

Reconsidering Occupy Oakland and Its Horizons:

Media Misframing, Decolonizing Fractures, and Enduring Resistance Hub

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Abstract

Reconsidering Occupy Oakland and Its Horizons is an archival study of the creation, reception, evolution, and remembrance of Occupy Oakland using a feminist lens. I investigate how Occupy Oakland’s radically democratic mobilization against economic violence, racism, and police violence was undermined by local and regional news coverage—namely in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Oakland Tribune*—through framing devices that demonized protesters and delegitimized the movement. I nevertheless found differences between local and regional coverage. Occupy Oakland challenged existing hegemonic boundaries regarding participatory democracy as its activists—seasoned and less experienced people from multiple generations—experimented with horizontal world-building through community structures, methods, and processes. This horizontal radical movement nevertheless struggled with the same divisions and inequalities that existed outside its camps: heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and classism. The “stickiness” of embodied and structural inequalities persisted in Occupy Oakland camps despite efforts to create a radically egalitarian community. The nature of this stickiness can only be understood by taking seriously the local material and institutional conditions, obstacles, and histories that shaped the spaces of protest and its participants. Though news coverage often describes the movement as a failure, several new projects and coalitions formed during and after Occupy Oakland, illustrating its dynamic legacy and challenging social movement scholarship that reproduces temporal demise frameworks in its analysis. A feminist examination of these projects demonstrates how stories of Occupy Oakland’s “failure” or “death” miss the nature of projects attempting to radically reimagine a patriarchal, racist, neoliberal social world along more egalitarian and just lines. The problems Occupy Oakland struggled against and challenged have only intensified during the CoVid-19 pandemic.

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Introduction

I started working on this project on the Occupy Oakland movement in March and April 2020, as the CoVid-19 global pandemic accelerated. With the assistance of the continuous violence of institutionalized white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, the virus has thus far taken the lives of more than 2.6 million people across the world and made tens of millions ill. As most of the United States was in lockdown because of the pandemic, the widely publicized police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020, triggered massive protests in the country and around the world demanding justice, dignity, and the right to breathe for Black people. These crises compounded with others in a context of limited mainstream media capacity, historical memory, and mental real estate. I had never experienced or felt such collective devastation and demands for change. I initially thought I would be able to address the newer revolts against white supremacy and police violence as part of the project on the Occupy Oakland encampment that began in October 2011, which centered on some of the same problems: anti-Black police violence, racism, widespread debt and poverty, lack of jobs, and housing segregation and gentrification. Ultimately, I decided instead to take a longer view on the Occupy Oakland movement and Oakland itself by considering the continuing effects of the encampment and the situation up to the present in Chapter 3. I was eleven years old and lived in a much wealthier and whiter town about ten miles away when the Occupy movement took root in Oakland in late 2011. I decided to study this utopian leftist project while living in the current historical moment as a way to consolidate and put into practice the feminist knowledge, theories, and analytical skills I had been studying for three years. The inequalities and violence that triggered the Occupy movement continue, as does activist work, despite the tensions that often arise within leftist democratic struggles, the focus of Chapter 2. Studying

Occupy Oakland allowed me to learn so much about a neighboring city with a storied, radical history in politics, labor, culture, and the arts that somehow never permeated the color line in my high school classes.

In her book about the importance of affect in the organizing of ACT UP, a grassroots coalition of LGBTQ+ individuals who organized in the 1980s and 1990s to fight the AIDS crisis, Deborah Gould introduces the concept of political horizons to discuss the power of imaginative world-building in social movements. She defines political horizons as “attitudes within a social group or collectivity about what is politically possible, desirable, and necessary,” asking how they “get established, consolidated, stabilized, and reproduced over time, and with what sorts of effects on political action?”¹ In this project, I look at how Occupy Oakland challenged existing hegemonic political boundaries regarding the feasibility of participatory democracy, economic equality, and horizontal world-building, as well as news media responses to its newly imagined political horizons. I take Gould’s assertion that “whoever tells the history of a social movement shapes it” one step further by showing that the outside stories told about Occupy Oakland as it unfolded often repressed and delimited the bounds of what is possible. Attempts to declare as failed Occupy Oakland’s world-building project miss the ways in which social movements can “unravel commonsense knowledges, counter the subtle and not-so-subtle power relations that pervade our lives, and assert that the way things are is not necessarily natural or the way they must or should be.”² OO certainly did all of those things and more. That is not to say that Occupy’s visions or political horizons were uniform, or that political horizons remained static. Though solidarity often blossoms around the feelings created when engaging in collective world-

¹ Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3.

² Gould, *Moving Politics*, 443-444.

building, OO also shows how embodied inequalities attached to certain bodies in these collective spaces. In addition, the structural inequalities and histories of local contexts present their own limits as well as alternative political horizons. In the case of Occupy Oakland, many of these alternative horizons developed into entirely new projects that lived on in different forms far beyond the end of the Occupation.

Reconsidering Occupy Oakland and Its Horizons is an archival study of the creation, reception, evolution, and remembrance of Occupy Oakland using a critical feminist lens. It looks at the various political horizons in the United States that the movement challenged, how mainstream media attempted to limit those horizons through its coverage of the movement and subsequent declarations of the movement as a failure, as well as different imaginations of political horizons within the group and how new groups spun off to further develop these horizons even after the movement's "end." It shows that although the United States Occupy camps started in New York City, Occupy Oakland may have left the deepest impact and legacy on its host city and community, possibly because of the way it emerged and worked with existing movements and organizations.

Drawing on media studies scholarship, Chapter 1 examines how Occupy Oakland was defined and framed in local news coverage, specifically the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Oakland Tribune*, from October 2011 through February 2012, the period during which these outlets extensively covered the movement. The Occupy movement encampments frequently rubbed against mainstream media reporters and companies given their embeddedness in the hegemonic neoliberal structure and understanding of themselves as guardians of democracy in a society the Occupy movement challenged and aimed to fundamentally rebuild. Because they ultimately supported the status quo, it is unsurprising that both newspapers contributed to a

demonization of protesters and delegitimization of Occupy Oakland through various framing devices, although the *Oakland Tribune* was more likely to provide nuance and context. Their coverage ultimately worked to limit the claims to newly imagined political horizons created by Occupy Oakland, which continued beyond the “end” of the movement.

Much of this faulty coverage came from a lack of focus on the radically democratic decision-making structure, goals, and social critiques of Occupy Oakland, the focus of Chapter 2. The chapter explores these dimensions in detail to better understand the nature of this horizontal movement and how it struggled with the same divisions that defined and structured life outside the camps: cis-heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and classism. What feminist geographers refer to as the “stickiness” of embodied inequalities persisted in the two Occupy Oakland campsites despite efforts to create a radically egalitarian space and expanded political horizon, leading to unofficial hierarchies. Tensions were complicated and compounded by heteropatriarchal violence in relatively open urban public spaces as well as Oakland Police Department racism, corruption and violence. These factors eventually led to fissures in the movement and the creation of new groups such as Occupy Patriarchy and Decolonize Oakland, which took up Occupy’s gauntlet but articulated a different kind of political horizon: one that demanded fundamental societal change for gender and sexual minorities, African Americans, and people of color, on top of Occupy’s demands for equal economic opportunity and participatory democracy. I trace the evolution of these conflicts using the occupyoakland website, museum and library archival collections that were made available to me, other movement’s web archives, blogposts, and a largescale survey of participants in Occupy Oakland while it was ongoing.

Chapter 3 shows that Occupy Oakland did not “end” when the police shut down the encampments. It continued to work on a number of important projects in multiple forms; indeed,

the Occupy Oakland webpage is updated with events at this writing. The projects and coalitions created during and after the Occupy Oakland encampments, I argue, demonstrate its dynamic and impactful legacy through the creation of new and expanded political horizons. Though mainstream news media coverage often describes the Occupy movement as a “failure” because policies were not measurably changed, a feminist-informed examination of Occupy and related projects during and after the encampments demonstrates how stories of “death” are premature and largely intend to crush radical imagination and practice. Most importantly, these post-mortems often ignore the ongoing and structural obstacles posed by patriarchal racist neoliberalism. Through this chapter’s examination of continuing struggles against economic, police, and intimate partner violence by many Occupy Oakland camp veterans such as the Oakland Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs, the Justice 4 Alan Blueford Coalition, and the Tsega Center, it becomes clear that Occupy activists and groups rearranged themselves and adapted to new conditions and events. The final section of Chapter 3 examines the impact of the CoVid-19 pandemic on Oakland residents and discusses the impact of the pandemic on this research project.

In the remainder of the Introduction chapter, I discuss the emergence of the Occupy movement and its historical and transnational antecedents to show how it drew on preexisting horizontal social movements for inspiration and strategies. The section that follows details the logics and unique practices used by Occupy activists around the world, which have continued in multiple democratic meeting settings, including the human mic and hand gestures. I also explore the ideological conflicts and interpersonal tensions that often emerged within Occupy camps. The third section provides an overview of Oakland’s political history, the racial violence narrative that distorts how the city and its Black residents especially are understood, and the

especially racist and violent history of the Oakland Police Department. The final section delves into media theory to examine how and why Oakland has been portrayed as a dangerous city by traditional news media coverage.

Occupy and Its Predecessors: Horizontal Social Movements

On February 2, 2011, Konu Matsu, a writer at the Canadian anti-consumerist activist magazine *AdBusters*, posted an essay in response to massive protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, titled “A Million Man March on Wall Street.” Matsu asked a daring question: “Could an uprising like this happen in America?”³

Over 25 million folks are now unemployed, 2.8 million homes are in foreclosure while the investment bankers who brought this economic misery cynically reap obscene bonuses and rewards. Blatant corruption rules at the heart of American democracy. And with corporations now treated as people, big business money dictates who is elected to Congress and what laws they shall pass. America has devolved into a corporate state ruled by and for the megacorps. What would it take for the people of America to suddenly rise up and say “Enough!”? A double dip recession? A crash on Wall St.? A war in the Middle East? If we want to spark a popular uprising in the West – like a million man march on Wall Street – then let’s get organized, let’s strategize, let’s think things through.

Occupy camps indeed sprung all over the world, shaped by their own histories but substantially driven by a challenge to the financial institutions and governmental policies that had driven the world to economic collapse. The first Occupy camp in the U.S. was established in early October when around 1,000 activists took over Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan,⁴ a privately-owned park located in New York City’s financial district.⁵ Occupy Wall Street called

³ Kono Matsu, “A Million Man March on Wall Street,” *Adbusters Media Foundation* (Vancouver, BC), February 2, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150402104218/https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/million-man-march-wall-street.html>.

⁴ Brian Greene, “How ‘Occupy Wall Street’ Started and Spread,” *U.S. News & World Report*, October 17, 2011, <https://www.usnews.com/news/washingtonwhispers/articles/2011/10/17/how-occupy-wall-street-started-and-spread>.

⁵ Lisa W. Foderaro, “Privately Owned Park, Open to the Public, May Make Its Own Rules,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/nyregion/zuccotti-park-is-privately-owned-but-open-to-the-public.html>. The park is owned by one of the world’s largest real estate companies, Brookfield Office Properties.

on the “99 percent” to mobilize against the “1 percent” in order to fight corporate greed, hold banks and financial institutions accountable for the 2008 economic collapse and its continuing effects, and, perhaps most importantly, to build new forms of deliberative democracy in camps through General Assemblies. Occupy camps emerged in over 900 cities around the world.⁶

The Occupy movement was indebted to many of its movement predecessors for developing horizontal movement ideologies and articulating what Rebecca Lila Steinberg calls “public recognition of whole-system breakdown (felt keenly by the lower economic classes).”⁷ Marina Sitrin notes that popular collective and assembly movements in the early 21st century in Argentina similarly attempted to organize on a “flatter plane” with the goal to create “power-with” one another rather than “power over” one another.⁸ Steinberg connects the Occupy movements in the United States to similar contestations over space and systemic breakdown that occurred in the Assembly Movement in Greece and the *Indignados* (also called the 15M movement) in Spain.⁹ Ernesto Castañeda argues that the 15M movement—which formed in response to high unemployment rates and massive cuts to government programs to meet international austerity requirements in the midst of bank bail-outs—was “a direct precedent to the Occupy Wall Street movement in the USA”:¹⁰ “The 15 May movement showed that not only people in North Africa had reasons to take the streets and engage in collective action, but many citizens in the developed world also had reasons to take public squares and show their

However, it is open to the public 24 hours a day and, importantly, is not subject to the same curfews as city-owned parks.

⁶ Karla Adam, “Occupy Wall Street Protests Continue World Wide,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/occupy-wall-street-protests-continue-world-wide/2011/10/16/gIQAcJIroL_story.html.

⁷ Rebecca Lila Steinberg, “The Occupy Assembly: Discursive Experiments in Direct Democracy,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 13, no. 4 (January 2014): 706, <https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.83.06ste>.

⁸ Steinberg, “Occupy Assembly,” 708.

⁹ Steinberg,” 706.

¹⁰ Ernesto Castañeda, “The Indignados of Spain: A Precedent to Occupy Wall Street,” in “Occupy!,” special issue, *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2012): 309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.708830>.

dissatisfaction with the economic and political status quo.”¹¹ Much like Occupiers in the United States did later, *indignados* camped in urban plazas, held assemblies, formed various committees, and rejected parliamentary democracy as unrepresentative and undemocratic.

As indicated by Matsu’s provocation, many scholars highlighted the Arab revolutions that emerged between December 2010 and March 2011 as critical predecessors for the Occupy movement in the U.S. since they often occupied public squares in their rebellions against class inequality and authoritarian rule.¹² The Arab uprisings created space for the broad economic and democracy critiques used in Occupy. Sarah Kerton draws on Rancière’s concepts of “politics” (*la politique*) and “police” (*la police*) to demonstrate how “through the act of gathering in a public square and making collective demands for societal change, Egyptian protesters demanded their place within a reconfigured public sphere and (re)distributed the sensible,” transforming and creating new possibilities for resistance globally.¹³ Occupy encampments in the U.S. were similar to these movements yet shaped by the specific housing, debt, and policing crises in the U.S.

Many of revolts of 2010 and 2011 that took over public spaces experienced tensions and conflicts based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and ideological differences. In a sense, these tensions were inevitable because hierarchies structure the societies from which they emerged and become special sources of conflict when they develop in collectivist utopian movements premised on building horizontal democracy. In the introduction to their edited book, *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, Frances Hasso and Zakia Salime

¹¹ Castañeda, “Indignados of Spain,” 309.

¹² Mervat F. Hatem, “The Arab Spring Meets the Occupy Wall Street Movement: Examples of Changing Definitions of Citizenship in a Global World,” *Journal of Civil Society* 8, no. 4 (2012): 402, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2012.744239>.

¹³ Sarah Kerton, “Tahrir, Here? The Influence of the Arab Uprisings on the Emergence of Occupy,” in “Occupy!,” special issue, *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2012): 302, 304, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.704183>.

discuss what they call persistent “stickiness” in the spaces of radical uprisings and revolutions that express “obdurate subordinations connected to particular bodies, spaces, and times”:¹⁴

Even as the authors in this volume argue for the dramatic and everyday making and contesting of spaces through symbolic and bodily transgressions, they also demonstrate the “sticky” and embodied aspects of difference and inequality that limited the horizons of the inclusive pluralities that emerged in every revolution and uprising. Solidarities across difference and redefinitions of space in these revolutions and uprisings were often restricted by various forms of policing and moral control, which were persistently structured by gendered and sexual master narratives and anxieties.¹⁵

Activists who recognize the inevitability of such tensions encourage forming coalitions and subgroups within social movements to recognize and facilitate democratic inclusion of difference in process, decision-making, and tactics. Movements such as ACT UP and the nonviolent action movements of the 1970s and 80s, for example, established women’s caucuses to address gender conflict.¹⁶ Gould writes of ACT UP’s fight for the development of affordable HIV/AIDS treatments and healthcare in the U.S.:

As a collectivity, ACT UP participants shared many values, but the movement fended off groupthink more or less successfully with its caucus and affinity group structure—a facet of the movement that contributed greatly to ACT UP’s non-hierarchical, decentralized, and democratic character and that participants found particularly compelling. Caucuses of women, people of color, and people with immune-system disorders (PISD) provided a degree of autonomy to those underrepresented groups and allowed differences of identity to flourish, at least initially, within the collectivity of ACT UP. Self-organized affinity groups of people who wanted to engage in civil disobedience or direct action together similarly operated relatively autonomously from the larger group.¹⁷

Many movements and organizations have such tensions, which often leads to fragmentation into subgroups. For example, the Combahee River Collective of Black lesbian feminists described the

¹⁴ Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime, introduction to *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, ed. Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 14.

¹⁵ Salime and Hasso, introduction, 4–5.

¹⁶ Benita Roth, “Feminist Boundaries in the Feminist-Friendly Organizations: The Women’s Caucus of ACT UP/LA,” *Gender and Society* 12, no. 2 (April 1998): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124398012002002>; Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 157-158.

¹⁷ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 190.

importance of addressing “interlocking” or “synthetic” oppressions in their famous 1977 statement. The statement criticized white-dominated women’s movements, white and male-dominated left movements, and male-dominated Black power movements for repressing race, class, and sexuality differences in their organizations. They called for a Black feminist “sexual politics” rooted in identity to combat oppression:

We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves.¹⁸

Such histories informed organizing and the creation of subspaces within the Occupy camps, including caucuses for people of color, queer/LGBTQ+ people, gender and sexuality minorities, and more.

Occupy’s Deliberative Democracy as Process

Seeing the large federal bailouts of financial institutions such as Bank of America and Goldman Sachs in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession as individuals lost their homes and livelihoods, Occupiers believed that democracy in the United States was not representative of the needs and desires of the majority of Americans. Accordingly, Occupy sites developed a complex system of working committees and caucuses to further the movement’s goals of true direct participatory democracy, alongside regularly occurring General Assemblies (GAs) run by facilitators whereby individuals could submit proposals for group consideration.¹⁹

¹⁸ Combahee River Collective, 1986. *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*, (Albany, NY Kitchen: Table: Women of Color Press, 1986): 4. Read the full statement here: https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf.

¹⁹ Liberate Oakland, “Assembly, Committee, Caucus What’s the Difference?,” Occupy Oakland, November 1, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/assembly-committee-caucus-whats-the-difference/>.

Occupy GAs developed a complex set of tools to further deliberative democracy within the camps drawing on existing practices and global movements. Their quest, according to Steinberg, was to create a new political system that “both produced and reflected attested ideologies of horizontalism and egalitarian decision-making.”²⁰ Occupy became an important site for new discursive experiments in direct democracy through the creation of a formalized process for assemblies and the development of tactics such as the human mic and hand gestures in General Assemblies. While many of the deliberative democracy tactics used by Occupy originated in other movements, activists developed or adapted what Steinberg calls “specific embodied tools for assembly use . . . to facilitate a discursive praxis of egalitarianism within the context of a speech exchange system suited to a large outdoor deliberative body” to align with radical horizontal world-building.²¹ These embodied tactics, such as hand gestures and the human mic, took on new meanings, power, and significance when they were used in Occupy assemblies. The human mic, which started with a “mic check,” was a human “amplification of each other’s voices” through repetition and was widely used to allow people present to say anything and be heard despite police bans on other instruments of amplification, as illustrated in a video from October 8, 2011, at a General Assembly during Occupy Wall Street.²² Also called “the people’s mic,”²³ the human mic allows communication in large crowds to be amplified without equipment: the speaker will share several words and the crowd nearby will loudly repeat the utterance, often to a group behind them, whose members repeat the phrase to those behind them, amplifying the message to the entire crowd. The people’s mic was used at antinuclear

²⁰ Steinberg, “Occupy Assembly,” 703.

²¹ Steinberg, 703.

²² Fred Cummins, “Human Microphone (Occupy Wall Street),” YouTube, September 18, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvJqLo_o7AM.

²³ Steinberg, “Occupy Assembly,” 703.

rallies in the 1980s and in Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization protests as a way of democratically communicating information on the streets, but evolved into an assembly tool within Occupy GAs, creating a kind of “group embodiment.”²⁴ Steinberg argues that in Occupy, the human mic produced intersubjectivity and an embodiment of personal and group agency, as well as generated *interexperience*, “a mutual inhabitation which exceeds that of understanding and describes a type of action in unison.”²⁵ When Angela Davis gave remarks at an Occupy Oakland rally on November 2, 2011, after returning from speaking at Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Philadelphia, she asked to use the human mic instead of the equipment they had rented or borrowed to call for “justice” and “hope for the future.”²⁶

One hand gesture used at various Occupy camps to convey agreement (raising both hands and wiggling fingers) was also used at the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, where participants used it to signal affiliation and affect. In Occupy, hand gestures were further developed (Figure 1), with complex new gestures created in camps across the world to convey many positions, including opposition and disagreement.

²⁴ Steinberg, 714.

²⁵ Steinberg, 707.

²⁶ “OCCUPY OAKLAND: ANGELA DAVIS SPEECH - 5 – HD,” EFootage.com, November 2, 2011, <https://www.efootage.com/videos/82231/occupy-oakland-angela-davis-speech>.

Figure 1: Occupy Hand Signals Graphic

OCCUPY TOGETHER HAND SIGNALS

SPEAKING



WANT
TO TALK



DIRECT
RESPONSE



CLARIFY
CLARIFY



POINT OF
ORDER

FEELING



AGREE



DONT
AGREE



OPPOSE



BLOCK

Figure 1: This graphic shows some of the Occupy hand signals used throughout camps in the US; it is not specific to Oakland.²⁷

These signals grew to embody and symbolize the direct participation dimension of the movement. Moreover, “including a catalog of embodied signals that amplify listener stances, further generate local intersubjectivity and augment both personal and group agency . . .

²⁷ Ruben de Haas, “File:OccupyHandSignals.pdf,” Wikimedia Commons, November 19, 2011, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:OccupyHandSignals.pdf>.

provid[ed] visually concrete evidence of emergent adaptations for deliberative democratic practice.”²⁸

Though the Occupy movement built organizational practices around eliminating hierarchy and implementing an egalitarian participatory democracy, Occupy sites still struggled with conflict around race, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, class, and more. Heather McKee Hurwitz discusses how “followers” in the Occupy movement often “fell back on gender and racial stereotypes about white men as ideal leaders.”²⁹ She argues that harassment and male dominance were tools used in some spaces to oppose non-traditional unofficial leadership. Black and indigenous Occupiers similarly criticized racism and white supremacy within the movement, with the latter calling out the problematic notion of “occupying” public land in a settler-colonial country. Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell describes how, “white privilege functions within Occupy, closing safe spaces for people of color to join and effectively participate.” He explains how the term Occupy, “relates to past and current efforts of militarization and occupation, which not only exclude necessary engagement of those who take projects of anti-imperialism and anti-militarization seriously, but also reconstitutes, through language and activism, these very practices.”³⁰ To combat these hegemonic tendencies within the horizontal movements, marginalized members created identity-based groups which were often based in Occupy working committees and caucuses. The next section provides an overview of the racial and class politics of Oakland and its relationship to policing and media coverage. Though hegemony exerts pressures everywhere, external localities shaped each Occupy movement site in unique ways.

²⁸ Steinberg, “Occupy Assembly,” 707.

²⁹ Heather McKee Hurwitz, “Gender And Race In The Occupy Movement: Relational Leadership And Discriminatory Resistance,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (June 2019): 157, <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-24-2-157>.

³⁰ Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell, “A Critique of the Occupy Movement from a Black Occupier,” in “Special Anniversary Conference Issue: A Celebration of the First Forty Years,” special issue, *The Black Scholar* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.41.4.0042>.

“Segregated Development”: Policing Oakland’s Class and Race Divisions

Occupy Oakland as site of protest attracted considerable attention from politicians, mainstream news outlets, and on social media and in daily conversation. Consequently, it galvanized local, national, and transnational solidarity, as well as negative commentary from political and economic elites and local and national media outlets who focused on occasional incidents of property destruction. In many ways Oakland was an anomaly among Occupy sites. Though many camps materialized in cities with historical ties to large corporations, banks, and other symbols of the 1 percent, Oakland did not appear to fit the bill as a city with no Fortune 500 companies or large financial institutions, in contrast to its neighbor San Francisco. To understand the media frenzy around Occupy Oakland, it is important to examine the city itself and its representations: demographics, geography, and racial histories that shape its layout and boundaries, and radical social movements within it.

Oakland is a major west coast port city in the East Bay Area of California, with an estimated population of 433,000 people in 2019.³¹ The city’s population is diverse, estimated at 28.3 percent white, 27.0 percent Latinx or Hispanic, 23.8 percent Black, 15.5 percent Asian, 0.9 percent Native American or Alaskan, and 0.6 percent Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, making it a majority people-of-color city.³² Oakland includes many people from working-class and lower socioeconomic statuses, with 16.7 percent of residents living in poverty according to the federal definition despite a median household income of \$72,692 from 2015 to 2019.³³ Robert Self

³¹ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oakland City, California,” U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/oaklandcitycalifornia>.

³² U.S. Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oakland City, California.” These demographics do not add up to 100 percent because some individuals are multi-racial.

³³ Compare to a poverty rate of 10.5 percent nationally in 2019. Jessica Semega, Melissa Kollar, Emily A. Shrider, and John Creamer, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2019,” U.S. Census Bureau, September 15, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-270.html#:~:text=The%20official%20poverty%20rate%20in,and%20Table%20B%2D5>.

writes that, “by the 1920s, real estate interests had carved the city into long, narrow strips that marked neighborhoods by income and elevation—flatlands, foothills, and hills—and embedded a class regime literally into the physical terrain.”³⁴ Working-class individuals lived and worked in the flatlands while middle class (and mostly white) professionals resided in foothills on the edge of the flatlands.³⁵ This landscape shaped the history’s political development in many important ways.

The City of Oakland has long been considered a site of leftist radical politics. Self describes the post-World War II interactions between Oakland city politics and conflicts over urban space, particularly to demand better distribution of wealth, opportunity, and resources.

This included labor movements in the 1940s and Black-led political movements of the 1970s:³⁶

Thirty years apart, organized labor and African American activists stood at center stage in setting an urban reform agenda for their generation. In the 1940s Oakland labor's political leaders called for a social democratic city, with union wages, inexpensive health care, affordable housing with low taxes, and public transportation available for all . . . Thirty years later African American radicals and reformers, first in contest, then in alliance, called for a remarkably similar social democratic city with renewed demands for racial equality. But . . . black leaders faced a new set of problems: entrenched poverty, deindustrialization, a weak urban tax base and a strong suburban one, and all of the social consequences of four decades of segregated development. They had to contend with the failure of the post-war political economy of growth liberalism to deliver either social mobility or economic security to black Americans as a whole.³⁷

The general citywide strike on behalf of female store clerks on December 3, 1946 and birth of the Black Panther party on October 15, 1966 are emblematic of these radical agendas, which were made necessary by the city’s deep inequalities and economic violence, especially on the

³⁴ Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.

³⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 7.

³⁶ Self, 2.

³⁷ Self, 2–3.

basis of race. Self describes how race, power, and urban space often merged together in Oakland's social movements:

Suburban city building drew homeowners, almost exclusively white and Anglo, into political battles to shape their new communities. In conflicts over land, taxes, and housing, a combination of federal policy, homeowner self-interest, and the real estate industry's profit-driven embrace of racial exclusivity encouraged suburban residents to take narrow views of their social responsibility. When black Oaklanders undertook the postwar struggle for racial equality, they challenged the inequities of this suburban city building and accompanying signs of urban underdevelopment: residential segregation, job discrimination, urban renewal, and deindustrialization. Over time, those challenges grew increasingly urgent and militant, precipitating among many East Bay African Americans a break with liberal assumptions and strategies in favor of community empowerment. African American-led political movements thus interpenetrated with a suburban politics focused on homeownership, taxes, and a retreat from connections to a larger social collective.³⁸

These conflicts around housing, racial inequality, and economic violence continue today in Oakland and certainly helped trigger Occupy Oakland in the wake of the world economic crash of 2008. Margaret M. Ramírez writes that “rampant foreclosures, evictions, and inflated housing costs that have dispossessed Oakland's low-income residents over the last decade are tied to carceral modalities that explicitly target the city's Black and Latinx geographies.” Ramírez draws on Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* to “build a borderlands analytic—a means of understanding gentrification and urban redevelopment as bordering practices that create structural and cultural exclusion in city space.”³⁹ These dynamics were exacerbated by the racialized policing of Oakland residents.

³⁸ Self, 2.

³⁹ Margaret M. Ramírez, “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (February 2020): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819843924>.

How Traditional Media Create “Dangerous” Oakland

Media coverage of Oakland often represents it as a violent or dangerous city by amplifying its murder rates and ignoring the structural systems of economic violence based on race and class. Headlines about homicides and other kinds of “deadly violence” in Oakland abound, as do articles about Oakland’s rank in national studies of “dangerous cities.”⁴⁰ The *San Francisco Examiner* even dubbed Oakland “Murderville” in 1992.⁴¹ Sonya Yvette Bradley found in her study of regional perceptions of Oakland that “people residing in San Jose and San Francisco perceived Oakland as far more dangerous than their own city, while Oakland residents assessed their city as safe as San Francisco.” These opinions were consistent irrespective of personal experiences and were significantly informed by negative media coverage “when compared to other Bay Area cities.”⁴² Bradley describes these negative media portrays as consistent through time. She cites a Gertrude Stein quote about the loss of Stein’s childhood home in 1937 (“there’s no there, there”) which has been widely misappropriated to discuss Oakland the city as lacking substance, as well the establishment of Hell’s Angels in the 1960s, and Oakland’s high murder rates during the 1980s and 1990s to show that “Oakland has been portrayed in the media as a haven for drugs and violent crime . . . As a result, the image and reputation of Oakland through the years has been perceived as economically depressed and crime-ridden.”⁴³

⁴⁰ For more recent local headlines, see [“Sad Milestones in Oakland as Deadly Violence Explodes in 2020”](#) in the *East Bay Times*, [“‘It’s a tragedy’: Oakland Crime Spikes Amid Pandemic with Worst Homicide rate in 7 Years”](#) in *ABC7 News*, [“Oakland Named One of the Most Dangerous Cities in America, San Jose One of the Safest”](#) in *KTVU FOX 2*, [“East Oakland the Epicenter of City’s Surge of Homicides Amid Pandemic. ‘The situation is getting worse’”](#) in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and [“OPD: Oakland Sees 1,400% Increase In January Homicides Over Last Year”](#) in *KPIX 5*.

⁴¹ Richard C. Paddock, “Oakland Mayor Calls for Action to Stem Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-03-25-mn-4197-story.html>.

⁴² Sonya Yvette Bradley, “Perception of Oakland by Three Bay Area Cities” (Master’s thesis, San Jose State University, 1993), iii, <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.9ugm-pfz5>.

⁴³ Bradley, “Perception of Oakland,” 1.

These narratives of Oakland as a dangerous place are often stoked by the Oakland Police Department, who supply crime statistics and create press releases that amplify and create fear around violent crime.⁴⁴ These tactics work to justify their continuing demands for more policing in parts of the city where communities of color are segregated and more money for the department's massive budget of \$290 million despite a \$62 million deficit in the city's 2020 budget.⁴⁵ The department itself has a violent and racist history that has frequently required federal intervention.

One of the most well-known instances is the Oakland Police killing of 17-year-old Black Panther Party member Bobby Hutton in April 1968. Police officers shot Hutton at least 12 times after he had surrendered and stripped to his underwear to show he was unarmed following a shootout between the police and the panthers.⁴⁶ The City of Oakland deliberately imported white police officers from southern cities in the 1960s and through the present day most Oakland police officers commute to the city to work.⁴⁷ Founder of the Black Panther Party Bobby Seale proposed a residency requirement for Oakland police officers as early as 1973 as a part of his campaign running for mayor of Oakland.⁴⁸ As of 2018, only 73 Oakland's 738 officers (9.9

⁴⁴ See the following press releases, all from 2020-2021: [“The city of Oakland is experiencing an unsettling rise in violent crime”](#), [“A Sharp Rise in Violent Crime in Oakland, Oakland Police See Spike in Homicides”](#), [“An Alarming Trend of Juveniles Committing Violent Crimes in Oakland”](#), and [“The Oakland Police Department reports a spike in homicides for the month of July. We ask our community members and city partners to help us find those responsible for these violent crimes”](#), all from the Oakland Police Department.

⁴⁵ Rachel Swan, “Defund the Police? Oakland’s Budget Shortfall Could Force Cuts,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 20, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Defund-the-police-Oakland-s-budget-shortfall-15817103.php>.

⁴⁶ “Bobby Hutton,” *PBS*, accessed March 10, 2021, http://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/people/people_hutton.html.

⁴⁷ Paul Harris, “Oakland Police: Controversial History Sets Tone for City’s Discord,” *Guardian* (U.S. edition), October 26, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/oct/26/oakland-police-department-black-community>.

⁴⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 306.

percent) were from Oakland, and 33.1 percent were white males, the largest demographic in the force.⁴⁹

In 2003, a civil rights lawsuit was filed against the City of Oakland alleging systematic mistreatment of residents by four OPD officers, including kidnapping, planting evidence/falsifying police reports, and beating citizens.⁵⁰ The class action lawsuit forced the city to pay millions of dollars in compensation to at least 119 plaintiffs. Moreover, Oakland was compelled to enter a Negotiated Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice that installed a federal monitor to oversee required reforms in the department. The four so-called, “Rough Riders,” though fired, were cleared on eight counts by a jury that included no Black persons; the jury was unable to reach decisions on 27 other counts.⁵¹

Another infamous instance of police brutality in Oakland was the 2009 killing of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old Black man who was shot in the back by Bay Area Rapid Transit Officer Johannes Mehserle as another officer, Anthony Pirone (who had punched and kneed Grant), kneeled on Grant’s neck and head at Oakland’s Fruitvale station until he died. The killing was recorded by a witness, and Mehrsele was convicted of involuntary manslaughter after claiming he had intended to use his taser as opposed to his firearm, a disputed claim in a case Grant’s family continues to pursue.⁵²

⁴⁹ Anne E. Kirkpatrick, *Monthly Informational Report on Recruiting and Sworn Staffing Levels as of July 31, 2018*, Oakland, CA: Oakland Police Department, 2018, <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/police/documents/report/oak071502.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Delphine Allen et al. v. City of Oakland*, Case No. C00-4599 TEH (N.D. Cal. Dec. 22, 2011), <https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/contract-economic-organization/files/Allen%20v.%20City%20of%20Oakland.pdf>.

⁵¹ Harris, “Oakland Police: Controversial History.”

⁵² Michelle Wiley and Sandhya Dirks, “‘Crying Out for Justice’: Oscar Grant’s Family Vows to Keep Fighting After DA Declines to File New Charges,” *KQED* (San Francisco, CA), January 11, 2011, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11854829/crying-out-for-justice-oscar-grants-family-vows-to-keep-fighting-after-da-declines-to-file-new-charges>. Kimberly E. Colwell and Jayne W. Williams, *Final Report: Internal Affairs Investigation, New Year’s Day 2009*, (Oakland, CA: Meyers Nave, 2009), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5985412-CPRA-NYE-2009-OSCAR-GRANT-IA09A002-Final->

Media scholars have long studied the complex interplay between protesters, police, and mainstream media outlets. I understand mainstream media to be conventional sources of news and journalism such as newspapers, broadcasting networks, and radio that have wide-reaching circulation and are often sponsored by large corporate conglomerations. Activists often used social media, zines, and other methods to provide alternative information to tell nuanced stories, challenge dominant narratives, publicize their message and recruit support. They also used conventional media to amplify their messages and reach audiences that may not be on social media or who may not see these messages due to the ways in which algorithms boost certain posts or bury others in one's feed. Traditional media outlets, in turn, rely on protesters for content. In this role, mainstream media also help shape and distort public perception of social movements and their activists.⁵³ Framing is an especially powerful way that media accounts shape public perception of protest events. These are "schemata of interpretation" that help observers and readers make sense of information and events.⁵⁴ Framing not only highlights the salience of certain issues, it also omits or distorts in telling the story, inviting value judgments in the process.⁵⁵ Journalists who cover certain protests, for example, will marginalize and delegitimize activists by portraying them as deviants, usually relying on official sources and

[Report.html](#). A report written by an independent investigators hired by BART confirmed this dispute and can be viewed at the previous link.

⁵³ William A. Gamson, and Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media as Interacting Systems," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July 1993): 116-17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1047795>. Gamson and Wolfsfeld describe the relationship between media and social movements as transactional, noting that "movements are generally much more dependent on media than the reverse." Protesters rely on news media for increased mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement to generate public support and sympathy. Media, on the other hand, rely on social movements for drama, conflict, and action; however, such a structure pits social movements against many other potential newsworthy stories. This creates what the authors call a power dependency, noting that for social movements, "the ratio is rarely favorable" and forces movements to pay a price of entry such as losing control over framing within stories.

⁵⁴ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974): 21; Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1993): 52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.

⁵⁵ Douglas M. McLeod, "The Protest Paradigm and News Coverage of the 'Right to Party' Movement," in *It's Show Time! Media, Politics, and Popular Culture*, ed. David A. Schultz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 35-36.

definitions, and failing to contextualize the causes of mass mobilizations.⁵⁶ Framing became particularly important in shaping the narratives about Occupy Oakland.

Focusing on institutional dynamics, Stuart Hall describes several newsroom factors, such as time pressures and demands of objectivity in newsrooms, that “produce a systematically structured *over-accessing* to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions,” leading the media to “tend, faithfully and impartially, to reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power in society’s institutional order.”⁵⁷ He found that the media, courts, and police feed into each other to produce racialized moral panic, in this case around “mugging” in early 1970s England.⁵⁸ Rather than thinking about modern police as simply responding to crime, court officials as objectively punishing the culprits, and media as giving objective accounts of the facts, together they “must be understood as actively and continuously part of the whole process to which, also, they are ‘reacting.’”⁵⁹

While Occupy Oakland was not a “crime,” similar dynamics existed between the police, economic and political elites, and the media. Continuous reporting on police raids and property damage, potential health hazards and other dangers in the camps, and other ways Occupy “hurt” the community, especially small business and property values, all contributed to the demonization of the Occupiers, shifting the framing from income inequality and racialized police violence to moral panic about the Occupiers that drew on a history of racialized media narratives about the city. Very quickly, mainstream coverage twisted or lost the Occupy messages, deemed

⁵⁶ McLeod, “The Protest Paradigm,” 34–40; Douglas M. McLeod and James K. Hertog, “Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media’s Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups,” in *Mass Media, Social Control and Social Change: A Macrosocial Perspective*, ed. David Demers, and Kasisomayajula Viswanath (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999), 311–315, 319–321.

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, (London, UK: Macmillan Publishers, 1978): 58 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ Hall, *Policing the Crisis*, 3–28, 219–227.

⁵⁹ Hall, 52 (emphasis in original).

its potential for change a failure, and trivialized its participants. Like the many horizontal social movements that came before it, Occupy was subject to the hierarchical norms that encourage reporters to turn to leaders and spokespeople for official positions. Despite these barriers, Occupy Oakland endured as a site of knowledge production, developing new forms and inspiring new projects and vocabularies that endure today, cementing its legacy as an important site of resistance.

Chapter One

Comparing Local and Regional Media Framing of the Occupy Oakland

Movement: *Oakland Tribune* and *San Francisco Chronicle*

In the creation of new political horizons, social movements inevitably brush up against hegemonic institutions and mechanisms of power which create and uphold the status quo. Given that the City of Oakland, California, has long been considered a site of radicalism and activism (particularly concerning issues related to race), it is perhaps unsurprising that Oakland has also been depicted as a violent place through amplified focus on crime rates and selective media coverage of local protests as destructive. Former President Donald Trump's declaration that Oakland and Ferguson, Missouri are the most dangerous places he has ever been to is evocative of sentiments that paint cities with strong racial justice movements as dangerous or violent.⁶⁰ One manner through which these sentiments are often mobilized is mainstream media. Deborah Gould writes of the mechanism by which mainstream media disparages social movements:

More subtle disparagements . . . deauthorize contentious activism. They work to make activism threatening in some instances and simply unintelligible in others, turning activism itself into something embarrassing, something that mature adults do not do. In doing so, they privilege, and potentially bolster, the electorally bounded political horizon, foreclosing other, more oppositional activist imaginings.⁶¹

I am particularly interested in examining the ways in which mainstream media privileges these electorally bounded political horizons, asking if existing political boundaries are perpetuated due to the nature of the social movement itself, the specific newsroom cultures reporting on it (and

⁶⁰ Robert Draper, "Mr. Trump's Wild Ride," *New York Times*, May 18, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/magazine/donald-trump-primary-win.html?_r=0.

⁶¹ Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 279.

newsrooms' familiarity with the locale they are reporting on), or the structures of journalism and framing protest itself.

On September 17, 2011, protesters began occupying New York City's Zuccotti Park in the first Occupy protests against economic inequality. The protests quickly spread across the country, and on October 10 the first Occupiers began pitching their tents in Oakland, California. Protestors first occupied Frank Ogawa Place across from the Oakland City Hall and renamed the area Oscar Grant Plaza to memorialize a black man shot and killed by the Bay Area Rapid Transportation police officer Johannes Mehserle on January 1, 2009. Following a massive police raid on Oakland's main Occupy camp on October 25, during which police officers deployed tear gas, rubber bullets, bean bag rounds, and other munitions, national attention quickly turned to Oakland as a site of radical resistance. News outlets flocked to the city to cover ongoing turmoil in the movement as workers shut down the Port of Oakland, took over public and private spaces, and marched through the streets.

In this chapter, I consider the politically limiting consequences of the framing devices used to represent the Occupy Oakland Movement by two California newspapers, the local *Oakland Tribune* and the regional *San Francisco Chronicle*, in their news coverage (rather than opinion or letters) between October 10, 2011 and February 1, 2012. Initially, I planned to also examine national coverage of Occupy Oakland from the *New York Times* given my interest in how familiarity with setting impacts framing, but I dropped that angle to delve more deeply into local and regional coverage.⁶² I selected the *Oakland Tribune* because it was headquartered in

⁶² Given its prominence as a national and international paper, the *NYT* focused its attention on protests across the country and sometimes situated its coverage of Oakland amidst protests in other cities. Articles that exclusively reported on Oakland centered around high-profile events related to Occupy Oakland such as the October 25 and November 14, 2011 clearings of the Oscar Grant Plaza encampment, Oakland port shutdowns on November 2 and December 15, 2011, and protests on January 29, 2012 that faced violent police repression. The *Times* often described "violent clashes" between protesters and police and described Oakland as the most "militant" Occupy site in the country. Its surface-level accounts of protests and police repression are not surprising given the ways that

and focused mostly on the city of Oakland and thus had ample resources and motivation to cover the protests in detail; it also had greater knowledge of the city.⁶³ It should be noted that the *Tribune* was consolidated along with several other East Bay newspapers in 2016 under a new name, the *East Bay Times*. I chose the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a regional paper due to its proximity to Oakland and focus on the Bay Area while at the same time positioning itself as a resource for news of national and international importance.⁶⁴ Protesters' unsuccessful attempt to occupy the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center on January 28, 2012, marks the end of my media analysis period because as protesters no longer occupied physical space, clashes with police were largely absent and ongoing mainstream media coverage of the movement dwindled.⁶⁵ In addition, activists had shifted their attention to other forms of resistance.

Examining both local and regional articles, it becomes clear that coverage of the Occupy Oakland movement served to stunt the radical potential of the project as it unfolded by depicting OO in a negative light. This negative narration was due to a lack of understanding of the Occupy movement itself, unfamiliarity with the complex local issues shaping the Oakland site, and general journalistic practices shaping protest coverage. There were certainly differences in the

national outlets often employ a “parachute journalism” method wherein reporters fly in from outside areas to cover events without significant understandings of the places they are covering. Thus, the *New York Times* did not paint a nuanced picture of the reasons for protest in Oakland, the inner workings of the camps, or the political vision Occupy Oakland attempted to execute. Though it reported on police violence, *NYT* coverage also highlighted property destruction and interpersonal violence near/in protests in a manner that sometimes demonized protesters and equated police brutality/violence with protesters' minor acts of resistance in the form of throwing bottles or vandalizing buildings.

⁶³ Information about the circulation of the newspaper is difficult to find as the *Oakland Tribune* itself no longer exists. Its current parent company (and its many subsidiaries) boasts a circulation of over five million weekly readers. It is likely the *Oakland Tribune*'s circulation was much smaller, and estimates from 1982 place it closer to 200,000 per a [New York Times article](#).

⁶⁴ “San Francisco Chronicle,” Hearst, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.hearst.com/newspapers/san-francisco-chronicle>. The newspaper has a weekly circulation of 1.2 million readers. More details about its viewership can be viewed in here: https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/655969/Media_Kit_and_File_Assets/MEDIA_KIT_GENERAL.pdf.

⁶⁵ Coverage would occasionally flare up around significant points of protest after the end of encampments, such as during May Day demonstrations in May 2012, or when cases related to Occupy Oakland worked their way through the courts (such as a settlement reached between the city and an injured protester in March of 2014).

two papers' coverage of Occupy Oakland but there were also shared ideologically driven framing devices that journalists relied on, including a focus on the leaderless structure of Occupy, its lack of tangible goals, and law-and-order standpoints that highlighted conflict with police or destruction of property. Coverage failed to ground the actions of the movement's actors in the specific context of Oakland, a critical point in demonstrating the necessity of Occupy Oakland's radical agenda. Additionally, in many ways inadequacies in coverage can be explained by foundational journalistic reporting techniques that center conflict and disruption, as well as the industry's embeddedness in hierarchical capitalist structures committed to preservation of the status quo.⁶⁶ Journalism, after all, is considered "the fourth estate" in the United States, alongside the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of government.

The first section of the chapter describes the tension between Occupiers and traditional corporate news media. As a result of this tension, protesters turned to both analog and digital media to challenge and reframe the problematic narratives about Occupy Oakland put forth in mainstream news accounts. This section also demonstrates how the *Oakland Tribune's* local focus created more in-depth coverage compared to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, especially regarding the wide breadth of protesters' concerns. The *Chronicle* was more likely, in contrast, to focus on the potentially negative impact protests would have on Oakland's reputation as a safe place for economic activity and to trivialize the reasons for protest, the focus of the second section. The third section examines how Occupy Oakland's deliberately horizontal structure was misunderstood and critiqued by the *Chronicle*. Indeed, perceptions of protesters as "angry" colored coverage of Occupy Oakland in both *Tribune* and the *Chronicle* coverage. I contrast

⁶⁶ Monica Brasted, "Protest in Media," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 17, no. 4 (2005): 384-87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650500374645>; Jules Boykoff, "Framing Dissent: Mass-Media Coverage of the Global Justice Movement," *New Political Science* 28, no. 22 (June 2006): 203-6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140600679967>.

analog media (such as printed-paper media including zines) distributed by protesters with this coverage in both the third and last sections. The final section takes a close look at how both newspapers' protest coverage contributed to the racialized image of Oakland as a violent city. The news accounts described protestors as violent even as they ignored or downplayed the police brutality endemic to Oakland's Police Department for decades. Both newspapers relied on official sources and crime statistics to bolster these representations. In studying the demonization of protesters and delegitimization of Occupy Oakland, it becomes clear that social movements face significant barriers in expanding or creating new political horizons because mainstream media shape how such horizons are framed and disseminated, often re-articulating dominant ideology in their coverage. These difficulties are complicated by different newsrooms' familiarities with the complex workings of movements and the local histories of the cities they take place in.

Framing Occupy Oakland & the Difference Local News Makes

Tensions between news media personnel and Oakland Occupiers ran high throughout the period during which Occupy received the most media attention, between October 2011 and February 2012.⁶⁷ Many protesters believed the mainstream press to be a tool of the "1 percent" that was contributing to the oppression of the "99 percent." Illustrating this tendency, news

⁶⁷ In their study of the media's "selection bias" when deciding what protest events to cover, McCarthy et al. describe a mechanism of selection bias called the "media issue attention cycle," or "the sudden ascendance of an issue from previous obscurity to a sustained prominence . . . that dominates the news for a period of time before once again fading from media attention." Behind demonstration size, the second most important correlate of news coverage for a protest is "being in the right place at the right time in a media attention cycle." As Occupy sites diminished and the media cycle moved on, coverage of Occupy protests decreased. Therefore, one can anticipate that the significant coverage the movement received at its inception and around significant events are very important in defining public attitudes towards the actors and determining longevity of the movement. John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail, and Jackie Smith, "Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations, 1982 and 1991," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 3 (1996): 481, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096360>.

coverage usually focused on the spectacle or violence associated with the movement rather than the substantive issues protesters raised. The Occupy Oakland movement, like other Occupy groups, did not have a formal hierarchical structure and offered no singular coherent message. News media, in turn, struggled to represent the complexities of the movement. To avoid the use of intermediaries and to create their own frames to shape public perception of Occupy, many protesters took to Twitter and other forms of social media to spread their messages directly to the public. Though many associate Occupy with social media, Sasha Costanza-Chock writes:

Media practices within Occupy are marked by extensive offline, analog, poster and print-based, and ‘low-tech’ forms of media production, in parallel with cutting-edge technology development and use . . . In many cases, Occupy activists make and circulate media elements across platforms (including analog media forms and channels) in processes elsewhere described as transmedia mobilization.⁶⁸

Costanza-Chock touches on the importance of traditional strategies for communicating and building support in Occupy movements, such as distributing political zines in paper and creating independent newspapers, including the *Oscar Grant Plaza Gazette* and the *Occupied Oakland Tribune*. These alternative sources of media allowed protesters to highlight the issues they wanted to educate the public on and articulate their own imagination for the future without having their message filtered through traditional news outlets or framed through the protest paradigm, a set of patterns in news coverage of protests that marginalizes and delegitimizes social movements defined by Douglas McLeod. Journalistic practices that categorize the protest paradigm include portraying protesters as deviant against the status quo, failing to adequately define and contextualize the motivations for protests, and relying on official sources and definitions.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sasha Costanza-Chock, “Mic Check! Media Cultures and the Occupy Movement,” *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2012): 378, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.710746>.

⁶⁹ Douglas M. McLeod, “The Protest Paradigm and News Coverage of the ‘Right to Party’ Movement,” in *It’s Show Time! Media, Politics, and Popular Culture*, ed. David A. Schultz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 34–40;

Analyzing textual and photographic coverage of Occupy Oakland from the *Oakland Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* reveal different levels of nuance in reporting when it comes to portrayals of the movement and what it was fighting for. While the *Oakland Tribune's* local nature allowed it to portray textured motivations and dynamics within the Occupy movement, the *Chronicle* failed to capture the movement's intentions or purposes and did not understand its internal workings, including General Assemblies, which were a democratic method of communication and decision-making used by Occupy encampments throughout the world beginning in 2011. For example, in the early weeks of its coverage of Occupy Oakland, the *Oakland Tribune* discussed the local contexts that shaped the movement as they covered Occupy solidarity protests in support of prison inmates and the occupation of a Wells Fargo Bank branch by mothers. These shortcomings regarding the movement's driving political ideology and goals severely limited the public's ability to understand Occupy's new political horizon and the reason it felt compelled to call for such drastic changes.

Though the overarching theme of economic inequality and corporate greed came to shape the Occupy movement as a whole, there were several specific factors at play in Oakland that fueled protesters' involvement. These included high rates of home foreclosures in the years following the economic crisis due to predatory (and often racialized) lending, police brutality (Oakland had several large protests following the murder of Oscar Grant by a Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer in early 2009), and detrimental health outcomes, including higher mortality, for the poor and working classes. According to a Bay Area health advocate and former Alameda county health public officer interviewed by the reporter, "every additional \$12,500 in

Douglas M. McLeod and James K. Hertog, "Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media's Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups," in *Mass Media, Social Control and Social Change: A Macrosocial Perspective*, ed. David Demers, and Kasisomayajula Viswanath (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999), 311–315, 319–321.

household income translates to an added year of life for residents of the Bay Area. Another study showed that residents with household incomes one standard deviation below the mean were 35 percent more likely to die prematurely; those with incomes one standard deviation above the mean were 25 percent less likely to suffer the same fate.”⁷⁰ The advocate argued that the Occupy movement was partly fueled by these links between poor health outcomes and premature death.

Protesters created newsworthy events and expressed the agenda and priorities of the Occupy Oakland movement to news outlets, including the local paper the *Oakland Tribune*. One example of this phenomenon is the protest that occurred on October 14, 2011, during which 150 people marched in solidarity with the ongoing Pelican Bay inmates’ hunger strike to protest inhumane conditions of confinement.⁷¹ They demanded that the prison eliminate group punishments, abolish the “debriefing policy” requiring prisoners to inform on gang activity, comply with the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in Prisons’ stance on long-term solitary confinement, provide adequate and nutritious food, and expand and provide constructive programs for those who are incarcerated indefinitely.⁷²

Not only did the *Tribune* cover this action, it also included themes from the demonstration and others like it in its early coverage of Occupy Oakland, such as an October 17 article about a camp visit from three American hikers who had recently been freed from an Iranian prison. According to the account, “The original message when Occupy Oakland got under way one week ago was a protest against widespread unemployment and corporate greed,

⁷⁰ Scott Johnson, “Oakland Effect: Outrage Over Inequality the Crux of Occupy Movement, Group Says,” *Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), November 25, 2011, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2011/11/25/oakland-effect-outrage-over-inequality-the-crux-of-occupy-movement-group-says/>

⁷¹ Harry Harris, “Protesters March Through Downtown Oakland,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), October 17, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/14/protesters-march-through-downtown-oakland/>.

⁷² Hannah Lehmann, “California Inmates Hunger Strike for Humane Conditions of Confinement, 2011,” *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, November 27, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/california-inmates-hunger-strike-humane-conditions-confinement-2011>.

but the encampment has grown to encompass many other causes: support for state prison inmates who are on hunger strikes, housing rights, fair wages and against social oppression.”⁷³ Due to its focus exclusively on Oakland, the *Tribune* likely had more resources and incentive to cover smaller protests as well as actions by Occupiers, sometimes contributing to more nuanced coverage of local causes. Another example of this local vision can be found in the *Tribune*’s November 4, 2011, article which gives a detailed picture of a group of mothers and children who called themselves the “Colorful Mamas of the 99 Percent” taking action against a Wells Fargo branch.⁷⁴ The group criticized Wells Fargo for reaping massive profits in the wake of the 2008-2009 federal bailout as they foreclosed on homes at a high rate in Oakland, which was cutting school budgets at the time.

In a photo included with the article (Figure 2), five children embrace hands and hold red balloons as they march in front of a banner with blue and green writing that reads: “TEACH BIG BANKS TO SHARE / WE’RE MOVING OUR MONEY!”. Each of the five children is wearing a large black letter printed on white paper glued to a colored background hanging by ribbons around their necks to spell out the word SHARE. Mothers flank the children on either side and can be seen in the background.

⁷³ Kristen J. Bender, “Freed American Hikers Speak to Occupy Oakland,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), October 17, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/17/freed-american-hikers-speak-to-occupy-oakland/>.

⁷⁴ Doug Oakley, “Moms and Kids ‘Occupy’ Oakland Wells Fargo Branch, Close Accounts,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), November 4, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/11/04/moms-and-kids-occupy-oakland-wells-fargo-branch-close-accounts-2/>.

Figure 2: Teach Big Banks to Share Photo



Figure 2: Photo by Jane Tyska on November 4 from the Oakland Tribune. Caption reads: “Parents and their children march to the Wells Fargo bank on Franklin Street near 20th Street on Friday, Nov. 4, 2011 in Oakland, Calif. After the short march from Snow Park, several of the group closed their bank accounts in support of the Occupy movement, and a short rally was held outside of the bank. From left are Citlali Sanchez-Udovic, Oakland, 4, Xitlamina Arroyo, Oakland, 4, Yan Wong, Oakland, 4, Chencho Soto-Vigil Koon, Berkeley, 3, Soluna Ibarra-Tacdol, Oakland, 3 and Danfeng Vigil-Soto Koon, Berkeley.”⁷⁵

The image captures the whimsical and multigenerational elements of the protest while hammering home the point that children are being cheated by the malfeasance of banks like Wells Fargo. The children hold hands to indicate solidarity and walk towards the photographer to suggest progress. The word “choice” on the banner places banks in a position of subordination to the mothers, who treat them as children who need to make better choices.

Though this kind of imagery can sometimes be used to undermine the seriousness of a movement, the inclusion of local nuances shaping the march helps explain why a new political

⁷⁵ Oakley, “Moms and Kids ‘Occupy.’”

vision is necessary. Wells Fargo incited anger for taking federal bailout money after the 2008-2009 economic crash and later posting record profits in a city with high foreclosure rates and predatory lending. City residents continued to suffer from the outcomes of the crash itself. As Doug Oakley writes of the protest: “Wells Fargo, which took federal bailout money during the economic crisis, posted a profit of \$15.18 billion for the 12 months ending in September, its highest number for any one-year period.” Oakley described several issues raised by the mothers:

The moms said they were closing their accounts because the bank should pay more taxes that eventually make it to social services that are being cut, like schools . . . “Taxes go to schools and in Oakland we’re closing five schools and 25 are on the chopping block,” said Murillo. “We want to contribute the voices of moms of color and present to the public the people who are carrying the brunt of a failed economy, which is our children.”

By highlighting the protesters’ messages about the local impact of these corporations, the *Tribune* helped readers understand some of the driving forces of Occupy Oakland.

Further context is given in the article when protesters were quoted discussing families who had lost their homes to foreclosure. These frames seem even more salient today following the exposure of the bank’s illegal fraudulent practices (such as secretly opening up bank accounts and applying for credit cards under customers’ names) that date back as early as May 2011.⁷⁶ In a report by the Senate Majority entitled “The Real Wells Fargo: Board & Management Failures, Consumer Abuses, and Ineffective Regulatory Oversight,” the authors write that “Wells Fargo’s customers have been exposed to countless abuses, including racial discrimination, wrongful foreclosure, illegal vehicle repossession, and fraudulently opened accounts.”⁷⁷ By situating protesters’ actions in the context of the predatory behavior of Wells Fargo in this article, the

⁷⁶ Michael Corkery, “Wells Fargo Fined \$185 Million for Fraudulently Opening Accounts,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/09/business/dealbook/wells-fargo-fined-for-years-of-harm-to-customers.html>.

⁷⁷ Majority Staff of the Committee on Financial Services, *The Real Wells Fargo: Board & Management Failures, Consumer Abuses, and Ineffective Regulatory Oversight*, H.R. Rep. 116, 2nd sess. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020), https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo146454/wells_fargo_staff_report_final_mm.pdf.

Tribune helped readers understand the gravity of the issues motivating Occupy protests.

However, some of this sentiment was undercut by comments by Wells Fargo spokesperson

Ruben Pulido, quoted in the same article:

“Also in 2010, [Pulido] said, the bank donated \$20.7 million to nonprofits and schools in the Bay Area and gave \$450,000 to public schools in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. “People who are closing their accounts should ask the institutions they are going to how much they are giving to local schools.”

It is unsurprising that Wells Fargo representatives attempted to undermine the narrative put forth by protests. Fairness practices in journalism require reporters to ask opposing parties for comment and thus inclusion of this perspective was unavoidable. Though its coverage of Occupy Oakland often presented “both sides” arguments, the local focus of the *Oakland Tribune* allowed for more coverage of the Occupy activism, thereby raising public awareness of the diverse issues discussed within Occupy Oakland and creating an understanding of the rationale driving Occupy’s new vision for the world to the public.

In contrast, the *San Francisco Chronicle* struggled to provide readers with a nuanced picture of the tensions leading to the Occupy movement, instead relying on tropes of the restless angry protester and stoking economic anxieties. Though it had a near endless stream of articles covering Occupy Oakland from the initial occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza on October 10, 2011, through January 2012 when the last attempts at occupying public spaces ceased, the motivations the *Chronicle* cited for Occupy Oakland protests were typically described in a few words: “anger over economic inequality and corporate excess”—if motives were mentioned at all. While this characterization is not inaccurate, seldom did articles dig into further detail about the driving forces and context surrounding this anger, such as frustration with federal bailout of large banks or high citywide unemployment rates. Between 2007 and 2011, one in seven Oakland mortgages

entered into foreclosure and one in fourteen were eventually foreclosed.⁷⁸ The individual and community harm of such realities cannot be overlooked, and yet the *Chronicle* typically failed to address them when covering the Occupy movement. Instead, the *Chronicle* often focused on questions of “safety and security” due to Occupy, a matter addressed in the next section.

Safety and Security for Who?

For the *Chronicle*, concerns about safety and security often centered on private property and business viability. The coverage repeatedly highlighted the Occupy Oakland camp as a public health hazard, its Occupants including violent deviants, and protests as disruptive to the business community because of property damage or negative reputations that could lead to devaluation as sites for future investment. Conversely, protesters often defined safety in terms of the risks from interactions with police, establishing clear rules banning law enforcement personnel from camps. They preferred to internally address conflicts that arose between Occupiers. Unlike the rhetoric employed by local newspapers and some politicians, many protesters did not highlight property damage as violence. They focused attention on the physical and carceral violence inflicted by policing and the criminal justice system, as well as economic violence inflicted by corporations such as banks.

The *Chronicle*'s coverage often portrayed Occupy Oakland as harmful to the very individuals on whose behalf it advocated. One such article, entitled “Oakland business owners fear they won't recover,” by Jill Tucker and Matthai Kuruvila, describes the situation for the

⁷⁸ James Yelen, “The Foreclosure Crisis in Oakland, CA: Before and After (Observations from the American Community Survey),” Open Computing Facility at UC Berkeley, December 13, 2016, <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~jyelen/2016/12/13/the-foreclosure-crisis-in-oakland-before-and-after/>.

owners of a formerly bustling restaurant, Kevin Best and Misty Rasche, struggling to survive in the aftermath of protests.⁷⁹ They write:

Business at their B Restaurant & Bar has been harmed further since Occupy Oakland tents went up at City Hall on Oct. 10. Best and Rasche worry that the collateral damage from the protest may be the final blow for their restaurant . . . as downtown business owners, they have been on a never-ending roller-coaster ride through the recession and the impact of high city unemployment rates, a series of high-profile protests and the disruptive demonstrations, and now Occupy Oakland, with its two tear-gassed melees in a little more than a week. Despite it all, what may hurt most is the damage to the area's image.

The *Chronicle* frequently reproduced the narrative of direct financial harm caused by Occupy to businesses and the long-lasting damage to Oakland as an area for investment. The lack of deeper analysis was startling. The very premise of OO was to criticize the causes of the 2008 recession that plunged so many small businesses into chaos in the first place, and yet the reporters frame Occupy protests not as the nail in the coffin, but the factor that “may hurt most.” Additionally, the use of the term “teargassed melees” leaves the root source of conflict and chaos vague. The reporters even go as far as to question why the Occupy movement would coalesce into such a powerful force in Oakland, where “only” one Fortune 500 company is based and the unemployment rate was 16 percent. This cavalier tone ignores the gravity of 16 percent unemployment, as if Oakland natives should have no economic grievances. The article implies that Oakland needs more corporations to come and employ people. These were surface-level accounts of the concerns of the Occupy movement and its drivers. They ignored racialized gentrification in Oakland and the increasingly high rents and costs of home ownership, as well as

⁷⁹ Jill Tucker and Matthai Kuruvila, “Oakland Business Owners Fear They Won’t Recover,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 7, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Oakland-business-owners-fear-they-won-t-recover-2324043.php>.

the long distances workers traveled between home and work due to lack of affordable housing in the city.⁸⁰

A “safety and security” discourse aimed at the potential dangers of protests dominated in *Chronicle* coverage of Occupy Oakland, even as residents and workers in Oakland worried about police violence. In Tucker and Kuruvila’s article describing the struggles of two business owners in the aftermath of protests, the reporters quote a real estate consultant who advises retail businesses, Helen Bulwik. The consultant discusses the impact of protests on downtown development: “People are afraid to come downtown . . . how do you sell it at this point? What you cannot sell is safety and security.” Bulwik’s discourse around individuals’ fear to come downtown as a result of protests is reminiscent of language used in the wake of the July 2011 protests that occurred in the aftermath of the killing of Oscar Grant, an unarmed Black man, at the hands of a Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer who was charged with manslaughter rather than murder. During these protests, some buildings in downtown Oakland were damaged, looted, or set on fire. Media deployed law-and-order and property-concerned rhetoric that focused on damage to the reputation of the City of Oakland from the protests *rather than the killing of Grant*. A few months later, city officials, the police, and the business community often repurposed this loaded language when discussing Occupy Oakland. The reporters described vacant storefronts and quoted the same retail consultant, who discussed the business community’s attempts to “revitalize” Oakland’s downtown: “The Men’s Wearhouse and Whole Foods, both damaged during last week’s strike, moved into the neighborhood in recent years, but Oakland remains an urban city without a significant retail presence downtown, Bulwik said.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Julianne Hing, “Gentrification Report: Black and Latino Displacement Is Remaking the Bay Area,” *Color Lines* (New York, NY), April 7, 2014, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/gentrification-report-black-and-latino-displacement-remaking-bay-area>.

⁸¹ Tucker and Kuruvila, “Business Owners Fear.”

These representations of Occupy as hindering the development of a struggling city ignored the movement's grievances with large (and anti-union) corporations such as Whole Foods, which was not yet owned by Amazon. Though loss of workers' wages and closures of small businesses are legitimate concerns, the condemnatory and patronizing attitude towards Occupy Oakland and its purported effects on the downtown image bordered on ideological fearmongering, reinforced by the image accompanying the *San Francisco Chronicle* article showing a large white banner with all-caps "AVAILABLE" printed in red letters hanging lopsided in a storefront window. The blinds are drawn behind the poster and Oakland City Hall can be seen in the background at the edge of the photograph (Figure 3). The dark hues of the photograph and overcast sky as well as the foreboding red letters create an ominous scene that promises the closure of additional businesses and loss of jobs in the space adjacent to the site where Occupiers pitched their main camp.

Figure 3: Space Available Photo



Figure 3: Photo by Michael Macor on November 5 from the San Francisco Chronicle. Its caption reads: “The 1330 Building on the corner of 14th street and Broadway shows an available sign in the window, under the shadow of city hall, in downtown Oakland, Ca. on Saturday November 05, 2011. The efforts to revitalize downtown Oakland has been difficult in recent years and now with the development of recent events has made them even harder.”⁸²

Like government officials, the business community and media took up the rhetoric of safety and security over grievances at corporate and state-sanctioned economic and social inequality. They did not acknowledge the history of institutions, systems, and relationships that impoverished Oakland in the first place or that the envisioned “revitalization” would lead to the further displacement of residents, revealing the ways in which Occupy Oakland’s political visions were severely limited in the public eye by media gatekeepers.

⁸² Tucker and Kuruvila, “Business Owners Fear.”

The *Chronicle* covered Occupy Oakland with a patronizing and trivializing tone, presenting protesters as unreasonably “angry.” In one article about “conflict” between the police and protesters, Demian Bulwa and Justin Berton quote Oakland mayor Jean Quan discussing protesters who damaged City Hall: They write:

“It’s like a tantrum,” Mayor Jean Quan said while showing the damage inside the building, which included a broken model of City Hall she estimated to be 100 years old. “They’re treating us like a playground.”
Quan said Occupy Oakland had “refused to be nonviolent” and, as a result, was “turning off the rest of the movement.”⁸³

Terms such as “tantrum” and “playground” infantilize the protesters and downplay the real grievances motivating the protests. The reporters quote several protesters describing the protest as “poorly planned” and “disorganized” moments after describing police violence in response to protesters’ actions. Such framing and rhetoric delegitimize the protestors and their claims, painting police and government officials as the adults or parents justly punishing angry children who were lashing out. By ignoring the driving force of these protests and highlighting protesters’ “anger,” the *Chronicle* obscured legitimate political critiques of systemic problems and contributed to the representations of long-time Occupiers as an unfocused violent mob.

Such trivializing portrayals were also present in coverage of the Occupiers’ “General Strike” and shutdown of the Port of Oakland on November 2 and December 12, 2011. The simplistic depictions of the shutdowns as disorganized and harmful to the community exhibited many familiar qualities. Kevin Fagan, Demian Bulwa, and Matthai Kuruvila wrote in advance of the November 2 strike that, “From schools and downtown stores to the nation’s fifth busiest port, Oakland is bracing for Wednesday’s citywide general strike, a hastily planned and ambitious

⁸³ Demian Bulwa and Justin Berton, “Occupy, Oakland Blame Each Other for Violence,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 30, 2012, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Occupy-Oakland-blame-each-other-for-violence-2826102.php>.

action called by Occupy protesters a day after police forcibly removed their City Hall encampment last week.”⁸⁴

Though the words frame the event as a probable failure—being “hastily planned and ambitious”—thousands of protesters were able to close down the port (police estimated 7,000 protesters while other estimates from protesters ranged as high as 30,000 people). The November 2 strike had support from several unions, as the *Chronicle*’s coverage noted, but the second strike in December was lambasted for not having union support. In an article titled, “Opposition Grows to Occupy’s Port Shutdown Plan,” Fagan, Bulwa, and Kuruvila write that “unlike last time, when the area’s major unions gave tacit or outright approval, many of them see Monday’s action as disruptive and unnecessary.”⁸⁵ The story quotes the Alameda County Building and Construction Trade Council’s secretary-treasurer, Andreas Cluver, saying “The port is a public entity. It’s really not the 1 percent. Go shut down a country club – that’s the 1 percent.” The patronizing tone once again targets Occupy activists for damaging the people they promise to speak for. In a similar vein, one subhead in the article is entitled “Hurting innocents.”

While the reporters were correct in asserting that union leadership did not support the strikes and that workers would be losing wages, this narrative ignores the subtleties of Occupy Oakland’s relationship with labor unions such as the International Longshore Workers Union. In an article about Occupy Oakland and the labor movement, Bill Baderston writes that the December 12 strike, which was part of a greater call to shut down ports all along the West Coast, “was problematic for ILWU leaders and some activists, since the union was facing major legal

⁸⁴ Kevin Fagan, Demian Bulwa, and Matthai Kuruvila, “Occupy Oakland: City Braces for General Strike,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 31, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Occupy-Oakland-City-braces-for-general-strike-2324646.php>.

⁸⁵ Kevin Fagan, Demian Bulwa, and Matthai Kuruvila, “Opposition Grows to Occupy’s Port Shutdown Plan,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 11, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Opposition-grows-to-Occupy-s-port-shutdown-plan-2395227.php>

constraints, including injunctions and massive fines resulting from earlier actions in support of the workers at Longview.”⁸⁶ Longshore workers in Longview, Washington had blocked access to an export grain terminal after the EGT hired unionized operating engineers in place of unionized longshore workers. While the reporters quoted Robert McEllrath, president of ILWU, criticizing OO for “co-opting our struggle in order to advance a broader agenda” in the second strike, they failed to mention the \$315,000 of fines ordered by federal judges that the ILWU faced at the time due to illegal picketing.⁸⁷

McEllrath’s criticism may have been valid, but the *Chronicle*’s coverage does not address the negotiations between labor and Occupy or the attacks against labor union action. As Baderston writes, “There is no question that some criticisms of Occupy were accurate, especially those concerning poor communication with labor and misunderstanding union democracy where a majority of union members vote to support particular proposals, but the growing sense of worker solidarity within Occupy and beyond was the great gain for the Shutdown.”⁸⁸ Despite the sometimes-uneasy alliance between the two, both Occupy activists and unions had a great deal to learn from each other to further their organizing goals.

Misunderstanding OO’s Vision & Message

Early depictions of Occupy Oakland in the *San Francisco Chronicle* consisted of dual imagery: a diverse collection of mostly peaceful protesters who properly displayed civil disobedience alongside violent anarchist comrades who vandalized stores and engaged in black

⁸⁶ Bill Baderston, “Occupy Oakland and the Labor Movement,” *New Politics* 14, no. 53 (Summer 2012), https://newpol.org/issue_post/occupy-oakland-and-labor-movement/.

⁸⁷ Erik Olsen, “ILWU Won’t Join Occupy Oakland’s Attempts to Shut Down West Coast Ports,” *The Daily News* (Longview, WA), November 24, 2011, https://tdn.com/news/local/ilwu-wont-join-occupy-oaklands-attempts-to-shut-down-west-coast-ports/article_1d1bf7e6-1631-11e1-8eff-001cc4c002e0.html.

⁸⁸ Baderston, “The Labor Movement.”

bloc tactics such as breaking windows, setting fires to dumpsters, and concealing their identities with black clothing and face coverings. As time wore on and more “hardcore” protesters continued their occupation against the city government’s wishes (and after forcible removal from the camp on October 25), this framework was used to delegitimize the protesters and their claims. This process took a matter of two to three weeks for the *Chronicle*, and closer to three to four weeks in the *Tribune*. However, both outlets portrayed protesters as hypocrites destroying Oakland and hurting working-class people. This narrative conjured notions of a group who had drifted from the “real” purpose of Occupy Oakland, namely criticism of large corporations, without understanding how taking over of public spaces was part of this criticism. Articles highlighted the “peaceful protesters”’ inability to tame the agents of destruction due to a lack of formalized structure within Occupy Oakland, again missing that direct democracy was part of the logic of the Occupy movements. This mainstream media focus on the lack of a hierarchical order as a problem illustrates how the newsroom reacts with frustration to any form of leadership that does not fit into the dominant ideological frame, which is explicitly hierarchical, and demonstrates the challenges social actors confront when trying to tell new stories and build new futures through social movements.

An excellent portrayal of this can be seen in Justin Berton and Demian Bulwa’s November 3 article entitled “Occupy Oakland Struggles with Provocative Fringe.”⁸⁹ This title contains loaded words. The word “provocative” begs the question: who or what social sectors are being provoked? Though one might at first interpret this provocation as against big banks or corporations, the words “struggle” and “fringe” in the title frame the protestors as provocateurs

⁸⁹ Justin Berton and Demian Bulwa, “Occupy Oakland Struggles with Provocative Fringe,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 3, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Occupy-Oakland-struggles-with-provocative-fringe-2324335.php#photo-1828988>.

of the mainstream, a difficult position for a movement focused on the “99 percent” versus the “1 percent.” Though Occupy Oakland was extremely successful in this initial discursive project, the use of the word “fringe” in the headline worked to delegitimize the claims made by this group to uphold the interests of the vast majority of people.

The article’s lede declares that “A majority of Occupy Oakland protesters sought Thursday to distance themselves from masked vandals who they said had undercut the movement by hijacking the tail end of a mostly peaceful protest, damaging downtown buildings and clashing with police.”⁹⁰ While it is entirely possible that *agents provocateurs* were present to undermine the legitimacy of protesters’ claims, this framing ignores the existence of different strategies and ideologies within horizontal movements. It does so by implying that those using black bloc tactics were “hijacking” the protest, as opposed to being one part of many factions within a complex movement that repeatedly voted in support of a “diversity of tactics.” Occupy had not labeled itself as entirely peaceful. Despite recognition of tactical diversity within the movement, the narrative and headline depict the subgroup as a “provocative fringe,” a separate entity, a “contingent of violent protesters” who are “smearing our movement.” The article asserts that “few in the Occupy camp spoke in favor of” these tactics and depicted black bloc as a nasty nuisance that true Occupy protesters were struggling to tame because they lacked hierarchical leadership: “They [masked vandals] may not be welcomed by all of Occupy’s committed sympathizers. But the hundreds of black-clad activists who coalesced downtown late Wednesday to take over a vacant building, barricade a street and then battle with police and vandalize stores are proving to be a complicated problem for the leaderless movement.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Berton and Bulwa, “Provocative Fringe.”

⁹¹ Berton and Bulwa, “Provocative Fringe.”

The media often portrayed lack of hierarchical leadership in the movement as a problem, showing its fundamental misunderstanding of the strategy behind Occupy Oakland: an intentionality around not having a visible leadership, explicit platform, or single spokesperson. One of the overarching Occupy movement's focal points was that the United States lacked true democracy as large corporations are able to manipulate and control the political system to defeat the needs of the masses. The government bailout of large banks instead of people in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis was a central tenet of this ideology, and one frequently highlighted by protesters.

A comic book-like zine produced on paper by protesters in October 2011 described the rationale behind such a structure (Figure 4). In one panel, a group of protesters are gathered together speaking with their dialogue written in all caps: “‘OCCUPY’ IS BASED ON A RADICAL KIND OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION. IN THE ‘GENERAL ASSEMBLY’ YOU MEET WITH OTHER PEOPLE FACE TO FACE, DISCUSS & DEBATE & MAKE DECISIONS TOGETHER.”⁹² The next panel describes the various hand signals used by Occupy during General Assemblies, along with drawings of each of the signals. The next pages explain that “Though facilitators guide the process, no one has control over the outcome. Yet decisions get made that everyone feels part of.” Transposed over a drawing of a tree with branches that say “We make plans / form groups / create networks / even institutions” is additional text: “Instead of making official demands, we make friends. We create a new form of government...FROM THE GROUND UP!”

⁹² Unknown maker, *Once You Get Past the Drum Circles*, 2011. Photocopy on paper, 4.25 x 2.75 in. folded, 8 x 11 in. unfolded. Collection of the Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Miguel Arzabe.

Figure 4: Participatory Democracy Zine



Figure 4: A paper zine distributed at Occupy Oakland describes how OO's participatory democracy functioned within camps and the reasoning behind such a political structure.⁹³

By engaging with leaderless tactics, Occupy Oakland ensured that no singular agenda or strategy could come to define the movement, a strategy built around the idea that any member of the 99 percent could become politicized and feel empowered to actively participate in the movement to change their lives. Yet this strategy was consistently lost on the *Chronicle*, which rarely explained the General Assembly format or the system of committees, subcommittees, caucuses, and working groups designed to give voice to all participants. With the exception of

⁹³ Unknown maker, *Past the Drum Circles*.

one article that notes “no fewer than 21 committees have formed to oversee everything from food to security,”⁹⁴ there is little discussion of how OO functioned or the democratic processes that came to define Occupy’s structure. This included the system for proposing and passing resolutions at General Assemblies and the ensuing hand gestures developed (Figure 5) “in order to express an opinion, to complete a decision on a proposal and to allow the entire community to co-facilitate our General Assembly.”⁹⁵ These practices were a critical part of the democratic processes of OO—yet they are not explored in a meaningful way in any of the *Chronicle*’s coverage, exposing a large hole in their reporting on Occupy Oakland’s purpose and how it functioned.

⁹⁴ Demian Bulwa and Kevin Fagan, “Occupy Oakland’s Diversity is Strength, Challenge,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 24, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Occupy-Oakland-s-diversity-is-strength-challenge-2325525.php>.

⁹⁵ Facilitation Committee, “Hand Gestures,” Occupy Oakland, November 17, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/hand-gestures/>.

Figure 5: Occupy Oakland Hand Signals Screen Grab

- 1. Applause/Agreement:** Place both hands in front of yourself, with palms facing out and open, then flutter fingers.
- 2. Disagreement:** Hands in front of self, open hands and face tips of fingers to the ground, while shake hands from side to side.
- 3. "That has already been said"/"Get to the point"/"Time is up:"** Place your arms in front of yourself, with your hands facing each other, and revolve your hands over each other in circular fashion.
- 4. Point of Process:** Create a triangle with both hands using your thumbs and index fingers to indicate that we are following the process. This is reserved only for moments that the process has derailed, not an opportunity for someone to derail the process by using this gesture.
- 5. Irrelevant Elephant:** Use one arm to imitate an elephant's trunk and swing it in front of yourself (making sure you do not hurt anyone around you) to indicate that the speaker is completely irrelevant in their speech.
- 6. Direct Response/Factual Response:** Straighten your index fingers while your hands remain in a fist. Move each hand back and forth in an opposite fashion towards and away from your face. A direct response/factual response signal is to indicate that you can provide a factual response to resolve the matter at hand, a correction based on a fact, and/or factual information that may allow the process to proceed forward.
- 7. Approve a Proposal:** Use of this hand signal comes during the voting portion of the General Assembly to indicate your approval to a proposal by raising a fist in the air with your thumb to the sky.
- 8. Stand Aside from a Proposal:** Use of this hand signal comes during the voting portion of the General Assembly to indicate your neutrality to a proposal by raising a fist in the air with you thumb to a side.
- 9. Disapprove a Proposal:** Use of this hand signal comes during the voting portion of the General Assembly to indicate your approval to a proposal by raising a fist in the air with your thumb to the ground.

Figure 5: This screen grab from Occupy Oakland's website describes the unique hand signals for Occupy Oakland passed at a General Assembly.⁹⁶

Thus, one can see how Berton and Bulwa's depiction of the so-called "radical fringe" of Occupy Oakland and the movement's failure of leadership is a flawed understanding of the deliberate choice to ensure no one group could speak for OO—only the resolutions passed democratically

⁹⁶ Facilitation Committee, "Hand Gestures."

by a majority at GAs could serve as the people's voice. The newspaper's unitary categorization of the desires and actions of a diverse movement misinformed readers and did not do justice to the movement's visions or its actors.

Though it also highlighted the leaderless structure of Occupy Oakland and a general sense of anger among protesters, the *Tribune's* coverage provided a greater sense of movement dynamics than did the *San Francisco Chronicle* because it discussed different working groups within Occupy, covered General Assembly decisions, and described happenings in the camp. Due to its local focus and allocation of resources, the *Tribune* had significantly more coverage of the Occupy movement and was able to paint a more nuanced (though still incomplete) picture of the movement and its inner working. One example is Scott Johnson's coverage of the Oscar Grant Plaza camp on October 18, 2011. In two separate articles, he describes a "diverse group of actors" united in their protest at the camp:

Organizers have established a schedule of talks, forums, discussion groups and seminars to keep residents and participants occupied during the day. Themes include "capitalism and colonialism" and "the history of the Black Panthers." . . . Each day begins with a yoga class at 8:30 a.m. A stationary bicycle has been set up near a "media center" tent for anyone to use. About 100 tents have been placed on nearly every square meter of available greenery. The grass is long dead and won't be revived until the protesters have left. A kitchen serving three meals a day, along with a library, an information center and a "safe space" for conflict resolution also have been added, after fights and arguments broke out in recent days.⁹⁷

Johnson continues by describing several discussions and incidents taking place throughout the camp, noting "the business of running a protest is complicated," but "what people do seem to agree on is the frustration with corporate America." These nuanced descriptions of the camp humanize the protesters and give outsiders a chance to understand the camp in a personal light,

⁹⁷ Scott Johnson, "Life at Occupy Oakland Attracts Range of Characters," *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), October 18, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/18/life-at-occupy-oakland-attracts-range-of-characters/>.

though the vague statements about anger did not paint the full picture of the many grievances of Occupiers.

A second article by Johnson that day highlighted the lack of agreement on specific goals within Occupy by discussing a symposium within the camp:

“How many of you feel righteous anger?” asked Katherine, a recent arrival in Oakland who was co-chairing an ad hoc symposium on “conflict resolution” for the occupiers, many of whom have witnessed fights, arguments and, in at least one case, a knife-wielding man who threatened several people . . . One woman spoke up and said that she and several other women had eventually calmed the man down and managed to get him to give up his knife. “We handled it better than the cops,” she said.

The police are a target of much of the ire of the protesters. They have declared the encampment a “police free zone” and go to great lengths to keep it that way. They have established a security cordon, and volunteers with walkie-talkies patrol it regularly to alert those inside of any encroaching law enforcement.⁹⁸

Such details from within the camp give readers a better understanding of the world that Occupiers were trying to build and the ways they went about doing that: alternative conflict resolution outside of the police force, education and mediation through discussion, and civilian/community accountability. Though the dialogue on these topics is framed through a focus on anger, unlike the *Chronicle*'s coverage the anger seems to be situated in the context of utopia-building as opposed to simply directionless frustration with the status quo.

Anger was not the only emotion invoked in Occupy Oakland coverage. The *Chronicle*'s coverage often expressed anxiety around lack of leadership, violent protest, and inability to define OO, as indicated by some of the images that accompanied articles. The photograph that opens Berton and Bulwa's November 3, 2011 story shows a white androgynous hooded figure dressed in all black smashing the darkened window of Springleaf Financial bank with what appears to be a black flag on a rod (Figure 6).

⁹⁸ Scott Johnson, “Occupy Oakland Movement Members Try to Define Goals,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), October 18, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/18/occupy-oakland-movement-members-try-to-define-goals/>.

Figure 6: Smashing Windows Photo



Figure 6: Photo by Liz Hafalia on November 2 from the San Francisco Chronicle. Its caption reads: “A protester breaks the windows of Springleaf financial bank on Webster St. during the afternoon march of the General Assembly of Occupy Oakland in Oakland, Calif. on Wednesday, November 2, 2011.”⁹⁹

Liz Hafalia’s photo captures much of the anxieties present in OO coverage: fear of lawlessness, chaos, property damage, and anonymity. The composition of the photo puts the viewer themselves in range of the figure’s swing: if the flag continued with its forward motion it would hit the viewer, placing them in the way of the menacing protester. It is also important to note the Webster Street location where the photo was taken. This street runs through Oakland’s financial district, downtown, and office district. The Springleaf Bank, which is no longer there, was located in the office district of Oakland several blocks northeast of City Hall. The area

⁹⁹ Bulwa and Berton, “Provocative Fringe,” <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Occupy-Oakland-struggles-with-provocative-fringe-2324335.php#photo-1828988>.

continues to house several other bank branches. This location and the upscale look of the building itself heighten the image's importance, whether the viewer finds the destruction horrifying or liberating.

In many ways, this photograph is an example of the masked "provocative fringe" of Occupy Oakland. Yet the viewer's inability to identify the protester in any meaningful way may also frighten some viewers regarding the collective and plural nature of the democratic movement. The framing of Hafalia's photo may provoke other reactions. Her composition makes the figure sizable compared to the bank itself, a false equivalency of the power disparity between the person and the institution that can exaggerate the strength of the movement and delegitimize the assertion that banks and large corporations have too much political influence. This false equivalency between protesters and the institutions they stood against was also present in the *Chronicle's* depiction of state violence in the Occupy Oakland protests, explored in further depth below.

Deconstructing the "Violent Clashes" of Occupy Oakland

Nationally, Occupy Oakland became known as a site of "violent clashes" between protesters and police. This rhetoric of violence reinforces an image of Oakland as a dangerous place, one that has been deployed by the media through the years in coverage of the city's crime rates.¹⁰⁰ Oakland's status as a minority-majority city with a high number of Black residents

¹⁰⁰ See introduction, n. 38 for examples of local media coverage of Oakland as a violent place.

(close to 25 percent¹⁰¹), its designation as the eighth-most diverse city in the United States,¹⁰² and the racialized character of depictions of violence should not be lost on readers.

Berton and Bulwa’s November 3, 2011 *Chronicle* article, “Occupy Oakland Struggles with Provocative Fringe,” illustrates the problematic media depictions of interactions between protesters and police, which downplayed the massive power differential between the two groups and thus diminished readers’ understandings of the impact of police violence on the protests.

Describing previous police violence in their article, the authors write:

Police had kept their distance from Occupy Oakland protesters since coming under scrutiny for deploying tear gas and flash-bang grenades and firing projectiles in a clash last week that left one demonstrator with a serious head injury. Critics said officers had used excessive force and violated city policies on crowd control.”¹⁰³

The use of the word “clash” to describe the violence inflicted upon protesters by police officers falsely equates the relative power of these two groups. While police equipped with riot gear fired munitions such as beanbag rounds, rubber bullets, and tear gas (which the *Chronicle* repeatedly described as “non-lethal” despite evidence otherwise¹⁰⁴), protesters used far less technical methods, throwing glass and rocks. Perhaps the more horrendous part of this excerpt is the roundabout way of describing how protester Scott Olsen suffered the skull fracture that hospitalized him in critical condition. By using the passive voice—it is the clash which “left” a protester wounded—the authors absolve the police who injured Olsen of responsibility. Though it was officially unconfirmed at the time who threw the unknown projectile (subsequent investigation revealed the object was a beanbag and Olsen received \$4.5 million in compensation

¹⁰¹ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oakland City, California,” U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/oaklandcitycalifornia>.

¹⁰² Adam McCann, “2021’s Most & Least Ethnically Diverse Cities in the U.S.,” WalletHub, February 17, 2021, <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-most-and-least-ethno-racial-and-linguistic-diversity/10264>.

¹⁰³ Bulwa and Berton, “Provocative Fringe.”

¹⁰⁴ Kelsey D. Atherton, “What ‘Less Lethal’ Weapons Actually Do,” *Scientific American*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-less-lethal-weapons-actually-do/>.

from the city of Oakland¹⁰⁵), protesters stated that the police caused the injury and a bean bag round was found near his body. A video taken after the officer initially injured Olsen shows a police officer tossing a canister of tear gas towards Olsen as he lay wounded on the ground and nearby protesters attempted to tend to him. This crucial detail was left out of Berton and Bulwa's summation of Olsen's injury (though it was reported in an earlier *Chronicle* story¹⁰⁶). Such a detail more accurately portrays state violence throughout Occupy Oakland. This erasure of OPD's violent behaviors occurred even as the department was under a federal monitoring program after the city settled in 2003 for a whopping \$10.5 million payout in a class-action lawsuit by victims of four corrupt Oakland police officers known as the "Oakland Rough Riders."¹⁰⁷ These actions are part of a long ongoing history of violence and struggle to reform within the Oakland Police Department, which has been under federal oversight for the last seventeen years¹⁰⁸—the longest agreement of this kind in the United States.¹⁰⁹

The hazy depiction of the violence inflicted upon Occupy protesters was present in most *Chronicle* accounts. The article which actually detailed Olsen's injury halfheartedly confirmed the cause in a roundabout fashion, writing that police had fired a projection towards Olsen, who was subsequently injured. Describing the video footage, Berton and Will Kane write, "While

¹⁰⁵ Amanda Holpuch, "Oakland Pays \$4.5m to Scott Olsen, Veteran Injured in Occupy Protest," *Guardian* (U.S. edition), March 21, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/21/city-of-oakland-pays-4-million-veteran-occupy>.

¹⁰⁶ Justin Berton and Will Kane, "Hurt Protester Scott Olsen Was 'Provoking No One,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 27, 2011, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Hurt-protester-Scott-Olsen-was-provoking-no-one-2325379.php>.

¹⁰⁷ Janine DeFao, "Oakland Settles 'Riders' Suits / Record \$10.5 Million Payout -- Police Reforms Required," SFGATE, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 19, 2003, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Oakland-settles-Riders-suits-Record-10-5-2633661.php>.

¹⁰⁸ Steve Rubenstein, "A Timeline of Chaos: Oakland Police Chief's Firing the Latest Embarrassment Two Decades After 'Riders' Scandal," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/A-timeline-of-chaos-Oakland-police-chief-s-15074917.php>.

¹⁰⁹ Anne E. Kirkpatrick, "Fired Oakland Police Chief, City Councilman Call For End To Federal Oversight Of Department," *CBS San Francisco*, March 2, 2020, <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/03/02/fired-oakland-police-chief-city-councilman-anne-kirkpatrick-noel-gallo-federal-oversight/>.

Olsen lay wounded in the street, other protesters rushed to his aid. Video footage appears to show an officer tossing another canister toward the group helping him. One protester can be heard screaming ‘What the f-’ at police as the device emits a loud bang.”¹¹⁰ Once more, the reporters create a layer of distance between the officer and the violence inflicted by using passive verbs to describe the officer’s actions. Reporters used language such as “Critics *said* officers had used excessive force and violated city policies on crowd control” and “Video footage *appears* to show an officer tossing another canister toward the group helping him” instead of fact-checking and confirming the event.¹¹¹ In the process, the *Chronicle* created an air of uncertainty around protesters’ assertions of police violence despite a well-documented long history of police brutality against Oakland residents.

OO protesters pushed back against “clash” narratives, as exemplified in an eight-page zine comic produced in October 2011 (Figure 7). A cartoon image of tear gas canister brought to life says (in all caps), “HI KIDS! I’M PAULY PEPPER SPRAY, & I MAKE HIPPIES’ EYES EVEN REDDER,” as the canister towers over a much smaller crying woman. The caption above the drawing reads: “RECENTLY, THERE’S BEEN LOTS OF CASES IN THE NEWS ABOUT POLICE OFFICERS USING PEPPER SPRAY ON NONVIOLENT PROTESTERS.”¹¹² The next page includes a drawing of a police officer grabbing a protesters and hitting him with a baton on the head next to the words “TAP TAP” and a hashtag symbolizing an expletive from the person being hit, alongside a loopy arrow to demonstrate the protester’s head spinning as a result of the injury. The officer is saying “WE’RE PROTECTING THE PEOPLE FROM THEMSELVES.” The next page reads: “There have been cases of old people, mentally

¹¹⁰ Berton and Kane, “‘Provoking No One.’”

¹¹¹ My emphasis.

¹¹² Unknown maker, *Why Use Reason When You Can Use Pepper Spray!*, 2011. Photocopy on paper, 4.25 x 2.75 in. folded, 8 x 11 in. unfolded. Collection of the Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Miguel Arzabe.

handicapped kids, and even pregnant women getting pepper sprayed or sometimes even tazed.”

The words are transposed on top of a drawing of an OPD spokesperson standing at a speech podium with a speech bubble that says, “We at the Oakland PD have always been an equal opportunity employer... of excessive and lethal force.” Another speech bubble reads, “although we do have a clear preference...,” likely referencing the racialized nature of OPD’s violent history. The artist(s) satirically directed the pamphlet toward children to draw attention to the absurdity of the police state and its extreme violence against everyday Oakland residents, including those typically understood as vulnerable, such as handicapped and pregnant people. Unlike the *Chronicle* and the *Tribune*, protesters always made sure to reference OPD’s extremely troubling record of police brutality before protests, better situating in the public mind the need for political projects such as Occupy, and helping their audience understand the justifications for and desires of their movement.

Figure 7: Pepper Spray Zine



Figure 7: A paper zine distributed at Occupy Oakland discusses the abuse perpetuated by Oakland Police through their use of pepper spray.¹¹³

Beyond elevating protesters to a status of equal exchanges of violence with police, the *Tribune* and *Chronicle* furthered the narrative created by many city officials, police, and the business community that the Occupy Movement was a drain on city resources (due to high costs for police raids on the camps, damage to public buildings, and cleanup crews in the areas where the two camps existed), especially in their coverage of some of the port shutdowns. However, the *Tribune* also focused extensively on one resource that wasn't money: police officers. In repeatedly noting

¹¹³ Unknown maker, *Why Use Reason*.

officers' inability to respond to other calls because of the need to police the camp, the *Tribune* played into the image of Oakland as a violent city with high crime rates in need of assistance, pathologizing the city itself and valorizing a department ridden with corruption, misconduct, and violence.

One complaint about the Oscar Grant Plaza camp frequently cited in articles was the unsafe conditions (and people) in it. In an October 19, 2011 *Tribune* article entitled "Occupy Oakland Residents Struggle with Internal Security Issues," the reporters detail a "full-blown melee" that erupted as protesters tried to evict a man who had attacked a woman in the Oscar Grant Plaza camp.¹¹⁴ Describing the people who congregated and lived in the camp, the reporters write:

Homeless people, ex-convicts, at least one registered sex offender, students, unemployed hotel workers, anarchists and reform-minded activists freely mingle together in what amounts to a democracy free-for-all. Sometimes, everyone appears to be on the same page. But the skein of civility has been frequently shattered as bullies, the mentally ill, drunks, thugs and anarchists have threatened the safety and well-being of the camp's more peaceful residents.¹¹⁵

This sense of a camp running out-of-control in a public space where police were not allowed to enter fueled many of the calls to shut it down. The murder of Kayode O. Foster on November 10, 2011, outside Oscar Grant Plaza sparked further discussion amongst police, city officials, and some community leaders about the unsafe nature of the camp. A November 13 *Tribune* article by Kristin Bender and Harry Harris opens with a plea from police officers "asking protesters to leave so officers can get back to 'protecting the citizens of Oakland.'"¹¹⁶ The law-and-order

¹¹⁴ Scott Johnson, "Occupy Oakland Residents Struggle with Internal Security Issues," *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), October 19, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/19/occupy-oakland-residents-struggle-with-internal-security-issues/>.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, "Internal Security Issues."

¹¹⁶ Kristen J. Bender and Harry Harris, "Police Union Pleads for Occupy Oakland to Disband as Authorities Investigate Homicide Near Camp," *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), November 11, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/10/19/occupy-oakland-residents-struggle-with-internal-security-issues/>.

frame deployed by the police through the media is accomplished by framing Oakland as a crime-ridden city in dire need of police control being sapped by the Occupy movement. The article goes on to quote a letter from the Oakland Police Officers Association, which reads:

In an average city in California, this might not be of emergency proportions for its citizens. Oakland is not an ‘average city’ — we have the highest violent crime rate in California. We are the 5th most violent city in the United States — with more shootings and homicides than any city west of the Mississippi.¹¹⁷

Reporters play into this violence narrative when they write, “The slaying Thursday marked 101 homicides in Oakland this year. At this time last year, there were 76 homicides.” Another article quotes a former Community Policing Advisory Board member saying “police response to Occupy events is slowing the time it takes officers to get to other calls in town. On the night of an Oct. 29 rally, for example, about 180 calls to police were waiting for officers to respond at 9:30 p.m., roughly three times as many as on a usual night.”¹¹⁸ According to the police’s own calculations, crime rates in Oakland actually dropped by 19 percent in the week of the police’s October 25 raid according to leaked emails between Major Jean Quan and Police Chief Howard Jordan.¹¹⁹ By uplifting the police union’s claims for their own necessity based upon a factually incorrect law-and-order rhetoric, the *Tribune* contributed to the stereotypical image of Oakland as a violent, dangerous city and demonstrating the limits of their coverage, as well as the political narratives Occupy Oakland was up against. This instance was not the first

¹¹⁷ Bender and Harris, “Police Union Pleads.”

¹¹⁸ Sean Maher, “Community Leaders Ask Occupy Oakland to Open a Dialogue with City Hall for Public Good,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), November 3, 2011, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/11/03/community-leaders-ask-occupy-oakland-to-open-a-dialogue-with-city-hall-for-public-good/>.

¹¹⁹ Leanne Maxwell, “Crime Dropped 19 Percent During Week Of Initial Occupy Oakland Raid, Says Investigative Report,” *SFist* (San Francisco, CA), January 16, 2012, https://sfist.com/2012/01/16/ktvu_investigation_reveals_crime_do/. Local news station KTVU Fox 2 obtained “about 1,000 internal emails between Oakland City Hall and the Oakland Police Department discussing how the city should handle the Occupy Oakland encampment before and after the initial raid on October 25th.” In one email to Mayor Quan, Police Chief Jordan wrote about the 19 percent drop in crime, saying: “Not sure how you want to share this good news. It may be counter to our statement that the Occupy movement is negatively impacting crime in Oakland.” This statistic was not made public during Occupy Oakland, but rather buried as the department continued to harp about the dangers of Occupy Oakland.

time wherein the *Tribune* quoted at length from traditional authority groups, giving certain institutional actors greater ability to shape public perceptions.

During its live updates on the status of the OGP camp in the wake of Foster's homicide, the *Tribune* published several full statements from groups like the mayor's office and the Oakland Police Officers Association (OPOA). One of these statements was from Mayor Quan calling on the end of the occupation, and another was a letter from the OPOA to the Occupy camp imploring them to leave and allow officers to "stop directing all of our efforts at policing the small enclave of 'Occupy Oakland' and get back to our job of protecting the citizens of Oakland in the neighborhoods where our residents live."¹²⁰ The update included the eviction notice handed to campers on November 11, 2011, which states that campers' "activities are injurious to health, obstruct the free use of property, interfering with the comfortable enjoyment of the Plaza, and unlawfully obstruct the free passage or use of a public park or square." By publishing the full statements from these actors much like a press release, the *Tribune* gave these groups even more power than they already had to shape the narrative around the protests. Lengthy statements from Occupy Oakland via their website or Twitter were rarely, if ever, published or referenced. Rather, individuals from Occupy Oakland were occasionally quoted, in direct contradiction to the movement's logics regarding who could speak on behalf of the movement.

¹²⁰ Thomas Peele, "Live Blog: Occupy Oakland Quiet as Rain Begins to Fall," *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), November 11, 2011 <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2011/11/11/live-blog-occupy-oakland-quiet-as-rain-again-begins-to-fall/>.

Conclusion

Historically, news media has played an important role in disseminating information about and framing the reception of protests in the public imagination. While news media coverage of social movements is shaped by journalistic practices and often replicates the protest paradigm, the structure of social movements themselves, the cities they are taking place in, and the familiarity of news outlets with said movements and cities all shape how movements are depicted to the public. Oakland has historically been depicted as a violent city in local news media, by Oakland police, and sometimes even residents and politicians, ignoring the long-standing reality of police brutality and gentrification and the difficulties for residents brought on by the Great Recession of 2008. Moreover, mainstream media and politicians have routinely represented Oakland's long history of organized protests and social movements as troublemaking rather than responding to structural inequalities.

Both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Oakland Tribune* followed these patterns and upheld existing political boundaries surrounding democratic processes and economic systems by demonizing Occupy Oakland protesters, misrepresenting or distorting the movement, and delegitimizing it during the movement's months in the mainstream media spotlight. The chapter shows that *how* this delegitimization occurred (such as invoking safety and security rhetoric that emphasized the harms of protests on businesses, ignoring and underplaying the systemic economic hardship that plagued many Oakland residents) as mainstream media narratives both upheld the existing political narrative OO fought against and limited the bounds of the new political horizons Occupy sought to create by ignoring or distorting them. News media accounts often disparaged the lack of hierarchical leadership within Occupy and utilized law-and-order framing devices to justify vicious police crackdowns against protesters despite OPD's history of

violence (especially towards Black communities). The City of Oakland was often pathologized as an endemically violent place, a trope rooted in the vilification of non-white, working-class people. Protesters pushed back on these depictions and articulated their own visions for a remade world by producing their own content in the form of zines, as well as underground newspapers and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The next chapter explores the various differing political horizons that emerged from Occupy Oakland and how these visions were shaped, including the conflicts that molded them. Even protesters were not immune to racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities within Occupy Oakland and disputes around these issues emerged in the camp itself, demonstrating the “stickiness” of these hierarchies even in radical social movement spaces.

Chapter Two

From Occupying to Decolonizing Oakland: “Stickiness” and Fractures in Social Movements

Though it professed to be a horizontal union of the 99 percent, divisions between social actors often arose within Occupy camps in the United States based on racial, class, indigeneity, gender, and sexuality-based differences, creating unofficial hierarchies. Occupy Oakland was no exception. To an extent, these hierarchies reflected the inequalities that historically structure the society and communities Occupy was born from. They have a history of manifesting themselves in social movements, including many of the international movements that directly preceded and inspired Occupy.

As discussed in the Introduction, many of the horizontal ideologies, democratic critique, and contestations over space developed in Occupy originated in international movements such as the anti-austerity (also called *Indignados* and 15M) movement in Spain in 2011 and the Arab uprisings and revolutions. In her examination of the various meanings of the word *civil* in Egypt from early 2011 through July 2013, Frances Hasso builds on Rancière’s concepts of “politics” and “police” to argue that material inequalities remained in the embodied spatial dimensions of revolutionary Egypt:

“Police” partitions, separates, excludes, allows, arranges, and distributes bodies and voices in space and time. “Politics,” in contrast, ruptures, transgresses, and refuses such distributions and arrangements through emancipatory enactments . . . Among the essential lessons of these revolutions, however, is that ideological differences and material inequalities do not easily melt away, even in emergent, pluralistic, and non-

doctrinaire revolutionary politics, because it is difficult to erase positional and embodied differences in the scenes where politics are made.¹²¹

Along with Zakia Salime, Hasso draws on feminist geography scholarship to call this persistence of embodied differences and inequalities “stickiness.”¹²² Put simply, inequalities that preexist the emergence of even radical social movements, such as racism, settler-colonialism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism are often “sticky” and persist within radical movements, leading to a variety of outcomes, including fragmentation.

This stickiness was observed and critiqued through a feminist lens in the Spanish 15M movement. María José Gámez Fuentes discusses tensions between feminist groups and the rest of the camps at the start of the movement. Feminist proposals were rejected in assembly gatherings, feminist working groups “encountered numerous difficulties in making themselves visible and heard,” and there was lack of representation of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, patronizing behavior, sexist stereotyping, and heteropatriarchal violence within the movement.¹²³ Gámez Fuentes describes how feminist activists focused on the link between quotidian precariousness and greater systems of oppression to build a culture focused on relational policies and intersectionality to challenge interlocking oppressions:

The initial tensions with other members of the camps made women realise that they had to give priority to make their vindications understood within the context of the current neoliberal crisis. Therefore they focused on the links between capitalism and patriarchy. In the face of quotidian precariousness, the materiality of the feminist 'the personal is political' was clearer than ever. Oppressions had to be fought not by mobilising under a gender identity but through the assumption of interlocking oppressions (based on race, class, sexuality, etc.). As activists have observed, physically occupying the squares along with citizens from diverse origins and social movements (ecologists, neighbourhood-based, anti-eviction, etc.) and creating new relations through everyday protest

¹²¹ Frances S. Hasso, “Civil and the Limits of Politics in Revolutionary Egypt,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 3 (2015): 606, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-3426445>.

¹²² Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime, introduction to *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, ed. Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 14.

¹²³ María José Gámez Fuentes, “Feminisms and the 15M Movement in Spain: Between Frames of Recognition and Contexts of Action,” *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 3 (2015): 360, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.994492>.

experiences has no doubt facilitated mutual knowledge sharing and consciousness of the interlocking character of oppressions (Marugán et al., [7], pp. 24–25).

The question was not, however, one of adding in homosexual politics, politics of gender, anti-racist politics and so forth, but of building together relational policies and strategies of political intersectionality that would challenge the spaces where oppressions coincided.¹²⁴

Like the feminist mobilizations in the 15M movement, several projects in Occupy Oakland emerged in response to gendered, racialized, and classed tensions, each articulating their own political visions for what a reimagined world should look like. They foregrounded and challenged interlocking oppressions, but ultimately Occupy Oakland was fractured by the “stickiness” of privileges and power attached to certain bodies and positionalities—especially white, straight, and masculine—as well as the longstanding repression and extraction by Oakland institutions such as the police and city government. These conflicts sometimes resulted in the severance of different Occupy Oakland outgrowths from the movement itself, and the formation of new projects independent of OO.

Despite such sticky dynamics across various horizontal movements and Occupy sites, there were unique historical and institutional factors in Oakland that contributed to the splintering of the utopian Occupy Oakland project. Using research on Occupy Oakland, I argue that the conflicts that occurred in various Occupy camps on matters of race, settler-colonialism, class and gender were produced not only by the individual positionalities and commitments brought into the camps, but by factors associated with local context and history. Discussing Cairo’s Tahrir Square in 2011 revolutionary Egypt, Mariam Aboelezz calls it a “glocal space” where the local and global merged together.¹²⁵ She insists on understanding Tahrir within the larger Cairo and Egyptian scales “to add *context* to the analysis; to situate the discursive

¹²⁴ Gámez Fuentes, “Feminisms and the 15M Movement,” 362.

¹²⁵ Mariam Aboelezz, “The Geosemiotics of Tahrir Square: A Study of the Relationship Between Discourse and Space,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 13, no. 4 (January 2014): 618, <https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.83.02abo>.

practices observed in the protest messages within wider Egyptian culture and society.”¹²⁶ She writes, for example, that protest banners and graffiti in Tahrir Square were not only messages from a revolution against the Egyptian government, “they were messages from Tahrir Square, from the Egyptian capital, by Egyptian people who shared a common repertoire of historical and cultural knowledge.”¹²⁷

I employ a similar “glocal” lens, treating Occupy Oakland as an important site within a global movement where activists articulated demands situated in localized, national, and international contexts, and where ideologies and tensions were shaped in part by a politics of location. Substantiating this point in their analysis of Occupy camps in Amsterdam and Los Angeles, Justus Uitermark and Walter Nicholls argue that, “While Occupy protests broke out around the world in a synchronized fashion and used similar symbols and narratives, the protests were sustained by quite different local networks in different cities.”¹²⁸ I take this proposition a step further to argue that local networks, histories, and demographics also shaped the conflicts that emerged in Occupy sites, as well as the resulting political world visions that attempted to address these conflicts. Oakland residents are majority people-of-color, with substantial proportions who are poor or working-class. The city functions to some degree as a home for working-class people who commute to work in neighboring San Francisco. It has a long and rich history as a center for artists, radical social movements, and community activism. It is also renowned for police corruption and brutality and municipal leadership that does not serve the needs of the majority of its residents. Thus it is significant that white, straight, cis-male bodies

¹²⁶ Aboelezz, “Geosemiotics of Tahrir,” 601 (emphasis in original).

¹²⁷ Aboelezz, 620.

¹²⁸ Justus Uitermark and Walter J. Nicholls, “How Local Networks Shape a Global Movement: Comparing Occupy in Amsterdam and Los Angeles,” in “Occupy!,” special issue, *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2012): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.704181>.

(and all that they embodied) dominated the space of this radical experiment and maybe not surprising that Occupy spun out into new groups such as Decolonize Oakland and Occupy Patriarchy.

This chapter analyzes the gender, class, and race conflicts that contributed to the fracturing of the Occupy Oakland movement by examining agenda notes from www.occupyoakland.com and the Case Western Reserve Occupy archive, as well as print materials collected by the Oakland Museum and Oakland Library. It also relies on primary sources written by activists who were involved in Oakland Occupy, as well as survey responses from Oakland participants collected through Occupy Research, an “an open, shared space for distributed research focused around the Occupy Movement”¹²⁹ created by movement participant researchers.¹³⁰ The first section lays the groundwork for understanding the important interplay between the place and space in social movements such as Occupy, diving into the logics and structures of the Occupy movement and its desires to build a deliberative democracy. I introduce demographic data about the movement from a survey conducted online by Occupy Research from December 2011 through January 2012 to understand what kind of people made up and inhabited the Occupy Oakland space. The second section examines the nuances of gender, race, and class in the Oakland camp, positionalities that were complicated by heteropatriarchal violence within the camp and police violence. In some cases, these conflicts necessitated the expansion and creation of new political horizons within Occupy Oakland’s world building. I look at the evolution of the group Oakland Occupy Patriarchy and their response to different forms of violence as one example of expansion. The final section details the evolution of another Occupy

¹²⁹ Occupy Research, “About,” OccupyResearch, November 30, 2011, <https://cementerio.montera34.com/occupyresearch.net/occupyresearch/about/index.html>.

¹³⁰ Amelia Marzec, “Occupy Research: Methods and Tools for a Decentralized Future,” *Huffington Post*, December 7, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/occupy-research-methods-a_b_1113145.

Oakland project that eventually declared itself autonomous from OO, Decolonize Oakland, and the factors driving the split.

The Logic & Composition of Occupy Oakland

To understand the criticisms that emerged in Occupy Oakland and how embodied “stickiness” persisted despite efforts otherwise, it is critical to understand feminist scholars’ conceptions of space and place as well as the logics that drove the structure of Occupy. Hasso and Salime write that space “refers to *arrangements* and *interactions* (e.g., between human bodies, animals, nature, sound, the visual, the digital, built environments) at multiple scales, not all of them material,” while places “are more ground and specific, ‘the lived and dynamic location where different people, social agents or powerful actors come together in unpredictable and even shifting ways.’”¹³¹ They describe how they are similar: “Spaces and places are . . . patterned by institutionalized inequalities, ideology, and behavioral scripts, shaping how users inhabit them and encounter others. They are also similar in being *made*, redefined, and ‘reclaimed’” through a variety of practices and representations that are dynamic and “difficult to control.” At the same time, existing “boundaries and hierarchies are often *weighty*, reinforced by powerful ideologies, sensibilities, and institutions that may reconstitute to effectively respond to challenges.”¹³² Analyzing the interplay between place (the city of Oakland and the everyday uses, memories, reputations, and histories associated with it) and space (the material and immaterial structures, functions, and interactions of Oakland’s camp sites, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, occupyoakland.org, and the bodies that built and inhabited these spaces) throughout

¹³¹ Hasso and Salime, introduction, 6 (emphasis in original).

¹³² Hasso and Salime, 6 (emphasis in original).

Occupy Oakland gives a richer understanding of this “glocal” site and the conflicts that emerged within it.

Occupy movements globally attempted to create leaderless, democratic horizontal spaces structures within the physical places they occupied. These efforts at deliberative democracy were engrained in the occupations themselves, as well as the structures and practices put into place in camp locales. Rebecca Lila Steinberg explains how face-to-face interactions in the occupied spaces were an important element in negotiating personal and group agency:

As in occupation and square movements elsewhere, the re-appropriation of public space in the U.S. became a highly influential precondition for emergent forms of public, large-group deliberation . . . Local intersubjectivity, global solidarity, and the embodied augmentation of personal and group agency, were generated and negotiated in face-to-face interaction at the GAs. Solidarity is built interactionally through the sequential organization of linguistic and gestural actions between dyads or larger groups (Clayman 2002). Each Occupy site empowered itself to create local systems of direct participatory democratic deliberation, including formalized agendas and proposal processes. Here, proposals are influenced by the local ecology (Mondada in press) and renew and are renewed by it in ongoing negotiation.¹³³

As Steinberg writes, group proposals and the deliberations around them in assemblies were central to the Occupy democratic project. The proposals were a key site wherein the space, goals, voices, and embodiments of the movement itself were shaped, negotiated, and contested. With no formal leadership, a large part of Occupy Oakland’s political horizon was the creation of “a participatory model that preserve[d] autonomy, enable[d] collective action and inhibit[ed] sectarian division and lack of accountability.”¹³⁴ In this way, the movement’s message could not be co-opted by a single leader; rather General Assembly resolutions spoke for the group. These measures attempted to eliminate institutionalized hierarchy in favor of participatory democracy.

¹³³ Rebecca Lila Steinberg, “The Occupy Assembly: Discursive Experiments in Direct Democracy,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 13, no. 4 (January 2014): 703, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1075/jlp.13.4.06ste>.

¹³⁴ Liberate Oakland, “Assembly, Committee, Caucus What’s the Difference?,” Occupy Oakland, November 1, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/assembly-committee-caucus-whats-the-difference/>.

Proposals in the Oakland camp required a 90 percent consensus to pass, and quorums initially required 100 participants, though this number was later reduced to 70. Consensus (or lack thereof) was communicated through hand signals, which were used to “express an opinion, to complete a decision on a proposal and to allow the entire community to co-facilitate our General Assembly.”¹³⁵ Disagreement was additionally expressed by groups exiting meetings en masse to drop the number of participants, leading to lack of a quorum minimum. Deliberative decision-making (as Occupy engaged with through these assembly resolutions) was a living project that evolved through group discussion and engagement. Steinberg writes: “Deliberation or group decision-making is not regarded as peripheral action leading to a binary act but rather as *an unfolding process* in which participants’ voiced views may shift as new voices and ideas emerge.”¹³⁶ As unfolding projects, the General Assemblies and the camps themselves can be understood as negotiation of the space, the bodies that inhabited it, and the relationships between those people. Occupy camps used additional tools within this unfolding process to promote discussion, such as teach-ins.

All individuals were allowed to speak at assemblies, forming a queue that was called the “stack.” The underlying logic was that all stakeholders should feel that their voice can exercise political agency, and that group decision-making should be achieved through deliberation as opposed to material interests, social statuses, cultural attachments, or ethical commitments.¹³⁷ However, as Steinberg notes, “these gatherings are constituted of real people, not idealized orators”—a critical reality in the unraveling of Occupy Oakland as a site for *all* members of the

¹³⁵ Facilitation Committee, “Hand Gestures,” Occupy Oakland, November 17, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/hand-gestures/>.

¹³⁶ Steinberg, “Occupy Assembly,” 705 (my emphasis).

¹³⁷ Steinberg, 713.

99 percent.¹³⁸ Recognizing the supreme importance of having speaking space within deliberative settings such as the GAs (this was where the movement “space” itself was in part negotiated) as well as the historical oppression of minority voices, many Occupy camps created “progressive stacks” wherein women and people of color were moved to the front of the queue of participants requesting the floor. This proposal was considered in Oakland but ultimately vetoed.¹³⁹ Because voice and presence were crucial in shaping deliberative democracy in Occupy, the experiences and voices that were present and centered in Occupy Oakland affected which resolutions passed, the nature of the space, and the collective vision professed.

To have a better understanding of the participants who inhabited and created Occupy Oakland, I draw on survey data from Occupy Research, a collective of researchers who were involved in the Occupy movement. Occupy Research conducted a survey to “gather information about the demographics of participants, as well as forms of civic and political participation in the Occupy movement . . . [that was] designed through a transparent and collaborative process that included Occupy participants and researchers from across the globe.”¹⁴⁰ The survey was conducted between December 7, 2011 and January 7, 2012, with a total of 5,074 responses. I analyzed the survey data along particular dimensions of interest related to Occupy Oakland participants specifically. I learned that of the 316 respondents who had visited an Occupy

¹³⁸ Steinberg, 706.

¹³⁹ Facilitation Committee, “GA Minutes: 11.23.11,” Occupy Oakland, November 23, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/ga-minutes-11-23-11/>. Politicians were also not given preferential treatment in the stack in Oakland. A list of Oakland’s General Assembly resolutions from October 10 through November 16 notes that “We do not recognize the authority of politicians. Therefore if a politician wants to address Occupy Oakland, they must join stack like the rest of the community.” Facilitation Committee, “General Assembly Resolutions (Oct 10 – Nov 16 Summary),” Occupy Oakland, November 17, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/general-assembly-resolutions/>.

¹⁴⁰ Occupy Research, “Preliminary Findings: Occupy Research Demographic and Political Participation Survey,” OccupyResearch, March 23, 2012, <https://cementerio.montera34.com/occupyresearch.net/2012/page/2012/03/23/preliminary-findings-occupy-research-demographic-and-political-participation-survey/index.html>.

Oakland camp (either Oscar Grant or the smaller Snow Park), 302 considered themselves a participant in the Occupy movement, which meant they shared social media posts about Occupy, contributed financially to Occupy, participated in protests or General Assemblies, worked in caucuses or committees, and/or lived in the camp. The median age of respondent-participants in Oakland was 37 years old; 31.8 percent identified as male, 58.6 percent as female, 3.6 and transgender, 1.0 percent genderqueer, and 1.7 percent declined to answer.¹⁴¹ Thus male-identified individuals who responded to the survey were the minority. Regarding sexuality, 61.9 percent identified as heterosexual, 25.2 percent as “Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Queer,”¹⁴² 12.9 percent declined to answer or identified as “other.”¹⁴³ As for race, 68.2 percent identified as White/Caucasian; 12.6 percent identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Arab, Southwest Asian, or North African; 7 percent identified as “Latino/Latina” (Latinx); 3.6 percent identified as Black, African, or African American; and 3 percent identified as Native American/Indigenous. The remaining 14.6 percent identified as biracial/multiracial/mixed race, other, or declined to state.¹⁴⁴

To examine the class composition of participants in Occupy Oakland, I compiled data related to income and education levels of those respondents to the Occupy Research survey: 71.2 percent of respondents had a college degree or above, which is a much higher level of education than residents of Oakland, while 18.9 percent had what I term “high school plus,” meaning they had completed a high school/GED degree or some college or an associate’s degree; 1 percent had

¹⁴¹ Occupy Research, “Preliminary Findings.” I downloaded the full data set and isolated responses from individuals who identified as participants in the movement and listed Oakland as the site where the survey was completed. For access to the full data set, see “Links to Data” on the Preliminary Findings page, linked in the citation above.

¹⁴² Compare to 76.4% heterosexual/straight and 15.5% LGBTQ in the general findings.

¹⁴³ Fill-in responses for “other” included: heteroflexible, butterfly, asexual, “Questioning/Pansexual” and “straight AND alternative in my sexual preferences.”

¹⁴⁴ This question was conducted as a “Select all that apply,” and thus may add up to a value greater than 100 percent. Fill-in responses for “other” included: Mediterranean, American, Iranian, East Indian, Jewish (x3), Ashkenazi Jew (x3), “Brooklyn-American,” “50% German,” “mutt,” and “Oakland.”

not completed high school. As Table 1 shows, while lower income earners certainly participated in Occupy Oakland (about 50 percent reported earning between zero to 49,999 annual income in U.S. dollars), a substantial proportion earned 50,000 dollars or more.

Table 1: Income Levels in Occupy Oakland		
Income Level (\$)	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
No income	8	2.6
1-9,999	18	6.0
10,000-19,999	38	12.6
20,000-29,999	35	11.6
30,000-39,999	22	7.2
40,000-49,999	30	9.9
50,000-59,999	16	5.3
60,000-69,999	18	6.0
70,000-79,999	9	3.0
80,000-89,999	7	2.3
90,000-99,999	11	3.6
100,000+	44	14.6
No answer/Decline to state/Not applicable ¹⁴⁵	46	15.2

Table 1: The table shows the number and percentage of respondents for each income bracket amongst Oakland participants in the Occupy Research survey.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ “Not applicable” was reserved for non-US respondents whose income was not in U.S. dollars. 25 individuals selected “Not applicable,” while 18 chose “Decline to state” and 3 simply did not select an answer.

¹⁴⁶ Occupy Research, “Preliminary Findings.”

This survey data provides a general idea of the demographic of Occupy Oakland, allowing us a sense of why kind of people created and inhabited these spaces. From the data, Occupy Oakland participants were majority women, as well as mostly white, heterosexual, and college educated. Participants came from a wide range of income brackets, though about 50 percent had lower socioeconomic backgrounds, earning less than \$50,000 per year. The next section discusses the embodied and ideological differences and inequalities that emerged within the deliberative democracy of the Oakland locales, leading to a variety of tensions and fissures.

Heteropatriarchy, Race, and Class: Safety and Policing in the Oakland Camps

The issues of safety and gender, as well as race, presented themselves in the first few days of the Occupy Oakland resistance as evidenced by an informal local questionnaire distributed by activists in the Oscar Grant Plaza camp and posted on the movement's website on October 15, 2011, five days after the start of the encampment. The survey asked questions about community standards regarding respect and racism/sexism, noting, "Some of us have noticed things that are causing or could cause us trouble at Occupy Oakland . . . There is a tension between a deep desire to welcome every person and the sad reality that some people's needs, styles or disruptions can ultimately threaten our community."¹⁴⁷ The survey asked, for example: "Have you noticed ways that historic racial tensions that have divided our movement in the past are present here? Or tensions around gender/gender presentation? Please describe." Though the questions are somewhat leading, the survey signals the presence of gendered and racialized tensions within the camp from its inception. It is unclear if the survey writers were members of the marginalized groups. The survey responses were discussed at a General Assembly on

¹⁴⁷ Starting a Dialogue, "A Survey for Occupy Oakland," Occupy Oakland, October 15, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/10/a-survey-for-occupy-oakland/>.

October 17, with brief answers to the question of safety recorded in the minutes, which in part read:

-How to deal with issues of Respect?

-no touching without consent

...

-Not being heard, people not listening to each other and allowing each other to value their different experiences¹⁴⁸

Though the limited notes do not encapsulate the entirety of the conversation around safety and space, they indicate the salience of these issues within the Oakland camp even as it attempted to be horizontal. The survey and discussion were attempts to address the issue of unwanted advances or violations of personal space that were present early on—though how serious or effective these measures were can be debated.

Some participants in Occupy Oakland clearly anticipated there would be safety and health/wellbeing problems, especially for oppressed groups. Prior to the first encampment of Oscar Grant Plaza, two friends called a meeting of Queer individuals and Queer allies “to discuss how we, as Queer and Queer allied people, could contribute to the environment of the upcoming encampment as a Safe Space for us to participate.”¹⁴⁹ This meeting was the inception of the Safer Spaces Committee, which swelled to over 100 members in the following seven weeks and worked to “provide anti-oppression advocacy and mental and emotional wellness support to participants of the movement.”¹⁵⁰ Erica Newman, one of the founding members of the Safer Spaces Committee, reflected on the motivations for creating the committee:

It was immediately clear that for those of us at that initial meeting, our willingness to participate in the Occupy Movement was contingent on our safety as Queer and Queer allied people. For us, a sense of safety required that the movement take a clear anti-

¹⁴⁸ Starting a Dialogue, “Survey for Occupy Oakland.”

¹⁴⁹ Erica Newman, “Safer Spaces of Decolonize/Occupy Oakland: Some Reflections on Mental Health and Anti-Oppression Work in Revolutionary Times,” *Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 138-139, <https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.3.2.138-141>.

¹⁵⁰ Newman, “Safer Spaces,” 138.

oppression stance, and be committed, in action, to the empowerment of all people. We have taken as our position that in order for collective liberation to occur, the emotional, mental, and somatic consequences of oppressive actions, such as harassment, exclusion, threats of physical violence, or other attacks on an individual's or group's integrity, must be recognized, held, and addressed.¹⁵¹

Newman and other participants drew on the concept of “safer spaces” which, as she writes,

“originated in Women's and Queer movements of the past decades as an identifier of space that is explicitly committed to safety for individuals or communities that are targets of oppression.”¹⁵²

The Safer Spaces Committee was formed with the belief that the health and wellbeing of individuals in movements is critical to sustaining them, and focused on both interpersonal violence within the movement (which it viewed as resulting from internalized oppressive beliefs) as well as healing from outside systemic oppressions and violence, such as police violence.

In addition to the Safer Spaces Committee, several feminist and queer collectives formed within Occupy Oakland to address heteropatriarchy, racism, lack of safety, and other sources of insecurity and “stickiness.” One of these groups, Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, organized actions to combat gender violence and promoted organizing that “**confront[s] and attack[s] structural racism and white supremacy in this city and in our own spaces.**”¹⁵³ OOP was created by a group of “women, trans people, queers, fags, and dykes” who formed a feminist and queer blockade at the December 12, 2011 port shutdown (Figure 8). This “bloq” began formally meeting to plan a feminist and queer occupation on December 17, 2011, asking LGBTQ+

¹⁵¹ Newman, 139.

¹⁵² Newman, 138.

¹⁵³ “Points of Unity for a Feminist & Queer Occupation,” *Oakland Occupy Patriarchy* (blog), December 8, 2011, (emphasis in original) <https://oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com/2011/12/07/points-of-unity-for-a-feminist-queer-occupation/>.

Occupiers in Oakland, “Have you been interested in occupations but felt uncomfortable, unsafe, unheard, annoyed, angry, or bored?” (Figure 9).¹⁵⁴

Figure 8: Feminist and Queer Bloq Flyer

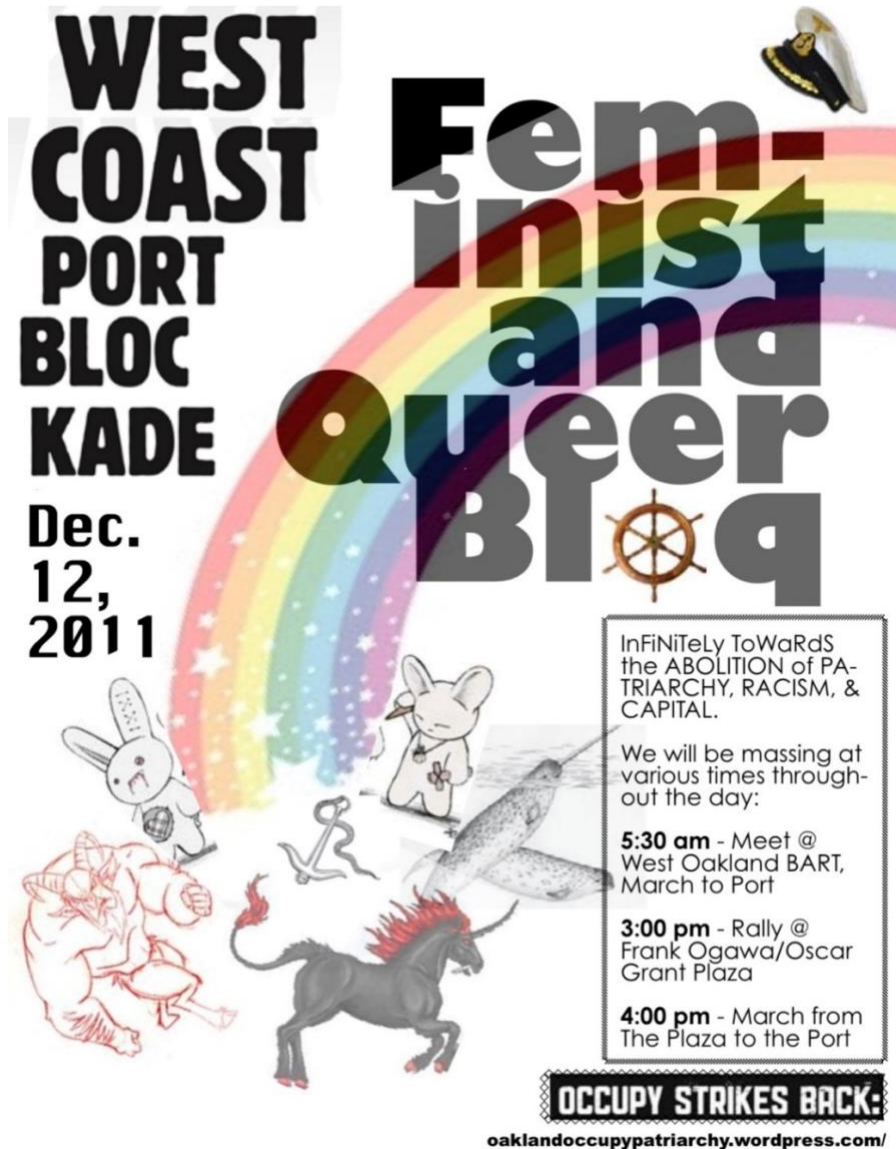


Figure 8: A flyer posted to the Oakland Occupy Patriarchy website on December 7, 2011 invites individuals to join the feminist and queer bloq for the December 12, 2011 port shutdown. The flyer has images of an enraged fiery unicorn, a rainbow, a narwhal, and other iconography that appears angry and wounded, sometimes with a feminine connotation (such as the drawing of a bleeding bunny).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ “SATURDAY Meet-up to Plan a Feminist & Queer Occupation 3pm-6pm,” *Oakland Occupy Patriarchy* (blog), December 16, 2011, <https://oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com/2011/12/16/saturday-meet-up-to-plan-a-feminist-queer-occupation-3pm-6pm/>.

¹⁵⁵ Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, “FEMINIST & QUEER BLOCKADE.”

Figure 9: Calling on Women, Trans People, Queers, Fags, Dykes Flyer

Calling on
women, trans people, queers, fags, dykes!

Have you been interested in occupations but felt uncomfortable, unsafe, unheard, annoyed, angry, or bored? Are you interested in being part of envisioning and creating a

FEMINIST AND QUEER OCCUPATION

Come to the first general planning meeting for an Oakland feminist/queer occupation!!!!

Saturday, December 17th.
At the Continental Club. 1658 12th St.
3pm-6pm. With ChildCare!

* note: "we" are a small group of people from Occupy Oakland who have been talking about this, but we do not want to have control or ownership over this project, come make it what you want it to be!

See reverse side for a series of working points of unity.



oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com feministgroup@gmail.com

Figure 9: An Oakland Occupy Patriarchy flyer posted on December 16, 2011 calls for individuals to join a feminist and queer occupation meeting on December 17.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, "SATURDAY Meet-Up," <https://oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com/2011/12/16/saturday-meet-up-to-plan-a-feminist-queer-occupation-3pm-6pm/>.

Oakland Occupy Patriarchy worked to expand Occupy's political horizon to combat sticky heteropatriarchy and interpersonal violence within Occupy Oakland, as well as systemic violence by the police, the state, capitalism, and white supremacy highlighted by Occupy Oakland. Their actions within Occupy included the creation of workshops to train gender and sexual minorities in self-defense in conjunction with another collective, the Offensive Feminists, and the distribution of pamphlets (Figure 10) instructing readers on the proper way to use pepper spray and tasers.

Figure 10: Use of Pepper Spray and Stun Guns Pamphlet

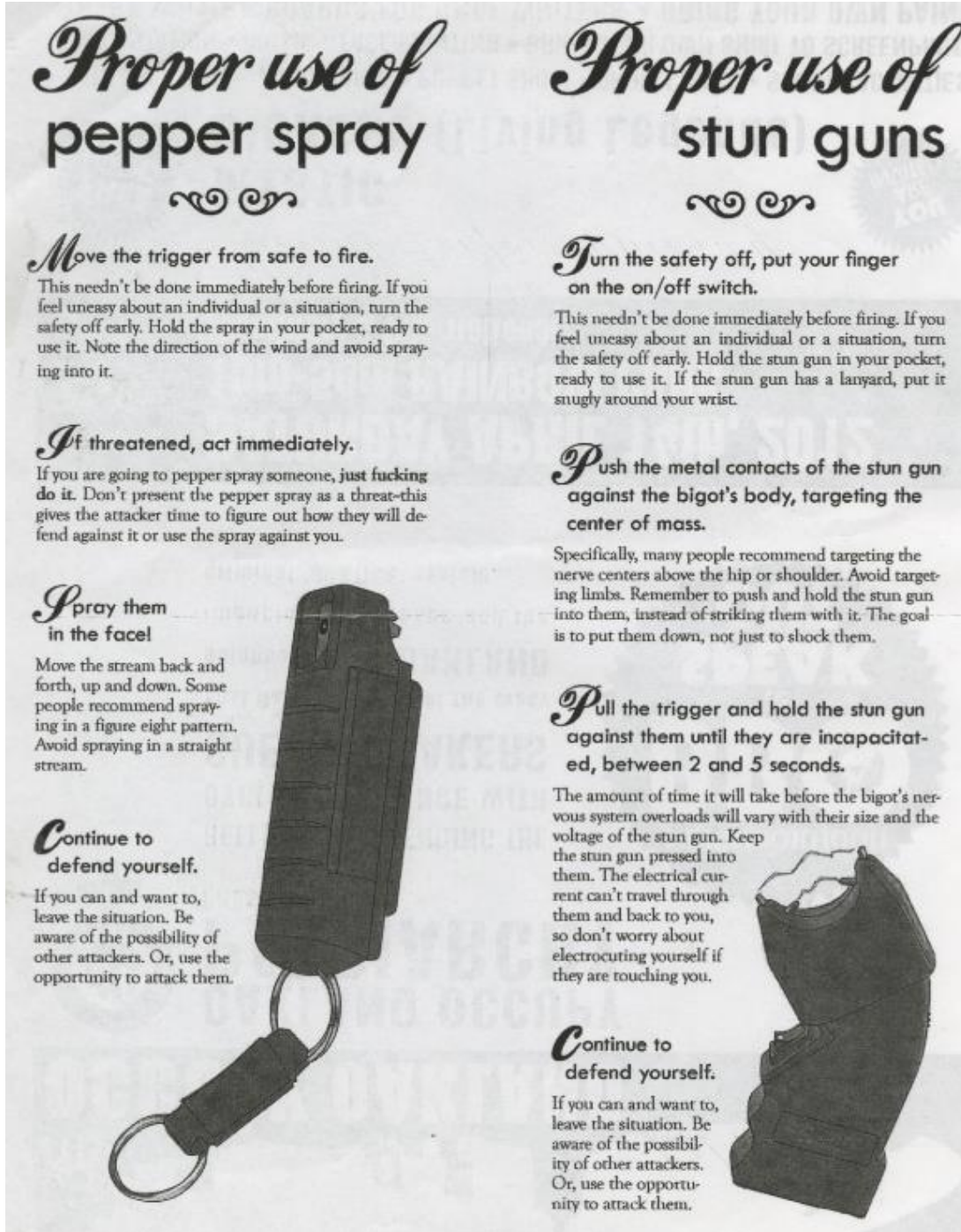


Figure 10: A page of a pamphlet created by Oakland Occupy Patriarchy with drawings of a pepper spray canister and stun gun tells readers how to properly use the weapons and protect themselves. The flyer uses a feminine cursive font and curly decals in its descriptions.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Unknown maker, *OA01_oaklandoccupypatriarchy_109.pdf*, 2012. "Collection Objects," Occupy Archive, OSF Home, April 15, 2020, <https://osf.io/wvm6s/>.

Sexist behavior was not uncommon in Occupy Oakland. In a newspaper article, an Oakland woman named Wil Cook spoke about male-identifying Occupiers assuming dominance in the camp by telling her how to do things. She noted that on one occasion, a man took a broom from her hands and told her to get another: “I thought it was me at first . . . but then I talked to other women in the camp who said it happened to them too.”¹⁵⁸ This illustrates the pattern of ingrained patriarchal attitudes within the Occupy Oakland movement despite its horizontal intentions, attitudes that can in part be attributed to the stickiness described by feminist activists and scholars in many revolutionary spaces. The embodied spatial forms of protest in Occupy camps foregrounded the importance of harassment and questions of physical safety for women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

General Assembly meeting notes for October 19, 2011 reveal the camp created a safe sleeping space for these groups: “In response to women, trans and queer people feeling unsafe in the camp, we are going to take this space (near amphitheater) and set up camp here. We will meet each other, organize, and make sure to eliminate sexism from the space.”¹⁵⁹ The creation of designated safe spaces for those with marginalized genders and sexual identities was not exclusive to Oakland, but a product of conditions in the Occupy movement. Tina Dupuy, an Occupier from LA writing about “the Occupy Movement’s woman problem,” said that across camps, “There’s this volatile mix of those waiting to pounce on anything to discredit Occupy and an open public space where female protesters are sleeping that absolutely anyone can wander into.”¹⁶⁰ Dupuy’s testimony reveals the unique problems that Occupy’s tactics posed to women

¹⁵⁸ John C. Osborn, “Event Raises Awareness about Sexism, Homophobia within Occupy Protests,” *Oakland North*, January 9, 2012, <https://oaklandnorth.net/2012/01/09/event-raises-awareness-about-sexism-homophobia-within-occupy-protests/>.

¹⁵⁹ Facilitation Committee, “GA Minutes 10.19.11,” Occupy Oakland, October 19, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/10/ga-minutes-10-19-11/>.

¹⁶⁰ Tina Dupuy, “The Occupy Movement’s Women Problem,” *Atlantic*, November 21, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/11/the-occupy-movements-woman-problem/248831/>.

and the LGBTQ+ community: due to rape culture and heteropatriarchy, inhabiting public spaces a protest tactic leaves women and LGBTQ people vulnerable to whoever enters the camp.

It is clear from the Occupy Research survey that questions of safety and harassment were deeply concerning for people with marginalized genders and sexual identities. In response to a question about potential deterrents for participation in Occupy Oakland, several participant-respondents noted heteropatriarchy as a reason not to participate. The 11 responses were similar in nature, including “patriarchy,” “manarchy,” “sexism in movement,” “feel overpowered by male voices,” “male privilege,” “sexual harassment,” “straight-dominated,” and “male-dominated.” *Many* more responses (at least 25) cited “violence” or some variation of the word as a deterrent for participation, whether it be interpersonal violence with other campers or fear of police violence.

The question of violence in the camp is a multi-faceted one. Survey responses that referenced potential for violence highlighted a general fear of danger, but at times also specifically mentioned police violence, fear of state violence, or potential for inter-Occupier violence. The responses included: “Not wanting to be exposed to hostility, anger and violence,” “Fear of being beaten or killed or put into a prison for my political views,” “negative tear gas exposure,” “fear of arrest,” “FEAR OF THE GOVERNMENT AND WHAT THEY WILL DO TO ME,” “Fear of COINTELPRO - like operation,” “AGGRESSION by participants,” and “Violence and confrontation by participants.” A *Mother Jones* article about right-wing media coverage of Occupy Oakland on October 22, 2011 provides an excellent case study for the nuanced ways in which the Oakland locale, safety, and race and gender interacted within Occupy. Discussing right-wing media’s reports on sexual harassment in the Oscar Grant Plaza

camp, verbal abuse of a reporter who was told, “we shoot white bitches like you around here,” and other threats of violence in the Oakland camp, Aronsen writes:¹⁶¹

While there is truth to many of these reports, the reality of Occupy Oakland is less bleak. As a tall, red-bearded young man who introduced himself as Roger told me, “We didn’t set up in a nice park in the middle of New York City. We set up in Oakland.” And that’s just it: The occupation is an experiment in self-governance; its problems are reflective of the problems of the city at large.¹⁶²

The reality of gender marginalization and harassment within Occupy Oakland can in part be understood as an effect of preexisting patriarchal norms and ideologies that govern the society Occupy was born in. Yet Roger also highlights the intersection of cis-male supremacy and place through his comparison of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza with the initial occupation that sparked this movement in Zuccotti Park, located in Lower Manhattan’s Financial District, to emphasize the focus on banks and Wall Street firms. He assumed that violence within this campsite was to be expected and accepted because—in his words—“we set up in Oakland.” While this sentiment is somewhat problematic in that it plays into often racialized depictions of Oakland as a violent place, it does underscore some positional differences, such as the class inequality that differentiated camp residents and visitors and residents from the larger community.

In their article on the Occupy camps in Oakland and Atlanta, Guillaume Marche and Jean Baptiste Velut highlight the importance of local social histories, political traditions, and activist networks in shaping the different trajectories of Occupy sites.¹⁶³ To demonstrate this point, they note staggering differences between Oakland and its neighboring city, San Francisco, where

¹⁶¹ Gavin Aronsen, “The Right-Wing Media Assault on Occupy Oakland,” *Mother Jones*, October 22, 2011, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/right-wing-attack-on-occupy-oakland/>.

¹⁶² Aronsen, “Right-Wing Media Assault.”

¹⁶³ Guillaume Marche and Jean-Baptiste Velut, “All Contentious Politics is Local: Studying the Occupy Movement from Below, in Oakland and Atlanta,” *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* 148, no. 3 (2016): 99, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfea.148.0098>.

another Occupy site sprang up. These differences included the racial demographics of the two cities—Oakland had a significantly higher black population and was a majority-minority city—and income levels—San Francisco’s median household income was \$75,604, 40 percent above the national average.¹⁶⁴ Unlike camps set up in cities like San Francisco and New York, where financial institutions loomed large, Oakland was not home to any large corporations or financial institutions. Instead, it housed what Marche and Velut call a “Wall Street on the Waterfront”: the Port of Oakland, the fifth biggest cargo container port in North America. As they explain:

The global claim against the financial concentration of wealth among the proverbial one percent had an immediate local translation: while this “Wall Street on the Waterfront” had operating revenues of over 297 million dollars in fiscal year 2011—a steadily increasing level that reached 336.6 million dollars in 2015, up 4.2 percent from the previous year (Port of Oakland 2011, 4; 2015, np)—its profits mainly pay for its modernization, but fail to benefit the public. For instance, Occupy coincided with the closing of five public elementary schools, which was to yield two million dollars’ worth of annual savings: Occupiers argued that a one percent tax on the port’s operating revenue would be enough to balance the city’s education budget (Bady). The port shutdown thus shows how wealth inequality was framed as a problem with tangible local consequences.¹⁶⁵

Thus, the global effects of neoliberalism made themselves felt in powerful ways in Oakland, meaningfully contextualizing Roger’s comparison between Oakland and New York by emphasizing the impact of racialized wealth inequality in Oakland, especially when one considers the disproportionate impact that the foreclosure crisis had on historically Black parts of the city such as West Oakland. Marche and Velut conclude: “from a right-to-the-city perspective, Occupy Oakland’s action therefore consisted, from the start, in grounding the struggle against global forces in a contested local terrain.”¹⁶⁶ The spaces and places of Occupy Oakland were

¹⁶⁴ Marche and Velut, “Contentious Politics,” 104. Compare to a median household income of \$51,851 in Oakland according to the 2011-2013 American Community Service data, which I extracted from the following report. Family Assets Count, *Building Financial Security in Oakland and Alameda County*, (Oakland, CA: Family Assets Count, February 2016), https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/profiles/Oakland_Family_Assets_Count_Data_Profile.pdf.

¹⁶⁵ Marche and Velut, 105-106.

¹⁶⁶ Marche and Velut, 105.

shaped by the economic and racial struggles and inequalities within Oakland, between Oakland and neighboring wealthier and whiter cities, and within the global economy and racial capitalism, creating nuanced layers when considering safety and gender conflicts in the camps.

Aronsen describes several male members of “the occupation’s ‘cop watch,’ a leaderless overnight patrol of 10 to 20 walkie-talkie wielding people who work to ensure the OGP camp’s safety by breaking up fights, keeping an eye out for sexual harassment and hard drug use, and—of course—watching for cops.”¹⁶⁷ The underscoring of the creation of internal security teams speaks to the complex intersection of patriarchy, class, and race in Occupy Oakland with another local issue in Oakland: policing. While gendered harassment was a problem at many Occupy camps, the Oakland location made conflict resolution related to harassment more complex than other camps. In an early effort to address these problems, Occupiers in Oakland discussed a “Friendly Neighbor Policy: Zero tolerance for racism, sexism, harassment, violence” proposal (which had been adapted from the Occupy Wall Street camp) at the October 23 GA.¹⁶⁸ It failed to pass, in large part due to concerns of how the policy would be enforced and a desire to avoid police intervention. These concerns were valid considering the violent history of the Oakland Police Department, which targeted and abused Black communities, including police murders of members of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and more recently the murder of Oscar Grant, a Black man shot by a Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer in Oakland in 2009. The department had furthermore violently repressed Occupy protesters on multiple occasions, resulting in two individuals being hospitalized with serious injuries. Much of the police violence had taken place while the city was under a federal monitoring program following a class-action lawsuit brought

¹⁶⁷ Aronsen, “Right-Wing Media Assault.”

¹⁶⁸ Facilitation Committee, “GA Minutes: 10.23.11,” Occupy Oakland, October 23, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/10/ga-minutes-10-23-11-3/>.

against four corrupt police officers known as the “Oakland Riders,” a program that began in 2003 and continues today because the department has failed to enact reforms ordered in the Riders settlement 18 years ago.¹⁶⁹

Protesters called attention to police brutality from the start of the movement, naming their site of occupation after Oscar Grant, as well as naming the library and class space after Raheim Brown, a young Black man killed by Oakland police in 2011. Thus, while sexual harassment and questions of security and safety (especially for those of marginalized gender and sexual identities) emerged across Occupy camps, the setting of Oakland engendered nuanced questions about what safety meant for different bodies within the camps. When police arrested and charged three members of Occupy Oakland with alleged hate crimes regarding remarks on a woman’s sexuality, Oakland Occupy Patriarchy quickly mobilized to condemn the Oakland Police Department and District Attorney, writing: “Police frequently lie, and also many of us, as products of a sexist racist society, do shitty things, but [either] way, **cops can’t and won’t change what sucks about this society. But WE sure as hell intend on doing that.** Part of that project is negating police authority and their monopoly of violence.”¹⁷⁰

By situating their caucus work in a local understanding of the dynamics of state violence and police brutality/misconduct in Oakland, OOP was able to discredit Oakland PD’s attempt to co-opt queer identities and instead insist on their own right to protect and heal. They wrote:

If someone fucks with us because of our gender, our race, our sexuality, that is something for US to handle, whether it means mediation, accountability, reparations, violent retaliation, or exclusion — that is for US to work out together, WITHOUT the police. In order to do that, we need to break down the barriers that the police and the capitalists are

¹⁶⁹ For court documents related to the settlement, see *Delphine Allen et al. v. City of Oakland*, Case No. C00-4599 TEH (N.D. Cal. Dec. 22, 2011), <https://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=5541>.

¹⁷⁰ “Pigs Are No Friends of Ours,” *Oakland Occupy Patriarchy* (blog), March 5, 2012, (emphasis in original) <https://oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com/2012/03/05/pigs-are-no-friends-of-ours/>.

so interested in building between us, so that we can start learning how to work together.¹⁷¹

In this way, OOP worked to deconstruct potential violence within the movement while also deconstructing violence outside of the movement. Though racialized police violence is in no way confined to Oakland, its historical prevalence and visibility in Oakland shaped the way protesters approached sexual harassment and violence.

Despite intersectional efforts within Occupy Oakland, the stickiness of ideological and institutional inequalities posed significant barriers to creating a space that reflected and protected everyone's needs and interests. Many activists splintered off into collectives that highlighted the centrality of race and criticized Occupy for its shortsightedness on the violent colonial legacy of the term "occupy" and the treatment of people of color in the movement in general. Because of the importance of allowing all individuals a voice in the deliberative democratic experiment, when certain voices, bodies, and ideologies were marginalized, these groups often decided to leave and start their own projects with different political horizons.

Genesis of Decolonize Oakland: Race, Indigeneity, and the 99 Percent

As with the Safer Spaces Committee, the People of Color Caucus was present in the first days of Occupy Oakland, with a post on the Occupy Oakland website on October 17, 2011 documenting its early existence. The POC Caucus was listed as one of three caucuses/working groups of the General Assembly. The working groups "meet, often before, during, and after the time of a general assembly to discuss proposals or issues of a particular type (e.g. facilitation) or of particular interest to communities within our occupation / movement. Their decisions and proposals are brought to the General Assembly where they are considered by everyone in the

¹⁷¹ Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, "Pigs Are No Friends."

movement.”¹⁷² Alongside the Queer People of Color Caucus, the POC caucus “[met] with the goal of strengthening our participation in the Occupy movement here in Oakland and beyond, and to likewise strengthen the Occupy movement by situating it in the context of our local, living communities and the ongoing work being done by those communities.”¹⁷³ These groups focused their organizing efforts against the police state, carceral systems, gentrification, and white settler colonialism, in addition to connecting with organizers in the Oakland community. Similar iterations of POC caucuses cropped up at Occupy sites across the country, though many of them “prove[d] ineffective when raising issues of privilege within Occupy’s ranks,” not for lack of effort on behalf of POC, as noted by Black occupier and academic Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell.¹⁷⁴

Calls to decolonize Occupy Oakland emerged in the first nine days of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza, in large part due to race consciousness informed by Oakland’s local history. As Occupy Oakland participant John Hayakawa Torok writes in his recollections on Occupy/Decolonize Oakland from 2011 through 2013,

Oakland is historically a center for Black cultural life on the West Coast. It remains one of the most diverse cities in the country. Not surprisingly, then, it is a site where a strong critique of the term “Occupy” itself emerged. United States imperial occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, as well recognition of American settler colonialism on occupied indigenous peoples’ territories, prompted reflection on

¹⁷² “Occupy Oakland Committees,” Occupy Oakland, October 17, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/occupy-oakland-committees/>. While I could not determine the exact inception date of the POC caucus from the archival material on www.occupyoakland.org, it appears to be well-established on day 7 of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza as “People of Color (POC) Caucus: People of color organizing in camp and beyond” is listed as a working group, followed by a link with contact information.

¹⁷³ People of Color Caucus, “People of Color/QPoC Meeting (2012-01-11),” Occupy Oakland, November 11, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/event/people-of-colorq poc-meeting-new-times/>. This statement was included as a description for multiple POC/QPOC meeting notices on the Occupy Oakland.

¹⁷⁴ Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell, “A Critique of the Occupy Movement from a Black Occupier,” in “Special Anniversary Conference Issue: A Celebration of the First Forty Years,” special issue, *The Black Scholar* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.41.4.0042>.

this question. As noted the “race” question also emerged in the Occupy Wall Street discourse in the first weeks.¹⁷⁵

In response to accounts in alternative media, his news feed, and his own experiences within the Oscar Grant Plaza camp, Torok wrote an essay in the initial days of Occupy Oakland criticizing the colonialist lens of Occupy Wall Street, which was first published on the Occupy Oakland website on October 18, 2011:

The decolonization critique of [Occupy Wall Street] has two components. The first is stated in the slogan, “Take Back Wall Street: Occupied Since 1625.” The major premise is that the economic and social development of the present U.S. order originates in white settler colonization. A minor premise is that the invention of racism served as ideological justification for both conquest and enslavement and that racism still prevails in Occupied America.

The second component is based on experiences, and criticism based on those experiences, by people of color participants in the Occupy general assemblies. This part of the critique centers how male, heterosexual, class, and especially white racial privilege exclude the histories and experiences of women and queer people of color in articulating the uprising's politics.

Thus, a call to “Occupy America” obscures the histories of colonization and resistance that U.S. indigenous and people of color communities often carry with them.¹⁷⁶

Torok alludes to the marginalization of certain bodies in the space of Occupy, particularly due to the centering of certain voices in the General Assembly. Drawing on the earlier discussion of deliberative democracy, it is clear that not all participants felt equal ownership and ability to enact change within OO’s democratic experiment, and responded by attempting to change the fabric of the space through different frameworks. Similar critiques of settler colonialism within Occupy emerged across North America. Adam Barker argues that Occupy as a whole was situated within a settler colonial dynamic and participated in the transfer of power and lands to the settler colonial majority:

¹⁷⁵ John Hayakawa Torok, “On Oakland’s Decolonize/Occupy moment 2011-2013,” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 8, no. 2 (November 2016): 440, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Interface-8-2-Torok.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶ John Hayakawa Torok, “The 2011 Occupy/DeColonize Moment,” Occupy Oakland, October 18, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/10/the-2011-occupydecolonize-moment/>.

Rather than addressing the roots of inequality in settler colonialism, the 99% seeks to level the playing field *within* the imposed system of state and capital, completing the settler colonial palindrome: Settler and Indigenous disappear, along with the history of colonization, leaving only homogenized (liberal and progressive) rights-bearing individuals . . . Indigenous peoples are not part of ‘the 99%’ in the way that most Settler people are (Yee, [12]). In order to enter the social space of the 99%, Indigenous peoples must ignore generations of difference making and marginalization by governments and Settler communities, and assume the role of a politicized ‘minority’ in solidarity with other minority groups making equivalent claims. Participation is contingent on abandoning fundamental aspects of indigeneity.¹⁷⁷

Indigenous peoples and POC within Occupy Oakland raised awareness of this colonial mindset and worked in the first three weeks on a resolution titled, “Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.” The proposal, which passed on October 28, 2011 with 97 percent approval, cited the exclusion of indigenous peoples due to the colonialist language of occupation and called for the respectful inclusion of indigenous peoples in the movement. It declared that “‘Occupy Oakland’ aspired to ‘Decolonize Oakland’ – to ‘Decolonize Wall Street’ – with the guidance and participation of indigenous peoples.”¹⁷⁸

Though they initially mobilized around calls for solidarity, Torok’s account describes how the Queer People of Color and People of Color caucuses in Oakland gradually moved away from a settler-colonialist occupation towards a decolonization framework, also reflected in their interactions on Twitter. On November 11, 2011, the Twitter account @DecolonizeOak tweeted, “Thinking we need an IndigenousPeoples subcommittee,” followed by a link to a now deactivated Tumblr called pococcupywallstreet¹⁷⁹ and a call to model this new subcommittee after the Tumblr with an emphasis on indigenous issues (Figure 11).

¹⁷⁷ Adam Barker, “Already Occupied: Indigenous Peoples, Settler Colonialism and the Occupy Movements in North America,” in “Occupy!,” special issue, *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2012): 330-331 (emphasis in original), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.708922>.

¹⁷⁸ The text of the proposal can be viewed here: <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/10/29/18695950.php>.

¹⁷⁹ A version of the Tumblr that was archived on November 10, 2011 (one day before the tweet) can be viewed here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20111110195610/https://pococcupywallstreet.tumblr.com/>.

Figure 11: Need Indigenous Subcommittee Tweet



Figure 11: The first tweet from @DecolonizeOak Twitter demonstrates the beginnings of the conception of the breakaway group Decolonize Oakland.¹⁸⁰

To address the whitewashing of the “99 percent” and problematic aspects of “occupation,” Indigenous organizers and POC allies began the first of a series of teach-ins on November 13. Andreana Clay, a queer Black feminist, describes how the twin issues of occupation and colonization united Black and indigenous folks in Oakland, writing in a blogpost: “There were several of us who met beforehand to strategize some about the larger discussion of occupation, (de)occupation, and the current movement. I came primarily as an ally to Indigenous folks, particularly the Ohlone, whose OakLand we occupy, and to think and discuss how the terms occupation and colonization relate to Black folks in Oakland.”¹⁸¹ She continued to describe the ways in which colonization, slavery, and the rape and plunder of Black women’s bodies in particular require decolonization, connecting the mentality of ownership, consumerism and space to gentrification in Oakland. Citing the displacement of Black working class families, local predatory lending, home foreclosures, and colonizer mentalities about property and ownership, she wrote: “Those things we thought were ours: homes, jobs, pensions, etc. are being taken from

¹⁸⁰ @DecolonizeOak’s Twitter can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/decolonizeoak?lang=en>.

¹⁸¹ Andreanna Clay, “Oakland, Occupied,” *QueerBlackFeminist* (blog), November 14, 2011, http://queerblackfeminist.blogspot.com/2011/11/i-went-to-first-teach-in-on_14.html.

us. So we need to reexamine our attachments to ownership and to colonization as more and more of us are displaced, joining the ranks of the ‘unrecognized.’”¹⁸²

The critiques of settler colonialism and whiteness brought forth by these Oakland activists were shaped by many factors and embedded in the nature of Occupy and local history, as Clay’s commentary shows. Activists attempted to change attitudes within Occupy Oakland through in-person teach-ins, working groups such as the POC and QPOC caucuses, and blogosphere and social media activity on platforms like Facebook. Some of the criticisms were based on the overarching concept of “occupation” and the homogenizing “99 percent” rhetoric. But the conflicts highlighted by groups like Decolonize Oakland were also grounded in Oakland’s history as a center for Black life in comparison to the dominance of white perspectives in the movement, as well as the dismissive attitudes of certain campers regarding matters of race, indigeneity, class, sexuality, and gender. Certainly there were also frictions between first-time participants and long-term community activists.

Torok, an active participant in the QPOC/POC caucuses and a unionized worker, describes how some members of the movement rejected identity politics and organizing, especially around issues of race and heteropatriarchy:

Some white activists dismissed race-identity based politics. Some people of color activists wrote off white activists who dismissed the politics of races and racisms. Some male activists dismissed gender-based and feminist politics. Some heterosexual activists dismissed lesbian-gay—bisexual-transgender and feminist politics. These arguments led to much learning but also much hurt. Those who identified with the politics of these margins sometimes withdrew from the Decolonize/Occupy work.¹⁸³

Occupy’s structure was grounded in General Assemblies and the various coalitions and committees that coalesced around specific issues. However, the ability of the movement to pass

¹⁸² Clay, “Oakland, Occupied.”

¹⁸³ Torok, “Oakland’s Decolonize/Occupy Moment,” 441.

resolutions and facilitate coalition-building hinged on the deliberative nature of GAs and a willingness to listen to and engage equally with others' perspectives. Torok highlights a problem that existed in many Occupy camps: the unwillingness of certain Occupiers to allow those of marginalized identities to take equal ownership of the space within the deliberative democratic experiment. Black Occupier and scholar Emahunn writes that “there has not been a serious effort by white Occupiers to facilitate the creation of a safe space for serious, meaningful discussions of this debilitating privilege.”¹⁸⁴ He argues, “Without support in numbers to protect Occupiers of color from acts of alienation, Occupiers of color cannot carve important space for a serious dialogue about white privilege (and, indeed, racism), nor can they fully expect white Occupiers to create this space.”¹⁸⁵ Torok describes interaction difficulties and learning in Occupy Oakland:

I sensed that the life experience of some of the younger and most active activists in Occupy Oakland meant that they did not know how to talk with employed workers or across race and class lines . . . High unemployment in the young activists' cohort, or their experience only in precarious employment, may further have had something to do with this. The young activists were sophisticated about the politics of gender and sexuality, often having been trained primarily in the historically white precincts of American secondary and higher education. As Occupy Oakland continued they learned to listen and speak across other vectors of difference with varying degrees of success. Moreover, some lacked access to — although many quickly learned about — the historical political race consciousness that comes from long participation in community-based anti-racist work. Others were already quite inspired by the local history of radical anti-racist and anti-subordination social movements.

Nonetheless the utopian aspirations and anti-capitalist critique articulated by many occupiers often made an impression on many workers and the underemployed or unemployed of all different backgrounds. Most workers, especially those with the unwaged care work of families, had limited or no time and thus lacked capacity in most cases to participate in the drawn out Assembly process.¹⁸⁶

Occupy Research survey findings from Oakland participants also discussed these tensions. One respondent wrote that a deterrent for their participation in OO was that “movement

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, “Black Occupier,” 43.

¹⁸⁵ Campbell, 44-45.

¹⁸⁶ Torok, “Oakland’s Decolonize/Occupy Moment,” 441-42.

leaders seem to be the ‘1% of the 99%,’ young, white, economically stable,” and “people of color [were] ignored/neglected/shutout/tokenized.” The same person noted “overexposure of young white people” as a reason for not engaging. Other answers to the question about lack of engagement included, “Replication of oppressions w/ in movement,” “Didn't want it to continue to grow as a largely White let [sic] movement,” “Lack of centering it on POC, indigenous highly marginalized folks,” and “Disagree with language (‘occupy’, ‘99%’, etc).”¹⁸⁷

Members of the POC/QPOC caucuses alongside indigenous peoples pushed to create space for themselves in Occupy by proposing a name (and framework) change. Debates around the proposal to change the name of the Oakland encampment ensued in the final days of November and early December (Figure 12), but the proposal failed to reach the 90 percent consensus threshold on December 4, 2011.¹⁸⁸

Figure 12: Decolonize Proposal Tweet



Figure 12: A tweet from @DecolonizeOak on November 25, 2011 reads: “Morning Star working on proposal to change OO to Decolonize/Liberate Oakland. Making statement at tonight’s GA. Hoping for Sunday’s agenda.

¹⁸⁷ Occupy Research, “Preliminary Findings,”

<https://cementerio.montera34.com/occupyresearch.net/2012/page/2012/03/23/preliminary-findings-occupy-research-demographic-and-political-participation-survey/index.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Facilitation Committee, “FAILED TO REACH 90% ON DECEMBER 4, 2011. PROPOSAL TABLED. EMERGENCY PROPOSAL. #3 on Queue for: Proposal to Decolonize Oakland: Creating a More Radical Movement,” Occupy Oakland, December 4, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/12/emergency-proposal-3-on-queue-for-december-4-2011-ga-proposal-to-decolonize-oakland-creating-a-more-radical-movement/>. The proposal received 68 percent of the vote.

After these unsuccessful efforts, the caucuses split from Occupy to form Decolonize Oakland, a collective that critiqued OO's use of the word "Occupy" for invoking colonial domination and normalizing U.S. military occupations abroad, and eventually declared itself autonomous from Occupy Oakland.

Unlike Occupy's focus on reclaiming state and corporate spaces for the 99 percent and emphasis on participatory democracy, Decolonize Oakland used the framework of decolonizing to encourage not just solidarity with indigenous peoples but to "a practice of healing from violence in forms such as slavery, occupation, and poverty," per a statement written by a key member of the collective, the Indigenous Morning Star Gali, and published on the occupyoakland website in anticipation of the Decolonize Oakland name change proposal:¹⁸⁹

Colonization, occupation, segregation are still active forms of violence in our communities. Our neighborhoods exist under a police occupation. Gentrification, which is pricing poor families out of their homes, is colonization under a new name. Segregation continues in education, as wealthier families send their children to private schools while our public schools suffer and shrink.¹⁹⁰

Decolonize Oakland activists incorporated antiracist, anticolonial, intersectional analyses into their political horizon to highlight the *local* problems, including related to land, labor and property, created by patriarchal, capitalist white supremacy:

While we know that "Occupy" is the terminology used around the country to explain and unify this movement, it does not address the real issues of colonization that happened in this country and particularly to Oakland and the Chochenyo Ohlone residents of this city. For years the Bay Area and Oakland have been the birthplace of revolutionary movements and innovations in movement work.

Changing the name to "DeColonize" is an innovation that would also speak to the brilliance and community of OO to address the current issues of gentrification in Oakland and the social problems that gentrification have perpetuated as well as pay homage to our revolutionary ancestors who fought for a better, more inclusive and respectful Oakland . . . It is our lands, our labor, our bodies, and our voices that have been stolen; at the encampment at Ogawa/Grant Plaza and in our local neighborhoods, we have come

¹⁸⁹ Morning Star Gali, "Decolonize Oakland: Creating a More Radical Movement," Occupy Oakland, December 3, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/2011/12/decolonize-oakland/>.

¹⁹⁰ Gali, "More Radical Movement."

together to decolonize our minds, restructure our relationships to one another, and build political institutions that meet the needs of all people. What we are doing is decolonizing Oakland. Let us choose a name that reflects our actions and beliefs.¹⁹¹

Not all members of Occupy Oakland were receptive to these changes and the possibilities they presented. Blogger Tequila Sovereign (indigenous activist Joanne Barker, who participated in OO before joining Decolonize Oakland) described some of the questions and controversies in a post written on October 30, 2011:

When we presented the proposal for a Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples to the General Assembly of “Occupy Oakland” on October 28, several individuals came forward to pose deeply felt questions about what – exactly – we were asking of them. Ultimately, what they were asking is whether or not we were asking them, as non-indigenous people, the impossible? Would their solidarity with us require them to give up their lands, their resources, their ways of life, so that we – who numbered so few, after all – could have more? Could have it all?¹⁹²

These sentiments were expressed in a statement in solidarity with indigenous peoples in late October and colored the atmosphere before the proposal to change OO’s name was put forth on December 4, 2011. Individuals worried in Twitter posts that changing the movement’s name to “Decolonize Oakland” would require white people to leave their apartments and homes. In a November 28, 2011 response on their blog “Pensamientos de Luz”, former OO participant (and member of Decolonize Oakland) Luz Calvo wrote:

A commitment to decolonization does NOT mean that (white/non-native) folks will be asked to leave their homes, neighborhoods, community, land, etc . . . Decolonization asks us to be rigorous in our questioning of white male (and all other) supremacies to open the way for previously marginalized voices (of all colors, genders, bodies, etc.) to be heard—not just because that is the right thing to do—but because this will build a movement that is stronger and more radical in its critique. Decolonization is a call for radical equality **inside the movement** as well as our demand for a more just and equal society.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Gali, “More Radical Movement.”

¹⁹² Tequila Sovereign, “What Does ‘Decolonize Oakland’ Mean? What Can ‘Decolonize Oakland’ Mean?,” *Tequila Sovereign* (blog), October 30, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111031111441/http://www.tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/>. An archived version of the blogpost, which is no longer available, can be viewed at the link in the citation.

¹⁹³ Luz Calvo, “Decolonization: What It Means to Me in the Context of ‘Occupy,’” *Pensamientos de Luz* (blog), November 28, 2011, (emphasis in original)

As discussed earlier, the proposal failed despite these calls for radical accountability and equality from within. As a result, the group of POC/QPOC caucus members and indigenous peoples broke off to form the Decolonize Oakland collective.¹⁹⁴ The principles outlined in their points of unity highlight the failures of Occupy Oakland and their goals:

We decolonize because this land is already occupied.

We decolonize because communities of color, women of color, and queers of color have been on the front lines of the struggle against male supremacy, heterosexism, capitalism, and colonial exploitation.

We decolonize because our current system was founded on settler colonialism, genocide, and slavery.

We decolonize to claim spaces for the self-determination of communities of color in Oakland.

We decolonize because any movement that doesn't confront the continuing force of colonization, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, and white supremacy replicates these oppressions.¹⁹⁵

The Decolonize group attempted to address *place* and create *space* for marginalized identities outside the homogenizing Occupy Oakland movement. During the Occupy Oakland movement, Oakland's population was 27.3 percent Black, 25.9 percent white, 25.4 percent Hispanic, and 16.7 Asian, but the share of Black people in the city was decreasing, a trend that continues today as gentrification displaces poorer people.¹⁹⁶ The city shut down five public

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111224044102/https://luzcalvo.tumblr.com/post/13443334687/decolonization-what-it-means-to-me-in-the-context-of>. An archived version of the blogpost, which is no longer available, can be viewed at the link in the citation. A third blogpost by a different individual in OO expressed fear that changing the "brand name" of "Occupy" would result in the Oakland movement "distancing itself, or removing itself from the wider movement." The post can be viewed here: <http://www.almusawwir.org/2011/11/why-decolonize-occupyoakland/>.

¹⁹⁴ Members of the collective that spun off to create Decolonize Oakland used footage from the December 4, 2011 GA to create an open letter to the Occupy movement, which can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_s3X0uW9Ec&ab_channel=Rebeccista

¹⁹⁵ "Points of Unity," Decolonize Oakland, February 12, 2012, (emphasis in original)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120913070156/http://decolonizeoakland.org/2012/02/12/point-of-unity/>. Though the original Decolonize Oakland website no longer exists, an archived version can be viewed at the link in the citation, where the Points of Unity were also written in Spanish.

¹⁹⁶ Matthai Kuruvila, "25% Drop in African American Population in Oakland," SFGATE, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 11, 2012, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/25-drop-in-African-American-population-in-Oakland-2471925.php>.

schools in Oakland during the initial weeks of Occupy.¹⁹⁷ Coupled with these difficulties was an extremely high rate of home foreclosure in Oakland, and city budget cuts in the wake of the 2008 crisis. Moreover, the police department's budget constituted nearly 40 percent of the city's \$455 million general budget.¹⁹⁸ Looking at this economic violence (which was deeply entangled with the police violence that persists in Oakland today), one can understand why Decolonize Oakland expanded beyond global injustices and critiques raised by Occupy to tackle inequality and access to resources for historically marginalized groups in Oakland, including Black communities and indigenous groups. These dynamics highlight how important the specificity of Oakland as a site of contestation was in the projects that emerged from Occupy.

Conclusion

As a central site of radical resistance in the Occupy movement, Oakland exemplified many of the gendered, racialized, and classed problems that permeated the Occupy camps despite intentionality around democracy and lack of formalized hierarchy. Local histories, organizing networks, and demographics shaped the emergence of conflict in Occupy Oakland camps, highlighting the importance of *place* and local histories within social movements. *Space* is also an important concept to consider, as the deliberative democracy mindset of Occupy projects globally required that all individuals had a right to shape the space and be heard within in. However, the persistent “stickiness” of power positionalities and different ideologies, including heteropatriarchy, class inequality, settler colonialism, and white supremacy in this radical experiment in participatory democracy led to fractures and the birth of new groups such

¹⁹⁷ Jill Tucker, “Oakland Board Votes to Close 5 Schools,” SFGATE, *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 30, 2011, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Oakland-board-votes-to-close-5-schools-2325158.php>.

¹⁹⁸ Marche and Velut, “Contentious Politics,” 105.

as Oakland Occupy Patriarchy and Decolonize Oakland with their own distinct political horizons. Chapter 3 examines Occupy Oakland's longer-term impacts on the social fabric of Oakland and its activist networks through a diffusion of new ideas and organizing strategies.

Chapter Three

From Occupy Oakland as Encampment, to Occupy Oakland as Activist Hub, to Even Harder Times

Scholars and analysts often evaluate the efficacy of social movements in their aftermath. Sometimes the evaluations take the form of an autopsy that determines cause of death or failure, including lack of tangible effects. Other times they are progress reports that track the implementation of new legislation as a result of the movement. Still others are longevity studies of the movement's impact on public consciousness over time. Sociologists in particular are concerned with identifying the factors and conditions that determine a movement's level of success or failure.¹⁹⁹ Social movement scholars have categorized social movements into four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline.²⁰⁰ Jonathan Christiansen identifies five types of social movement decline—which is the temporal point when movements are evaluated as successful or failed.²⁰¹ “Success” in this framework typically focuses on the institutionalization of a movement's goals (such as changes achieved through the passage of laws) and shifting public consciousness around a particular issue and its framing. “Failure” often results from state repression that limits the legal field of action for activists, state violence or defamation, institutionalization into existing networks with loss of emphasis on a movement's

¹⁹⁹ Margo Giugni, “Was It Worth the Effort? The Outcomes and Consequences of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.371>; Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, Edwin Amenta, and Michael P. Young, “Making an Impact: Conceptual and Methodological Implications of the Collective Goods Criterion” in *How Social Movements Matter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 21-22; Maurice Jackson, Eleanora Petersen, James Bull, Sverre Monsen, and Patricia Richmond, “The Failure of an Incipient Social Movement,” *The Pacific Sociological Review* 3, no. 1 (1960): 35, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1388665>; Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor, “Whatever Happened to The Women's Movement?,” *Mobilization* 10, no. 1 (February 2005): 38–39, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.10.1.46245r7082613312>.

²⁰⁰ Jonathan, Christiansen, “Social Movement and Collective Behavior: Four Stages of Social Movement,” *EBSCO Research Starter*, (2009): 2, <https://www.ebscohost.com/uploads/imported/thisTopic-dbTopic-1248.pdf>.

²⁰¹ Christiansen, “Four Stages,” 2.

goals, and dissolution due to factionalism or inability to maintain momentum and public support. Success/failure frames are limited in their ability to recognize social movement consequences on other scales, however.

Social movements scholar Marco Giugni notes that the success/failure perspective does not capture inevitable disagreements within movements about goals and the subjective dimension of defining success (including overemphasizing legal or policy changes). This framework overemphasizes activist intentions and has difficulty measuring the unintended social, political, and individual effects of social movements. Policy-oriented evaluations do not capture the depth and breadth of social movement consequences and impact. He argues that even with policy changes, “What really matters . . . is that such change be translated into new collective benefits for beneficiary groups.”²⁰² Even without “policy gains,” protests can alter “the power relations between challengers and authorities” and lead to “broader and usually more durable systemic changes, both on the structural and cultural levels.” Finally, social movements “have a range of potential effects in the social and cultural realm.”²⁰³ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison elaborate on such social and cultural effects when they argue, “In a broader historical sense . . . the success of a social movement depends on the *effective diffusion of its knowledge production*.”²⁰⁴

Feminist scholarship has also challenged narratives of movement decline or death, but in relation to Western feminist movements. Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor argue in their analysis of the “live burial” of the feminist movement that we “need to move beyond the

²⁰² Marco Giugni, “Introduction: How Social Movements Matter: Past Research, Present Problems, Future Developments,” in *How Social Movements Matter*, ed. Marco Giugni, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): xxii.

²⁰³ Giugni, “Introduction,” xxii-xxiii.

²⁰⁴ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, introduction to *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991): 64 (my emphasis).

contentious politics model that analyzes feminist mobilization in terms of discrete cycles characterized by a sharp rise in conventionally defined protest events, political actions, and social movement organizations.”²⁰⁵ They argue instead for a “more fluid and continuous conception of a complex movement with thresholds and turning points . . . We firmly believe that social movements based on fundamental social cleavages do not die out, but scale down and retrench to adapt to changes in the political and social climate.”²⁰⁶ Staggenborg and Taylor point, for example, to overlaps in movement communities, to the creation of new collective identities and “emotional cultures” that serve as bases for action, to the personal identity transformations that become a part of daily life, and to changes in mainstream culture as evidence of the survival and evolution of the women’s movement in new and reimagined forms. In the Palestinian context, Frances Hasso argues that intensive social movement involvement led to discernable “feminist generations” of gender-egalitarian ideology and high sense of self-efficacy among working-class Palestinian women that outlasted the demise of the movement.²⁰⁷

Feminists have examined the political effects of narrative or discursive framing, at least in feminist theory. In her book, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011), Clare Hemmings writes:

Despite the complexity of the last few decades of feminist theory—its dizzying array of authors, objects, disciplines, and practices—the story of its past is consistently told as a series of interlocking narratives of progress, loss, and return that oversimplify this complex history and position feminist subjects as needing to inhabit a theoretical and political cutting edge in the present.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor, “Whatever Happened to The Women’s Movement?” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 47-48, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.10.1.46245r7082613312>.

²⁰⁶ Staggenborg and Taylor, “Whatever Happened,” 48.

²⁰⁷ Frances S. Hasso, “Feminist Generations? The Long-Term Impact of Social Movement Involvement on Palestinian Women’s Lives,” *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 3 (November 2001): 587, <https://doi.org/10.1086/338974>.

²⁰⁸ Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 3.

Hemmings argues that the main narratives of progress, loss, and return create a feminist “political grammar” that is “highly mobile and does not belong only to feminists.”²⁰⁹ The nature of the feminist story told about the past “is always motivated by the position one occupies or wishes to occupy in the present.”²¹⁰ She calls on feminists to reconsider their political grammar in order to reclaim the radical potential of feminist theory and change the present stories about feminism. She is interested in “the politics that produce and sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it.”²¹¹ These concerns remind us of media misrepresentations of Occupy Oakland during its encampments and street protests (Chapter 1) and shed a different light on the tensions and fractures that occurred within Occupy Oakland (Chapter 2). They also challenge us to reconsider stories of Occupy Oakland’s demise or failure. Chapter 3 offers evidence that Occupy Oakland continued in different forms under conditions that remained dynamic and that its impact and effects were and remain powerful for Oakland residents.

Mainstream media sources and even some scholars discussed the Occupy Movement as a failure because of its lack of tangible goals, structures, or substantial policy change nationally. For example, few regulations and consequences emerged for the banking, finance, and corporate leaders responsible for the world financial crash in 2008-2009.²¹² Many of the local, national and international inequalities Occupy Oakland sought to transform similarly remain deeply

²⁰⁹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 2.

²¹⁰ Hemmings, 13.

²¹¹ Hemmings, 15-16.

²¹² See [“The Failure of Occupy Wall Street”](#) in the *Huffington Post*, [“Occupy and Black Lives Matter failed. We can either win wars or win elections”](#) in the *Guardian* (U.S. edition), [“Occupy, 6 years later”](#) in *The Week*, [“Why Occupy Wall Street Fizzled”](#) in *CNN Business*, and [“Why Occupy failed”](#) in *Prospect Magazine* for a few examples in media. Though there was not a consensus of failure in academia, for some examples of this “failure” conclusion, see [“What can we learn from Occupy’s Failure?”](#) in *Palgrave Communications*, [“Why the Occupy movement failed”](#) in *Public Administration Review*, and [“A Noneventful Social Movement: The Occupy Wall Street Movement’s Struggle Over Privately Owned Public Space”](#) in *International Journal of Communication*.

entrenched and can be observed on multiple scales, including in Oakland. The rhetoric of failure obscures the extreme resistance to transformation by powerful institutions and forces. It also misses the ways in which Occupy Oakland modified its community and society, and the deep imprints participation left on participants. Despite mainstream media accounts and traditional analyses, the impulses that motivated Occupy Oakland, the lessons of Occupy Oakland, and Occupy Oakland activists themselves continue in new coalitions, projects, and a range of institutions. The movement created new discourses and practices and challenged existing inequalities by effectively resignifying their causes and sources and insisting that a better world was possible through organization and mobilization.

Oakland has a long and storied history of revolutionary, community and labor movements and activism that continues. The Occupy Oakland respondents in the Occupy Research Participant Demography and Political Participation Survey, which was administered during the encampments, indicated that most Oakland activists were previously involved in community organizing: of the 302 Oakland respondents who considered themselves participants in the Occupy movement, a staggering 246 (81.5 percent) indicated that Occupy was not the first social movement they had participated in. Compare this to the general research findings for *all* Occupy participants in the survey: 68.1 percent of all 4,221 participants had preexisting movement experience.²¹³ Occupy Oakland participants were highly involved in the city and region, with 69.5 percent affiliated with non-profits, 33.4 percent with non-governmental organizations, 14.2 percent with labor unions, and 35.8 percent with social justice organizations.

²¹³ Occupy Research, "Preliminary Findings: Occupy Research Demographic and Political Participation Survey," OccupyResearch, March 23, 2012, <https://cementerio.montera34.com/occupyresearch.net/2012/page/2012/03/23/preliminary-findings-occupy-research-demographic-and-political-participation-survey/index.html>.

Connections to preexisting activist networks played an important role in shaping Occupy Oakland activism in 2011 and afterward.

Guillaume Marche and Jean Baptiste Velut describe how during and in the wake of the Occupy Oakland encampments, activists continued to work in and with other organizations and networks, but pushed them toward more direct-action tactics. Indeed, Occupy activists never separated themselves from pre-existing organizations, which strengthened the Occupy Oakland community and revitalized the other organizations:

Instead of integration, whereby Occupy in other localities more or less dissolved itself into the preexisting social movement network, Occupy Oakland developed *coalitions* whereby activists have striven to retain Occupy's specificity while getting involved in specific causes. For example, fieldwork observation shows that the work done outside the general assembly and the camp was largely carried out through pre-existing social movement activist networks . . . Occupy neither dissolved itself into the local activist movement, nor took it over, but nourished and was nourished by it. Interestingly, these networks were not only boosted, but also challenged by Occupy, whose constituency and militant base are more ethnically and educationally diverse, and whose strategic emphasis lay more on direct action than institutional advocacy.²¹⁴

Rather than failure or decline, March and Velut point to reformulation and continuation after police destroyed the Occupy Oakland encampments. While Occupy Oakland's unique execution of participatory democracy also ultimately declined when people no longer lived together, it becomes clear that Occupy Oakland did not "die out" or "fail" but generated new ways of thinking and talking about neoliberalism and state failures, permanently marking the history of Oakland and Occupy participants who continue to organize and spread lessons in activist work. Occupy Oakland *was* a critical site of knowledge production, and generated stories, practices, and ideas that diffused into new projects and existing activist networks that exceeded the temporal point when the camps were destroyed. These projects and networks

²¹⁴ Guillaume Marche and Jean-Baptiste Velut, "All Contentious Politics is Local: Studying the Occupy Movement from Below, in Oakland and Atlanta," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* 148, no. 3 (2016): 108-109 (emphasis in original), <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfea.148.0098>.

include the Oakland Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs, the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition, and the Tsega Center.

This chapter tells a different story in the wake of the most publicly visible manifestations of Occupy Oakland, the encampments and street protests. It sheds light on its diffusion of new knowledge and explanations, hope and utopian imaginations, democratic communication and resistance practices, and forms of solidarity and organizing. The first section focuses on a coalition formed in Occupy Oakland that continued to fight a predatory swaps deal between Goldman Sachs and the City of Oakland. Indeed, the City of Oakland, which was often less than pleased with Occupy activists, used Occupy Oakland's vernacular to resist the deal. The second examines two projects (there were many more) that continued to mobilize Occupy activists, the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition and the Tsega Center. It shows the alliances and overlaps between Oakland activists and organizations—which continued—and brings us back to Oakland Police Department violence, especially against African Americans, which is so central to Oakland's history and Black struggles in the city. The final section discusses methodological and research issues during the CoVid-19 Pandemic and how people in Oakland are faring in the most recent crisis.

The Continuing Struggle against Institutional Economic Violence

Critics of the Occupy Movement in the United States often pointed to lack of concrete policy goals. However, Occupy did not simply fizzle out but rather exerted ongoing ripple effects using a variety of means and tactics. Occupy Oakland's attack on financial institutions and corporations that preyed on the majority of Oakland's residents, its signifying of the people as "the 99 percent," and its unique democratic practices and coalition-building strategies laid the

groundwork for ongoing activist challenges in the years that followed, complicating the so-called “failure” story. Goldman Sachs remained a focus of organized protest. The financial institution has investment interests in the Port of Oakland, which Occupy protesters shut down on November 2, 2011 and disrupted on December 12, 2011. At the time of the Occupy encampments, Goldman was a primary investor in the port terminal operator company SSA Marine, which owned several ports along the Pacific Coast.²¹⁵ Occupy Oakland disrupted operations at several terminals of the Oakland Port on December 12, 2011, in solidarity with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union workers’ dispute with the new owner of a terminal in Longview, Washington, and with port truckers in Los Angeles battling to unionize against SSA Marine. This action was part of a larger Occupy effort to shut down ports all along the West Coast (including San Diego, LA, Portland, Tacoma, Seattle, Vancouver, and Houston, as well as non-port actions in Anchorage, Denver, and New York).²¹⁶ This coordinated Occupy attack on “Wall Street on the Waterfront,” was to “not only make a statement, but cause a lot of profit loss,” organizer, filmmaker, and Occupy Oakland participant Boots Riley said in a video about the shutdown.²¹⁷ The video opens with a flyer announcing the “COORDINATED* WEST COAST PORT BLOCKADE” (Figure 13) as ominous music plays in the background, followed by video clips of police moving through the night (Figure 14), until Riley announces that “they coordinated attacks against us, we’re going to respond back with coordinated attacks against the 1 percent.”

²¹⁵ Judith Scherr, “U.S.: Protestors Occupy Ports in Oakland and Beyond,” *Inter Press Service* (Rome, Italy), December 13, 2011, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/12/us-protestors-occupy-ports-in-oakland-and-beyond/>.

²¹⁶ Dave Id, “Occupy Oakland West Coast Port Blockade Press Conference, 12/09/11: Video,” *Indybay* (San Francisco, CA), December 9, 2011, <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/12/09/18702267.php>.

²¹⁷ Becca Moss, *West Coast Port Shutdown 12-12-11! w/ Boots Riley from Occupy Oakland (and The Coup)*, YouTube, December 5, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3Ja-oOnZOo&ab_channel=BeccaMoss.

Figures 13 and 14: West Coast Blockade Flyer and Police Screen Grab



Figure 13: A graphic from a video promoting the December 12, 2011 West Coast port blockade shows silhouettes of protesters wielding signs and standing high above ground alongside the machinery of the Oakland port as the sun rises. The bright orange and yellow hues of the graphic express a hopeful, excited energy.²¹⁸



Figure 14: A screen grab from the video shows several police officers at night dressed in black riot gear, ominously contrasting with the bright hues of the port blockade graphic. The officers march together in unison as Riley utters the words “they coordinated at against us.”²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Moss, *West Coast Port Shutdown*. Watch the full video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3Ia-oQnZOo&ab_channel=BeccaMoss.

²¹⁹ Moss, *West Coast Port Shutdown*.

Riley constructs a counter-narrative that generates emotion and incites action among the 99 percent to fight the 1 percent and the companies that represent it. The video mentions the greed driving Goldman Sachs' policies in bright yellow letters on a black background to the sound of upbeat Spanish music: "Dec 12th port blockade is also in solidarity with port truckers / many of whom make as little as \$50 a day / while Goldman Sachs reaps record profits at SSA port terminals." One individual in the video notes, "If we can show them the power of what a group can do to close down and stop them in one day, that scares them in everything and makes it stronger for any action that we do after that." Occupy Oakland activists insistently focused on challenging power structures in a way that placed regular working people firmly at the helm of control. They understood such displays of people power to be important for increasing the movement's strength and influence as a collective "we." Thousands from Alaska to California heeded this call for action and marched on multiple ports on December 12, closing two terminals in Oregon and one in Washington and disrupting many others including in Oakland.²²⁰ In the process, they showed the power of action and storytelling that expanded the public imagination of what kind of change was possible in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. This sense of possibility endured well beyond the existence of the Occupy encampments in Oakland with respect to Goldman Sachs.

In January 2012, Occupiers in Oakland, including Boots Riley, criticized the predatory swaps deal between Goldman Sachs and the City of Oakland which was made as part of a bond sale.²²¹ The city entered this interest rate swap in 1997, essentially hedging a bet that interest

²²⁰ Laird Harrison and Emmett Berg, "Anti-Wall Street Activists March on West Coast Ports," *Reuters*, December 13, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-protests-ports/anti-wall-street-activists-march-on-west-coast-ports-idUUSTRE7BB00W20111213>.

²²¹ Liberate Oakland, "Goldman Sachs Charging Oakland \$5 Million a Year," Occupy Oakland, January 15, 2012, <https://occupyoakland.org/2012/01/goldman-sachs-charging-oakland-5-million-a-year/>.

rates on the city's \$187 million bond debt would remain high. Goldman assumed Oakland's floating interest rate on the bonds and the city agreed to pay Goldman a fixed interest rate of 5.68 percent. Though this deal initially favored the city because interest rates were close to or above 5.68 percent, when the federal interest rate was reduced to close to zero to stimulate economic growth in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008, the city was left paying Goldman the high fixed-rate interest—which cost \$4 million a year—until the end of the contract in 2021. To end the contract early required the city to pay a \$16 million termination fee.²²² Though the city had been losing millions on the deal for years, during the encampment months and after its destruction, a coalition formed to fight the swaps deal. Activists demanded termination of the contract without payout and a return of the \$18 million the city had already paid Goldman since 2008. The Oakland Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs included in its ranks Occupy Oakland's Labor Solidarity Committee, OO's Research Working Group, OO's Interfaith Tent, Decolonize Oakland, ILWU Local 10, other union branches such as SEIU 1021, and other activist groups, faith organizations, and concerned residents (Figure 15). It continued working well after the end of 2012.

²²² Darwin BondGraham, "Oakland's Toxic Deal with Wall Street," *East Bay Express* (Berkeley, CA), February 15, 2012, <https://eastbayexpress.com/oaklands-toxic-deal-with-wall-street-1/>.

Figure 15: Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs Letter

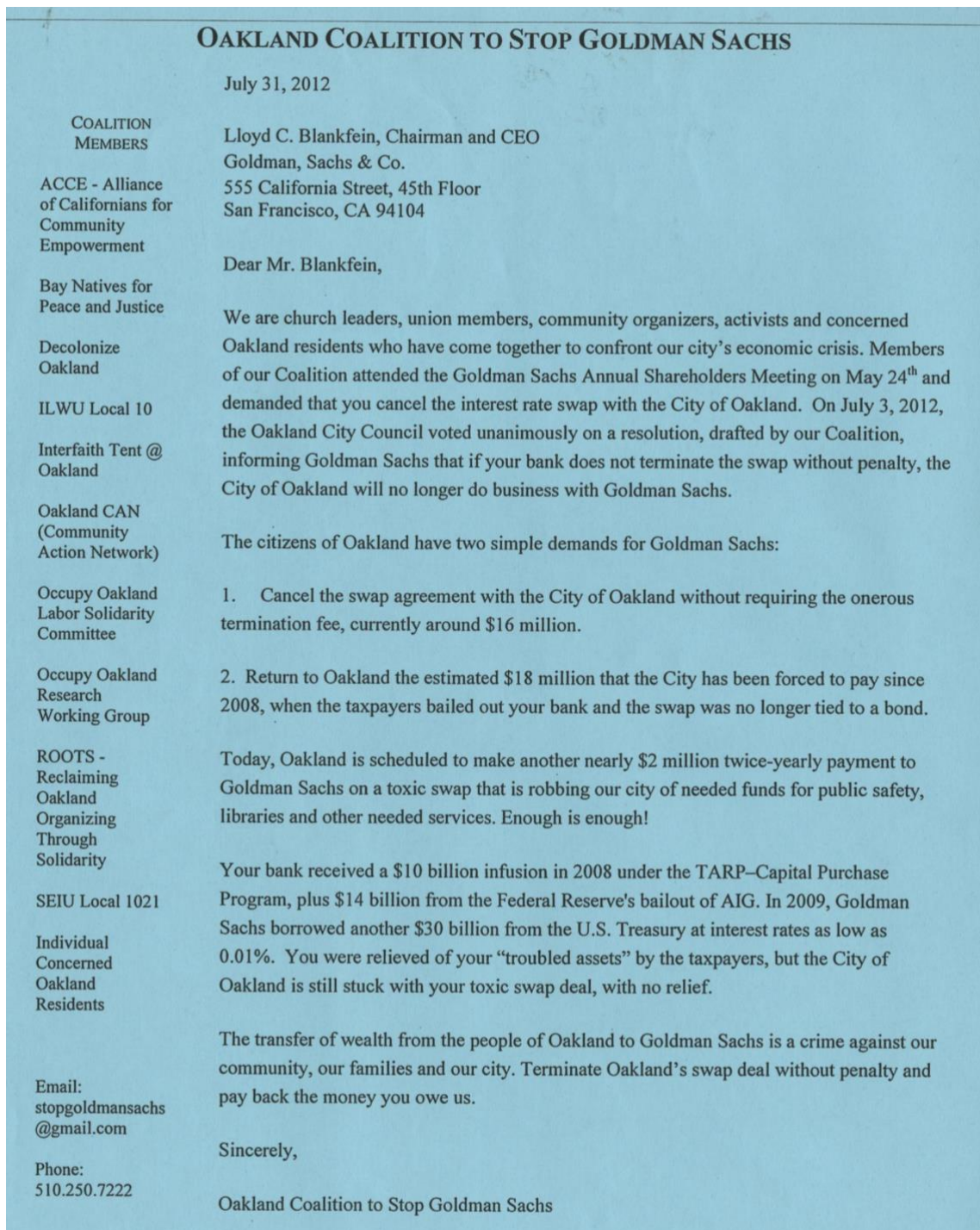


Figure 15: A letter from the Oakland Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs sent to Goldman's CEO on July 31, 2012 lists the coalition's members and demands.²²³

²²³ Oakland Coalition to Stop Goldman Sachs, *OA01_oaklandcoalitiontostopgoldmansachs_121.jpg*, 2012. "Collection Objects," Occupy Archives, OSF Home, January 17, 2020, <https://osf.io/cbzr8/>.

The Oakland City Finance Committee met with the coalition on June 26, 2012, to discuss the city's swap rate.²²⁴ Oakland's City Council sided with activists in early July 2012, unanimously passing a resolution on July 3 that stated that if Goldman refused to terminate the swaps deal within 60 days and waive the fee for early termination then the city would never do business with the bank again (a process known as "debarring").²²⁵ The council also held that a refusal to terminate the contract would force it to "use all good faith efforts 'including options proposed by the Stop Goldman Sachs Coalition.'"²²⁶ City council members stood alongside protesters from the coalition (including Occupiers, Oakland residents, union workers, and members of the faith community) outside Goldman Sachs' San Francisco headquarters on July 31, 2012, calling for the end of the swap through renegotiation with the city government.²²⁷ At the rally, Oakland City Councilwoman Desley Brooks drew on a rhetoric developed by the Occupy movement to critique the financial giant:

We continue to lose services because we have banks like Goldman Sachs, who understand how to take advantage of programs to relieve their debt crisis, but can't understand how to work with cities like ours to alleviate some of the crisis we are having . . . They have received all the money they were supposed to get . . . If we stop these greedy banks from preying on our communities, we will all be better off.²²⁸

Brooks utilized the vernacular of Occupy in her critique of Goldman when she criticized "greedy banks from preying on our communities." This rare union between the Oakland City Council and Occupy Oakland, as well as the creation of a new coalition that neither absorbed Occupy nor was

²²⁴ Liberate Oakland, "Stop Goldman Sachs 6/26 12 Noon Oakland City Finance Committee," Occupy Oakland, June 24, 2012, <https://occupyoakland.org/2012/06/stop-goldman-sachs-626-12-noon-oakland-city-finance-committee/>.

²²⁵ Halah Touryalai, "City Of Oakland Taps Occupy Wall Street To Take On Goldman Sachs," *Forbes*, July 15, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/halahtouryalai/2012/07/11/city-of-oakland-taps-occupy-wall-street-to-take-on-goldman-sachs/?sh=656684e66e18>.

²²⁶ Touryalai, "Oakland Taps Occupy."

²²⁷ Sarah McBride, "Oakland Leaders Urge Broad Battle with Goldman Sachs," *Reuters*, August 1, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-goldman-swaps-oakland/oakland-leaders-urge-broad-battle-with-goldman-sachs-idUSBRE86U1Q920120801>.

²²⁸ Marilyn Bechtel, "Protesters Tell Goldman Sachs: Stop Immoral 'Swap,'" *Indypendent* (New York City), August 3, 2012, <https://indypendent.org/2012/08/protesters-tell-goldman-sachs-stop-immoral-swap/>.

a subset of the movement, complicates attempts to define OO as having failed or fitting within a typology of social movement “decline.” Though it often clashed with Occupy, the city’s demands for fairness in the face of large banks on moral bases can be attributed in part to the rhetoric and conversations brought forth and shaped by Occupy Oakland. With the articulation of the 99 percent as a group with serious claims against the 1 percent, Occupy created space for new kinds of politics that challenged sociopolitical cultures, existing ways of doing things, and economic institutions. The nature of this politics was shaped by the histories and patterns of repression and organized resistance in particular communities. Claims that Occupy Oakland “failed” do not take into account the various ways in which the movement stretched the public imagination of what kind of world was possible, namely, one in which interactions between civil society, governments, and financial institutions were not fully mediated through neoliberal economic frameworks. They insisted on a moral sensibility that adjudicated fairness and unfairness.

The swaps deal was never renegotiated, however. Oakland City Council passed a resolution approving a \$226,000 budget to hire an outside consultant on July 30, 2013 to debar Goldman Sachs²²⁹ but two years later it was still unclear if the company’s report was ever produced.²³⁰ In June 2016, Goldman co-invested in the purchase of a downtown office building from the city for \$19.5 million.²³¹ Moreover, the aggressive onslaught of gentrification in Oakland continues, as does the city’s relationship with predatory financial institutions. Close to

²²⁹ Steven Tavares, “Oakland Begins Investigation Of Goldman Sachs For Rate Swap Deal,” *East Bay Citizen* (Alameda County, CA), August 7, 2013, <https://ebcitizen.com/2013/08/07/oakland-begins-investigation-of-goldman-sachs-for-rate-swap-deal/>.

²³⁰ Labor Solidarity Committee, “The Vampire Squid, the Missing Contract, and Double Jeopardy,” Occupy Oakland, October 27, 2015, <https://occupyoakland.org/2015/10/the-vampire-squid-the-missing-contract-and-double-jeopardy/>.

²³¹ Roland Li, “Exclusive: Here’s Where Goldman Sachs Is Putting Its Money in Oakland,” *San Francisco Business Times*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/blog/real-estate/2016/07/goldman-sachs-oakland-office-acquisition-hp-gs.html>.

one-third of poor neighborhoods in Oakland experienced gentrification between 2013 and 2017, the highest rate in the country.²³² Foreclosures and homelessness, which abounded in the wake of the 2008 crisis, remain prevalent.

Despite the remarkable union between city government leaders in Oakland—who ordered the Oakland Police Department to brutally attack protesters—and Occupiers, local movements and coalitions were unable to fundamentally change the enormous economic power wielded by Goldman and other financial giants as well as real estate developers. Reading this reality as a failure avoids addressing the profound systems and resources arrayed against the needs of regular people and why we have come to accept these conditions as unchangeable. Nevertheless, at this writing, a collective of homeless and marginally housed mothers in Oakland, Moms for Housing, utilizes occupation strategies popularized by Occupy Oakland “to reclaim housing for the Oakland community from the big banks and real estate speculators.”²³³ Though the group is not associated with Occupy, one can see the similar tactics and rhetoric in their messaging and strategies. The collective highlights the endurance of homelessness and economic violence with the prominent statistic: “There are four times as many empty homes in Oakland as there are people without homes.”

The Continuing Struggle Against Police and Intimate Violence

Occupy Oakland as a space of organizing and activity moved in directions that brought activists into new or reformulated coalitions focused on challenging physical violence. The most

²³² Louis Hansen, “Oakland, S.F. Neighborhoods Fastest Gentrifying in U.S.,” *The Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), June 20, 2020, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/06/18/oakland-s-f-neighborhoods-fastest-gentrifying-in-u-s/#:~:text=High%20housing%20costs%20and%20wages%20pushing%20out%20poor%20residents&text=Nearly%20one%2Dthird%20of%20poor.to%20a%20new%20national%20study>.

²³³ “Home,” Moms 4 Housing, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://moms4housing.org/>.

prominent of these was the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition, which was formed soon after the May 6, 2012, murder of Alan Blueford, a Black student at Skyline High School, by Oakland Police Officer Miguel Masso. Masso shot Blueford in his back three times after the police vehicle, whose headlights were off, approached Blueford and chased him. Blueford carried no weapon and had not threatened the police. Police officials repeatedly changed their story about the incident when speaking with the Blueford family and attorneys, and the city initially refused to release the coroner's report.²³⁴ The Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition, which built out support from existing activist networks, demanded "the release of the Police and Coroner's reports on Alan and the firing and prosecution of Miguel Masso, the police officer who killed him."²³⁵ The coalition included clergy members, SEIU 1021, ILWU, Occupy Oakland, Dignity & Resistance, International Socialist Organization and many other residents. The family was eventually able to obtain a copy of the coroner's report after paying \$326 in fees.²³⁶

Occupy Oakland protesters often showed up to press conferences, protests, and other events put on by the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition, and promoted the group's regular meetings on its site, occupyoakland.org.²³⁷ The strong bond between activists against police violence in Oakland is also apparent in a film titled *#OO: Occupy Oakland* that was screened to raise money for the Alan Blueford Coalition (Figure 16). The film "highlights why the Occupy movement was different in Oakland because of Oakland's history going back to the Black

²³⁴ Adam Balogh and François Hughes, "The Police Won't Tell Us the Truth," SocialistWorker.org, International Socialist Organization, January 1, 2018, <http://socialistworker.org/2012/07/06/police-wont-tell-us-the-truth>.

²³⁵ "Press Release: Blueford Family Demands Coroner's Report," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), July 20, 2012, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2012/07/20/press-release-blueford-family-demands-coroners-report/>.

²³⁶ JP Massar, "I Am the Mother of Murder Victim Alan Blueford," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), July 20, 2012, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2012/07/20/i-am-the-mother-of-murder-victim-alan-blueford/#more-75>.

²³⁷ Labor Solidarity Committee, "Search Results for Justice 4 Alan Blueford Coalition Meeting," Occupy Oakland, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://occupyoakland.org/search/justice4alanblueford+coalition+meeting>.

Panther Party and right up to the Oscar Grant Movement. This film has a very clear anti-police brutality theme as well as a strong Justice 4 Alan Blueford message.”²³⁸

Figure 16: #OO: Occupy Oakland Screening Poster



*Figure 16: A poster for an Occupy Oakland film posted on the J4AB website on September 9, 2013 shares information about a screening of the film to benefit the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition.*²³⁹

²³⁸ “#OO @Grandlake—a Benefit for #Justice4AlanBlueford,” *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), September 9, 2013, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2013/09/09/oo-grandlake-a-benefit-for-justice4alanblueford/>.

²³⁹ Justice 4 Alan Blueford, “#OO @Grandlake.”

Natural connections existed between the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition and Occupy Oakland. In the film #OO, which I watched as a rough-cut, filmmaker Kevin Pina explores the strong connections between protesters who organized around the death of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old killed by Bay Area Rapid Transit police in January 2009, and Oakland Occupiers. Several individuals interviewed in the film mentioned that Oscar Grant protesters went on to participate and lead the Occupy Oakland movement. Civil rights attorney Walter Riley explained that Occupy members were “informed by that sense of outrage by the conduct of the police department and informed by their outrage with the Oakland City Council and the Oakland Mayor’s office, the people that had experienced the fight for justice for Oscar Grant also participated and helped to lead the Occupy movement in Oakland.”²⁴⁰ The film is dedicated to “the people of Oakland and the families of Oscar Grant and Alan Blueford” (Figure 17).

Figure 17: #OO Final Words Screen Grab

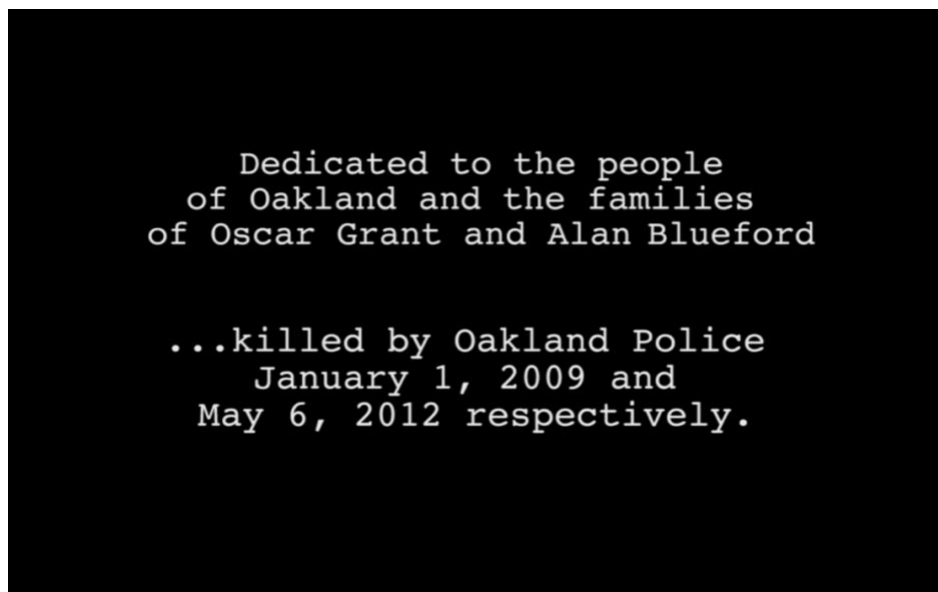


Figure 17: This screen grab displays the final words of #OO, which are dedicated to Oscar Grant and Alan Blueford, two young Black men killed by police in Oakland.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Kevin Pina, #OO: *Occupy Oakland*, Long Memory Productions, forthcoming, <https://twitter.com/AcrossMediums/status/1338747471074189313>.

²⁴¹ Pina, #OO.

In their resolutions calling for justice for Alan Blueford, SEIU 1021, ILWU Local 10, the SF Labor Council, and the Alameda Labor Council all mention the brutal police crackdown on Occupy protesters, citing a report that detailed ongoing investigations into the department's actions on October 25, 2011, when the Occupy camp was raided and protesters were subject to substantial police violence.²⁴² That report was written by Robert Warshaw, the Federal Monitor overseeing the Oakland Police Department's reform efforts per a negotiated settlement agreement reached in 2003, which placed the police department under federal oversight after the Oakland Riders scandal. Warshaw's report on OPD's attack on the Occupy Oakland encampment notes that "serious concerns were raised by both City Officials and the community at large concerning use of unreasonable force, overall police performance, and OPD's ability to manage future events in an acceptable manner" based on an independent review the city contracted in response to the violence of October 25. Examining the findings of that review, Warshaw's report mentioned 45 potential compliance concerns for the negotiated settlement agreement that were pending investigation or currently being investigated.²⁴³ Activist coalitions against police brutality such as J4AB show the organic connections between Occupy activists and the community, which predated Occupy Oakland and continued after the encampments were destroyed and street protests by "Occupy" per se turned into other organizing and mobilization.

²⁴² SEIU 1021, "SEIU 1021 Resolution in Support of Justice 4 Alan Blueford," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), November 5, 2012, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2012/11/05/seiu-1021-resolution-in-support-of-justice-4-alan-blueford/>; ILWU Local 10, "ILWU Local 10 Calls for Justice 4 Alan Blueford," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), October 25, 2012, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2012/10/25/ilwu-local-10-calls-for-justice-4-alan-blueford/>; San Francisco Labor Council, "SF Labour Council Resolution in Support of Justice 4 Alan Blueford," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), January 17, 2013, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2013/01/17/sf-labour-council-resolution-in-support-of-justice-4-alan-blueford/>; Alameda County Labor Council, "Alameda Labor Council resolution in support of Justice 4 Alan Blueford," *Justice 4 Alan Blueford* (blog), February 7, 2013, <https://justice4alanblueford.org/2013/02/07/alameda-county-central-labor-council-resolution-in-support-of-justice-4-alan-blueford/>.

²⁴³ Robert Warshaw, *Special Report of the Independent Monitor for the Oakland Police Department: Review of the Frazier Group, LLC's Independent Investigation of October 25, 2011 Occupy Oakland Response*, (Dover, NH: Office of the Independent Monitor, 2012): 5-8
<http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakcal/groups/police/documents/webcontent/oak049660.pdf>.

The Alan Blueford Coalition was not the only project with ties to Occupy Oakland that emerged following the end of the encampments. So did the Tsega Center in East Oakland, “an independent feminist social center that prioritizes radical self-organizing by and for women, transpeople, and genderqueer/gender nonconforming people – particularly people of color, queer and gay people, mothers, and children.”²⁴⁴ The center was named after an Occupier was killed by her intimate partner on July 30, 2012, and drew on many of the Occupy organizing tactics and groups that foregrounded feminist and queer political practices. The Tsega Center website only shows activity through 2013. This example similarly challenges the binary sociological framework of failure/success for evaluating social movements. Honoring an Occupy activist killed by her intimate partner combined with coalitional Occupy tactics to continue Occupy’s work even after OO’s physical sites were destroyed. The Tsega Center’s website illustrates how Occupy Oakland was a site of action-based knowledge production, theory, and organizing that continued. On the webpage titled, “Who was Tsega?”, activists wrote:

Tsega was a comrade of ours from Occupy Oakland who always stood out of the crowd, she always was around at protests yelling and screaming at the injustices she was hearing, and standing up against violence and police brutality . . . When we think of her, we think of how strong she was and how she inspired us, and we wanted her strength and her memory to live on within us. We wanted to remember that we have to fight and struggle against domestic violence and violence against women, children, and LGBTQ people, so we named the center after her.²⁴⁵

The activists invoked Occupy Oakland as an important site and community. They expanded beyond the physical spaces of the Occupy encampments to call for continued struggle that counters heteropatriarchal violence, “we have to fight and struggle against domestic violence and violence against women, children, and LGBTQ people.” Unlike the Goldman Sachs

²⁴⁴ “Mission Statement,” *Tsega Center* (blog), March 16, 2013, <https://thetsegacenter.wordpress.com/about/>.

²⁴⁵ “Who Was Tsega?,” *Tsega Center* (blog), accessed January 10, 2021 <https://thetsegacenter.wordpress.com/who-was-tsega/>.

Coalition, which drew on the recognized anti-capitalist identity and language of the U.S. Occupy camps, the Tsega Center activists focused on how class, race, gender, and sexual subordination often work together as violent formations, in this case taking the life of Tsega. The center also organized a march and rally in December 2013 to recognize the killing of 19-year-old Renisha McBride, “a young, black woman that got killed for being black and asking for help in a white neighborhood. After being in a car accident in a white suburb of Detroit, she went to someone’s door to ask for help and a white man named Theodor Wafer shot her in the face and killed her.” The rally, according to their webpage, was designed to bring together various communities to speak truth about lost loved ones and systems that perpetuate these losses. The post publicizing the rally reads (in all caps):

WE GOT SOME POWERFUL MOTHERS, FAMILY MEMBERS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS COMING OUT TO SPEAK TRUTH ABOUT THEIR MURDERED LOVED ONES, AND THE SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS IT TO KEEP HAPPENING WITHOUT NO JUST REASON BUT FOR THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN. WE AS AFRICANS CAN NO LONGER SIT BY AND NOT EDUCATE OUR PEOPLE ON THE GENOCIDE AND THE WAR ON OUR BLACK AND BROWN YOUTH IN THIS COUNTRY. WE MUST SPEAK FOR THE DEAD.”²⁴⁶

Almost two years after the killing of the Black teenager Trayvon Martin by a white vigilante in his neighborhood in Florida, the activists condemned the “system” that allows the murder of African, Black and Brown lives and framed the problem as well beyond Oakland.

The Tsega Center also drew on Occupy Oakland’s working group structure in its formation. The groups met once a week to create a public space for “solidarity, education, recreation, celebration, and for sharing skills, food, and other material resources” and promoted organizing from within and in solidarity with other causes or groups.²⁴⁷ As indicated by the

²⁴⁶ “March for Ranesha McBride this weekend!,” *Tsega Center* (blog), March 16, 2013, <https://thetsegacenter.wordpress.com/2013/12/13/march-for-ranesha-mcbride-this-weekend/>.

²⁴⁷ Tsega Center, “Mission Statement.”

Renisha McBride case, the center focused its organizing against anti-Black violence, which included police violence and incarceration.²⁴⁸

Police violence remains a problem in Oakland but so does resistance and activism such as large Black Lives Matter protests in the past decade. Many Occupy activists are involved in the local BLM chapter and other movements working to combat police brutality, including the Black-led Anti-Police Terror Project.²⁴⁹ APTP, along with Oakland protesters, filed a class-action lawsuit in June 2020 to have a preliminary and permanent injunction placed on OPD's use of certain munitions during protests, seeking declaratory relief and money damages.²⁵⁰ The preliminary injunction was granted in part in July 2020, severely limiting OPD's use of tear gas, rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades, and other "less lethal" weapons against protesters, as well as requiring officers to wear body cameras and undergo further training for crowd control and management.²⁵¹ In the class action complaint for damages and injunction application, APTP's lawyers describe significant instances of brutality by OPD during summer 2020 anti-police violence protests when the CoVid-19 Pandemic was also raging. The complaint reads:

OPD deployed constitutionally unlawful crowd control tactics including kettling, indiscriminately launching of tear gas and flashbangs into crowds and at individuals, and shooting projectiles at demonstrators . . . knowingly placed these demonstrators in physical danger through indiscriminate use of excessive force . . . knowingly created a danger to public health by forcing demonstrators to break social distancing rules. . . targeted journalists and others simply recording its conduct . . . targeted medics who were seeking to give aid to those harmed . . . [and] falsely claimed demonstrators were inciting violence, throwing Molotov cocktails, assaulting officers, throwing rocks and bottles at

²⁴⁸ "The Tsega Center," *Tsega Center* (blog), accessed January 2, 2021, <https://thetsegacenter.wordpress.com/>.

²⁴⁹ John Hayakawa Torok, "On Oakland's Decolonize/Occupy moment 2011-2013," *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 8, no. 2 (November 2016): 437-438, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Interface-8-2-Torok.pdf>.

²⁵⁰ *Anti-Police Terror Project et al. v. City of Oakland et al.*, Case No. 20-cv-03866-JCS (N.D. Cal. Aug. 10, 2020), <https://clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PN-CA-0043-0001.pdf>. For a copy of the application for the injunctive, see previous link. Anti-Police Terror Project website: <https://www.antipoliceterrorproject.org/>.

²⁵¹ *APTP v. Oakland*, 2-3, <https://clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PN-CA-0043-0003.pdf>. For a copy of the preliminary injunction, see previous link. For a copy of the order granting in part and denying in part the injunction with greater detail, see this link: <https://clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PN-CA-0043-0004.pdf>.

officers, and destroying property to justify their use of force and to discourage participation by the public.²⁵²

The complaint also describes the court's continued supervision of OPD per the negotiated settlement agreement reached in 2003 as a result of the Oakland Riders scandal. It writes, "More than 17 years later, the Court's supervision continues because Oakland has failed to implement and sustain the required changes."²⁵³ Clearly, the department remains riddled with many of the same issues raised by Occupiers and protesters a decade earlier.

At this writing, the Oakland Police Department was investigating several of its officers for an Instagram account that "mocked police department policies about police brutality and use-of-force in a racist and sexist way," including "pok[ing] fun at the idea of lying about beating up people in custody and the killing of George Floyd."²⁵⁴ The department had knowledge of this account as early as September 2020, but did not begin investigating until January 2021. The Instagram was condemned by U.S. District Judge William Orrick, who oversees the department's implementation of required reforms, alongside court-appointed monitor Robert Warshaw.

One consequence of the longtime work of the Anti-Police Terror Project in Oakland as well as the Defund/Abolish the Police movements that emerged following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 is that the Oakland Police Department is facing a proposal to have an independent civilian agency take over investigations of complaints of police misconduct and excessive use of force.²⁵⁵ Currently, complaints are investigated by the

²⁵² *APTP v. Oakland 2-3*, <https://clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PN-CA-0043-0003.pdf>.

²⁵³ *APTP v. Oakland 3*, <https://clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PN-CA-0043-0001.pdf>.

²⁵⁴ Annie Sciacca, "Judge Urges Oakland Police Leaders to 'Root out' Officers at Center of Social Media Scandal," *Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), February 25, 2021, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/02/24/judge-urges-oakland-police-leaders-to-root-out-officers-at-center-of-social-media-scandal/>.

²⁵⁵ Annie Sciacca, "Oakland Police Would Lose Power to Handle Officer Misconduct Complaints under New Proposal," *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, CA), January 17, 2021, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2021/01/15/new-proposal-would-put-civilian-group-in-charge-of-investigating-all-oakland-police-misconduct-cases/>.

Community Police Review Agency (a branch of the Oakland Police Commission, an independent group that oversees OPD's policies, practices and customs) and OPD's internal affairs division. Though these investigations are technically separate, they must be jointly resolved before officers are disciplined or exonerated. The proposal is being brought to the city administration for review by John Alden, Executive Director for the Community Police Review Agency, and was endorsed by the Police Commission. It would "effectively gut the police department's internal affairs function" and could save the city \$1 million or more by eliminating unnecessary and often self-serving investigations done by the police department into its own officers. To be implemented, the proposal would need to be approved by the Oakland City Council and Warshaw, OPD's federal monitor, and likely need to involve the police union. Decades-long struggles to wrangle the Oakland Police Department into mere *compliance* with reforms showcase deep-seated white supremacy, corruption, and violence. The burden has always been on community groups to keep people safe, an extremely taxing and never-ending endeavor, more so today when the CoVid-19 Pandemic has magnified the precarity of life for the majority of people in Oakland.

Even Harder Times: Doing Research in 2020-2021

At the start of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, an environmental biologist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, tells the Great Lakes indigenous creation story of Skywoman, who fell from the heavens into darkness and created Turtle Island alongside the animals she encountered. This is earth as we know it today. Kimmerer considers the origin story in the midst of planetary degradation by greed and endless consumption fueled by capitalism: "Perhaps the

Skywoman story endures because we too are always falling. Our lives, both personal and collective, share her trajectory. Whether we jump or are pushed, or the edge of the known world just crumbles at our feet, we fall, spinning into someplace new and unexpected.”²⁵⁶ As I finalize this thesis, we have been falling in a different way for a year, exacerbated by the CoVid-19 Pandemic. The speed and consequences differ depending on who we are and where we live. Some are free-falling to a reality they will have the resources to survive while for others, no safe landing spots are in sight. I researched and wrote this project in a year of emotional devastation, isolation, grief, political upheaval, uncertainty, widespread illness and death, and amplified economic suffering and precarity for tens of millions of people in the United States and even more around the world. My project was certainly shaped by these conditions and by the continuation of systemic state violence on Black bodies in the U.S. especially, as well as resistance that was escalated by, among others, a resurgent Black Lives Matter movement.

The CoVid-19 Pandemic and human responses to it substantially transformed life on earth. It arguably produced the conditions that increased the probability for George Floyd’s premature killing. The physical, social, and economic effects of the virus and the subsequent lockdowns have been experienced unevenly across the U.S. population. Communities of color, especially Black and Latina/o/x communities, and the poor and working classes have suffered higher proportional cases and death rates. They have also been more likely to face financial ruin due to the deep class and racial inequality that already shaped health status, health care access and affordability, access to clean water and other utilities, jobs and occupations, wages and savings, and the ratio of persons to a home or apartment’s square footage. The conditions that pre-existed CoVid-19 were exacerbated in ways we have still not fully measured. During the

²⁵⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013): 8-9.

same time period, wealth continued to be accumulated and concentrated to the top fifth and certainly the top 1 percent of the population. As the *Guardian* reports, “billionaires increased their wealth by more than a quarter (27.5%) at the height of the crisis from April to July” 2020, bringing their savings to a record-high of \$10.2 trillion.²⁵⁷ Elon Musk, the founder of the electric car company Tesla, increased his fortune by \$76 billion during this time period, to a whopping \$103 billion.

The idea of “harder times” is critical to understanding the misery that massive swaths of people are struggling through. It is not surprising that Occupy Oakland activists who criticized settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy—many of them indigenous, queer, poor, people of color—are struggling even more in the Covid-19 conditions of 2020-2021. They fought against the very systems that disproportionately subjugated certain communities. The struggles today are not dramatically different from the crises that triggered Occupy Oakland and Decolonize Oakland: police and state violence, gentrification, disproportionate distribution of ill health and early death, lack of investment in education for poor and working-class communities, especially Black and brown, indigenous and POC subjugation, and POC/indigenous peoples’ closer proximity to economic insecurity and death.

For many groups, “hard times” are a continuous mode of existence since the factors that create “hard times” are perpetuated in the structuring of our society, a point that Occupy Oakland highlighted in its language and actions. Yet these realities are being felt in new and increasingly intense ways during the pandemic. In Alameda County and the City of Oakland, people of color and indigenous people have experienced significant disparities in Covid-19 infection and death

²⁵⁷ Rupert Neate, “Billionaires’ Wealth Rises to \$10.2 Trillion amid Covid Crisis,” *Guardian* (U.S. edition), October 7, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires>.

rates (Figures 18 and 19), with Latina/o/x people suffering the highest case rates in Oakland and African Americans suffering the highest death rates in Alameda County.²⁵⁸ There are several possible explanations for these disparities, many of which I discovered in my work in the summer of 2020 at a local news site named *Mission Local*, which primarily focuses on news in the majority-Latinx Mission District of San Francisco.²⁵⁹ In my time at *Mission Local*, it became clear that Latinx people in the Bay Area disproportionately held low-wage frontline jobs that do not allow them to have healthcare, paid sick days, or protection from illness. They are more likely not to have citizenship and thus limited in their ability to access resources that may help poor people. Due to low wages and lack of documents, many Latinx families live in bigger numbers in small apartments, increasing their chances for exposure. African Americans are also disproportionately represented in frontline jobs and have higher rates of chronic illnesses, making them especially vulnerable to worse CoVid-19 outcomes. Joseph Singer and Nadia Sussman write how the phenomenon of John Henryism compounds the toll of living in a racist society, making young Black men dramatically more likely to die as a result of CoVid-19 infection than white men in the same age group—“The unique, unrelenting strain caused by racism can alter a body’s normal functioning until it starts to wear down. John Henrys, who battle with an unequal system as they try to get ahead in life, bear the consequences in their bodies.”²⁶⁰ Due to systemic racism in the healthcare system, African Americans generally are more likely to be cautious about seeking help and more likely to have negative experiences. These structural conditions leave communities of color especially vulnerable to CoVid-19.

²⁵⁸ Libby Schaaf et al., *Final Report and Action Plan: Building a Healthy and Equitable Community*, (Oakland, CA: COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force, 2020), <http://www.acgov.org/allin/docs/COVID19RacialDisparitiesTaskForceReport.pdf>.

²⁵⁹ Mission Local website: <https://missionlocal.org/>.

²⁶⁰ Joseph Singer and Nadia Sussman, “Black Men Have the Shortest Lifespans of Any Americans. This Theory Helps Explain Why,” *ProPublica*, December 22, 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/black-men-have-the-shortest-lifespans-of-any-americans-this-theory-helps-explain-why>.

Figures 18 and 19: Graphs of CoVid-19 Case Rates and Death Rates by Race

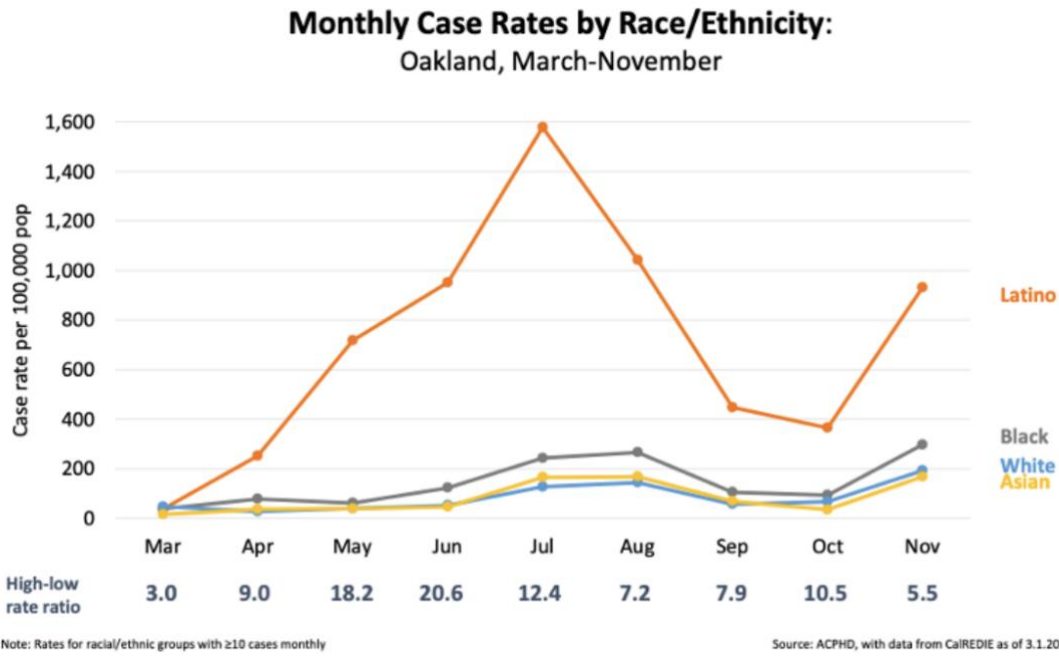


Figure 18: This graph from Oakland’s COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force report demonstrates racial disparities of the coronavirus case rates in Oakland from March 2020 through November 2020.²⁶¹

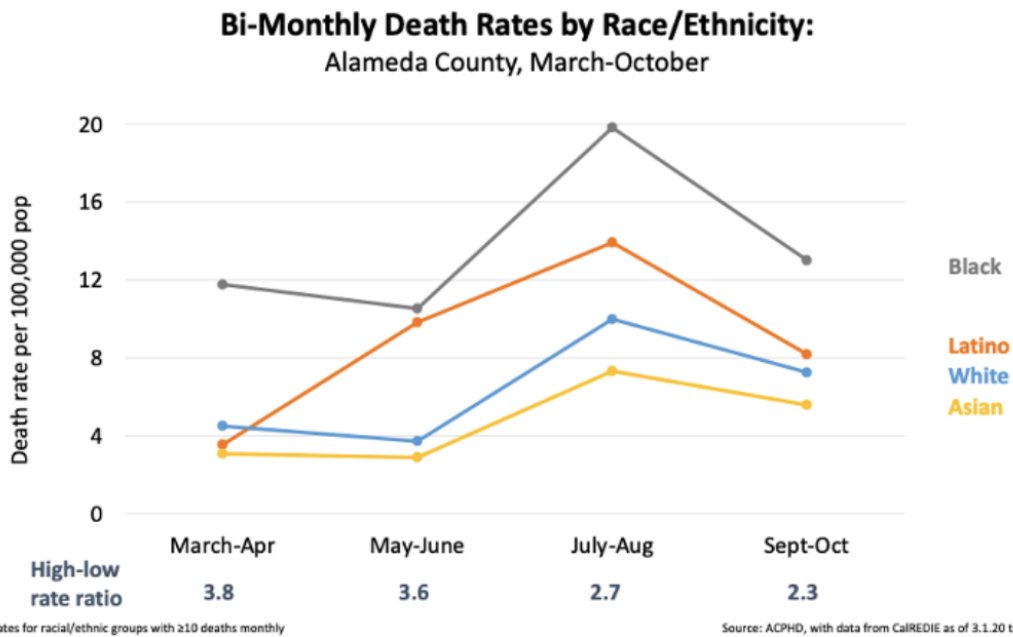


Figure 19: This graph from Oakland’s COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force report demonstrates racial disparities of the coronavirus death rates in Alameda County from March 2020 through September/October 2020.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Libby Schaaf et al., 1.

²⁶² Libby Schaaf et al., 15.

While comprising only 22.3 percent of the estimated population for 2019, Latinx residents of Alameda County account for 51.5 percent of CoVid-19 illness cases where race is known as of March 5, 2021. Black residents account for 11 percent of the county’s population and 10 percent of CoVid-19 infection cases. In contrast, white residents comprise 49.3 percent of the county population but a mere 17 percent of illness cases where race is known. Asian residents comprise 15.8 percent of cases though they account for 32.3 percent of the population.²⁶³ Though the increased dissemination of vaccines in early 2021 has brought hope for curbing the pandemic, distribution of the vaccines has furthered racial inequities in Alameda County. The *Mercury News* reports that Latinx residents account for 25 percent of deaths, a few percentage points above their representation in the county, but received only 12 percent of first-dose vaccines where race is known. In comparison, Black residents of the county accounted for 17 percent of deaths, significantly above their population proportion, but comprise only 7 percent of those who have received their first vaccine dose. White county residents account for 34 percent of deaths, significantly lower than their proportion of the population, and 35 percent of those who received vaccines by early February 2021.²⁶⁴ Though the article did not include vaccine and death rates for the Asian population, the Alameda County COVID-19 Dashboard shows that Asian residents account for 17.4 percent of deaths, slightly more than half of their proportion of the population, and 25.6 percent of vaccines as of March 5, 2021.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ “COVID-19 Data: Real-Time Data of the Impact of COVID-19,” Alameda County Health Care Services Agency Public Health Department, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://covid-19.acgov.org/data.page>; “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Alameda County, California,” U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/alamedacountycalifornia>. These percentages were calculated using the Alameda County Covid-19 database and US Census Bureau statistics.

²⁶⁴ Marisa Kendall and Fiona Kelliher, “Racial Disparities Haunt Bay Area COVID Vaccine Programs,” *Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), February 5, 2021, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/02/04/racial-disparities-haunt-bay-area-covid-vaccine-programs/>.

²⁶⁵ For the most recent data on coronavirus cases, deaths, and vaccines in Alameda County, see the Alameda County Help Public Dashboard here: <https://covid-19.acgov.org/data.page>.

Oakland's CoVid-19 Racial Disparities Task Force notes in its final report that group experiences reflect longstanding inequality in institutional and systemic decisions:

People of color have been more likely to face increased risks as essential workers, lose work as industries shut down, be unhoused or face housing instability and crowding, be incarcerated, and have limited options for affordable and culturally appropriate healthcare. These disparities are driven by policies and decisions we made long before this pandemic and that we continue to make. Unless we change them at their root, through corrective action, these decisions will continue to concentrate the risks of this and future emergencies in communities of color.²⁶⁶

These statistics highlight how little conditions in the wake of Occupy Oakland have changed.

The CoVid-19 Pandemic intensified in the U.S. in March 2020, especially in New York, and quickly spread to the rest of the country. As economic, physical, and psychological suffering intensified, the largest ever anti-racist mobilizations in defense of Black lives in the U.S. and around the world were triggered by the widely publicized final seconds of life of 46-year-old George Floyd on May 25, 2020, an unarmed Black man killed by police outside a convenience store in Minneapolis.²⁶⁷ Floyd had lost his restaurant job during the pandemic and was being arrested for using a counterfeit 20-dollar bill to buy a pack of cigarettes. He begged for his life to three Minneapolis police officers (Derek Chauvin, J. Alexander Kueng, and Thomas Lane) who pinned him down to the ground in a chokehold with their knees while a fourth officer observed (Tou Thao). Chauvin had pulled the handcuffed man, who persistently complained of claustrophobia, out of the back seat of the police vehicle.²⁶⁸ Bystanders who captured the murder on video had called for the kneeling officers to stop and the officers standing by to intervene.

²⁶⁶ Libby Schaaf et al., 1.

²⁶⁷ Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *New York Times*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>.

²⁶⁸ Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthaler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis, and Robin Stein, "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *New York Times*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

Floyd repeatedly cried, “I can’t breathe,” and called out to his mother, who was already deceased.

Floyd’s words were a resounding reverberation of the words of so many victims of police brutality and murder, such as 43-year-old Eric Garner in New York City, an African American man who was suffocated by New York City police officers in 2014 while in an illegal chokehold after officers Justin Damico and Daniel Pantaleo approached him on suspicion he was selling untaxed cigarettes.²⁶⁹ Garner similarly cried out, “I can’t breathe” 11 times as witnesses begged the officers to “let up.” Garner was pronounced dead one hour later. Other murders of African Americans made headlines in the months preceding Floyd’s killing. Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, was killed while jogging near his neighborhood outside Brunswick, Georgia, on February 23, 2020. Gregory McMichael, a former Glynn County police officer and investigator with the local district attorney, and his son Travis McMichael, who was armed with a shotgun and a handgun, chased the running Arbery in their pickup truck, yelling “Stop, we want to talk to you” and several racial slurs. The son shot Arbery twice in the chest and called him a “f - - - ing n - - - er” as he lay dying on the street.²⁷⁰ The killing was filmed by William “Roddie” Bryan, who had also chased Arbery in his car; the video was released on the instructions of Gregory McMichael “because he thought it would make he and his son look better.”²⁷¹ Breonna Taylor, whose killing on March 13, 2020, was not recorded, was a 26-year-old emergency room technician who died when police used a battering ram to raid her apartment after midnight in

²⁶⁹ Al Baker, David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, “Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner's Death,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html>.

²⁷⁰ Russ Bynum, “Testimony: Shooter Used Racist Slur as Arbery Lay Dying,” *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, June 5, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/7122aaf2c54ed22590a5b8d32565a58f>; Richard Fausset, “What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html>.

²⁷¹ “Ahmaud Arbery: What Do We Know about the Case?,” *BBC News*, BBC, June 5, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52623151>.

Louisville, Kentucky, firing 32 shots as they looked for drugs belonging to Taylor’s ex-boyfriend based on “poor” intelligence.²⁷²

The violence highlighted the embedded racism within and violent unaccountable power of police departments in the United States. The millions of protestors who turned out night after night, week after week, in cities and small towns all over the U.S., in turn, were beaten with batons, kicked, punched,²⁷³ violently kettled into small areas despite coronavirus concerns,²⁷⁴ teargassed, pepper sprayed, shot with rubber bullets and beanbag guns,²⁷⁵ hit with flash grenades,²⁷⁶ run over with cars,²⁷⁷ and kidnapped by police who refused to identify themselves as such and taken into unmarked vehicles.²⁷⁸ The visible and invisible violence enacted by the state on Black and brown bodies is a crisis that coexists with others.

Writing the thesis in the time of CoVid-19 meant my access to resources, material and immaterial, was dramatically limited. Archival and in-personal research was constrained by the mobility, enclosure, and interactional limits imposed by the virus and intensified conditions of life precarity for millions of people. The situation illustrates how much and how little has

²⁷² Malachy Browne, Anjali Singhvi, Natalie Reneau, and Drew Jordan, “How the Police Killed Breonna Taylor,” *New York Times*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000007348445/breonna-taylor-death-cops.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>; Richard A. Oppel Jr., Derrick Bryson Taylor and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, “What to Know About Breonna Taylor’s Death,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>.

²⁷³ “US Law Enforcement Violated Black Lives Matter Protesters’ Human Rights,” Amnesty International, August 4, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/usa-law-enforcement-violated-black-lives-matter-protesters-human-rights/>.

²⁷⁴ Ali Watkins, “‘Kettling’ of Peaceful Protesters Shows Aggressive Shift by N.Y. Police,” *New York Times*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/nyregion/police-kettling-protests-nyc.html>.

²⁷⁵ Adam Gabbatt, Tobi Thomas, and Caelainn Barr, “Nearly 1,000 Instances of Police Brutality Recorded in US Anti-Racism Protests,” *Guardian* (U.S. edition), October 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/29/us-police-brutality-protest>.

²⁷⁶ Lewis Kamb, “Seattle Police Continue to Use ‘Flash-Bang’ Grenades During Protests, Despite Recommendations,” *Seattle Times*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-police-continue-to-use-flash-bang-grenades-during-protests-despite-recommendations/>.

²⁷⁷ “Police Car Drives into Crowd of Black Lives Matter Protesters in Detroit,” *Independent* (London, UK), YouTube, June 29, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiU8sL7Yq9Q&ab_channel=TheIndependent.

²⁷⁸ Jonathan Levinson, Conrad Wilson, James Doubek, and Suzanne Nuyen, “Federal Officers Use Unmarked Vehicles To Grab People In Portland, DHS Confirms,” *NPR*, July 17, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/17/892277592/federal-officers-use-unmarked-vehicles-to-grab-protesters-in-portland>.

changed since 2011, when I was an 11-year-old unaware of the Occupy movement. CoVid-19 conditions dramatically changed individual priorities and research conditions and possibilities. They required constant rethinking to continue. The physical constraints of conducting research during a pandemic made themselves felt on several levels. First, attaining access to archival materials on Occupy Oakland proved to be extremely difficult, as museum doors were shuttered to the public in many places, especially California, for over a year. I was unable to physically enter any museums or library archives. Between waves of the pandemic, restrictions were at times lessened to allow employees to enter. I used email to access some materials that had already been digitized and saved in collections, and to obtain pictures from librarians and museum workers who painstakingly looked through archives for items that fit vague descriptions I could provide from preliminary research. I am eternally grateful to these individuals.

Sometimes exchanges were cut short by resurgence of the disease that shut out employees of these institutions. For example, I was able to obtain Occupy Oakland zines from the Oakland Museum of California early on in my research, but unable to receive permission to use those images in the months following because the Rights & Reproduction Office closed before I requested official permission. Despite repeated attempts to contact the office, I received automatic emails to resubmit my request at X date when the office reopened, which was repeatedly pushed back in the months between emails and Covid-19 surges. One week before submitting this project, I heard back from the museum and obtained permission to use low resolution images under fair usage. My research was very much shaped by the limited materials I had access to, and relied heavily on materials that were accessible online, including the wonderful resources posted and organized on the occupyoakland website and digital Occupy archives in different research collectives.

Interviews with movement participants, often a critical part of social movement research, were difficult to arrange and obtain in “the new normal.” Over many months, I reached out to several activists I had identified within the movement using a variety of means. Because of its emphasis on horizontalism, lack of identifiable leaders, and distrust of the media, finding names and contact information of Occupy Oakland participants was often difficult. I reached out to contacts for several committees and collectives listed on the occupyoakland website and its affiliates, including Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, the Safer Spaces Committee, and the Foreclosure Committee. All the emails were returned with a “Failure to Deliver” notifications.

Almost no individuals I reached out to by email responded. There are several possible explanations. The first is activist distrust of outsiders and worry about surveillance, even fear of identifying with radical social movements during this time, particularly when all interactions could only be conducted remotely and electronically without building trust in person. A scholar I reached who had conducted extensive research in 2011 on Occupy camps across the U.S., including Oakland, noted her own and her respondents’ wariness and ultimately did not provide any leads after I followed up several times: “I have to be a little careful to maintain confidentiality and relationships with my participants.” Another reason is that people simply did not have the time or capacity to aid a student researcher with whom they had no previous connection given the state of the world and individual situations of suffering and caretaking exacerbated by CoVid-19 conditions. Related is my own privileged status and association with Duke University, a predominantly white and wealthy institution, of which I was quite aware.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Annual tuition at Duke University is \$55,880 in 2020-2021. “Undergraduate Tuition & Fees,” Duke Bursar Financial Services, Duke University, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://finance.duke.edu/bursar/TuitionFees/tuition>.

Despite being initially responsive, Decolonize Oakland collective members were unwilling or unable to do an interview after one person reached out to other members about the possibility of a group interview. My interlocutor had asked: “In talking with my comrades, a few questions have arisen. Could you please tell us a bit about yourself and your interest in Occupy Oakland? What are your personal politics and investments in this research? Where were you raised? Etc.” I explained my solidarity and background as a class-privileged white woman completing my undergraduate degree at Duke. I stated that I hailed from Orinda, a much wealthier and whiter town of about 20,000 people about 15 minutes away from Oakland.²⁸⁰ I shared my interest in understanding social movements in Oakland specifically because of its rich history of activism as well as my desire to fill in my own knowledge gaps about a major movement that took place mere minutes from where I live.

When I followed up after three weeks reassuring them of my commitment to high ethical standards, my interlocutor wrote back: “Many of my comrades are going through hard times right now. There was some interest in doing a group interview but it fell apart. As for me, I don’t feel comfortable speaking alone as we worked collectively. In addition, the whole thing was quite a few years back and my memory of specifics is quite fuzzy.” The content of this authentic response is telling on a number of levels. It speaks to the collective spirit of Occupy Oakland; to the continuing solidarities and social connections among its members, even a decade later; and to the real suffering that is shaping so many people’s lives at the time of this writing.

²⁸⁰ Approximately 76 percent of Orinda residents identify as white and the next largest proportion, 16 percent, identify as Asian-American; the median household income in 2019 was \$223,217. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Orinda City, California,” United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/orindacitycalifornia>.

Conclusion

Though social movement theorists often focus on a binary framework of success and failure to analyze the impacts of social movements, the complex array of factions within and in partnership with Occupy Oakland mean that such an analysis does not get at the heart of Occupy. Occupy Oakland existed as a critical site to facilitate the growth and change of Oakland's preexisting activist network, as well as the center point for the diffusion of new ideologies and collective identities in Oakland. By tracing new coalitions and projects that were birthed in the wake of Occupy Oakland and employing a feminist framework to analyze social movement outcomes, we can see how Occupy altered activist networks and created new political horizons, and thus did not experience "decline" in the sense typically used by social movement scholars. However, many of the problems that influenced the creation of the movement persist in Oakland and the U.S., and have been heightened in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The chapter foregrounds the question of how we want to address temporal limitedness when examining social movements such as Occupy Oakland. Is "fizzling out" or the "end" of a particular form of activism necessarily negative? As Occupy Oakland activist Lelah Behbehanian explained in the film *#OO*: "There became a time where the beating we took for trying to hold down the public spaces in the middle of town centers became so much that it became clear that it was no longer feasible to do so, the police and the city made it unfeasible to actually continue in that form and so we had to find new ways of acting in the face of that kind of repression."²⁸¹ Behbehanian pointed to rational and practical reasons that force movements like Occupy to change or end as they are constituted. To use Staggenborg and Taylor's words, Occupy Oakland was also forced to "scale down and retrench to adapt to changes in the political

²⁸¹ Pina, *#OO*, <https://twitter.com/AcrossMediums/status/1338747471074189313>.

and social climate.”²⁸² Nevertheless, Occupy Oakland activists often went on to pursue new projects and the movement itself diffused new ideas, tactics, and relationships that are often unrecognized. Behbehanian argued that as relatively brief as Occupy Oakland was in historical terms, it was intense and transformed its participants:

The Occupation isn't dead, it's just not in your town center. It's gone mobile . . . there's no way I can believe that people actually participated in this and made such enormous changes in their communities—even if they were brief—and could walk away from that not being changed. And so many of the people who were doing this work before Occupy continue to do it and many who weren't, I think now have been motivated to do so.

A true examination of Occupy Oakland reveals that the impacts of social movements and their afterlives are far more expansive than is often originally thought. By insisting that to be valid social movements must either exist for a long time or meet certain institutional metrics, we miss the endurance of new ideas, utopias, collective identities, and solidarities, as well as how movements and struggles must regroup and revise to remain effective. In the case of Occupy Oakland, activists offered radical explanations for the world as it was and imagined a different world together. Moreover, the people, visions, and strategies did not actually disappear. Mollie Costello, a former Occupier who wore a “Justice 4 Alan Blueford” shirt in the *#OO* film, brought this message home: “The people in Oakland are collectively a beautiful group of people who, I think, know that another Oakland is possible. And if we were to expand beyond that, another America is possible, another world is possible. We don't have to have a nation or a world of haves or have-nots, this is completely constructed by a very tiny segment of our population.”²⁸³

²⁸² Staggenborg and Taylor, “Whatever Happened,” 48, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.10.1.46245r7082613312>.

²⁸³ Pina, *#OO*.

Conclusion

“When I think about how Occupy Oakland came into existence and whether the Occupy movement has been put down and silenced, I would say the Occupy movement’s spirit still carries on to this very day.”
- Cephus ‘Uncle Bobby’ Johnson, Oscar Grant’s uncle²⁸⁴

Reconsidering Occupy Oakland and Its Horizons uses a range of analysis methods and types of sources to show the complex political horizons imagined within Occupy Oakland, the existing political boundaries it rubbed up against, and the ways in which it worked to expand what futures were possible in the City of Oakland and in greater society. Using a transnational feminist lens, I position Occupy Oakland as a site of importance within this global movement to discuss the local and national political realities that created the issues activists responded to within and outside of OO camps, as well as the utopias activists imagined and worked to build. The thesis makes clear that the political imaginations created within social movements are shaped by a number of factors that emerge or have implications in their unfolding: the preexisting narratives challenged by the movement, the location of the movement, and the conflicts that emerge within the movement (which are structural, embodied, and personal). This thesis is particularly interested in the stories told about the movement while it is ongoing, the way it is remembered and discussed by people who had different levels of investment in it, and the movement’s afterlives, or reverberations and continuing effects.

Occupy Oakland is important to analyze due to Oakland’s history of radical social movements, as well as the ways in which Oakland continues to be pathologized in the public imagination locally and nationally by mainstream news media, politicians, and the Oakland Police Department. During their physical presence in the camps, OO protesters were demonized

²⁸⁴ Kevin Pina, #OO: *Occupy Oakland*, Long Memory Productions, forthcoming, <https://twitter.com/AcrossMediums/status/1338747471074189313>.

and the movement faced questions of legitimacy in local and regional news coverage, showing the power of the ideological boundaries Occupy challenged. Observers, especially in mainstream media, often trivialized or ignored Occupy's intricate structures and the logic behind the processes that were instituted. Within the movement, political horizons and imaginations varied and at times challenged each other. The stickiness of embodied inequalities around race, gender, class, sexuality pushed toward the creation of collectives within the movement to develop their own ideologies/frameworks. In some cases, they separated from the movement entirely. Despite these fractures, the imaginations and coalitions within Occupy Oakland blossomed far beyond the "end" of the physical occupations of space. A rhetoric of failure itself fails to consider the expansive horizons that Occupy enabled and articulated, and how the movement left deep impact on hundreds of participants and lived on through the diffusion of new knowledge and ways of thinking in the public sphere.

Occupy Oakland and the organizations and movements that preceded, co-existed alongside, worked in collaboration with, and emerged from it have not been able to resolve the fundamental problems that shape people's lives unequally and unjustly in Oakland and elsewhere, although many activists continued the struggles, joined by new people. Many of the issues Occupy formed in response to continued and worsened during the CoVid-19 Pandemic, such as gentrification and displacement, high rents, poverty, lack of educational opportunity, economic inequality, political disfranchisement, and racist policing that targets Black and brown bodies, especially if they identify as nonnormative genders and sexualities. Resolving these substantial issues is a heavy weight to place on Occupy Oakland. This is not a fair metric against which to judge a movement's success or failure. As Deborah Gould points out, social movements "reveal sizable cracks in people's apparent complacency and indicate a conviction among

participants that social arrangements are neither inevitable nor immutable.” Activist mobilizations “not only puncture the taken-for-granted, they also offer alternative ways of understanding and being in the world. They are a testament to the ever-present possibility of change.”²⁸⁵ Once punctured, these holes cannot be patched close, despite narratives that insist on reproducing the status quo.

Occupy Oakland was not co-opted and it did not simply “die.” Most activists continued to protest in other ways and projects, and the generations that followed them continue to build upon the possibilities articulated by the political horizons that emerged from Occupy and movements that preceded it. Though deemed to have failed, Occupy Oakland threatened the establishment in a significant way given the harsh repression it faced. As Gould writes, “It can be exhilarating to interrupt the workings of power to such a degree that it froths at the mouth in response.”²⁸⁶ The existing power institutions and their members in Oakland—government officials, bankers, developers, police, and business owners—were often apoplectic as they faced a difficult to control movement that generated excitement and held multiple effective actions. They used a variety of strategies to delimit its horizons until they actually demolished its sites. One participant in the *#OO: Occupy Oakland* film, named only as a member of the musical group Fresh Juice Party, insisted: “The news media can continue to downplay the significance of Occupy as can other forces, but we realize the significant of it, if nothing else, due to the amount of force that the authorities felt it necessary to bring down on the movement. I mean clearly, somebody was scared.” The movement and imaginations it unleashed, which continue and evolve in multiple new movements, threaten the establishment even today. The structural

²⁸⁵ Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 444.

²⁸⁶ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 279.

horizons of these movements' visions for social transformation are largely delimited by the immense power wielded in protection of neoliberalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. The ideas and practices they develop do pose real threats—why else expend so much energy to destroy them and punish their participants? Occupy's existence, effects, and aftermath reminds us that resistance exists in multiple forms and offers *many* possibilities for reconsidering pasts, presents, and futures. Occupy Oakland carved out a space for itself and its ideas in the public imagination. Political horizons were stretched in Oakland and beyond, and that expanded line of sight cannot be shrunk back in.

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