessary tension) between a recognition of the integrity of the individual and a recognition of the good of the larger community. Some members of Occupy New Orleans have questioned the strong emphasis in the Occupation Movement, and in our local movement in particular, on the creation and nurturing of community. Some have, indeed, been very harsh in their condemnation of this aspiration. However, I would argue that this decidedly com-

them, the great strength of the 60's movement for change was its character as a many-sided community of liberation. This was true first of the Civil Rights Movement of the first half of the decade, and then of the countercultural and student movements (“The Movement”) of the second half of the decade. What inspired the Civil Rights Movement above all was its aspiration to create, and its quality of already in large part being, that “Beloved Community,” that community of love and liberation that had not only a powerful collective dimension but a profound personal, ethical and spiritual one. What made “the Movement” of the late 60's, albeit for a brief historical moment, a deeply transformative phenomenon, was its character as a realized liberatory community, with its own forms of organization, its own ways of living, its own means of communication,



RADICAL HOPES, RADICAL CHALLENGES

By: Kezia Kamenetz

In my mind the occupations, more than anything else, are living breathing experiments in organizing community based on anarchistic principles, the scale of which has not been seen in America in decades, if ever. I think this is the most exciting thing to happen to anarchism in my lifetime. This conviction begs the question: where are all the anarchists?

At the occupation I have seen those who have dedicated their lives to organizing and activism of all radical stripes leave in frustration. It is one thing to meet with those who already share your analysis and create non-hierarchical organizations with them. It is quite another to seek consensus with those who do not share your views. That is when the true test of ideals occurs: when the desire to create a world in the image of anarchist analysis clashes with the desire to create a world where no unjustified power is asserted and everyone is given the same freedoms we would want for ourselves.

This isn't meant to blame. The practice of anarchism is extremely hard work. It is made even harder when you have so much knowledge about what is wrong with this world, when you have so much passion about the tactics that should be used, when you have so much conviction about the ways we should structure a different community, as so many radicals and anarchists do. The more you know, the harder it is to relate to those who don't, let alone break bread and make compromises with them.

But let's be clear: anarchists cannot create the massive change they seek by themselves. With the occupations, there is an opportunity for anarchist organizing principles to reach the masses. I believe anarchists need to be, more than anything else, models of relationship and organizing that is non-hierarchical and consensus-based. But how?

If I've learned anything at the occupation, it's that the analysis and theories of anarchism have little if anything to do with its practice. A person can have as radical an analysis as anyone: that private property is theft, that our devotion to patriarchy continues to oppress half of the population, that those in power incite racism by oppressing and exploiting people of color, or simply that the application of unjustified power is the ultimate locus of everything that is wrong in our world. But how does one put this analysis in practice? What is unjustified power and how can it be prevented from asserting itself-- and how can we prevent individuals from submitting to it?

This is a question with endless answers, so I'll start simply with the experience I've had so far in

trying to facilitate General Assemblies at Occupy New Orleans. The first time I saw video of the General Assemblies I was mesmerized. Finally, a clear image of anarchistic political organization! I was convinced this would result in the utopia I have always dreamed of (more accurately, the utopia as imagined by Ursula LeGuin's "The Dispossessed"). When Occupy NOLA began, I immediately applied myself to the facilitation of the GAs. To me, discovering and perfecting this process was an important aspect of the movement and I wanted to contribute.

When I set off to help facilitate, I didn't really do much research. A man from the New York occupation was around and had been doing facilitation up there. I immediately deferred to him. This was one of my first mistakes, and thus one of the first lessons I learned. Even when someone knows more, or has had more experience, it does not mean that he should be unquestioned. If we do not want unjustified power asserted over us, we have to be careful when we eschew responsibility. When we do not take responsibility we give away our freedom and become vulnerable to power, even when it is not being aggressively asserted. Perhaps if Occupy NOLA had not had the authority of someone from New York, it would have started from a much less authoritative position as it began the assemblies. If everyone had felt truly engaged in the process from the beginning, it could have eased the pain of creating consensus within the body.

As General Assemblies continued, the facilitation group began the process of creating our process. This is where I made another mistake. As a very vocal member of the facilitation committee, I pushed for having assemblies be as close to how assemblies were supposedly operating in other cities around the country, thinking people would eventually understand, even though day after day we were alienating more and more members of our assembly as we stalled out on even basic issues. I did not respond to the needs of the community but instead, because of my conviction of how the meetings should go, and my belief that the process was going to work, I asserted my conviction over others. I was not patient with those in the occupation, I did not try hard enough to reach them where they were. We did not start as inclusively as we could have, and we have suffered for it.

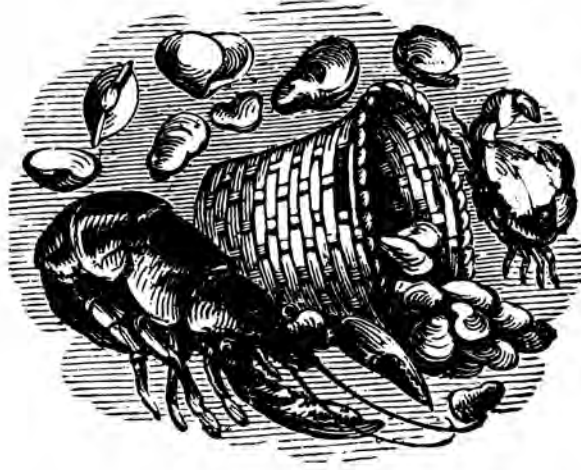
Let me be clear: I know deeply that one of the most wonderful/terrible things about a truly decentralized organization is that we can only feel so much responsibility when things go poorly, or wonderfully. I don't blame myself for how things have progressed. I'm just trying to analyze how I

unjustly asserted myself.

The lesson I learned is that even a strong conviction about something can be enough to create a dynamic of unjustified power in a group. Special knowledge can do this even moreso. If you have either, you should be in a constant state of check, ready to defer to others at any moment, even if they have neither. We cannot assert our power over others because of their ignorance. Even if this ignorance appears willful, we must keep trying to bridge the gaps. As individuals and people living in groups we have very little experience when authority is not asserted. It is a hole that we seek to fill, because without leaders the responsibility rests solely on us. This is the underbelly of being given the amount of freedom available in a space like the occupation-- it is a great responsibility. We have to empower ourselves to speak our truth and live our bliss while being ever vigilant as to when those acts are preventing others from the same.

And so, the General Assemblies go on. Brave souls stick it out night after night in the face of pretty intense danger. Dinner gets served. Discussions reach new highs and lows. The pace is slow, but that's how we know we are in New Orleans. I can't venture to guess what is going to happen, which is certainly the most exciting part. But perhaps the biggest lesson I have learned is that these occupations are extremely difficult to stop. Even those who walked out in frustration trickle back. At times I feel that the occupation is impossible, that I have to leave, that I could do it better myself or with the help of those with whom I share close bonds, but yet I cannot not give up on the occupation, for the same reason I can not give up on anarchism. It has taught me too much, and given me too much hope. Even though I was born and bred in systems of unjust power-- economic, political and social-- I have faith that as individuals and groups we can break those patterns: that in the end, these systems are just tools we use to assuage our egos or seek control when we feel fear, and through hard work and careful practice, we can find real ways to break them down.

Anarchism as a theory is not the same as anarchism as a practice, but they are based in the same values: that we should love and trust one another simply because we are human, and that no one will know true freedom until everyone is liberated and empowered in a precisely equal way. This is our challenge and our only hope. Are we ready to rise to the occasion? Hope to see y'all at the occupation...



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