

Interview



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Q: How does what you’ve witnessed at Occupy Oakland compare with other climate events you’ve been at?

A: There’s a difference in the amount of energy and excitement because it takes a different kind of energy to sustain living together and occupying a space, and really feeling like we’re to some degree putting our bodies on the line in a sustained fashion. That has been really exciting to witness. While a lot of folks in Oakland have been politically active, but a lot of folks in the Occupy movement in general are getting active for the first time, or at least first time in a really big way, and that’s exciting that their first point of entry is taking a huge stand and commitment.

Q: Have you been surprised by how much success Occupy has had thus far and how much coverage it’s finally getting and how it’s spread so far and wide?

A: It is surprising, but not overly so. In a way, it’s so clear—you have people facing some of the worst economic environments in so long. We’re seeing more seniors graduating from college going home to live with their parents than ever before, and people are losing their homes. When we’re facing conditions such as this and we have the benefits of the Internet and the ability to mobilize people in a distributed fashion and when there’s such a common message that resonates, which is, it’s not very in-depth or coherent, that we are the 99 percent, they are the 1 percent and we can’t allow this to continue. So on a very basic level it’s very easy to understand why it’s taken off, but there’s still a question of why this is taking off versus other things.

Q: What organizing lessons can the climate movement draw from Occupy?

A: Right now it is meeting people where they’re at, which is the basic rule of organizing. Where people are at right now is they are losing their homes, they’re not able to get jobs and people aren’t able to survive, it’s really that basic. In the climate movement, we need

to meet people where they're at, maybe not just talking about how there is this global crisis, where we could potentially not live on a planet that sustains us because of the conditions, but meeting people where they're at, where it's like we do have this global crisis on our hands, and how crazy is it that our politicians and economic leaders are not addressing it in a way that provides economic opportunity. It's meeting people where they're at and the hot issue right now is the economy—but you can't have an economy if you don't have a planet to live on.

Q: Occupy appears to be a multigenerational movement, but it looks as if a lot of the energy is coming from youth. Why do you think that is?

A: With any social movement, it is often fueled by the passion and ideas and commitment of young people. The Occupy movement is no different than that. The climate movement is also not that different. Young people are so concerned we're not going to have a future, we're not be able to live on a planet that looks like the one we grew up in.

Q: What are the ramifications of Occupy for the climate movement--does it provide opportunities or does it take away momentum?

A: I think people need to go out to the Occupy spaces and get involved and build alliances and partnerships. What I see with the Occupy movement is that there aren't many coherent demands; there aren't as many demands that are concrete that will change economy from the way it is now. At the same time because there are people in so many different cities, that was the perfect time to be demanding specific things. I think the climate movement should not go in and co-opt what has been happening. The Tea Party was co-opted by Republican corporations who exploited it and funded it heavily. I don't think we would do that, but we should be building partnerships and pushing the process since it's an open process to include more specific demands that can really capitalize on the fact that we have thousands of people in the streets camped out, making huge personal sacrifices, to send a message to our representatives. I think that's really critical.

Q: What's your assessment of the media coverage of Occupy, including the role of the alternative media.

A: People were talking a lot about the media blackout during the early days of the Occupy movement, but I wasn't tuned into the mainstream media during that time, and I was seeing Occupy all over the place, on blogs and Facebook. Seeing the photos has been really really powerful. It was sort of similar with the Tar Sands Action (the two-week sit-in in August at the White House), where people were posting their photos, powerful images that give life to what's happening on the ground, and through new and social media those photos were able to go places and touch so many people and inform them as to what was happening to make sure that thousands of people all over the country and all over the world were bearing witness to what was happening. It raises the question of where the mainstream media is and why aren't they covering this.

Social media and new media have helped put the mainstream media feet to the fire—'no, you actually have to cover one of the biggest things that is happening for my generation.'" This happened with the Tar Sands Action. We did have a few mainstream media folks from the beginning that were covering the action, but we were able to get even more by having our own stunning visuals and video to showcase that this was a movement to be taken

seriously and that they needed to get down there and cover it. It's critical to be continually documenting your own movement and to make that a priority.

Q: Are there are media lessons coming out of the Occupy movement?

A: The media lesson is, we've known this for a while, that how one visualizes and feels a part of a movement is by being able to see what you're a part of and how it's growing.

We've known this for a while and it's about organizations and the people who fund these movements to make that a priority. These are conversations that we as Project Survival Media have a lot is about the value of the work we bring to the movement; it is absolutely critical in terms of people feeling urgency and understanding why people are going to get arrested, why people are putting their bodies on the line, and why they should be there to join them.

Q: Any other takeaways from what you've been seeing with Occupy that's relevant for climate?

A: I'm just ultimately excited that the two movements can continue to build off one another and build those partnerships and relationships and be more unified. I was just at a panel at Bioneers, and there was an elder talking about the 1960s and how when she was an activist there was always the question of whose issue was more important, who was more oppressed, which effort had more legitimacy and where should you put your efforts based on that. What she was saying was that when she looks at our generation and the movements that are springing up, she doesn't see that sort of delegitimizing of the other. I think it's important to build off of that; we need to continue to build that unity and align our efforts and partner in a way that is meaningful for everybody. Hopefully we can through Occupy, which is more of a platform for all these issues, find unity there.