

# O ver the last decade,

Third World peoples' movements against globalization, neoliberalism and related issues have captured the imagination of the world. From the militancy of street protests to the fight for autonomy advocated by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, also known as the Zapatistas), radical politics led by people of color is quickly evolving. We are hearing less of old top-down strategies and more about popular education and grassroots organizing.

A small but growing movement of people of color is developing a new conversation that advocates anti-authoritarianism and anarchism as solutions to our collective struggle. Such a movement is largely led by youth, and such advocacy is a departure from the old-guard politics espoused by revolutionaries of color. Many of these people of color met in October 2003 in Detroit for the first Anarchist People of Color conference. Others continue to organize, agitate and act to find bottom-up answers to the freedom movement's most perplexing questions.

*Our Culture, Our Resistance: People of Color Speak Out on Anarchism, Race, Class and Gender, Volume Two* is the continuation of writings by people of color covering the concepts of anarchism, race, class and gender. Released simultaneously with *Our Culture, Our Resistance*, the purpose of this book is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue among people of color and others as we strive toward freedom.

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Ernesto Aguilar, editor  
[www.illegalvoices.org](http://www.illegalvoices.org)

# OUR CULTURE OUR RESISTANCE VOLUME 2

Further  
Conversations  
with  
People of Color  
on Anarchism,  
Race, Class  
and Gender

Leavenworth. Info on his case visit his website at [www.freeramsey.com](http://www.freeramsey.com), or write him at Ramiro R. Muñiz – 40288-115, P.O. Box 1000, Leavenworth, KS 66048-1000.

**Ewuare Osayande** ([www.osayande.org](http://www.osayande.org)) is a political activist, poet and author of a number of books including his latest work *Black Anti-Ballistic Missives: Resisting War/Resisting Racism*. The former chairperson of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Radical Congress, he is the co-founder of P.O.W.E.R.: People Organized Working to Eradicate Racism. The *Quarterly Black Review* has called Osayande "one of Black America's newest insurgent intellectuals coming to the table with enough mental firepower to be a David Walker for our time." He currently resides in Philadelphia, PA.

***Our Culture, Our Resistance: People of Color Speak Out on Anarchism, Race, Class and Gender, Volume Two***  
*First edition, published September 11, 2004*

**Disclaimer:** This work has been edited for typographical errors and formatting. Authors' structure and flow, for the most part, has been left intact, so to support people of color's efforts to speak in their own words as they wished. This work may not be free from editing faults, however.

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# Our Culture, Our Resistance

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to people of color around the world and our just fights for consciousness, justice, land, freedom and liberty. This volume is also dedicated to the memory of Houston activist Olaniyi Labinjo and all anarchists of color fighting the good fight everywhere.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the authors; to Heather Ajani for tremendous support; to Erika for her help; and to AK Press for its work, but also for rejecting this book and inspiring independent people of color publishing.

# Culture Clashes Among American Anarchists

by Victoria Law

My great-grandfather was the type of man who refused to get out of bed unless there was breakfast waiting for him. Since he wouldn't get out of bed to go and work, there was never any breakfast waiting for him. It was a cycle that did nothing to alleviate the family's poverty.

When he grew old enough, his son, my grandfather, left the small village to seek work in Shanghai. He found it and spent the next year shoveling manure for a living. He worked his way up to become a jeweler's apprentice, eventually opening his own jewelry store. He returned home to build the village's largest private house for his mother, who had long endured the ridicule of her neighbors and acquaintances. When the Communists won the Civil War, confiscating both the house and the jewelry store, he started again in Hong Kong, this time with a family of six and a wife who loved the latest fashion. One year, he held the traditional Chinese New Year's party. It was packed with fellow entrepreneurs. The next year, his business crashed; their doorway remained empty. The visitors of yesteryear, who had eaten all his snacks and drank all his liquor, had found more lucrative families to call upon.

My other grandfather was the unsuccessful owner of a factory that made burlap bags. Rarely did these bags yield a profit and so my mother's

living in New England and abroad (years in Brazil and China, months in Spain and Argentina). After dropping out of grad school and moving back to LA in 1997, he's spent most of his time working as a community and issue organizer and—most recently—a public school teacher. His dream is to start a community center that promotes the sharing of resources, skills, and knowledge across boundaries of race, ethnicity, and class, and help people learn through experience their power to shape social reality.

**Tomás Moniz** has been living, loving, fighting, writing, teaching and parenting three kick ass kids in the bay area for the last 12 years. Comments questions concerns, can go to Moniz at [tom\\_moniz@riseup.net](mailto:tom_moniz@riseup.net)

**Suneel Mubayi**, 18, born in NYC, grew up mostly in New Delhi, India, came to New York last June after finishing high school in India to study at Columbia. He started writing poetry and stories at the age of 14, and studied theatre for two years in school. After initially writing mostly love and emotional poetry, he began to explore political arenas as muses, and was inspired by post-9/11 and the war. At some point in time, around the age of 16, he realized that he wasn't really a he inside, despite being birth-assigned female, and Suneel's political revolutionization has been closely intertwined with her shedding of gender boundaries and categorizations. She has since pursued spoken word performance and theater acting fairly successfully all over NYC and is learning how to trash the system from the belly of the Ivy League beast.

**Ramiro "Ramsey" Muñiz** is a political prisoner remembered for his leadership role during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s. As an attorney, Muñiz defended the rights of Mexicanos whose constitutional rights were constantly violated. In 1972 and 1974, Muñiz was a gubernatorial candidate in Texas for La Raza Unida, a political party established and developed solely by Mexicanos to articulate an independent political vision. Muñiz garnered six percent of the vote and, during the campaign, spoke widely of Mexicano political power and potential. He is now serving time in

# About the Authors and Interviewees

*Author and interviewees in alphabetical order*

**Kapila** is an artist, organizer, writer and poet born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in January of 1981. Started working with the Centro de Estudos Libertarios Ideal Peres – CELIP, a anarchist study group, and the Resistencia Popular (Popular Resistance). Came to the U.S. at the age of 21, and started to get involved in student organizing, joining Students for Justice, a group of mostly community college based activists, and was part of the process which created a federation of the different Students for Justice chapters in the San Jose area (Silicon Valley, in California). I am part of Silicon Valley De-Bug, a young workers and artists self-managed media and organizing collective. I joined the IWW and have been part of the effort of starting a branch in San Jose. Currently I am working on a book about art and revolution and am part of the Furious Five anarchist collective in San Jose.

**Victoria Law** has been a self-identified anarchist since she was sixteen. Since then, she has participated in various collectives and anarchist endeavors, learned photography, been published on-line and in print, made zines, traveled overseas and become a mother. She and her daughter will be visiting her great-grandmother's former house in Shanghai in January 2004 between the Western and the Lunar New Years.

**Shawn McDougal** is a Black man who's been an anarchist since before he even heard the word. He was born and raised in LA, but has spent time

strongest childhood memories are of eating salted peanuts one at a time to make them last. Her younger sister died of hunger. One of her older sisters had to be given away.

Despite these inauspicious beginnings, both of my parents had attained middle-class status by the time I was born. They had come to the States to go to college. Both were the first generation in their families to attend, let alone graduate, high school. They owned their own home in a predominantly white area in Queens. Both parents worked white-collar office jobs. I have no childhood memories of material want.

This last fact has been used against me when I bring up race and racism. There have been more than a few occasions when white anarchists quickly shift the conversation from my discomfort at being the only non-white face in the room to class issues. I had a middle-class childhood. How dare I complain about, or even question, the lack of racial diversity in any given anarchist project when I have never experienced material deprivation? It does not matter that I grew up to become a single mother making less than fifteen thousand a year. The fact that I grew up privileged invalidates anything I might have to say about discrimination-whether it be based on race, skin color, gender or even my status as a parent-both in and out of anarchist circles.

In their attacks on my well-to-do childhood, white anarchists overlook some deep-rooted cultural differences. For instance, I grew up with a series of amahs. In pre-1949 China (and in post-Revolution Hong Kong), Chinese parents rarely cared for their own young. Instead, they turned them over to amahs, who acted as wet nurses, babysitters and maids. Most amahs remained with the family until all the children were grown and continued to maintain close ties with their nurslings. For the poorer families, like that of my maternal grandfather who could not afford to hire a woman, the elder children took responsibility for the younger. In earlier times, the son was married off-at the age of two or three-to a preteenage girl whose role was more that of surrogate mother than wife.

American culture has nothing that resembles the amah. Wealthier families may have nannies, which is what I suppose the average American anarchist envisions when I talk about my childhood. Because many of them have grown up in places that encourage ethnic and cultural segregation and because Chinese culture discourages unnecessary interaction—particularly more intimate interaction—with other cultures, they have no frame of reference for my stories. I am seen as having grown up with the privilege of having had servants. There is little attempt to probe further into the culture and understand that amahs, while technically employees of the household, had more intimate relationships than an American family's maid, cleaning lady or dog walker.

Perhaps this refusal speaks to the internalized notion that only American heritage and tradition matter. If an experience comes from someplace else, it doesn't count.

It is not just the differences in culture that cause misunderstanding. What many self-proclaimed working-class (white) anarchists fail to understand is that having money did not insulate me from the insults American society heaps upon its children of color and its girl children. The fact that my parents held white-collar jobs did not prevent me from encountering grown men who believed it was within their right to approach a ten-year-old girl and quietly say, "Nice pussy." My parents owning their own home did not protect me from other children pulling their eyes sideways and taunting me. Living in a well-to-do neighborhood did not shield me from the history teacher who looked at me and the Indian girl in his sixth-grade classroom and said, in all seriousness, "It's too bad that you come from inferior cultures."

Such closed-mindedness is not limited to anarchists focused on class struggle. Although all anarchist groups and projects proclaim, "We welcome all who agree with our mission statement, regardless of race, sexual orientation, etc.," what many of these groups fail to realize (or perhaps don't care to realize) is that their mission statements and their ideal visions often fail to

It is our duty and responsibility as liberators to pass on our oral traditions of struggle, sacrifice and freedom. From the medieval mazorra of this oppressor, we reach out of the voices of the mountains in Chiapas, where our brother Marcos continues to liberate our sisters and brothers from the same oppressor that rules here in America. And in this world of conflicts, that fire of spirituality continues to rise regardless of the genocide wrought. Everywhere throughout the world, the oppressed, people of color, are rising. It seems as if the entire universe is reaching into its ancient past for the answers of tomorrow. We of the sixth sun, Mexicanos from Aztlan, have reached and embraced the enlightenment of our spiritual, cultural and historical pasts for the last five hundred years. We have lived in a mode of darkness and ignorance. The oppressor has, with malicious intent, destroyed and/or refused the right for us to be exposed to the beauty and power of our ancient past. A race without a history or past is a race of non-existence.

In conclusion, it is with pride and honor that I share this by Flores Magon. It represents the purpose of this book on culture, resistance and anarchism:

*"It is necessary to educate our people, to teach them the real causes of their misery and slavery... This is why our hands, instead of being armed with muskets, are armed with pens, a weapon more formidable and far more feared by tyrants and exploiters."*

– 1916

Presently, we of Aztlanahuac are in the midst of rising, with a power of resistance and liberation like never before in our history. The silence has now become our new fire ceremony of liberation, justice and land. We must all come with clean hearts and be prepared to sacrifice, because without sacrifice, there will never be freedom.

His visions, his dreams and his revolutionary spirituality are very much alive tonight. Even though I have been condemned by the oppressor to a death sentence, it is my tonalli (destiny) to continue with the visions, dreams and liberation of all humanity, especially the oppressed people of color. It is in the dungeons of the oppressor where I have found the truth and direction that we as oppressed people must take in order to be free once again.

During my confinement in the hole, if I would wish to communicate in my dreams with my brother Flores Magon, I would concentrate for days on his spirituality and writings. Within a few days, he would appear in my dreams, not only sharing his inner thoughts, but, most importantly, what we must do to rise again and remove the chains that our people bear in the present. His most profound statement was, "My brother, you must reach into the ancient past, reach into the roots of our hearts, reach into the strength of our revolutionary spirituality." I will never forget how I would rise from my sleep and immediately begin to write the essence of our conversations. Yes, he is very much alive!

Our Mexicano spirituality is alive and throughout all Aztlan and in our Holy Land (Mexico). In fact, it is more alive than those so-called leaders who pretend to represent the masses of our people while, at the same time, compromising and making political deals with the same oppressor that continues to tighten the noose of the rope of oppression.

In a letter to his attorney, Flores Magon said he would rather die in prison than abdicate his ideals. "I prefer this to turning my back on the organizers and having the prison doors opened at the price of my honor." Flores Magon wrote. "I will not outlive my captivity, for I am already old, but when I die, my friends will perhaps inscribe on my tomb, 'here lies a dreamer,' and my enemies, 'here lies a madman.' But no one will be able to stamp the inscription, 'here lies a coward and traitor to his ideas.'"

address, or even acknowledge, the very different realities we come from. Their mission statements may sound good on paper, but often fail to take into account that many people of color do not feel comfortable in almost all-white spaces. They refuse to acknowledge that we may have had bad experiences with predominantly white groups both in and out of the anarchist movement. They refuse to understand that we automatically notice when we are the only ones in the room. They refuse to comprehend that we are tired of being touted as the group's (sole) member of color, of being accused of being overly sensitive to skin color or of having our concerns ignored altogether. They refuse to see that overthrowing the capitalist system will not automatically address the institutional and internalized racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that we experience every day.

Last winter, I went to a meeting of anarcha-feminists. The flier offered childcare – a rarity in the anarchist scene. That alone made me hope this would be different than other meetings and groups I'd attended in the past. After all, the organizers, neither of whom were parents, understood the need for childcare. They might be more open-minded about other issues as well.

After dropping my daughter off in the childcare space, I entered the meeting room. A circle of chairs had been set up. As the room filled, I noticed every face except mine was white.

A few years ago, this would not have bothered me. I had entered the anarchist scene in high school and hadn't cared much about racial diversity or differences. I was just glad that no one made fun of me because I looked different or acted different or actually cared about what went on in the world. As I grew older, I began to notice my difference more and more. I noticed that people sometimes treated me differently, as if they were going out of their way to welcome the one woman of color and prove that they were not racist. In high school, I was invited to a Love and Rage meeting. Love and Rage was a closed collective; more than a few older white anarchists in the scene were surprised that I, a girl so new to politics, had

been asked to participate while they had been ignored by the group for years. I arrived to the meeting late. The discussion was going full force. The topic? How to bring more people of color into the organization.

That day, I was acutely aware I was very unlike the others in the circle. My discomfort lessened only slightly when another woman of color entered.

Throughout the meeting, I struggled with the prospect of bringing up the group's lack of diversity. I wondered if my concerns would be dismissed or even ridiculed. I wondered if I would be accused of being divisive or of distracting from the "real" issue of women's status in the anarchist movement.

At the end of the meeting, as a sign-up sheet was being passed around, another woman – one with blond hair and blue eyes – saved me the discomfort. "Before I agree to be on any sort of listserv or be part of any kind of network, I want to ask about future outreach. I'm not interested in being part of a predominantly white group."

All eyes divided between darting towards me and towards the other woman of color on the far end of the room. I was glad that a white woman had brought up the subject. However, since half the people in the room were looking at me and no one at all was speaking, I decided to add my thoughts. "I think the term anarchy-feminist might turn away some women of color who share the same politics but don't explicitly identify as anarchist. Maybe the next flier can drop the term."

As I spoke, I remembered past conversations with radical women of color-women who shared anti-authoritarian ideas and beliefs but who didn't want to be identified with a movement that they saw as white brick throwers. I thought about the woman of color who had attended a few different anarchist meetings and been turned off by white male anarchists' dismissal of race issues. I thought about the woman of color who had posted the article, "Where was the Color in Seattle?" Her concerns had been dis-

# Eplilogue

## Ricardo Flores Magon is Alive in All of Us

by Ramiro "Ramsey" Muniz

*"I covered my face with my hands as I was shackled and chained, beginning three years of solitary confinement in the belly of the beast. I sat still in pure unconsciousness, neither hearing nor feeling, nor knowing in the darkness of the dungeons of America, like the deep of the sea, with no time and no world. In the depths that are timeless and worldless, it was then that the revolutionary spirit of Ricardo Flores Magon reached into the depths of my heart..."*

Into my second year of solitary confinement, in the mode of darkness, I was informed by the forcing oppressor that seventy four years ago, our revolutionary brother Flores Magon had been confined in the same cell. Even before the latter information, his revolutionary spirits would appear at any given time or day. Fortunately, with the support of family and others, I was able to receive various books written on the life, history and death of Flores Magon. The most vivid and profound statement has made months before his death here at Leavenworth USP is the following:

*"My dream of beauty and beloved visions of a humanity living in peace, love and liberty... will not die with me, while there is on Earth a painful heart or an eye full of tears. My dreams and visions will live..."*

– March 16, 1922

I too disagree with the idea that race and gender should be taken a priority over the class struggle – the simple idea that race and gender issues could be solved inside the capitalist system in any frame is simply ludicrous. Inside the capitalist system, we have no real say in the affairs of business and very little (in the most optimistic of the views) in the affairs of the government. A feminist or a race movement that did not have as priority to smash the capitalist system would fall sort on its legs – gender and race justice are impossible inside the capitalist system. The capitalist system is not only a system based on class dominance, but one too that maintain women and people of color inside that class and oppressed inside of it.

The means must be coherent with the ends. A movement that disregards any of the oppression-systems is bound to be limited and to create a society based on elitism. Unless the movement is committed to be one that will be addressing those three issues seriously and not sidestepping it with "we are all equal" condescending behavior, its range is going to be limited and it will turn off people that see themselves as not only working-class, but feel other pressing form of oppression crushing them.

It is time to reevaluate the movements approach on issues of race, gender and sexuality – it is good to see there is a movement of people already working in that direction. It is time for us to have a revolution in ourselves to change our perception on what a real liberation of the people means.

I see their faces – their smiling brown faces – and there is nothing of me in there. We shall build a different world.

missed as unimportant; what really mattered were class differences. I thought about the radical women of color who had the perception that anarchists were either unwashed, smelly white punk kids or white academics. Both had the option of renouncing radical politics and rejoining the mainstream world. This was what the word anarchist conjured up for them. Why would they want to get involved with any group that labeled itself that?

There was an uncomfortable pause. After some hemming and hawing, an organizer suggested perhaps instead of directly trying to reach out to women of color, this group could do fundraisers and donate the proceeds to women of color organizations "that are doing good work."

I felt as if I'd been smacked. I wondered if the woman realized how patronizing and racist her suggestion was. In my mind, I could see Charlotte Mason giving money to the black artists she deemed "primitive" enough. Only, instead of the 1930s heiress who demanded her artists sit at her feet and call her "Godmother," these were post-millennium anarchists deciding which women of color were anti-authoritarian enough to receive their money.

The other organizer had a different suggestion, one which also circumvented the possibility that they would have to reach out to women other than the same old (white) faces. She suggested that the group work around issues facing women of color, such as the prison-industrial complex. Although she didn't outright say it, I felt that her suggestion was that this predominantly white group speak for and act on behalf of women of color rather than actively trying to get them involved or even find out what their main concerns were.

Later I learned that one or two of the attendees had felt offended on my behalf. How dare someone bring up race and the lack of non-white faces with Vikki sitting right there? Is she blind? Doesn't she realize that Vikki is a person of color? Is she implying that Asians are not really people of color? They refused to see her question as anything other than an attack on me. I tried to explain that I was glad that a white person had broached



the subject because, frankly, I was tired of being the one who always had to. Instead, I began to understand that many white anarchists are unwilling to talk about race. They would rather dismiss it as a social construct that does not apply to anarchists and, thus, ignore the issue altogether.

The next time I saw this woman, I thanked her for bringing up the subject. I wanted to let her know that I was not angry or offended by her observation. "You shouldn't have to always be the one to bring it up," she stated. Since then, I have not had a white ally in other projects to pipe up and point out the obvious. It has fallen to me—the woman of color, often the only woman of color in the room—to point this out. The responses have ranged from uncomfortable silences to lukewarm acknowledgments to outrage. Whatever the tone, the common defense is always, "We don't discriminate against people of color." What is left unsaid is, "See? We welcome you. That's proof that we don't discriminate."

I now understand why so many people of color are wary of working with whites. When I first encountered the suspicions and wariness of people of color towards white anarchists, I dismissed their concerns. "Hey, they're doing good work," I defended. "Who cares what color they are?"

I now see that it is not that white anarchists are white. It is that many of them are unwilling to try to understand the needs, concerns and experiences of those with different skin colors.

As an anarchist of color, this disturbs me. I am tired of always being put in the position of explaining racism and race issues to white anarchists, sexism and gender issues to male (and sometimes female) anarchists, or some form of discrimination to virtually everyone I encounter. I am tired of the prophecy that in an anarchist society, racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination will magically cease to exist. Such explanations no longer appease me. Instead, I see them as white anarchists' way of not confronting the problems and issues within our own movement and within themselves.

with the women of the working class. An abused woman will identify with the plight of another one – independent of class or race; a queer person can identify with persecution and prejudice.

It is however, very important to notice that, empathy and de facto equality are a far cry from each other, and while the bourgeois women might have in common with the working-class women their subordinate position, they are enemies of class and therefore not allies.

### **Conclusion**

The union of the working class in one fight will not happen without the acknowledgment of the levels of oppression inside the working class itself and the actual facing and destroying of the power imbalance in the movement that proposes to change the reality of oppression lived by the working class nowadays. A forced union of the working class, with disregard of the real issues of gender and race except in a superficial way is bound to fail.

A world revolution is necessary – a complete change of structure, a social, economic and political revolution that destroys class, gender and racial oppression.

I disagree with the idea that the class struggle should take priority over the race and gender struggle. This centralist and elitist view of disregarding the concerns of women and people of color have been seen thousands of times before, and we have been betrayed and stomped on enough to realize that those with power will not relinquish it, it must be taken from them. Only the oppressed can liberate the oppressed, and it is vital that we understand people of color, women, queers and all the other oppressed people inside the working class have not only this motto repeated in their heads like a mantra, but that they actually need to exercise that line inside the movement and draw their own conclusions of where they want to go and what needs to be done.

to create an atmosphere of fear so overwhelming that the mere presence of the male becomes threatening. Male attitudes – tone of voice, way of sitting, conversation, clothing – everything is designed in order to keep women guessing and consequentially, afraid. Why is it then surprising that our movement and our spaces are normally male dominated if why do not critically analyze the balance of power in the attitudes and presence of men and women inside the movement.

A woman in a room full of men, no matter how strong, outspoken and determined she is, and no matter how much the men are determined to treat her as an equal – is definitively in a position of less power and thus will not have the same weight in her voice. And with the institutions are not conscious of this power imbalance and do not work actively in reverting this situation – the maintenance of the status quo is inevitable.

The oppression of women by the working class males is a phenomenon that can be traced back to almost every single culture. To see the feminist struggle as separate and a "division of forces" of the working class is a ludicrous statement – a reflection of a poor understanding of the nature of oppression and the nature of the working class.

Indeed, to separate these three fights is to divide the working class, but to set priority in any of them and have the others as a tag along is to destroy any hopes of liberation that the working class might have.

The gender-based oppression serves a political purpose too. It serves the elites that women have no political power for the same reason that it serves the elites that people of color do not enjoy political power. There is, however, a difference between the gender elite and the elite of color. The male-dominated elite of color is, globally speaking, fairly stronger and definitively more aggressive in its pursuit of power than the gender-elite. The gender-elite lives in a much more subordinate position (to their male counterparts) than the elite of color – thus putting them in a closer position

# Pencils like Daggers

by Tomás Moniz

It starts with a story:

My grandma, worried that her 3-year son had not spoken a word yet, had him chase down a grasshopper. Diligently, without complaint, the boy did and returned with a smile. Open she said; confused and scared, he did. She shoved it in and closed his mouth. *Hablas, mijo, hablas*. He spit it out crying. Crying and yelling. He has not stopped either since, she says, and smiles thinking of her now 50-year-old son talking his time away in a New Mexican state penitentiary.

This is not make-believe. This is how we find our voice. This defines our language.

Here is my story. Or the start of it. My name is Tomas Ignacio Aragon; everyone calls me Tom. This I know for sure. I come from families of lies, of stories to deceive you, to deflect discovery. As a bicultural child, I was not comfortable in nor completely accepted by either side of my families. In the white world of my working class mother, I was the visible mistake, the dark stain on the family name. White working class military folk, dealing with the daughter who runs away to find her place, to save the world in the late '60s, and comes home struggling to save herself and feed her two year old son. With her, I was raised to avoid declarations of race, of difference, trying not to discuss my brown skin and brown hair in a family of blondes and blue eyes, forgetting my Spanish, speaking English only. I hid my shame with my silence.

On the Chicano side, I was the product of typical male weakness, the sign of my father's co-optation and ultimate demise by white women come to save the poor, the natives. He was seduced by her presence, her education, her future. And those things he loved about her, she used to leave him when he found his place in el pinto, the typical educational facilities for poor Chicanos in New Mexico. His anger at her transferred in to his abandonment of me. No letters. No contact. My father running from the law, running, running, knowing the inside of a cell more than his son.

Wait. This is not a story. This explains nothing, so I create my own explanations.

I started writing to find my color, saying on paper in black indelible ink what I couldn't to my classmates, to my first few lovers, to my mother and members of my own family: I am Mexican. I am white. I am.

'Fight one bean you fight the whole burrito.' I remember this saying as a warning white kids said about fucking with Mexicans in Ventura, California. I remember the sound that they made on the school bus, slapping hands, laughing, all building a solidarity of whiteness or non-brown-ness when one kid calls out 'smells like beans' as the Mexicans leave the bus, walking down the aisle. At 15, I couldn't stand it any more. I stood up and hit the kid in front of me with my backpack breaking my connection to them. I wanted to be the burrito. I am Mexican; I am not white. But in the end I wasn't welcomed. I am the one who had to find trouble rather than it finding me. It has been the same ever since. I walk the borders of cultures, the too white to be brown and too brown to be white. Sometimes hassled by both sides and sometimes passing into each. Sometimes seen as one of the boys, sometimes the affirmative action product. I enter college deciding to claim, to rename, to embrace and revel in my contradiction, my displacement, my ambiguity, my absence of certainty.

MEChistAs in college scoffing about my lack of Spanish and complaint that

Gouges understood that – because the culture of sexism – a structure that "embraced" men and women as "equals" would do nothing to actually satisfy women's need and desire for liberation. It would be a token act. The need of self-organization for women came from the realization that in a social structure, every single relationship is one of power, and if men constructed the social structure, it would be inherently sexist. Only women could devise a structure that would really benefit women.

Sexism always had a condescending tone to its rhetoric, a view that men's subjugation of women was actually a necessity for the welfare of women. What is interesting is that this view is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of our society, and to ensure this, it is necessary that all men participate consciously or unconsciously in terrorizing women – much like the State, the function of manhood is to terrify women into accepting men's 'protection' for the price of their total submission. As Susan Brownmiller puts it, rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." Domestic violence, violence against women and rape are forms of intimidation and bullying through which, firstly, male dominance is imposed, and second, male 'protection' is made 'necessary.' Culture reinforces the dominant role of the male and its 'need' of violence.

The cult of violent behavior by men, against women and against each other, is more than just assertion of power against the recipient of violence. It is part of the engine that feeds of the terrorizing of women to keep them submissive. Is the double use of the rod – it can beat you up or beat someone else to protect you. And, as Susan Griffin notes in the book *Rape: The All-American Crime*, "if the professional rapist is to be separated from the average dominant heterosexual [male], it may be mainly a quantitative difference." The level to which dominance and violence are exerted to the domination of women may vary in quantity, but not in substance.

The idea of our social fabric reinforcing gender roles of violence/passivity is

maintain such a relationship.

The strained relationship between capitalism and women has a lot to do, in a modern setting, with the fact that the elites of the world are – no matter their "color" – an oppressive majority of males. The male dominance is not only a "cultural trait" as it is one of applying a simple rule of power – those who have power will not give it up for free. Concentrated power is limited – the more you share the less you have and the elites of the World will not relinquish power for women.

The relationship of power between men and women needs to transcend race and class in order to be effective. Although one could argue that this is just another classist plot of the bourgeois to keep their economic rule over the working class, it is very interesting to notice that misogynist thinking is part (in different levels) of a multitude of cultures, even before they got in contact with each other. 'Primitive' societies had their good share of misogyny – they were hardly the utopia that certain people picture them to be. The dominant gender in our societies has been exploiting women's work and women in general for millennia after millennia. Sexism is not a capitalist invention. It is not accident that the bourgeoisie power is composed essentially of males, this is merely a consequence of the fact that even when the class struggle between the nobility and the bourgeois aristocrats was being fought, in one thing they agreed – that was a fight between men, to see which man was going to be the ruler. It is obvious then why the views of women like Olympe de Gouges were so threatening to them that she was guillotined in 1793 as a reactionary loyalist.

Robespierre, Marat and the men of the Revolution were most certainly terrified of losing their power to a woman who advocated not only the necessity of full legal equality between the genders, job opportunities for women, schooling for girls and the creation of a national theater where only plays written by women could be performed, but the creation of the National Assembly of Women, emphasizing the need for women of self-governing and equal power.

meetings were held only in Spanish. 'Chale, man. What's up with you?' Because I was raised by a English speaking white mother. Awkward silence.

My teacher asked why the absence of Mexican American writers in a California literature class bothered me. Because I am one. Awkward silence.

This is the only way I can speak to you. I am an academic and I am not afraid to talk that talk – the hybridity of myself causes these contradictions that I embrace like old lovers knowing how to soothe each one, how to excite and comfort. I was freed in theory and abstraction finding voice in books by Moraga, Anzaldua. Finding fathers in Acosta, Reechy. Finding heart in the radical acts of violation and violence like Tijerina at the New Mexican courthouse, Murrieta's refusal to bow his head, Los Crudos' demand for an uncompromising politic, Rage Against the Machine's connection to difference and abhorrence of authority. I became a bicultural, Chicano with no respect for authority, no time for lazy assumptions about race, culture, politics, class, sexuality. I found myself in the refusal to singularly define myself.

Wait. This is a lie. These words. Stories.

How do I claim myself: how to separate what I feel as a Chicano, as a male, as a person of privilege. How do you claim anything when you can't claim the authenticity of your own voice? Remember: speak clearly, be careful if your pronunciation is off, if your skin fades too pale in the winter, present your color in your movements, your clothes, your lovers.

In a world that wants singularity, I choose both. In a culture that wants uniformed sexuality, I choose to embrace bisexuality. In a society that denies authentic autonomy, I found myself in anti-authoritarian histories, in the romance of clandestine organizations. I was seduced by the pen and the gun, by non-monogamist lifestyles, by radical, dissident Chicano nationalism, by the feminist rhetoric to reclaim our selves, our lives, our sex, our religion, our consciousness. This has defined me and hurt me. I

tend to be the problem, the one who asks too many questions, who is never comfortable with the way it is. With the way I am.

But now I refuse to be silent or shameful or half-hearted. I tried to avoid it for a while, but if I wanted to find and meet other anarchists in the East Bay, I needed to go to the Long Haul, an anarchist infoshop in Berkeley. So I took a deep breath, opened the door and entered, trying to free myself of my previous feelings, my stereotypes, my love and hate for the anarchist community; and yes, I know it ain't one homogeneous thing, but regardless, my experiences with it have been fraught with good ol' revolutionary angst.

Let me explain.

I have never been into the punk scene, I am not white, I became a father at 20 and had to think about changing diapers, not just about changing social structures. I remember being chastised by someone trying to get us to go up one summer to the logging protests and when I reminded him of my responsibilities, he snapped back: 'what was more important.' I wanted to punch him, to make him see his ignorance, the elitism of privilege, the typical dismissal of people with children, with jobs to pay for food and rent. Yet, this has happened over and over. Meetings at 6 p.m. or reading my child a bed time story? How to choose? It felt as if I could never fully commit, never be as dedicated as the people I met – mostly younger, white, students, who were mobile, who could survive on a fluctuating income. Now there is nothing wrong with this, but this was not me, not my experience, not my culture. But I knew that the anarchist views more closely resembled my views about how life could be lived than anything else, so I tried as much as I could to find that community. I brought my kids to meetings; I swapped childcare with other parents on my block (a nice way of realizing it truly does take a neighborhood to raise a child). I tried to figure out how to balance riding bikes with my kids around the block versus riding in critical mass, which is right at dinner time. I realized I needed the anarchist community after years of trying to com-

## Gender

In this essay, when referring to sexism, the concept, unless noted, incorporates issues like women's rights, women's position in the bottom of the scale of the capitalist society, homophobia and male violence against women.

Sexism – male dominance – is the less addressed and consequentially the most widespread system of oppression in the world. The roots of sexism in societies cannot be easily traced and I will not even attempt to dwell in its history to avoid any fallacy. However, in this essay, we shall analyze sexism in its relationship with global capitalism and the struggle for liberation.

The revolution of the capitalists was an economic and political revolution – not social. The French Revolution, the fall of the Absolutists in Europe, the social changes that followed were design to enforce the rule of the bourgeoisie and strengthen the influence and power of this rising class against outside forces. Representative democracy, liberty and freedom and all the other promises that the revolution made to the people were designed according to which form would create a favorable atmosphere for the establishment of capitalism.

It is interesting then to notice that the revolutionary leaders were quick to crush the women's movement that was born during the revolution. The establishment of Capitalism could not allow the development of such a movement, especially since, in order to satisfy what those women were demanding, a distribution of power was necessary. One pamphlet distributed by those women during the revolution was called Request for Women to be Admitted to the Estates-General, and had the following quote: ""Man is born egotist... he reduces us to managing his household affairs and to partaking of his rare favors when he feels so inclined." Nothing could be more true and it exemplifies the relationship between the elite and women – the relationship of power and the need of a structure that 'justifies' and

the effects of the FTAA on labor, environment and the people. It is just very convenient that those issues show up so they can rally public support.

This pattern repeats itself around the globe. Besides, the majority of this "elite of color" are actually descendent of Europeans. Just look at South America, the diversity and richness of races and cultures in it – then look at the elite of South America, a very white and European class of bourgeois. The elites of Africa, while not European in skin, are mostly educated and raised in Europe or the U.S. The pattern repeats itself.

In maintaining the white supremacy, the elites of color try to escape guilt-free. In the fight for racial and gender equality, the working class remains bound. It is not that these fights are not important; if anything, alongside with class, they are the most important ones. It is only that, without the fall of the capitalist system as a whole, any fight becomes just filler.

Other parts of the elites of color take a more aggressive position in the defense of the interests of the world capitalist elite. The elites of Japan thrive over the complete subjugation to the American empire. Make no mistake: this is hardly a submissive elite – they were imperial forces for centuries and held an elitist racial position over their neighbors. However, in this game they play, the subordinate elite because is very much in their interest to keep the status quo, and the rest is inconsequential. Japan, defeated on WW II, is reborn as a global potency. But in submission to the white empire. Their pop culture, their dream, their means of production – everything about modern Japan cries – slave, but this condition of slave to the elite of world capitalism asserts its hegemony and dominance over other nations. More than that, it asserts the dominance of the Japanese elite.

The left worldwide have, for decades now, struggled with race and class and gender – which liberation should take precedence over another – without realizing that if any take precedence, the whole fight in itself is almost a moot point. Racism is not only a pillar of class oppression. It is one of the single bases of oppression itself.

partmentalize the seemingly disparate aspects of my life – the non-monogamist, the self-schooling parent, the activist, the Chicano academic, the fuck-the-police poet. But how I got to this point is another story. Is in fact many stories.

Let me start at the beginning. I began noticing the glaring discrepancies in my life; I grew up on hip-hop and could see it being co-opted into cheap fronting and frivolity. This was not the community I was a part of, dressed in hand-me-downs and learning to break on ripped up sections of linoleum. I simply couldn't handle the growing consumerism, the value placed on objects, after having lived in poverty, after scoffing at and detesting the symbols of wealth for so long (yes, out of envy and jealousy at the time perhaps). Yet, I desperately needed to believe in the anti-authoritarian politics of NWA, Public Enemy, Freestyle Fellowship and others, for I was not hearing it from anyone else nor in any other way that spoke to me.

It continued in undergraduate classrooms in which I was appalled at the refusal to engage in anything but what was deemed 'practical and possible realities.' After being told that Republicans and Democrats held the only legitimate and viable worldviews, I wondered how the hometowns I grew up in – Las Vegas, New Mexico, Kailua, Hawaii, Ventura, California – were included in anything we discussed. How did these 'viable' political choices account for the poverty, the single mothers, the drugs, the lack of choices available? There had to be another way. And when I did make my way to an anarchist study group. I seethed at people's unwillingness to even attempt to connect anarchy with issues of race and privilege. There had to be other ways. Other places. Others.

So I retreated for a while into my own experiences, creating and nurturing a lifestyle that embodied the values I couldn't find elsewhere. I found connections with my imprisoned father and prison issues that introduced me to Attica, to my father's penitentiary, to political prisoners. I reveled in becoming a father and was soon horrified as disciplined behavior became the

primary learning objective in my son's school. What could I do, where to turn? I refused to participate in the privilege of private schooling so that was out. And then I found *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, and we created our autonomy, but struggled to connect with others who chose to homeschool for reasons of liberation rather than Christian bullshit and racist, classist fears about public education. Where were the other parents? People fuck, so I know people reproduce.

Moving to the East Bay from the city did help me meet more people with similar values. While attempting to create a relationship based on free choice rather than social coercion, my partner and I met another young parent questioning the rigid social definitions of what relationships could be. With the inspiration from Emma Goldman and the practical advice from *The Ethical Slut*, we began to embrace non-monogamist freedom to explore our own sexuality, our growing identities, our interests. But even here we felt out of place: we weren't 50-year-old hippies reminiscing about free love, nor were we new age converts trying to fuck while rubbing crystals and engaging in tantric poses. We were in our late twenties, we were looking for others more like us.

All these interests and choices of my life culminated in the tear gas of Seattle. Studying globalism as an advisor to student clubs on the campus I taught at, we decided to participate in the WTO protests, not realizing the dramatic and liberating events that we would be a part of.

So after the smoke cleared from Seattle and then DC and then Quebec, I realized that I could no longer chase the revolution, that I could no longer compartmentalize the different aspects of my life. I needed a way to synthesize them all. After ten years of making half-hearted attempts to connect with people who looked and lived so differently it seemed than me, I decided to toss aside my ego, my attitude, and my fears and both find and help create the community I wanted.

strate both that power is in the side in the elite; and that the oppressed's situation can improve if only they submit enough so the elite do not seem them as a threat, but as something they can thoroughly control. At the same time, they need to keep the distance between those that have privilege, and those who do not.

It is interesting to see that the elite of color too benefits from the racist structure, and if racism were to simply be wiped out of the whole scenario, they would be in bad waters. It is of their interest that the white elite dominates – that would eagerly try to take over if they thought that they could do it without tearing the fabric of social control that the white capitalist elite maintains.

The racist structure of the system allows the elites of color to maintain their power and give them other possibilities. Imperialism has been used as a shield by every single dictator that had power threatened by the bigger shark, from Castro to Hussein to Milosevic. This dragged into direct or indirect the defense of their oppressive regime millions of people of color, working class people and anti-imperialist militants. This is not a justification to the U.S. actions, but an example of how the racist structure benefits not only the white elite and therefore supports directly or indirectly by the elites worldwide. It is a case of opportunism, where oppressors assume an "oppressed" mask to defend themselves against the taking of dominance against another.

A very concrete example of that is the role that Brazil plays now in the FTAA meetings. Lula and the PT (Brazilian Worker's Party) have been repeatedly trying to sell this image of a defiant Brazil, which is concerned with the imperialist role that the U.S. would play in South America in case the FTAA gets approved. What they are concerned about is that Brazil might lose its hegemonic dominance over the South American market; and then, if the U.S. does not open its market to Brazilian products, the Brazilian elite of landlords would lose power. They are not concerned with

Global white dominance appears in two different aspects: privilege and de facto ruling.

The privilege of the white race is an absolute in the world's politics and economics; nowhere in the face of the world are people of European descent the oppressed minority (or majority) to an elite of color. The "white race" enjoys a privilege that does not falter by geographic means.

The white colonial/imperial power stretched itself through the process of capitalist globalization. The consolidation of global capitalism is not only rooted in racism but dependant on it. From Brazil to India to Mexico, the lighter skin carries a lighter burden and occupies the higher place.

The de facto ruling of a white elite that controls the global capitalist state enforces the privilege of the "white race." Transnational corporate forces are massively concentrated in the U.S. and Europe and so are the powerful nation-states. The "white race" enjoys a position of privilege in these two segments.

Token gains on race and gender are not so much to pacify race and gender struggles, as it is to foment further struggle. The idea is to give the exploited a little taste of what they could get, but to make it clear that would have to carry a certain burden in order to get it. Just like a mule that tasted a piece of the carrot once is bound to want to eat the whole carrot, and will work with all its strength to reach the unreachable carrot, and carry the weight of the cart in its back. But, apparently contradicting themselves, the capitalist class shows its contempt by race and gender equality by openly attacking any form of improvement in the situation of the oppressed genders and races. This makes the structure, in the eyes of people of color, a racist one, instead of a purely classist one. It is necessary to keep people thinking that a) gains can be achieved inside the structure and b) racism is everywhere (which is true, but it needs to be really thrown at people's faces all the times). The objective of this exercise is to demon-

In the three years since I have made this commitment to be involved in the anarchist community, I have met some powerful and inspirational people; I have learned to see that resisting the oppressive and seemingly undefeatable social world we live in can be practiced in so many minute, marvelous and meaningful ways – in fucking, in gardening, in punk, in slumming it, in cooking. Perhaps even in crystals. I've been a part of RACE (Revolutionary Anarchists of Color), been to and participated in the anarchist conference, started a zine, *boxcutter*, with a few others to explore aspects of personal liberation. I even staff a shift now at the Long Haul. With each step I try to bring my stories and my experiences with me. I want to be a part of something that combines theory and praxis, that can talk the talk and walk the walk, I want to work with people that I can learn from, that inspire me in my own efforts of teaching, parenting, living my daily life. I want to try and fail rather than remain safe in stasis. And yet, at times I still feel like an outsider to the radical/anarchist community. But now I know that I am apart of it, and so I have a responsibility to it, to help shape it. I am writing to engage myself in this process that will force me to embrace more of it, to be more involved in it, and to welcome other people like me – marginalized from the mainstream, yet not quite the typical anarchist – to join this discussion. I know many more people are out there, many more stories, and I hope we can start sharing them.

Anarchy is the radical approach to life of not simply living a fair equal and free life for yourself, but making the connection and working for the liberation and equality of everyone. It is anti-authoritarian; it is non-coercive; it is based on the principles of active involvement, of direct action, of a radical faith in diversity. Now this doesn't imply that the struggles of all communities are equal. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize, within ourselves individually and within our individual cultures, the points of privilege we may have access to and benefit from. It is crucial in anarchist thinking to understand the workings of white privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege and so on, and to work to destroy these forces. And one of the first things to realize is that the state in all its aberrations must go. We



need to radically imagine new ways to relate to each other within communities of our devising – until then, police will always be an abusive presence of control and white privilege, behavior will only be tolerated that works to reinforce the status quo.

I am tired of anarchist thinking that only serves intellectual exercises and academic notions of social discourse and I fear generally white male punk violent angst against private property that serves only the transitory pleasure of the actor while serving to marginalize poor communities and heighten the repression of difference by condoned state terrorists – the cops. I also am tired of isolated individual anarchist practices that serve only the development and liberation of the individual who has access to and time for these pursuits such as veganism, voluntary simplicity and conscious social marginalization. There is another way.

People of color and the anarchist tradition are now set to revitalize that. I came to anarchy through sex and Seattle; and now that I'm here, now that I've plundered my way through the 'classical or canonical' texts (how ironic that so many fight for these labels as if this provides some authority to these anti-authoritarian texts), I've come to fuck it up, to shake it down and push it forward into the multicultural, diverse pedagogically flexible revolutionary philosophy it is. No longer will I be told that real anarchy is not related to struggles for national liberation, not about the praxis of living a life defined by radical honesty and trust, not about coalitions and communication.

For me anarchy must be linked to the individual only in relation to the communal, whether that community is lovers, or family, or children, or employers, or neighbors.

I cannot separate my political growth from my personal growth. Nor will I even try. I knew there must be something out there, something to validate what my partner and I felt but could not articulate – that true commitment,

society shapes the format of the future and the present of the said society. In the case of the disappearance of race and gender in our society, the only struggle to be faced would be the class war – and against a united working class, the capitalist are bound to lose. The need of a different struggle, the need of race and gender inequality for the capitalist is to engage the working class in different battles, to divide and conquer it.

Based on that, one could argue that, in the long run, racism has always been a structure designed to maintain the power of a certain class over another by creating a platform of "equality" of sorts, making them "brothers" of the oppressed class. This definition of racism carries more weight than we can initially imagine, but it fails to recognize that racism can outlive class oppression – and be still the source of power to a few that would dominate the hierarchy that from that would emerge.

Racism and Sexism are more culturally rooted in the world than Capitalism, more than the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Some cultures are feudal systems, other monarchic dictatorships (But I deny the Marxist evolutionism of societies in the sense of feudal-to-capitalist-to-communist-to-free-socialist as being an evolutionary process that is absolute to any society). Racism and Sexism are two paramount structures of domination with which the world dominant class maintains its power, and, without them, the structure of World Capitalism would collapse.

It is part of the strategy of the global elite to actively support and maintain white dominance worldwide.

The idea that white supremacy is an American phenomenon, that it is a national issue to be dealt nationally, and that racism in the U.S. have origins in American Capitalism is, in essence, a very American idea. At the same time, the complex aspects of race in the U.S. and the current debate on racism and classism might be the catalyst for the change in the perception of race and white dominance.

tyed to and share the same roots of those concepts. Racism, in this essay, refers (unless noted) to race dominance and privilege, national identity, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism and cultural repression. All those share a basic identity of a dominating ethnic/national group and a subordinated one.

To understand race and capitalism in a broader sense of the American concept of race, it is paramount to us to analyze race in its historical context.

Racism in Europe started before Capitalism. The feudal lords and the crown of Spain (absolutist and mercantilist) already obsessed over the concept of "limpieza de sangre," the purity of blood. This concept became strong in Spain in the 1400s, when the Spaniards fought against the Moors invaders. A national liberation struggle, if you like.

These concepts of race and the purity of blood, however, were deeply ingrained in European culture. Europe was a continent driven by conquest and tribal wars. The Romans regarded the tribes of Germans and Franks to be barbarians, brutes of low intelligence and destined to be submitted to the rule of the Roman fasciae.

Examples run back in history ad nauseam, in demonstrating a racist culture and a racist system as an integral part of the European culture. Why should we be shocked that they, when spreading their empire, spread too their racist system?

It is sometimes a fairly common misconception that other cultures had no racist background until the arrival of the Europeans. That is not true. The African tribal wars that to this day plight the people in that continent are a living proof that race (identity) has been an issue long before Capitalism.

What seems then to be the purpose of racism? In classical dialectical materialistic analysis, the constant struggle over power between forces of

true respect and love was not linked to ownership, possession, fear, and distrust. After years of working hard to 'make it,' to be successful, good, liberal citizens, we looked around and realized there must be more than what we have been striving so hard for,. We rejected marriage, but were unable to articulate a philosophical reason yet, we had kids, but refused to become the conservative self-centered parents we saw other new mothers and fathers becoming, we were political in all the condoned ways – liberal Democrat, wanting taxes to go to public schools and senior centers.

All wasn't perfect; we each wanted things, but we wanted to be together, we each had attractions to others but know it was wrong, we each understood that after working so hard raising three kids, a few years away from our thirties, that we had to change something or choose this path forever. And then came Emma and Andee.

Emma Goldman hit us like a ton of bricks – non-monogamy, freedom to do and love who you want, to choose to be together rather than to have to be together. The essays spoke deeply to our own unspoken philosophy.

Let me tell you a story:

At 20, I hitchhiked from Las Vegas, New Mexico down the highway to see my father face to face. To try to find some answers. He tells me he fucked up. He should be out there with me, working with me, living life with me. Because, he says, I realized I'm a slave in here. And now I can only fight against other slaves. Out there, when I realized I was a slave, I coulda done something, I coulda fought back at least. Somehow. In here, it's just fucked up.

My father explained that in jail, pencils are like daggers, you can write and you can stab. 'Mira, ' he points to his arm, 'here are the pencil tips that I cannot get out.'

This is not a metaphor. This is a warning.

# Strong Hearts and Poisoned Waters

## Exclusion and the Reproductive Rights Movement in the U.S.

by Puck

Abortion is not and has never been only a "white issue." Although few people today realize it, women of color have been involved from the very beginning. Women of color have played and continue to play a crucial part organizing for and shaping the struggle for reproductive freedom in the US.

### Who Gets Abortions?

Currently, Latinas are two times as likely as white women to have an abortion; black women are three times as likely. Black women obtain 24 percent of abortions in the US. Indeed, polls show that over 80 percent of African Americans support family planning, yet few are members of the prominent reproductive rights organizations.

Why? A look into our recent past shows that people of color have valid reasons to suspect the motives of predominantly white groups advocating for the single issue of abortion rights.

During the last century, the pro-choice movement, or the family planning movement, often dismissed or ignored concerns of women of color when they weren't problems for white women as well. Devastatingly, the repro-

The understanding of the concept of privilege and how privilege imposes itself is necessary to understand why is that racism and sexism are so strong in our societies, why is that we to fight for the "right" of getting jobs (not goods jobs, just jobs in general), why it is two or three times scarier for us to walk at night, why is that, even when economically would make sense to alleviate the tension around race and gender – our society is adamant in keeping those tensions alive and burning.

This elite benefits threefold from the system of World Capitalism – the system devised, planned and structure around the white male bourgeois privilege, a system that connects the different levels of exploitation in one single machine.

### Race

Different from others, I firmly believe that the structure of the World Capitalism could not do without racism and sexism. The reasons for the existence of this two can be slightly different but the end result is the same – the submission of the oppressed levels of the people to the elite of the capitalist society.

For the purpose of this analysis, racism and sexism shall be broadened to comprehend a multitude of other correlated subjects that are intrinsically

The understanding of the concept of privilege and how privilege imposes itself is necessary to understand why is that racism and sexism are so strong in our societies

paramount to their institutions of power to ensure the security of the 'invisibility' of the fact that the elite of the world is composed of one class, one race and one gender. This elite controls the levels of government and the levels of business. They are the church (the moral authority) and they are the creators of culture. They are the philosophers, the educators. They are too the most pernicious and dangerous group of people.

This elite has across the centuries used the divisions and social inequalities in society. In fact, they are the creators and the maintainers of this oppressive structure, and the sole beneficiaries of it. Through a structured and systemic misogynist, racist, homophobic, brutal capitalist protocol, they ensure the maintenance of their global empire and especially, the maintenance of their privilege domain over the majority of the people on earth.

It is, it always was, in the interest of that elite that we, the people, do not understand their affairs and could have no access to their domains. The institutions of race, class and gender are notably set to the advancement and comfort of these people and the exploitation of others.

This elite maintains nowadays a global system of exploitation, a structure that interlocks racism, sexism and "traditional" capitalist exploitation, which, for lack of a better word, I shall call World Capitalism.

Traditional Marxist and class struggle analysis have always had a very bad understanding of the race and gender – the concept that those two systems of exploitation were a "fruit" of capitalist society and would be eliminated when the class struggle is resolved fails to analytically criticize a culture based in racism and sexism – both of which came into the picture way before capitalism was around – and how the power structure of privilege does not have to be ratified by the police, the capitalists or even the State. Culture alone can be a catalyst of exploitation and submission, and the change and the complete revolution in the bourgeoisie social fabric cannot be done by simply taking the bourgeois out of the picture.

ductive rights movement of the past at times allied with eugenicists and other white supremacists in opportunistic political coalitions meant to further the abortion rights movement.

### **Understanding the Past**

Being pro-choice or a feminist today means having to acknowledge and transcend the racist legacy of collaborations between white feminists, conservatives and eugenicists who shared common ground on parts of the abortion issue. How we fight for reproductive freedom today must be informed by the reality that for many women of color, abortion is just one fight in a larger struggle of class and racial oppression. Unlike for some white or middle class women, the lack of access to reproductive freedom that many women of color face has more to do with the limitations placed upon them by their ethnic and class background than by the actual legal status of abortion or geographic availability of abortion clinics.

Early on, the Black community saw reproductive control as being an essential key to liberation, and they have fought for it since the times of slavery. Black women have been underground providers of safe and affordable abortions. Later, African American women organized with other women of color and brought tens of thousands to participate in rallies demanding an end to forced sterilizations.

Then and now, many feminists of color challenged white feminists who framed abortion rights as a woman's issue that was unconnected to other social injustices.

As Black feminist and activist, Loretta J. Ross explains:

Many Black women still do not see abortion rights as a stepping stone to freedom because abortion rights do not automatically end the oppression of Black women.

Sadly, the vital participation and intellect brought to the reproductive rights movement by women of color are noticeably absent from many white feminist accounts of history.

### **The Privilege of "Choice"**

Until recently, mainstream and preeminent pro-choice organizations have promoted a narrow view of reproductive liberty that focuses on the "right to choose" abortion. This can come across as sounding trivial and consumeristic. The language of abortion rights politics can also be culturally insensitive and alienating to recent immigrants and women who come from religious backgrounds- even those who support and get abortions.

Women of color have also been subjected to controlling and coercive reproductive policies and, as a result, many continue to distrust public health services and are more apt to view family planning programs with apprehension.

As Brenda Romney, an African American activist, explained:

"When our children were [white men's] property, we were encouraged to have children. When our children are ours, we are not worthy parents. Those are the messages, the background and the context of health care in general.

This is some of what Black women bring with them when they seek health care information or abortion services."

Therefore, many women of color feel that it is more central to their needs to demand for economic justice and healthcare- including reproductive rights- instead of focusing on the aspects of "choice" and availability regarding abortion and birth control.

The system of class and the European system of white dominance and colonialism fused to become one single straight brute force, a giant juggernaut that tramples over the working-class worldwide and its two legs are racism and sexism.

Let us be realistic.

While I work at Stanford University, serving food for the sons of the elite and the future elite, it is increasingly strange for me to realize that this elite sometimes has skin darker than mine, accent thicker than mine, visible cultural roots sometimes more apparent than mine. The strength in which this realization affects me cannot be easily described – it is an eye-opener and is a mind narrower, it is both an epiphany as it is of such an obscurity. This multicolored, multicultural bourgeoisie is always the enemy and sometimes the most unexpected and always undesired ally, which forces its "diversity" and its "oppressed situation" down my throat, in an obscene mockery of the plight of the workers of the world.

Let us be realistic.

Racism – white dominance – is not an American phenomenon. The "white race" supports a global system of racial inequality and prejudice where, worldwide, the white male has a hegemonic dominance. It is the new capitalist model, and it is the old. Imperialism is a stream that never dried because it is vital for the World Capitalism.

### **The World Elite – World Capitalism**

The capitalist globalization process that everyday kills and destroys the lives of millions and millions of people around the globe serves the political, social and economic agenda of a very well structured global elite. This global elite is composed essentially of capitalist white males, power-hungry and with no desire whatsoever of relinquish or divide power. It is

# Race, Gender, Class

## Structure of the Global Elite and World Capitalism

by Kapila

*Let's put one lie to rest for all time: the lie that men are oppressed, too, by sexism – the lie that there can be such thing as 'men liberation' groups. Oppression is something that one group of people commits against another group specifically because of a 'threatening' characteristic shared by the latter group – skin color or sex or age etc. The oppressors are indeed fucked up by being masters (racism hurts whites, sexual stereotypes are harmful to men) but those masters are not oppressed. Any master has the alternative of divesting himself of sexism or racism – the oppressed have no alternative – for they have no power-but to fight. In the long run, Women's Liberation will of course free men, but, in the short run, is going to cost men a lot of privilege, which no one gives up willingly or easily. Sexism is not the fault of women; kill your fathers, not your mothers.*

– Robin Morgan

I look at their faces, I see reflection and masks that sometimes repeat my own in a strange cyclic pattern of power. Because in here, I am but a wage-slave, condemn sweating and hurting for eight bucks an hour, forced to smile and accept condescend behavior from the all-smiling, ever merry elite of the capital. Out there, they might call me a brother, an equal. We are not.

### An Issue of Survival: Birth Control as Social Control

*Abortion was not openly discussed in the Black community because other survival issues were key.*

*- Lois Smith, an African American member of the Jane collective (a collective that provided safe and sliding scale abortions before Roe v. Wade passed)*

Eugenicists promote the idea that essentialist traits such as intelligence and criminality are biologically determined and can thus be eliminated or emphasized through the selective breeding or elimination of "pure" races.

The ideology of eugenics became applied public health policy in the U.S. during the 1960s and '70s. Industrial tycoons like the Rockefeller family funded it; prestigious universities studied it, and governors introduced legislation proposing the compulsory sterilization of Native American, black and poor women in order to "fight the war on poverty." In truth, these policies were aimed at decreasing the explosive political potential of minority populations and pacifying white fears of social unrest during a time of increasing militancy in the struggle for civil rights.

During the 1960s, family planning services became accessible for large numbers of poor women of color through federally subsidized programs like Medicaid. Although this was seen by most feminists as a victory, on the flip side, the government also began coercing Native American and black women on public assistance into getting State-sponsored hysterectomies by threatening to revoke their welfare benefits if they refused.

During the 1970s, it is estimated that up to 60,000 Native American women and some men were sterilized. Indian Health Service had a "captive clientele," since Native women often lacked access to services other than those paternalistic public ones located on reservations. In 1975, for every seven babies born, one woman was being sterilized. Shockingly, the IHS sterilization campaign was paid for entirely with federal funding.

Puerto Rican women were also sterilized at astronomical rates by U.S. tax dollars. During the same time, several Mexican American women were sterilized at a County hospital without much explanation or information. A national fertility study conducted by Princeton University found that 20 percent of all married African-American women had been sterilized by 1970.

Given that experience, it is no surprise that in the communities of color targeted by government-controlled depopulation programs, birth control and abortion were equated with genocide for years to come. Many poor women of color felt that they had been "tracked" toward sterilization and were outraged at having been denied the opportunity to have children in numbers of their choosing.

"While birth control was demanded as a right and an option for privileged women, it became an obligation for the poor," Ross recalled.

When women of color organized successfully for laws requiring the "informed consent" of patients undergoing hysterectomies in an effort to cut down on forced sterilizations, they had to do so often without support from mainstream white abortion rights groups- who were then too obsessed with their own narrow self-interest to see the broader feminist struggle at hand.

### **No Substitute for Social Justice**

Access to abortion and birth control do not exist free of social values. White people of all political motivations have supported abortion when it suited their interests and set the stage for years of racial tension and mistrust in the arena of reproductive rights policy. Today, eugenic ideas like "overpopulation" and biological determinism continue to influence public health and social policies that blame poverty, crime and pollution on the rising population growth of brown and black people- ignoring the root causes of social ills: unequal distribution of resources in a society deeply segregated by white supremacy.

mass action and organize the people who participate-the kittens action spreads the meme of organizing to create more organizers!

Thus, the movement becomes deeper.

With the help of baby-steps, we can see how the kittens action provides a powerful application of the meme of experience over symbolism, and a powerful tactic in helping us build a bigger and deeper movement.

### **Conclusion: Spreading Revolution**

For me, as an organizer and as a teacher, the biggest question I face everyday is: What can I do to get people to have experiences that transform and enrich their sense of possibilities? One of the things I've learned (and relearned many times!) is that this question is equivalent to the question: What can I do to transform and enrich my own sense of possibilities? As a religion teacher I had in college named Thandeka once told me, The inner and the outer are one.

On some days or at some moments I see the light and feel inspired, at other times it's enough just to get through the day without seriously wanting to hurt somebody or myself. Such is life.

Besides self-care, like walking or playing or staring at stars or fun personal stuff like that, one thing that renews my hope in a heartbeat, that allows me to smile and say things like "George Bush is good for America" to my friends and not feel like I'm telling a sick joke is this: remembering that I am just but a single thread in a huge and unfolding tapestry of liberation. Every single person on this planet has a role in weaving that tapestry. And everybody's got a unique thread to weave. The best and only thing I can do is weave my thread and get out of the way of people trying to weave theirs.

The revolution is now. The revolution is all the time. Welcome to the revolution.

cause later on. By taking a small action people's sense of themselves had changed, and they were much more likely to do other and bigger actions in the future, consistent with their changed sense of self. (This study and similarly interesting results from social psychology can be found in Robert Cialdini's *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion* and Eliot Aaronson's *The Social Animal*.)

This notion of getting people to do small things in order to make them more likely to do bigger things later on is known as baby-steps by organizers (and foot-in-the-door by sales people). It is a powerful example of the power of action in transformation.

The kittens action applies this notion of baby-steps on two levels, at the level of the wider public and at the level of the kittens themselves.

Firstly, in a kittens action, because the kittens are engaging the public, and not just holding signs or chanting in a crowd, they can get the people they meet to do things like write letters, sign petitions, put stickers on their cars, wear buttons, swear oaths, and a host of other token actions that will get the people who are not activists to move one baby-step in the direction of becoming activists.

Thus, the movement becomes bigger.

Secondly, by helping kittens have a baby-step experience as organizers directly and personally engaging the public to promote their cause, the kittens action helps the participants to see themselves as organizers. Thus the kittens action help create more organizers, more people who will be active and effective over the long-term at expanding the movement. These individuals will not only interact with the people they meet that particular day; they will go on to be more likely to interact with others they meet in the future-in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, in the supermarkets. In this way, not only does the kittens action do like any

A recent example of this phenomenon was the Norplant controversy during the 1990s. Norplant is unusual because it is a contraceptive that is 99 percent effective and can last up to 5 years after its initial administration. However, it requires the insertion of six matchstick-sized capsules under the skin of a woman's forearm. Although Norplant is expensive and can cause negative side effects including depression and irregular, heavy bleeding, public subsidies covered the costs for many poor women of color. Politicians framed the initial cost as an expenditure that could save millions of dollars nationally in the welfare costs it would take to raise the children of "irresponsible women."

Several states wanted to require mothers on welfare to use it as a condition of receiving their benefits. Debates ensued in the national media: "Can Norplant Reduce the Underclass?"

Commonly, women who suffered negative side effects and asked for their Norplants to be removed were denied and had to endure paternalistic, bureaucratic and controlling service providers.

### Hope Prevails

During the 1980s, feminists of color clamored louder than ever to be heard. Women of color gained in numbers as well as prominence within mainstream pro-choice organizations, and some assumed leadership positions. Reproductive rights groups put more energy into reaching out to people of color. Health activists of color broke through the "conspiracy of silence" surrounding abortion in their communities, framing reproductive rights as a human rights and healthcare issue. The first "March for Women's Lives" was organized in 1986. Ross, who worked with the National Organization for Women (NOW), was employed to find organizations of women of color to endorse this first national march dedicated to abortion rights. She reflects on the changes in the years since:



In 1986 Black women were skeptical about joining a march for abortion rights sponsored by what was perceived as a white woman's organization. Although all the leaders of the Black women's organizations I contacted privately supported abortion rights, many perceived the issue as marginal, too controversial, or to 'white.'

By 1987 NOW was responding more clearly to the voices of women of color.

By 1986, the annual march was endorsed by 107 organizations of women of color, and by 1989, "more than 2,000 women came together to form the largest delegation ever [at the time] of women of color to support abortion rights.

Women of color were responsible for expanding the focus of the abortion rights movement. Their influence can be found in the shifting language used by mainstream groups – from one centered around abortion to one emphasizing reproductive rights. The work women of color had been doing all along in their communities to support reproductive freedom slowly began to be recognized and at times supported by mainstream feminist groups. Most importantly though, women healthcare activists of color continued to push for more and more justice- for more social justice in the pro-choice movement and more feminism in their communities.

Here in the year 2004, at the eighth March for Women's lives, let's reflect on the mistakes of the past and the injustices of the present. We still have a long way to go. Let us constantly strive to bring about more instances for increasing numbers of people to experience self-determination, true democracy and justice in their lives. We must not let our vision of liberation be obscured by political compromises that promise only a few of us legitimacy and victory. We must all be free simultaneously, or none of us can truly be free.

instructions could be overcome. (I once chatted with a woman who was a self-made life-planning counselor. She told me a bit about neurolinguistic programming—a self-improvement approach that uses individually chosen gestures to symbolize moods or mindsets that we want to reinforce in ourselves. Something for further study...)

So we've considered some weaknesses with symbolic approaches to social change. What about experiential approaches?

An example of the power of action and experience in personal transformation comes from the field of social psychology.

There was study conducted by a team of social psychologists in a suburban neighborhood. They posed as 'community workers' and asked the residents whether they would be willing to place a billboard in their front lawns as a public service. The billboards would say 'Please Drive Carefully.' Of course, the vast majority of them said 'hell no!' to the request – 85% of the people in the study's control group in fact refused to do this public service. In the test group, however, in the same neighborhood, with demographics exactly the same, 83% said 'yes' to the 'community workers' strange request.

One group was 85% 'no' while the other group just the reverse, 83% 'yes.'" Why such a dramatic reversal in response between the two groups of residents? The only difference between the two groups was that, two weeks previously, another set of 'community workers' had visited the test group, with a smaller and much easier request: Would they be willing to place a 3-by-3 inch card in their front window with the words 'Please Drive Carefully'? When given this token request, the almost all of the people said 'yes.'

Because the people in the test group had already done a token action supporting the cause (placing the card in their window), they were much more likely to do a bigger action (putting up a billboard in their yard) for the

(Additionally, personality typologies such as the Myers-Briggs and learning theories that look at multiple intelligences and learning styles suggest that symbolic-oriented learners – as opposed to concrete-experientially-oriented learners – form a privileged minority within our schooling system, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels.)

Recognizing the problematics with this kind of power is difficult, especially as many of us, including me, have found a kind of power to fight oppression through our facility with language and symbols.

Yet there is a paradox. On the one hand, we want people to take action and take charge of their own lives, and not be lead by whatever images they're fed by the elites, or whatever myths they're told by charismatic people around them. On the other hand, the most ready tool for social change many of us have is our own influential voice (be it spoken or written or performed or illustrated). (Eugene Debs, socialist presidential candidate in the early 1900s, illustrated this paradox when he said, "I don't want you to follow me or anyone else. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, somebody else would lead you out.")

It is essentially the question of how to promote revolution without promoting oneself. This question must be recognized and grappled with those of us who envision a society without elites of any kind.

The history of revolutions for social equality creating new elites and ruling castes shows the difficulty of overcoming this conundrum. Clearly, in these instances, symbolic revolution, articulated by revolutionary elites, won out over experiential revolution grounded in the unique perspectives of all members of society. Top-down won out over bottom-up.

Perhaps the conundrum can be cancelled by an approach that combines actions with symbols in some sort of dialectic or transformation? To the extent both the actions and the symbols are controlled by each individual, elitist divisions of labor between those who instruct and those who follow

# A Critique of Gangsta Culture

by Suneel Mubayi

I see it all around me in my neighborhood – the people who I claim to be fighting for; the people whose oppression fuels part of me; the people whose rights I want increased. The young people I want to join in struggling with, to ally. But wait, there's something wrong. I don't see them struggling; I see them conforming. They have no meaning or idea of what oppression is, even though they're enacting it and internalizing it in public.

Every time I walk past them, they're loitering on the streets, on street corners, on the bumpers of cars, in clusters, like gangs. They look at me with my pale skin, smooth, silky dark hair, colorful clothing and piercings and give me long stares. They hoot and catcall at me. Sissy-ass white/honky fag wanderin' in the wrong 'hood. They have no notion or idea of "the struggle" or "the movement." For them, politics means who's the best gangsta on the block; who's got the coolest clothes and chains; the most money and pussy.

A few weeks back, I walked into this Russian-run jewelry/piercing place on Broadway and 145th to get a third piercing on my ears. The guys who run the place, two slightly built, pale Russians, have already exoticized me in my previous visits by directly associating me to the Kama Sutra and wanting to know whether I have a copy, only because I say I'm from India, even though according to them I don't look it. Once you say you're from somewhere else, that's all that matters. These guys basically make a

living by pawning and selling jewelry to the aspiring young would-be gangstas of the neighborhood, apparently ripping most of them off and cheating in the process. Their mannerisms are very deliberate, exaggerated, and put-on, from the constant use of "my brother" to the gangsta embrace and the hand on the heart. Of course, they deal with even their most trusted customers through bulletproof glass and an entrance door that must be buzzed to open. So anyway, as I was getting my piercings done, which were \$10, there were other customers negotiating the price of gaudy gold chains in thousands of dollars, in a community where I wonder who can genuinely afford that. In walk in a group of young teenagers, mixed sexes, but definitely in their younger teens. They all crowd around a showcase to my left that has more gold chains displayed and one of them starts exclaiming, "Oh, man! That's gangsta! That's gangsta!" So few words, yet revealing so much. Obviously, they've learned from somewhere or someone at a very young age, that being a gangsta is something to look up to, aspire and revere. I wanted to scream at them, shake them and tell them how they were perpetuating their own oppression and how the establishment wants them to be gangstas precisely so that it can lock them up in jail for the rest of their adult lives. But something stopped me; something said, they'll have no idea what you're talking about, they'll laugh at you; look at how they're already giving you weird looks with your long hair, multicolored clothes and multiple piercings. All these feelings and signals leave me heartbroken and not knowing what to do to help the people I claim to be fighting for.

Please. This is not some pissed-off white liberal guilt. Neither is this an attempt to say that minority folks, particularly Blacks and Latinos, have themselves to blame for the oppression they suffer. This is not some grandiose attempt to generalize and categorize every youth in Harlem. These are just observations I make, walking to and from home, every day. Even though I've been living here for more than a year, I hardly know anyone even in my own building, other than polite greetings. But when I'm walking around outside, or doing stuff within the building like laundry, even

learning experience. Did it happen because someone made an especially convincing argument to you, or told you a particularly compelling story? If you're like most people, chances are your most powerful learning experience was precisely that – an experience, something that happened that you were a part of.

In the realm of social change as well, the symbolic approach has limitations.

One weakness of the symbolic approach to social change can be seen in the diluted and in some cases reversed. Policy victories of the civil rights movement, for instance; although *Brown v. Board of Education* (and following rulings and legislation) ended de jure segregation in schooling, de facto segregation continues. Fifty years after *Brown* the racial gaps in education persist, mainly because the racist attitudes of whites in America have not changed that much.

Another weakness with symbolic approaches to change as compared to experiential approaches has to do with long-term vision. Is our vision to continue a culture where politics is a spectacle, a parade of rhetoric and images, controlled by an elite minority of privileged and highly-trained image-makers, story-tellers and symbolic analysts (be they from the left, center or right)? Or do we want to create a culture where politics is not seen primarily as something you watch, read about or listen to, but rather as something you do, something you experience?

This is a really difficult thing to imagine. It is perhaps a universal of human culture that the leaders and chiefs tend to be the ones who are the most verbally astute. Throughout human history – and evidence suggests even in the days when we were all hunters and gatherers living in small nomadic bands – political life has been disproportionately influenced if not dominated by those who were the most adept at words and images. Is it even possible to have a political culture that doesn't have this sort of built-in status hierarchy?

organizers (and teachers). This question should be on the mental front burners of anyone who cares about changing the world.

There are essentially two views on the problem of getting people to learn or change. One view is that learning happens primarily through symbols – words, texts, stories, images, etc. The other view is that learning happens primarily through experience – things that happen to us and things that we do. (These two views are really part of a more complex continuum. For instance, consider role-models, people in our lives that serve as examples for us to follow. Are they experiences? Are they symbols? Both? Neither?)

Organizers (and teachers) who take the symbolic approach focus on making convincing arguments, telling compelling stories, showing people evocative images. Symbolic learning is the dominant approach taken in traditional schooling, and it serves important functions – the memorization of facts, the communication of the experiences of others. Also, within organizing symbolic work serves a vital function-background knowledge, raising critical questions .

The experiential approach to learning focuses on hands-on projects, field trips, apprenticeships, experiments, student-centered learning. (One example of student-centered learning is Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy: it is all about privileging the 'subjective' experience of the learner over the 'objective' official knowledge of the teacher.) In organizing, the experiential approach focuses on helping people reflect on their own experiences, and pushing people to have new experiences-to expand their understanding of an issue and their relationship to the issue.

Although formal schooling is dominated by symbolic learning, experiential learning is almost universally recognized among educators to be the most powerful approach.

Pause for a moment to think about your most powerful and memorable

if I don't interact, I'm always observing. My eyes and ears are always perked. I guess little pitchers have big ears, right?)

The youth I describe, again, do not represent a gross generalization that the reader might think I'm attempting to make. What they do represent is the visible face of the youth of their community, what an "outsider," who's not "in" or "down" with them might see as (s)he walks or drives through the neighborhood. The fact that they do represent the visible face is something very important, especially for all the youth of the community who aren't so visible.

They portray variations of what is commonly known in American popular culture as the gangsta mentality. If they do not seem to quite succeed at it, they certainly do not have any lack of aspiration or enthusiasm to become gangstas. Here is the point that must be made – their visibility has everything to do with their aspirations to gangstahood.

These youth are visible and become the de-facto representatives of young Harlem because American popular culture, the mass media, and the establishment have made the gangsta identity. They have created it, seizing on certain alternative politico-cultural trends in the African/Latin-American communities and forging this identity of the gangsta, simultaneously elevating it on a very high pedestal, one that is near impossible to reach for the youth it calls to. They have then made it acceptable for this identity to be portrayed in their own channels as being representative of all minority urban youth. So one channel is spewing lyrics and images glorifying murder, rape, drug dealing, looting and lavish wealth as somehow being the only path to success for these youth; another channel is simultaneously reporting how "gangsta rap" is encouraging violent and delinquent behavior amongst these very same youth, and the apparently pressing need to "crack down" and "get tough" with these kids. It wouldn't be uncommon for these channels to have common owners, stockholders, financiers, backers and investors. But what is the effect it is having on these kids? On one hand, they are constantly told that the only way they can be successful in life is to become a gangsta or a

gangsta's bitch; on the other hand, as they become more and more deeply immersed into this culture, the very same establishment starts enforcing draconian laws and regulations on them, and criminalizes them without ever trying to show them that one can be successful and happy in life without being either a gangsta or Colin Powell. The cops and the judges will listen to our whining and tell us they don't criminalize the kids; they are already criminals and need to be dealt with before they get out of hand. The news produc-

...the kids who  
are perpetually  
loitering  
outside are  
objects or  
pawns being  
kicked around  
in a power  
game

ers, MTV execs, rap artists and record producers, etc will tell us they're just doing whatever makes the most money for them for the longest time.

The result is that the kids who are perpetually loitering outside are objects or pawns being kicked around in a power game, seen as criminals in the eyes of the rest of the world. One never sees any cops stopping and telling these kids to go buy a book, or guide them toward more meaningful social interactions, or just talk to them. One neither sees any cops

ordering them to disperse immediately, even though there are "No Loitering" signs in bold around most buildings. This isn't a coincidence. They are allowed to loiter perpetually and hang around, so that they can self-affirm their identity as gangstas to the cops, who will then trawl the streets in their police cars and go around "busting" random people, subjecting them to humiliating searches and arrests in public on mere suspicion of behavior or activity associated with the gangsta mentality. The same cops will then go home and find their kids being drawn to the same thing.

what organizers do – getting people to do something, getting people to take action. Ultimately, it doesn't matter if someone joins a particular organization, as long as that person is doing work to expand human liberation, and as long as they understand that their work is part of a larger tapestry of transformation, a tapestry that includes the work I and people like me are doing.

This is a critical point so let me take time to be clear here. The impact and legacy of left social movements (e.g. the civil rights movement, the anti-nuke movement) cannot be measured simply by the policies that are passed or by the organizations that get created. After all, policies can be subverted and organizations can ossify. The main value of left social movements comes from the transformative actions they inspire from millions of unnamed and unaffiliated people, people whose lives are changed by something they are a part of, people who take what they learn into the rest of their lives. The main value of social movements comes from the way they deepen our consciousness and shift our culture.

Any tactic or strategy connected with a vision for liberation must say yes to the following question: Does this tactic or strategy lead to transformative action? Does this tactic or strategy organize?

It is clear that the kittens action, like any mass action, does organize people, at least its participants. Participants step outside their normal scripts of silence and anonymity in the face of the culture of complicity, and they do something about the ills they perceive. Further, by directly engaging the public, kittens can organize many, many others as well. More on this to come.

How do people learn? What makes people change?

*Meme 5: experience over symbolism*

What makes people change? This is the fundamental question facing all

*Meme 4: Organization vs. Marginalization*

Anarchists who are into organizing are often critical of those who represent anarchism largely as a subculture or lifestyle. Anarchist organizers argue that lifestyle anarchists marginalize themselves in their safe subculture niches and thus become invisible and irrelevant in the wider movement.

The marginalization anarchist organizers worry about is not just a problem for anarchists – it's a problem for the left as a whole. (N.B. I know some of y'all don't like the word 'left.' Sorry for any semantic inconvenience. What I mean by 'left' is very broad: the people who believe we need more social equality, more sustainability, less hatred, and more liberation in the world.) For most of us on the left, the longer we see ourselves as part of the left, the more we feel estranged and distant from regions of culture that used to be familiar to us. We spend more and more time with other progressives and activists, and less and less time with that 'conservative brother-in-law who just doesn't get it.' We shift our sense of community as we shift our sense of self. This is quite normal.

However, if we on the left are going to win the public to our side of the struggle, we gotta do more than complain about the people who don't know what we know, or the people who aren't activated like us. We gotta figure out how to teach people what we know, and we gotta figure out how to activate people. In short, we gotta organize.

A lotta people assume that organizing means organization-building. Perhaps this comes from the (correct) notion that systemic change requires institutional change, and the (incorrect) notion that institutional change requires mass organizations. Or perhaps it comes from Marxist-Leninist party-fetishism. Who knows?

When I talk about organizing I don't mean getting people to join an organization, although that can be a part of it. By organizing I simply mean doing

And what about the faceless masses, those youth who refuse to accept this manufactured criminalization that looks so cool, who refuse to conform? We must remember that there's no black and white, no two distinct groups here necessarily, but shades. There could be kids in the gangs who long not to be there, who long to be productive, creative, and successful, but are just afraid of the backlash by the cool ones for daring to be different. There could be kids forcibly kept at home by paranoid, scared parents who don't want to see them spend the rest of their lives in jail under racist Rockefeller drug laws, who are nevertheless blinded by the gangsta illusion. And then, somewhere, are my crowd – the friends I've never met, but whom I talk to all the time.

I hope my Black and Latino friends and comrades, especially those in Harlem, will read this and try to understand my perspective. I hope they will understand that I'm not being racist here and not at all attempting to stigmatize. I am trying to find reasons for the perceived image of young people of their communities in popular culture as being unreformable delinquents and criminals; why that path looks so seemingly attractive and how it has so much to do with what the media and the establishment creates; what it says is OK and what it says isn't; how it can say both about one thing simultaneously for its advantage and to oppress. I hope these comrades will give me their feedback and point out any places I'm incorrect or going wrong. I will be the happiest of all if my analyses based on my own perceptions are proved to be categorically wrong and incorrect. If they are, it shows the media and the pigs haven't got to absolutely everybody. If they aren't wrong, then I'm afraid that we as far left radical people of color, have a hell of a lot of work to do, and as our respected Anarchist Panther comrade says, a lot of painful growing, learning and changing ahead as well.

**Journal Entry**

I what? You what? Feeling lonely? Trying hard to find polemical analysis to

figure out why you're feeling lonely in a suite with 9 other people? The closer you are to them, the more isolated you feel?! How does that make sense? Me, the seasoned New Yorker with all the older friends, the older ladies, suddenly on campus and with her (I will stubbornly use the pronoun of my choice) age group – feels lonely. Feels jealous as she sees clumps of excited, giggling happy teenagers walking, no bouncing, past her. It acutely touches on that nerve that has always been so sensitive inside you, babe, that nerve that holds companionship and abandonment and friendship and partnership. You know inside you that you're years more mature than them, that you made not just a fist of it alone in Harlem for a year, but a stable home.

Are the most brilliant of us destined to be alone? Why does everyone seem to have bosom buddies already that they're hanging out with all the time? It touches on all those memories that can never be erased, the memories of abuse before awakening, through suffering, when as a frightened little girl inside a boy's body who understood things too well for her own good, you looked around you and everyone seemed to be coping, everyone seemed to be stable and connected to each other except you. You established yourself in a world outside of this gated campus when this gated campus seemed to big and complicated a world for you. And you never knew then that in a year, you would be a blooming, beautiful flower of a boy-girl becoming man-woman in the infinitely bigger world of the whole city. You've combated racism both inside and outside of you, expunged the colonialism and casteism from within, and not so politely alerted the rest of the world of much of the same present in it. You found out about Orientalism and Eurocentrism and dealt with those, no sweat. Those are serious characteristics in one's mindset to deal with, babe, and you did it with no problems.

You learned the hard way how to deal with problems that manifest themselves in the form of people. From the racists to the establishment pigs, to the infatuations to people who needed to be avoided but tempted you so

The kittens action promotes a culture-shift on all the fronts I've just mentioned.

First, it gets folk to transgress the taboo about talking politics in public. The demise of this taboo would have deep and far-reaching consequences in our society. No longer would the American public be content to limit its sophisticated analyses and passionate debates to sports, pop stars and movies. No longer would our roles as consumers or workers eclipse our roles as community members, as citizens (documented or not). When social reality ceases to be a trivial show, when social reality is something that we have important things to say about, then we can move from being spectators to being creators.

Second, by breaking through not only the taboo against politics but the taboo against purposefully engaging strangers in dialogue, kittens renew their sense of interdependence and connection with the real people who make up the real society around them. Conversing about heartfelt stuff with people outside our normal circles makes it hard to reduce people to tokens in a theory, it expands our sense of our own humanity, and it moves us out of alienation.

Third, the kittens action – just like other anti-authoritarian forms of mass action (e.g. affinity group convergences) – engages participants in a form of collectivity where every individual is a key actor and decision-maker, and where the power of the group is directly dependent on the power of the individuals, and where the power of the individuals is directly connected with the power of their team and indirectly (especially at the final reconvergence/sharing stories step) connected with the power of the overall action. We learn to create liberated forms of collectivity through practical experience.

How do we move from the margins into the center?

collectivity as requiring a weakening of our individuality. We come to see individuality and collectivity as locked in a zero-sum competition. To be a 'strong individual' means to ignore the collective, and to be a 'good team-player' means to efface one's own needs.

How can we create social groups that both enhance and feed off of the power of the individual members? How can we create liberated forms of collectivity?

In reaction to the pervasive hierarchy that informs our social groups, and because they cannot think of alternative structures, some anarchists espouse doing away with complex forms of social organization altogether. Some pine for an idyllic past where everyone lived in small egalitarian bands and complex divisions of labor did not exist. However, the majority of thoughtful anarchists make a distinction between the legitimate authority of experts who we choose to listen to for advice or situational leadership, and the imposed authority of bosses, rulers and elites.

But knowing in theory that legitimate and non-coercive leadership is possible doesn't mean that it's always clear how to make it work in practice. A huge stumbling block for efforts to create egalitarian social arrangements is that the vast majority of people's socialization has occurred primarily through hierarchical groups and institutions. One of the powerful and far-reaching impacts of the global justice movement's mass mobilization efforts has been the exposure of many, many people to effective egalitarian forms of decision-making (e.g. affinity groups). These people certainly take their experiences into other aspects of their lives and their social change work.

A question to ask about any tactics (or strategies) for social change is this: to what extent do those tactics (or strategies) help prefigure or bring about a desirable and necessary change in the way we live our lives, a desirable and necessary shift in our culture?

much. The people who hurt you when they wanted to nourish you; the people who broke your heart and nearly broke your spirit. But nothing broke you. You realized that there is no heteronormative idea of a woman – that you were the woman who broke that notion that occupied your mind – you made yourself the woman who can be smooth and sensitive and soft, and at the same time, tough as nails and durable through the roughest weather. You broke the barriers that heteronormativity had set up between male and female, masculine and feminine, and showed by your own example that there could be the woman who could fight for herself without losing any of her femininity.

Now suddenly, you feel small, young, and fragile again. The thought of classes tomorrow and a schedule scares you and makes you feel weak, when the racist pigs of the NYPD couldn't do that after even having you cornered and alone. It's just the memories, babe, it's just the memories of when you were young. In recalling, you regress into the past, leave the present and that's why you start feeling crumbly again, because the little boy-girl lives in you only as a memory, not as a current and tangible reality. That makes it a little more scary and harder to grasp, but it being a memory as opposed to an existing identity makes you safe from vulnerabilities, but you are not that person anymore, so that little child will not think for you, and its weaknesses will never affect you. Definitely, you will get upset when you think of how much you suffered as him/her, and the memories will be vivid and frightening like nightmares, but you will never be her ever again. Sometime, when I feel like it, when I feel ready, I will write in detail and specifics about my suffering. The incidents, from the earliest to the latest to the ongoing; the abusers and predators (with special mention to brainless children in all the schools I was put in and the bitch who appointed herself as my mother/colonizer); the mistakes I made; and all the trauma I went through. It's too much right now – the thought of delving so deep into the filthy muck makes me shake and unable to type.

People tell me come on, Suneel, everyone's suffered, everyone's been hurt,



and so, and therefore, there's nothing special about your pain and your pain. Wrong. There are people out there who'd have suffered less than me, more than me, or as much, in similar ways or different. But the fact that I choose to express them, the fact that I have the ability to write about them like this, analyze them, and not just stuff them under my exterior until I explode and injure everyone around me, like I see most others do, is special. And if others choose to do so as well, then that's special too. Don't believe what the capitalists and the pigs and the wolves tell you. There is room enough on this earth for all of us to be happy, successful, well off, and well known. Because if we all know each other, and understand each other, we'll all be famous and we'll all feel we're getting enough attention from each other. And there is no such thing as the human face of socialism, because socialism is all human, all one hundred percent of it, and anyone who thinks otherwise and still calls themselves a socialist are only living a more contrived and subtle version of machismo and militarism. I didn't mean for this to touch so much on my sexuality, and my sexual awakening, but it is so present in everything I think and do, from my daily existence to my radicalism and sociopolitical thought to the way I relate with friends and with lovers too.

I've endured the taunts and the doubts. My dad telling me that feeling like I'm a woman inside is just another source of confusion, and that I'd do better with less confusion in my life. Wrong, dad. I'd do worse if I tried to be something I know I wouldn't be happy being. The worst combination of my grandmother and my stepmother telling me that with my current identity, straight girls would be turned off because they want men, gay men likewise, and lesbians too because they want women who have women's bodies (I might still have one yet!), and that I'm sexually frustrated! Turns out she doesn't know all the girls out there. My womanhood endures.

Often I'm plagued by self-doubt – am I doing this just to attract attention? Am I taking being a stage-whore too far off the stage? I answered it myself when I expressed these doubts to my friend Erica (thank god for her) and she

help or a reliance on other humans. We strive to be independent, so we tend to repress, not express, many of the feelings that arise from our basic needs. Hence, for these reasons and others, instead of communication, dialogue, and understanding, we have advertisements, announcements, and arguments.

How can we create dialogue that deepens our understanding of ourselves and each other?

Furthermore, our economic system actually depends on people feeling disconnected and unable to rely on others: individually wrapped lifestyles make us bigger consumers and more fearful workers. Ways of relating that are about mutual aid and interpersonal connection outside scripted roles – insofar as they are not marketable or commodifiable, and insofar as they interfere with workplace discipline – get deemphasized in our corporate-mediated culture. (The historical loss of the commons has been well-documented, and continues to play out in contemporary struggles over privatization.) The acceptable roles – consumers, workers, sports fans, et al. – get scripted for us. As we spend our time wearing masks not of our own creation, we feel less in control of our own lives, and a sense of powerlessness (or alienation) becomes pervasive. The alienation leads to greed and fear: Greed to beat out our competition (i.e., fellow humans), and fear that the competition will beat us out. The business and the government elites use greed and fear to increase the power they wield in our lives. And the alienation grows...

How can we stop this cycle of alienation, fear, and greed?

Finally, most forms of collectivity in our society – teams, companies, public agencies, etc. – are organized as clear hierarchies, with bosses, managers and followers. Very rarely do we have opportunities to work in groups that are organized in an egalitarian way, where the experiences of each participant are equally important. Thus, we get used to seeing

become stronger organizers.

One visionary implication of the kittens action is thus revealed: building a society where everyone sees themselves as creators of social reality, with lead-not just supporting-roles to play.

There are other ways I believe the kittens action fits within a larger vision of consciousness change. I'll explain more below.

What needs to change in our culture?

### *Meme 3: Transformation as Culture Shift*

Political structures and economic structures not only shape culture, but they arise out of culture (cf. feedback – everywhere). Social transformation of the kind people like us wanna see will require more than a changing of the guard-it will require a shift in our culture, a shift in our everyday habits of thinking and acting.

In what ways does our culture need to shift? There are many, many ways I can think of, and I'm sure you can, too. I'll list a few here that are of particular relevance to the kittens action.

First, mainstream U.S. culture has a bizarre taboo against talking politics in public. Our media primarily focus on personalities, trivia and tragedies. Social reality is mainly a show – one with us as spectators, and whose key events seem beyond our control.

How can people see themselves as creators of social reality?

Second, we have a dominant culture that squashes dialogue on deeper levels. For most people in our society, it is not cool to seem ignorant or confused, so asking questions is uncool. It is not cool to show a need for

asked me the most fundamental question of all: what does being a woman mean to you? I thought for a few moments and answered: being a woman means simply that. Being a woman. It's a feeling, a sense that's hard to express in words, because to me, being a woman means having an identity that is feminine, but without any preconceived notions, ideas, or mindsets about what a woman is or what a woman should be. In any sense, be it in terms of looks, actions, habits, social roles, or anything else. Everybody feels like there is some kind of 'ideal' man and an 'ideal' woman too. Well I reject that. I am a woman with no conditions and no strings attached. And no presumptions too. You may find me rather androgenous, deviant, and genderbending. I like to dress up, be pierced, and be 'effeminate' or 'girly.' But those are just tastes and habits, like preferring cookies 'n cream above butter pecan and not to be confused with my sexual identity and preferences. Yes, I am all those things, or rather, I possess all those qualities. But I claim the right to choose my ultimate sexual identity beyond my traits, looks, qualities and features, even if it is different from the sexual organs I possess. And whether that's feminine or hermaphrodite or my desired blend of masculine and feminine is my choice. You can love it, be OK with it, be uncomfortable with it, be revolted by it, or leave it. But it's my choice. Being a woman means being a woman.

So just ride through the fear and the sense of isolation, babe. You've settled in a world much bigger than this. And nobody says you have to settle here. Just like dad (thank god for him too) said, you're not here to socialize, you're here for an education. And those who party nonstop and think they're being really bad/causing lots of trouble don't know that they're playing the exact moronic role that the system wants them to. You and your friends know what causing real trouble means. And you know it's a good thing, something to be proud of, feel noble and just about. Look beyond the social butterflies and the people who pretend so much that they're just pretenses of themselves. You're about to grasp knowledge, analysis, understanding, and ability. And with it will come your destiny, and the revolution.

# Free the Land

## Social Justice and the Environmental Movement

by Ewuare Osayande

*The following is the edited transcript of the keynote address given at The Climate Control Conference, February 21, 2004, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.*

Since we are dealing with the question of environmentalism I thought it might be appropriate to introduce my sharing with you by quoting from the most celebrated scientist of the previous century, being that environmentalism relies heavily on science. The person being Albert Einstein who himself was not just concerned with theories of relativity but was a committed socialist and used his popularity and influence to speak out against oppression. He says, "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us - universe. A part limited in time and space where we experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us restricting us to our personal desires into affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures in the whole of nature in its beauty."

The struggle on the part of the environmental movement is the struggle to free itself from that delusion that separates itself from the rest of the struggles against oppression on the planet, as well as the rest of the planet itself. This optical delusion, this way of viewing the world through

action would be forming a Copwatch group to show up and closely observe whenever folk get stopped by the police.

Since any tactic has implications for strategy and vision (cf. feedback – everywhere), when evaluating a tactic we should ask ourselves: Does the tactic (or its related strategy) work to change power relations and consciousness in a fundamental way? If the answer is yes, great. If the answer is no, time to rethink our tactics.

How does the kittens action work to change power relations and consciousness? In some ways the kittens action is closer to direct action than the typical march-rally.

At a march, most participants do not directly engage the public; they are merely part of a crowd passing by waving their signs. The immediate target of a typical march-rally is actually the media, and only indirectly the public. Organizers draw media attention in the hopes that the media will then communicate their message to the public. In contrast, at a kittens action, the participants interact with the public directly; they become the media themselves and take their message directly to the people.

Also, participants at a kittens action (kittens for short) must think and make decisions on the spot – where to go, who to engage, what to say, how to respond – whereas few such decisions need to be made by marchers following the crowds on a pre-planned route. And these interactions happen involving many, many more members of the public than the relative few who happen to see a march go by. Their autonomy combined with the widespread nature of their action means kittens pose a greater challenge than marchers to the taboos about how to behave in public.

Finally, kittens interact with lots of people who may not automatically agree with or be as passionate about the issues as them. Thus they work more than marchers in challenging their own fears of rejection. They

like, "Naw, it wouldn't make much of a difference. Other people – the middle managers, the staffers, the lieutenants, the assistants, etc – would all just move up to take their places. What would need to change is the system, the consciousness."

To fight the power (and win), it is not enough to get rid of the people who are privileged. We must change the consciousness that the current power relations reflect. I'm reminded of the marvelous title of an anarchist pamphlet I've had on my shelf for the longest but that I've never gotten around to reading: *You Can't Blow Up a Social Relationship*.

A characteristically anarchist approach to taking action to challenge power relations is direct action. Direct action means taking action to directly address a problem or get your needs met, without asking the powers that be to do it for you. Direct action means fighting power by asserting your own power, as opposed to asking that others with power treat you kinder or gentler. Although many activists don't emphasize this, direct action isn't just about fighting power: it's also about changing consciousness. People who take direct action to improve their lives end up by having a greater sense of control over their own lives. By taking action they change the world, and by changing the world they change themselves. (This is another example of feedback-everywhere. Also, see Meme 5 for more on the role of action in shaping our sense of self.)

Some people confuse direct action with civil disobedience, especially after the dramatic protests involving mass arrests that we've seen in the global justice movement since Seattle. Though direct action and civil disobedience can overlap, they are not the same. Civil disobedience means breaking a law in order to get justice – either directly in the moment or indirectly through a moral appeal to other people. Direct action means doing what it takes to get immediate justice – whether the action is legal or not. Consider the issue of police brutality. An example of a civil disobedience response would blocking the streets in order to highlight the issue for the public. An example of direct

rather white, western and elitist eyes ... this is more than a call for inclusion. It is a call for making the movement contextually aligned with the ideology and the ideologies of oppressed peoples' struggles for liberation.

There is a profound reluctance on the part of activists in the environmental movement to embrace a social justice platform that is accountable to the lived reality of people of color worldwide who live in poverty and under oppression due to the legacy of European colonialism and American imperialism.

According to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the World Health Organization, Global warming is already responsible for the deaths of some 160,000 persons a year already. The study concluded that children in developing countries are the most vulnerable to the impact of global warming. So here at the outset of our conversation I want to make it clear that we are already dealing with a circumstance that the environmental movement is prepared to address if it would only heed the call.

Malaria, diarrhea, malnutrition, from droughts and floods are all the result of climate change brought on by the industrialized efforts of the West. Robert Watson, former chairperson of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated, "Almost any change in climate will reduce agricultural productivity in the tropics and the sub-tropics. Climate change is a developmental issue, not an environmental one."

In other words he is saying that, given the way in which global warming impacts the planet, the areas of the world that get impacted the most and experience the greatest chaos, crises and disaster as a result are those areas are all too often underdeveloped. We are not talking about Europe. We are not talking North America, Canada, Russia even. We are talking about the tropics and sub-tropics, Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America. Nations that are under-developed and thus don't have the infrastructure to respond to the threat of global warming. And so disease is rampant. Malnutrition, diarrhea, all of these issues that in developed nations all you

got to do is go to the hospital and get a pill.

For this reason social justice cannot be an afterthought for environmentalists. For in truth it lies at the very heart of the movement itself, of the struggle to save the planet. Save the planet from what? Save the planet from whom? From what? The answer could be from global warming, from the effects of what occurs in what is called the greenhouse effect. From whom? From multinational corporations who pollute our air and governments that allow these corpses to get away without restrictions in most cases particularly when they set up shop in communities of color.

The question becomes and the question that lies at the heart of the environmental movement is how did this occur? How did multinational corporations gain access to the lands and lives of so-called Third World peoples over the globe? This is a question of colonialism. This is a question of the history of conquest on the part of Europe. Those people are still oppressed. They still suffer the legacy of colonialism and national oppression.

But here is the problem. See we can talk about theory and ideology but when the rubber meets the road, when we really get down to it – the very corporations who are involved in some of this mess fund many of our organizations in the environmental movement.

So the question becomes if you are really about doing the real work then you may in fact end up sacrificing a large part of your funding. I've had conversations with a number of activists over the years. I have been involved in this struggle for some decades now, and over the years we activists understand and appreciate that if you are going to deal with truth, if you are going to deal with the root causes of oppression and suffering then you are going to need to find alternative sources to fund your work.

And history speaks to this. I will share how. Earlier I spoke about Robert Watson, who was the former chairperson of the UN Intergovernmental Group on Climate Control. He was removed from his post by an alliance

Why is this way of thinking so pervasive? There at least three reasons for the popularity of this idea of power: 1) It provides a kind of rationalization for resignation-'We have good reason to feel hopeless! We're powerless for chrissakes!'; 2) It results from internalized oppression-resistance becomes inconceivable when we see ourselves as powerless; 3) Our concepts work metaphorically. The commodity concept of power arises via metaphorical extension: Power is something we desire and that we negotiate in social transactions, and thus it is like a commodity.

The problem with this scarce commodity concept of power is that it can lead people to make bad strategic choices in their social change work, and it can lead to perceived and therefore manifest powerlessness. For example, radical social actionists often criticize liberal reformists for solving social problems in a way that reinforces the power of the oppressive social forces that cause the problems to begin with. By begging the master to throw you a bone, you affirm the master's power over your life. To the extent this criticism is true, it is the liberal reformists' assumptions about the 'powerlessness' of the people they want to save that is to blame.

A thought experiment I like to give people when it seems like their understanding of power is too absolute or commodity-like is this: *Imagine you could get rid of the top 1,000,000 power people in the world-you know, the CEOs, the high-level officials, the presidents, the generals, the corporate boards of directors, the biotech wizards, the movie moguls, etc. Imagine you could just snap your fingers and boom! they would all disappear without a trace.*

After their twinkling eyes tell me they've gotten the picture, I then ask:

*Ok. So the rulers of society are gone. Now what happens next? Social liberation? The struggle's over? We won?*

After some moments of consideration, they usually will say something

vision. This corollary of feedback— everywhere — the unity of tactics, strategy and vision — is embodied in the classic anarchist understanding that our means (tactics/strategy) must harmonize with our ends (vision).

Thus, the kittens action is not only a tactic for mobilization, to be used or not as expedient, but it also implies a class of compatible strategies for transformation, and a class of compatible visions of the society its practitioners would like to create. Again, the kind of strategy and vision implicit in the kittens action will be made more clear as we look at the five other memes.

How do we fight the/for power?

*Meme 2: Power as a relationship (rather than a commodity)*

Power exists only in the interaction between people. Although the power relationship may imply different roles—the 'powerful' and the 'disempowered' — that relationship only has reality because of the participation and the acquiescence of each participant.

This principle has been recognized by generations of diverse social theorists and social actionists (e.g. Hume, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Foucault, and Biko, to name just a few) who have long argued that the power of an oppressive regime rests on the people's obedience to that regime. In the words of Steven Biko, "The most powerful tool in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

Despite this long tradition of nuanced and dialectical thinking about power, many people, including many on the left, still tend to think in absolute and static terms when they ponder the nature of power: the elite or the privileged are 'powerful' while the oppressed and the marginalized are 'powerless.' Power for them becomes like a scarce commodity: some people have it while others don't.

between Exxon, Mobil and the US government because of his outspokenness, because of his willingness to place the issue on development. He was ousted because he went on record stating that the people experiencing the heaviest impact on global warming are poor and oppressed.

The question for the environmental movement is: Are we going to try to cooperate with corporations? Or are we really going to begin to try to challenge the corporate structure in a way that truly redresses the problem toward the benefit of the majority of people who suffer, not just those of us who live in the most privileged generation in the history of the planet.

The corporate response is often to kill the messenger. For activists of color all over the globe the term kill here is not meant as a metaphor. That is actually what happens. The threat of death and the terrorism witnessed and visited upon communities of color that seek to respond to the reality of corporations coming into their communities, setting up plants, polluting the air, the soil is real.

I want to share two examples of this. Just for the sake of time we just got to deal with two. There are plenty more. Many people are aware of the activist Ken Saro-Wiwa of the Ogoni people in Nigeria and how he was executed in '95 for representing the interests of his people. Many folk are aware of the activist Chico Mendez from Brazil who was also killed. Both killed by corporations. Both killed with the backing of their respective governments. Both killed with the funded support of the US government. There is a connection here that we as activists can't get around. Their lives become the litmus test. I am not saying that we have to put ourselves in front of bullets or put ourselves in the hangman's noose. But at the same time what about their lives becomes instructive for how we ought to be engaging this work?

The sad thing is and this is my personal criticism. It ought not take somebody's death to cause that community's struggle to gain access to

the media. It shouldn't take someone having to be imprisoned for years before activists in the West catch wind of the worry and begin to talk it up.

That's a problem again of the lack of network, the lack of an international outlook on the part of activists in the West who are the ones with the most access, no doubt, no question. When you listen to their stories, when you read their writings, you'll understand that for people of color throughout the world, those in so-called third world countries, particularly, the environmental struggle is not simply about saving trees. It's about saving people. It's about freeing the land. It's about liberating the land. There is an acute awareness on the part of activists throughout the globe outside of privileged nations that our land has been robbed from us. That is why the pollution is occurring. We lack control over the very land we live on. And understanding that, walking with that analysis, we realize that we will never change the condition of our environment until we are able to liberate the land, until we are able to get these corporations off our land.

That is why in the case of the Ogoni in Nigeria they tied their struggle against Shell with their struggle to political rights. It was not simply about getting Shell out of Nigeria. It was also coupled with the struggle to gain parity politically within the structure. But those of us here in the West who take what we believe is democracy for granted, we don't understand and appreciate that.

In Brazil the struggle was about gaining land rights. These were small time farmers. These were people who lived in the forest. They had no contact to the world per se. They were comfortable with that. They were fine. Along comes some cattle herders and they wanted to tear down all the trees so they can make land into pasture so their cattle can eat. So Americans can buy beef.

I read a study just recently that said that the fact that people buy beef has had a greater impact on global warming than humans themselves, than human consumption itself. Meaning that cattle eat more than we do and

The standard view of the philosophy of reductionism is that a whole can be understood simply by understanding its parts. Classical physical science is the child of reductionism – for example, the search in physics for the smallest building blocks of matter. In reaction to the limitations of reductionism, holistic approaches to knowledge emphasize relationships and wholes – parts only can be understood in a particular context or environment.

Feedback – everywhere is the idea that reductionism and holism are both true, but only partially. Parts create the whole and the whole shapes the parts. There is mutual influence between the various levels in a complex system, a dialectical cascade between the micro and the macro.

For example, it turns out that in the brain not only do the things we sense, perceive, or experience inform our concepts, and shape our moods, but that our concepts and moods in turn shape what we perceive. Have you ever misinterpreted a friend's innocent remark? Then you know what I mean.

In the social realm these contending perspectives – reductionism and holism – play out in debates between rugged individualist 'conservatives,' and social constructionist 'liberals.' (A lot of contentiousness in our society actually seems to arise from these same clashing views on the relationship of individuals to groups.) Feedback-everywhere allows us to transcend this duality: not only do individuals create society, but society creates individuals.

As I mentioned before, a common criticism of anarchists is that we are all action without theory, tactics without strategy. A corollary of the feedback – everywhere principle provides adequate response to this criticism: the unity of tactics, strategy and vision. Although it is axiomatic among folk who wanna be smart planners that vision determines strategy determines tactics, it is rarely recognized that the chain of effect runs in reverse as well: what we do today (a tactical choice) shapes our path for tomorrow (strategic possibilities), and the unfolding of that path shapes our evolving

to create and promote tactics whose long-term effects are similar to those of the kittens action if our vision for a more liberated and just world is to be realized. What exactly the long-term effects of the kittens action are will be clearer as we proceed.

What's the connection between tactics, strategy and vision?

*Meme 1: Feedback – everywhere*

Maybe it's because my first intellectual passions lay in the sciences and mathematics, but I often find useful metaphors for thinking about how people, social groups and society work coming from fields like mathematics, biology, and complex systems theory. For example, I've found the biological cell with its semi-permeable boundary – selectively and flexibly allowing in some but not all outside influences – useful in thinking about how an evolving culture or social group interacts with other groups or cultures.

In thinking about how society as a whole functions, one useful metaphor is the human brain. Like society, the brain is made up of multitudes of specialized yet adaptable, highly interconnected, dynamically developing yet historically shaped, semi-autonomous units. In the brain these units are neurons, while in society they are people.

In a complex system such as the brain (organisms and ecosystems are further examples of these sorts of systems), there are various levels at which one may examine the system's dynamics. These levels fall along a spectrum from the micro – the realm of individual parts – to the macro – the realm of patterns and relationships among parts. For example, in the brain there are neurons (micro level) and there are concepts (macro level). Whereas small numbers of neurons may be involved in a processing a particular sense datum (for instance, recognizing the color green), large collections of neurons are involved with more emotional or conceptual work (for example, appropriately recognizing a green traffic light).

their waste contributes more to global warming than ours does. And they are being fed so we can feed on them. Because of our consuming drive there are whole populations of people in South America who are being removed from their land. And are being killed if they refuse to get off.

We got to make the necessary connections. It is not enough to call for a boycott of Shell. It is not enough to stop eating meat. When their blood, Ken and Chico's blood comes all the way back to the White House. We can talk about the corrupt Nigerian government. We can talk about the corruption in the Nigerian government. But who made the corruption in the first place? What does US foreign policy have to do with any of this? Plenty. And so our struggle as environmentalists here has to be about charging the government responsible for the crimes and atrocities that occur all over the globe wherever American interests are present. And we have to support the indigenous people's struggle to liberate their land.

Malcolm X, who was assassinated this night back in '65 himself gave a number of addresses here at Harvard, stated in his speech, "Message to the Grassroots," that, "Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice and equality." The environmental state of the Ogoni people, the environmental state of the Mapia people from whom Chico Mendez's folk come from in Brazil will not fundamentally change until they receive justice. And that justice cannot

**...we will never  
change the  
condition of our  
environment  
until we are  
able to liberate  
the land**



occur ultimately until they are able to liberate their land. We have to understand this. We have to understand that there is a relationship between Bush's war in Iraq, Bush's so-called axis of evil when the evil starts here at home.

See what many fail to understand is that if you don't have money you have little to no defense in our times. And that can be made in a very general way even in terms of what I am talking about here about oppressed peoples across the globe. If you are poor you have no defense. And the sooner that we who are more privileged begin to understand or appreciate that fact and create a movement in alliance with that reality to remedy the same, the sooner we will begin to see true progress. Until that occurs we're in trouble.

This next quote I am going to share with you is from Ken Saro-Wiwa. He is talking about Shell and its relationship to what's going on in Nigeria. He said, "Shell has waged ecological war in Ogoni since 1958. And ecological war is highly lethal, the more so as it is unconventional. It is homicidal in its effect. Human life, flora, fauna, the air fall at its feet and finally – the land itself dies. Generally it is supported by all the traditional instruments ancillary to warfare – propaganda, money and deceit. Victory is assessed by profits. And in this sense Shell's victory in Ogoni has been total."

Over the 39 years of exploitation at the hands of Shell some 30 billion dollars in profit Shell has accrued in the Ogoni region alone, which is only 3% of the total oil production in Nigeria. That's a billion dollars essentially a year since Shell has been in Nigeria. Yet, in spite of all this production and profit, the condition of the Ogoni people remains ridiculously sad. No running water. No electricity. Yet the corporation can come in and make that much money and not have any obligation to the people whatsoever.

Shell's profit motive is largely responsible for the repression of Nigeria's democracy. It is that factor that leads to the corruption of the government

community, not just warm bodies to fill the streets or hold one sign in a sea of signs. Imagine the impact of 5,000 activists spending an hour or two throughout the city having conversations with 50,000 or 100,000 people!

### The theory

One criticism often leveled at anarchists by certain segments of the left – in particular Marxists – is that we are all tactics and no theory. I vehemently disagree with this criticism. The reality is that anarchist practice usually has strong theoretical underpinnings. The problem comes with articulating those ideas in a way that non-anarchists can understand.

Before we continue, there is a term that I use that may be unfamiliar to many readers. It's that weird term that appears in the title of this essay: meme. (It rhymes with seem.) It was coined by zoologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*. It was taken from a Greek root meaning 'imitate.' Memes are units of cultural information such as recipes, ideas, songs, social conventions, fashions, gestures, rituals and sayings. Memes are to culture what genes are to biology. Like genes, memes replicate, mutate, spread and die out. Just as genes powerfully shape the form and function of biological organisms, memes shape the form and function of cultures and societies.

In the rest of this section I will give you a sense of the theoretical basis for and the visionary implications of the kittens action. I will do this by explaining five key concepts – five powerful memes that, taken together, may serve as tools to shift how we think about and do social change work. In explaining these memes I will show that the kittens action is not merely a tactic as it's commonly understood – a choice of action to be used or not as expedient. The kittens action carries within it both a strategy – a long-term plan of action and a vision – a place we want our strategies to take us to. I also hope to show that whatever one thinks of this particular tactic, there is a sore need for anarchists in particular and progressives in general

Next, people went out in teams of two to five. Some went to supermarkets, others to gas stations, and others to bus stops. People were out for about an hour. (From the agenda we put in the email you can see we'd planned for a longer time outreaching, but, shockingly, we were behind schedule.)

When the teams returned we had a debriefing session. The energy was palpable. Folk talked about how exhilarating it felt to approach total strangers in the streets and talk politics. Folk talked about some of the amazing and interesting people they'd met – for example, one guy who is not a typical 'activist' but who organizes his buddies every year to donate SUV-loads of food to homeless folk on Skid Row. Folk talked about how most of the people they met were actually pretty open to chatting and happy to receive info on alternative media. One guy mentioned how he realized how difficult it was to judge people by the way they look or dressed – an older guy who he'd assumed would be a Bush-lover was actually pretty critical of the war and complained about all the tax breaks going to the rich. One woman said how now she feels more confident, so that next time she's in line at a grocery store she'll be less afraid to talk to people in line next to her.

We did another POP! the Revolution event the following month, with similar experiences reported by a new set of participants. One complaint was that our leaflets didn't have enough info on local resources to help people in need of specific help: How to move more from talking to action?

Although the POP! the Revolution event was more like a workshop than a mass action, it is essentially a mini-kittens action. With more participants – hundreds or thousands instead of a few dozen – a mass kittens action would likely include many forms of outreach to engage the public, from various sorts of leaflets and surveys to street preaching to street theater and interactive art. My hope is efforts like POP! will help popularize the idea of the kittens action, so that more mass action organizers will think in terms of getting folk they mobilize to be organizers, outreaching in the

and the denial of democratic rights. See, here is a clue. We don't need to look overseas. We don't need to go over or across our borders to see the corruption cause it is happening right here. In America those who are the poorest and not white, it is in their communities that corporations set up their toxic waste dumps and pollution centers that produce major respiratory problems for the poor and of color in our own country. The term environmental racism coined in 1982 grew out of the learning that the most significant factor in the siting of hazardous waste facilities nationwide was race. Ask yourself where do the corporations in this community dump their trash? Where does Harvard dump its trash?

Just as in the case of the Ogoni people, the Mapia people and other oppressed peoples, majority Black cities like Camden in New Jersey and St. Louis, Missouri and others, have been robbed of their political rights due to state takeovers. The argument made by state governments used to justify this anti-democratic, in fact fascist act, is that the political structure in those cities have been corrupted. No one bothers to ask how those structures got corrupted.

The same stuff going on in Nigeria is going on here. So people get denied political rights because corporations have corrupted the politicians. And then you get other corrupt politicians coming in saying we are going to take over. Why? Not so that democracy can be reestablished but so that more corporations can come in and set up shop. That's what is going on right now in Camden. It is what is going on in St. Louis and other places throughout the country where the majority populations are Black and Latino and poor.

The struggle is about the land. The struggle is about the political struggle and rights, self-determination of oppressed peoples. Whoever owns the land determines the quality of the air, thus the quality of life. According to a recent study done forty of the world's poorest countries face losses of more than a quarter of their food production as a result of global warming

by the year 2080. Those forty nations are home to 2 billion people on the planet. That is about one third of the world's population. The future is now!

Here is another example. I just happened to hear this on NPR one night about the Inuit of Alaska and how they found large quantities of DDT in the breast milk of the women. Now most folk would ask the question, "how did they get that stuff there?" The scientists were dumbfounded. They would think that these folk farthest removed from the sprayers that go over crops would be the last people to be at risk. But it is due to the wind patterns. They had higher quantities of DDT than Canadian women because of the wind patterns and the climate in that region around the North Pole.

So people who don't even have a hand in the exploitation suffer as a result of our desire to live comfortably. Something is wrong. Something is wrong I tell you. There is a growing divide between rich and poor nations, between the industrialized and the underdeveloped nations, between the West and the rest. The question for the environmental movement is: What side are you on? You must become radical. You must radicalize your movement to place it in alliance with those who suffer the most. They're not looking for a handout. These aren't people who are ignorant of the issues. These are folk who are very aware, who live in the reality you've researched.

The environmental movement at its most authentic state is an anti-imperialistic movement, is an anti-racist movement. So if you as an environmentalist are not demonstratively resisting and fighting imperialism, if you as an environmentalist are not demonstratively resisting and fighting racism then I question their commitment to environmentalism.

I am going to leave this on your head and hearts. I have worked with a number of groups represented here and others. And the issue always comes up and hopefully may come up during the Q and A about diversifying membership. Many predominantly white organizations want to make themselves more aware of the issues and concerns of people of color, to

*Activists from all over LA coming together to join forces for a day of schmoozing and organizing in the community, to turn traditional protest into community engagement, and to have fun. A new way to help the LA left feel more connected.*

*agenda in brief:*

*2:00: PREPARE – welcome to the community, intros, brief training, form street teams*

*3:00: OUTREACH – street teams fan out to surrounding grocery stores, gas stations, connect with the public, ask critical questions, share resources*

*5:30: PARTY – food, music, open-mic, performance art, share experiences*

*This is the first of what will become a monthly event, held at different locations all throughout LA, highlighting our various struggles*

*If you are interested in teaming up with us, or to help make this and future events successful, then spread the word, and join our email list!*

At that first event about 50 people showed up. Many of the people present were not regular activists; just progressive folk who were fed up with feeling powerless and wanted to do something.

After intros we did a training on how to talk to people, on how to approach strangers to get their attention, on what to expect in terms of people turning you down or ignoring you, on how to focus your efforts on people willing to dialogue and not waste time debating people who wanna be haters, etc. We gave everyone a list of questions to ask people about community issues, and a stack of informational leaflets with alternative media and community resources.

forces around LA could come together on a more regular basis and do concrete work together.

Many were in agreement, so some of us organized the first event, called POP! the Revolution (POP= People Organizing & Partying), to happen in January. Here is the email announcement we sent out:

*Ready to see LA-area activism taken to the next level?*

*Ready to connect with diverse activists working on various fronts in the struggle for social justice?*

*Ready to stop feeling angry and start celebrating and building the culture of resistance?*

*Then you are invited to:*

*P. O. P. ! t h e R e v o l u t i o n P a r t y*

*People Organizing & Partying*

*\*People: because to win we don't need to convince those who stand against us – we simply need to activate those already on our side*

*\*Organizing: because it's time to move from the margins and into the center*

*\*Partying: because revolution needs to be fun!*

*Saturday, January 17th, 2004, 2 p.m.*

*Echo Park Methodist Church*

*1226 Alvarado, just north of Sunset*

*Sounds intriguing... In a nutshell, what is it?*

make your organizations more friendly and cooperative, but are experiencing trouble. It doesn't seem to work. Your initiatives aren't making progress.

I challenge you to study, to reconsider your ideology, the way in which you go about movement, the way in which you go about struggle, how you develop propaganda, the kind of language style and usage that you use. Because I am telling you and I am telling you the truth. There are people of color who are prepared. There are people of color who are already engaged in this very work. They may not consider themselves environmentalists. They consider themselves mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, living in urban wastelands, concerned about the lived reality of their people. They don't need a title. They don't need an organization. They are doing the best with what they got which ain't much. I challenge you to reimagine your movement not in leadership but as following the direction of these activists of color who exist on the frontlines of the movement itself.

The problem is that all too often is that white activists tend to believe that they know best, tend to believe that you all know better how to engage struggle than people actually living it themselves.

The number one thing, then I am going to bring it to a close. The number one thing you can do for the environment this year is to beat Bush. I am not aware of how many people here are a part of the Green Party, or whatever your politics are, whether you are Republican, Democratic, Independent or Libertarian or whatever. But I am thankful that Nader decided not to run for president this year. [Within a few days of this address, Nader would announce that he was again going to campaign for the presidency; this time as an independent – go figure!] Not just because we have a better chance of getting Bush out of office cause that vote now will hopefully go to the Democrat to make sure that happens. But it is also because there is a greater issue here. And it's an issue that is going to stay with the Left or the movement, if you will, until we remedy it. And that is this: When Nader ran in 2000, there was a split between the progressive

vote that partly enabled the fiasco that led to Bush being appointed the president. My point is that had there been some kind of coalition among progressives that cut across race and class lines we might have been able to avoid that. The problem with the Green party is no different than the problem with the environmental movement and other majority white movements in this country. That it is bogged down by a racism that even the most enlightened, the most concerned still have trouble addressing. Given that, we all lose out.

We have to begin to enter into dialogue as different organizations, as different communities, as people just concerned about the future of not just our country but the world. We have to do that with the same amount of fortitude and passion that we engage our particular issues. That is our only solution. Me personally, I believe that we need to radicalize the Democratic Party. No, I do not suffer from the delusion that we will be able to wrestle it from the clutches of the corporate structure. But if we were able to develop a progressive radical wing that is vocal, that is clear on the issues, that knows how to use the media to our advantage, then we're better able to capture the imagination of the American people. And that could be the starting point for the development of a third political party that truly represents the misrepresented and those of us that are not represented at all in government. The Green Party is not that kind of party. The propaganda machine of the Republican Party is well money and very sophisticated but it is not undefeatable.

So I'll close up with this little thought. You know, the people responsible for why global warming is such a problem is the rich. Not just because they own the corporations that pump pollution and toxins into the air, but also because they eat the most and thus have the most gas. All those bad emissions in the air aren't just coming from the smokestacks but from the asses of the upper classes.

offer in this essay. I call it the kittens action. I choose this term because of what it evokes. Kittens (cats) are different from sheep in that, because they are not herd animals, their movements are not easily controlled or constrained by those who would domesticate them. If you've ever lent an ear to a frustrated meeting facilitator, school teacher, or soccer mom – or if you've ever been one – you will probably recognize the phrase "It's like herding kittens!"

The kittens action follows a very simple recipe:

**Step 1.** Converge.

**Step 2.** Form teams, share materials for outreach.

**Step 3.** Spread out.

**Step 4.** Engage the public.

**Step 5.** Reconverge.

**Step 6.** Share stories and celebrate.

The kittens action is similar to what some people call an organizing blitz, though blitzes usually have organization – specific goals (like signing up new members), and I've never seen this sort of tactic used at a mass action level involving people and groups with diverse interests. Also somebody told me once that in Mexico City they did something similar with teams called brigadas.

### **The practice**

There was a gathering of diverse organizers and activists in December 2003 to discuss community and autonomy in LA. The event was organized by folk who'd been inspired by their exposure to Zapatismo, such as the people at Casa del Pueblo. At the end of that meeting one of the requests was for a way for the diverse people and organizations present to continue to connect and work together. I suggested putting together a monthly kittens action, perhaps with a different theme each month, so that various

Now, change the channels.

A second mass action. Same city. Five hundred (or 5,000) people gather in a park. You're there with them. Organizers circulate around with handouts on how to approach strangers and talk politics in public and suggested locations. People share leaflets, surveys, stickers, street-theater scripts, chalk. You all form teams of 2 to 5 people. The teams – hundreds (or thousands) of them – fan out to locations all throughout the city. (Supermarkets, gas stations, post offices, shopping centers, laundromats, bus stops and movie lines are among the favored spots.) At these locations the teams talk to people about the issues, ask questions from a survey, hand out stickers and leaflets to those who are down with the cause. A few even perform theater or create chalkings on busy sidewalks. After an hour or two of connecting with people on the street, you all reconverge for a rally. Folk share stories about how it felt to engage with the public – the challenges and the breakthroughs. Great speakers, rousing performers, old acquaintances, drums and chants. You even spot a reporter or two from the local media. You and your friends go home, confident that you did your part for the movement for peace and justice today.

Questions for you to consider before moving on:

- Which action has the greatest impact on public awareness?
- Which action is more likely to empower people to stay active in between the mass actions?
- Which action is more dependent on the corporate media to get its message out?
- Which action spreads more of a practical understanding of what it takes to build a movement among the people who participate?
- Which action creates a deeper sense of community among participants?
- Any other differences you think noteworthy?

The second mass action is the practical tool – a tactic – that I promised to

# Sheep Dreams and Kitten Memes

by Shawn McDougal

My goal in writing this is to help expand the movement for human liberation which many of us understand ourselves to be a part of. First I'll explain a bit about the vision that drives me in my social change work. Next, I will offer one key practical idea for movement-building. I will follow the idea with a concrete example of how I and some comrades have put the idea into practice. Then, I will share some key concepts useful not only for explaining the practical idea, but also for developing and evaluating virtually any tactical plan for mass liberation that movement-builders might consider.

The ideas I present here are not new. I am a synthesizer; I like to take disparate ideas and fashion them into a synthesis that is my own. Feel free to take the pieces you desire and synthesize them in a way that makes sense for you.

The title of this piece was inspired partially by a leaflet I created a couple of years ago called "Mobilize like kittens, not sheep," and partially by the notion that culture is fundamentally about patterns of activity that we continually (re)create. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I hope the title makes sense by the time you finish reading this.

## The Vision

What is my vision?

A world where everyone understands that they are creators of social reality, rather than spectators... a world where everyone feels worthy of the best in life, and no one feels subordinate or less worthy than anyone else... a world where our interactions bring out the best in us, rather than the worst... a world where our institutions are nurturing and life-affirming, rather than domineering and life-negating... a world where our hopes overcome our fears.

(Note that in describing my vision I do not mention the usual list of 'isms' that so many of us rightfully oppose: capitalism, racism, heterosexism, patriarchy, adultism, elitism, etc. I believe these dehumanizing social patterns are really symptoms of more fundamental problems: We are unconscious of our own power, and we are ruled by fear. To the extent we realize that we do not merely inherit the world but that we shape it, these destructive and fear-based patterns will be replaced by creative and hope-based patterns – at every level, and in every facet of our lives.)

### ***What drives my vision?***

Growing up in an underclass Black family in Los Angeles, I experienced the effects of racism and classism – external and internalized – around and within me. (I call my family underclass and not working-class, cuz most of the time nobody had a job – it was mostly welfare and petty hustles.) Seeing my older brother marginalized for being gay, and seeing my single mom have to hustle and get money from her boyfriends for us to survive ('Can you throw me down some change this month?'), taught me about heterosexism and patriarchy. Also, seeing people risk jail-time just so they could have something that looked nice taught me about the power of conformity and internalized oppression in people's lives. Seeing (and much later, experiencing) drug addiction taught me about the often self-destructive power of escapism.

Success in school shaped me to be a young elitist – the kid who was

gonna make it out of the ghetto. That same success got me a scholarship to an elite boarding school in New England where I began to see the levers of elite power close up. I realized that the people in power were no more deserving than anyone else. Eventually, time spent as an exchange student in Brazil helped me see the global nature of class society, patriarchy, white supremacy and the other 'isms' I had come to despise, as well as the crucial role America plays in the global system. The people I met in Brazil also reminded me of the amazing power of the human spirit, and our capacity to create connections and joy even under miserable social conditions. It was in Brazil that I realized that I could not escape from or ignore the problems of the world, but that I had to live my life fighting them.

When I was in college I met people who called themselves anarchists. I saw that we had the same basic attitude on a lot of things – especially challenging authority and conformity – so I realized that I was an anarchist, too.

### **The idea**

Let's do a thought experiment. Two actually. Ready?

First, imagine a mass action in your favorite city. It's a march/rally. Five hundred (or 5,000) people gather in a park. You're there with them. While people stand around waiting for the action to begin, organizers circulate around with extra signs, chant sheets and whistles. You all line up and walk along a route – maybe a mile or two – where city officials make sure traffic is cleared. Or, maybe you couldn't get a permit and you're walking along the sidewalk. Along the way folk are chanting, singing, drumming, waving signs, a few even passing out leaflets to lookers-on. After an hour or two of marching, you reach the destination point. There is a rally. Great speakers, rousing performers, old acquaintances, drums and chants. You even spot a reporter or two from the local media. You and your friends go home, confident that you did your part for the movement for peace and justice today.