

OCCUPY: A Culture of Resistance was Born in 2011: the People United in an Independent Movement

In 2012, the Real Conversation will be in the Occupations, while Corporate Candidates have a False Conversation

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The Occupy Movement that developed in 2011 profoundly shook the foundation of the 1%. Almost instantly a new form of political power was created, all truly grown from the grass roots, and handed the 99% some REAL political capital for the first time in decades, and installed the Occupy Movement as a force to be reckoned with. Next spring promises to see more growth of this movement as the economy continues to stagnate and the government continues its dysfunction. Already, the Occupy Movement is showing its political independence: protesting candidates from both parties who are part of corrupt money-based elections. The irrelevance of the political debate, primarily between two-corporate approved candidates, will become more evident as the voices of the people grow.

How We Got Here

No doubt every occupier has their own story, this is ours. On December 16, 2010 we joined with Veterans for Peace and other organizations in an anti-war protest. The theme of the protest was [developing a 'culture of resistance' in the United States](#). Many of us spoke that day about the need for resistance, perhaps none more clearly than noted author Chris Hedges who said "Hope will only come when we resist the violence of the state. . . . those who resist here today with non-violence are the last thin line of defense between a civil society and its disintegration." That day 132 Americans, mostly veterans, were arrested standing against the corporate-military state that the United States has become.

The next day, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vegetable vendor in Sidi Bouzid, a poor town of 40,000 people located in the center of Tunisia, [set himself on fire](#) in front of the municipal building seeking redress for police abuse. Bouazizi's death highlighted an unfair economy that created a life of poverty and misery for many in Tunisia, similar to many around the world. Police corruption and brutality that enforced the unfair economy sparked his suicide. His mother told [TIME Magazine](#) that his death "was about his dignity. Dignity before bread. Mohammad's first concern was his dignity." His death ignited a rebellion that [toppled](#) the 23 year old autocratic rule of Zine Ben Ali in less than one month.

The Tunisian revolution sparked revolutions that became known as the Arab Spring. Most notable was the still-ongoing Egyptian Revolution which began on January 25th receiving wall-to-wall coverage in the United States. [Al-Jazeera reported a 2,500% increase](#) in web viewership during the revolt, with more than half of the upsurge coming from the U.S. By February 11th the long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak had resigned. The Arab Spring led to a European summer, especially notable in Spain and Greece – these rebellions also continue.

While these uprisings were occurring, the United States was already in revolt but for the most part it was not covered by the media. The media did take note of the occupation of the capitol in Wisconsin, and to a lesser extent in Ohio and Michigan, but those were the tip of the iceberg of a widespread revolt. There were protests multiple times a week on a range of issues including closings of schools, tuition increases, mountain top removal for coal, austerity measures, health care, banking, foreclosures, failure of big business to pay taxes, climate change, war, torture, Bradley Manning – the issues and actions go on and on. There is a sampling of protest videos in this article, [It Can Be Done. Now is the Time](#), published in July to convince people that the time was right to successfully occupy Freedom Plaza.

Even though all of this was occurring, those of us organizing the occupation of Freedom Plaza were still not sure if the American people were ready to stand up against the power of concentrated wealth that had corrupted the government. On [July 13th when Ad Busters](#) published a blog calling for “20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months,” we were not sure whether this would detract or be synergistic with the Occupation of Washington, DC. After a brief discussion, we quickly reached consensus and on July 19 [endorsed the action](#). We decided to do all we could to help it succeed, issuing a [joint statement of endorsement](#) with one of the OWS organizing groups on August 8. Organizers from Occupy Washington, DC went to the assemblies in New York to participate in making plans for OWS. Many of us were there on the first day and some stayed until our occupation began on October 6.

While 20,000 did not show up on Wall Street, a small but persistent group of people did sleep in the park and show commitment to the cause of holding the wealthy accountable. This combined with New York City police abusing their power and pepper spraying non-violent protesters who were already in their custody; and then making mass arrests of 700 people on the Brooklyn Bridge, led to an explosion of [hundreds of occuppies throughout the country](#). More than 1,200 Occupy camps sprang up quickly around the nation and the world. This [TIME “Person of the Year”](#) protest awakened Americans to their common economic struggles and the power of their solidarity.

The Occupy Movement had gotten the attention of the nation. The first few months had a noticeable, even dramatic, impact on the public discourse, but the first few months were not without their problems. Occupies were not ready for dealing with many of the problems that exist in our unfair economy – homelessness, mass poverty, crime and violence – all existing problems which were drawn to occupy sites. Decades of policies that funnel wealth to the top left many in the nation abused, beaten down and battered. The Occupies had the challenge of dealing with those injured Americans.

Occupiers were torn between taking care of as many of the 99% as they could and building an effective political movement and safe encampments. At Freedom Plaza, we invited the homeless and hungry for a community dinner in the first few days of our encampment. We quickly learned that societal and individual problems beyond our control came with them. After weeks of trying to deal with the issues we had several General Assemblies discussing the problems. We decided on a set of principles and a community occupant form that people had to sign which included those principles:

Agreement on Principles and Rules:

As an occupant of Freedom Plaza, I agree to the following principles and rules. I understand that a breach of these principles and/or rules may be reason for expulsion. I have received

and understand the peacemaker process that is available in case of a dispute, and I understand that certain behaviors such as not participating in the community or violence and drug or alcohol use will result in immediate expulsion.

1. I will use my anger at injustice as a positive, nonviolent force for change.
2. I will not carry weapons of any kind.
3. I will not vandalize, destroy or steal property.
4. I will maintain neatness of my personal belongings and cleanliness of Freedom Plaza.
5. I will not use or carry alcohol or illegal drugs on Freedom Plaza and I will not enter the Plaza in an intoxicated state.
6. I will respect quiet hours between 11 pm and 7 am.
7. I will act in a respectful manner and I will not insult, swear in public or attack others.
8. I will not assault, verbally or physically, those who oppose or disagree with me.
9. I will protect myself and call for assistance if I am assaulted.
10. I will participate in the General Assemblies and direct actions as I am able.
11. I will volunteer in Freedom Plaza daily (see list of tasks on back of page 1).

While some other occupations criticized Freedom Plaza for having rules, we found that even as we discussed this during General Assemblies, some of the homeless participants staying with us began to take on responsibility – helping to serve food, cleaning the camp, manning the health tent, participating in protests – and transformed into very valuable participants. Police, who appreciated our principles and our peacekeepers who enforced them, were often reluctant to remove people from a public park for violating them. Our peacekeepers had to develop methods to enforce the principles without assaulting people who violated the principles. This is still an issue we struggle with as do many Occupations.

The Occupy learned a lot of lessons from the first phase of occupations of public space. No doubt, when occupations re-ignite the lessons will result in even stronger occupations in 2012.

Where We Are Going

When we [called for the occupation of Freedom Plaza](#) in early June, we said this occupation would be [“the beginning.”](#) We saw the occupation of Freedom Plaza as a tactic, much like a lunch counter sit-in or Freedom Ride during the civil rights movement, designed to educate and mobilize people for a much bigger and longer effort to end a government dominated by money and militarism and shift power to the American people. We knew a long-term independent movement challenging corporate power was needed to undo [years of intentional efforts by corporate](#) interests to seize control of government and social institutions.

Shifting power to the American people requires much more than an occupation. The Occupy

Movement needs to build on four strong components – (1) non-violent protest and civil resistance, (2) non-participation in the existing corporate finance-dominated economy, (3) the development of concrete plans and policies to transform the corporate economy into a people's economy and (4) ending government dominated by money by shifting political power to the American people. Occupy Washington, DC says: no oligarchy, no plutocracy we want participatory democracy.

The closure of many of the Occupy encampments, including New York's Zuccotti Park, has some in the media claiming the Occupy Movement is over. In fact, [occupy actions continue around the country](#) and people involved in the movement realize that [occupy is not just about occupying](#). Also, the Occupy Movement is gaining new allies. For example, the faith community in Washington, DC is coming together under Occupy Faith and black church leaders are coming together under [Occupy the Dream](#). But most importantly, the anger at the unfair economic system rigged by corporate-funded politicians has not subsided. Occupiers want to hold the 1% accountable. Occupiers across the country are making plans for next year, indoors and out of site, to expand and build their activities in the spring. The Occupation Movement is not finished – it has just begun.

The transition to winter at Freedom Plaza gave us the opportunity to discuss where we wanted to go in [Phase II](#). We talked to people in our web community as well as those on the Plaza. We surveyed everyone on the Plaza to understand what their interests were. These ideas and insights determined our next steps, which might be helpful for other occupations to consider:

1. Continue to hold Freedom Plaza. We have achieved a great deal through the occupation of Freedom Plaza. We've shown how persons from different backgrounds, economic circumstances, races and political interests can live and work together; and form a community. The encampment on Pennsylvania Ave. between the Congress and the Treasury/White House allowed us to reach thousands of people. Our signs, newspaper – the [Occupied Washington Post](#) – and conversations with many Americans have spread the Occupy message. We've carried out multiple protest actions in Congress, as well as at banks, the Chamber of Commerce and other locations. We've held our own [occupied super committee hearing](#) and published a report to fix the economy, the "[99%'s Deficit Proposal](#)." This winter the number of people at the encampment will shrink but it will be available to expand as needed for actions like [Witness Against Torture](#) from January 11 to 20, the [Occupy The Dream's](#) plans for the Federal Reserve on January 16, MLK Day, [Occupy Congress](#) scheduled for January 17 and the [Occupy the Courts](#) protest against the *Citizen's United* decision on January 20. Freedom Plaza will continue to be a flagship for the American people to see that the Occupy Movement continues.

2. The Peace House and Organizing National Resistance. Approximately a dozen occupiers will move into the Peace House to work on organizing [NOW DC](#) (the National Occupation of Washington, DC) that begins on March 30. They will organize to bring occupiers from throughout the country to the nation's capital to show the breadth and depth of the Occupy Movement. Peace House occupiers will work with occupations and others from across the country to build NOW DC. The creators of [the Peace House](#), William Thomas and his wife Ellen Thomas, maintained and supported a 24 hour a day, 365 days a year, 30 year protest of nuclear war on the north side of the White House. The disarmament vigil, founded on June 3, 1981, is courageously maintained by [Concepcion Picciotto](#) who joined Thomas a month after it began. Picciotto will continue to use the Peace House when she takes breaks with Freedom Plaza occupiers filling in to continue the vigil. Volunteers at the

Peace House will also work on local outreach and education in the greater DC community.

3. Mt. Rainer House and Organizing Occupy the Economy and Occupy Media. Another dozen occupiers will move into the Mt. Rainer House. This house will focus on building democratic economic structures as alternatives to the corporate-economy. This year is the United Nation's [International Year of Co-operatives](#) and we will focus on creating worker-owned co-operatives that grow a co-operative sub-economy. Business plans will be developed, start-up capital sought and initial projects will be run out of the Mt. Rainer House. We will open the development of democratized economic structures to our web community as well. Already being examined are a political messaging business involving bumper stickers, signs, buttons and tee shirts, a food service providing occu-pie food and a housing redevelopment business. These co-operatives will provide funding to the occupiers working on them and revenues for the Occupy Movement. In addition, the Mt. Rainer House will be developing an Occupy Television Show and other media projects for public access, cable and web-outlets.

Both houses will be run as collectives that we intend to develop into useful models for other Occupies around the country to emulate and improve. Occupy Washington, DC will be building on years of experience with collectives, co-operatives and intentional communities to create Occupy Homes like these that are productive and build the movement.

The fourth leg of our Occupy Washington, DC community is our [web-based community](#). Some web-occupiers have joined the encampment at Freedom Plaza, others have supported it financially, others have organized to bring people to Washington, DC and still others have provided ideas for how we should shape our future. Providing ways for people to be involved who cannot occupy full-time is an essential component of Occupy Washington, DC.

With all of these new activities we are not leaving the old behind. We will continue to provide educational forums on a range of issues, invite noted speakers to Occupy Washington, DC, and we are working on curricula for outreach to youth. The non-violent civil resistance actions we have done against the 1% political and economic elites will continue and escalate. We will continue to organize protest actions in Congress and to expose the monied interests that dominate the government. We are working with Occupy EPA to organize actions that encourage whistleblowers. And, we are inspired by actions we are seeing across the country - the [Occupy Our Homes](#) movement to defend people facing foreclosures; No doubt the year will be filled with creative approaches by occupiers across the country.

Of course 2012 is an election year. There is a lot the Occupy Movement can do related to the election. We have been inspired by the work of the [Occupy the Caucuses](#) movement in Iowa challenging both parties and all candidates. We are pleased to see this expanding to New Hampshire with [Occupy New Hampshire](#). We hope to see this expand across the country. These efforts are not about supporting candidates, but challenging the corrupt money-dominated electoral system that produces candidates that represent the interests of the 1%. There have also been protests at fundraisers and we hope to see more of those as getting money out of politics is a top priority for creating the new participatory democracy the country needs.

President Obama has [received more Wall Street funding than any candidate](#) in history. Mitt Romney is the likely Republican nominee and he is also receiving [widespread support from](#)

[Wall Street](#). The corporate media will make sure that only these candidates get significant air time. The corporate-funded, two-party run National Commission on Presidential Debates will only allow corporate candidates to participate and exclude those that represent the people. The system will ensure that most Americans will see only two choices – both approved by Wall Street. We do not see how voting for a Wall Street funded candidate will do anything but increase the power of money and decrease the people's power.

The truth is for the vast majority of Americans their presidential vote is pre-ordained. Due to the Electoral College in all but about a dozen states we can already definitively predict where your vote is going. This should be greatly freeing to most Americans – we do not have to vote for either corporate candidate out of the manipulation created by fear of the greater evil. We are free to send a message to both corporate parties that we do not accept their money-dominated campaigns. In many states there will be other candidates on the ballot. The Green Party is likely to put forward a strong candidate in Jill Stein, MD. The new Justice Party, working to get on the ballot around the country, will put forward a strong candidate in the former mayor of Salt Lake City, Rocky Anderson.

The Occupy Movement should stay independent of any corporate-funded parties. In [Let the Trumpet Sound, the Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) Dr. King is quoted as saying: “I feel someone must remain in the position of non-alignment, so that he can look objectively at both parties and be the conscience of both—not the servant or master of either.” An election year is an excellent opportunity to show the system is corrupt; the elections are money-elections and protest candidates from both corporate parties. The Occupy Movement should show its independence from the money-dominated elections we seek to end.

The main job of the Occupy Movement during this election year will be to change the conversation from a mostly irrelevant debate between two corporate approved candidates to one relevant to the American people. We need to show that the pre-scripted, focus-group, corporatized rhetoric of the presidential campaign is a false conversation – and the people of the United States are having the real conversation about our future. In the end, whoever is elected will need constant pressure from the Occupy Movement to put the people's necessities first. So, our job is to build a strong independent movement in 2012 and beyond.

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