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Expect resistance

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EXPECT RESISTANCE

By

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**A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Fine Arts in Film**

**College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
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Rochester Institute of Technology
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Abstract

The documentary process is one that puts experimentation above structure, almost to the antithesis of conventional narrative storytelling. With the documentary thesis project *Expect Resistance*, Shane Burley took on a complex set of political ideas and experiences and attempted to thread them together into a common narrative. This made the project evolve over time, taking on new forms, and adapting to the conditions of the actual filmmaking process. Here he discusses the changes in the project, the challenges that were implicit with this type of film, and how the final film attempted to challenge perception about political involvement and the role of the house in a post-foreclosure world. Additionally, the budget of the film is looked at in detail and the complete interview with Noam Chomsky is included, which grounds the film in a broader analysis of capitalism and social movements.

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A New Vision

There is a filmic perspective that has been lacking. After the political upheavals of the sixties, the point of documentation and art has left the activist sphere. Instead it is almost solely discussed from the outside, finding its base in the bourgeois media and a sense of objectiveness that is shifting strongly to the right. A political documentary hits a period renaissance, there still lacks a style of internal filmmaking where the filmmaker finds their foundation on the inside.

It is with this concept in mind I developed the project that would become Expect Resistance. In 2008 we began to hear rumblings of a financial crisis, soon to become a collapse that would completely decimate the economic growth for a generation. Housing values became central to this, with foreclosure becoming the new normal for working class communities. Neighborhoods around the country began to be the victims of a class-based assault of almost military proportions, with banks having to ramp up their removal efforts after property values plummeted. It is in this environment that the Take Back the Land movement was developed. Beginning in Miami, Florida, the movement takes on two principle tactics. First, it defends people from foreclosure-based eviction with community organizing, neighborhood solidarity, and physical blockades. Second, it supports homeless families to illegally move into empty, bank owned homes. Here they would fix them up, make them livable, and become regular residents of a community.

This was a movement I was already on the fringes of, and when my thesis project began to be touched it was already in my mind. The idea came to the front of my mind for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that had

confrontation and direct action at its heart. I knew that eviction blockades were “scenes” that played out with an implicit drama and antagonism, which I could tap into as a way of creating a compelling human drama. At the same time there were elements I found fascinating as a filmmaker and storyteller, especially in the way that people bypass political and social systems by localizing direct action. There were already characters here since people moving liberating vacant homes and defending their houses from foreclosure, respectively, had complex issues and had already made difficult choices about how to fight back. These were real people who were becoming inspirational in their struggle to survive. At the same time, there were also hardened activists that would become engaged and committed to making this a long-standing movement with the power to inspire revolutionary change. This again made them unique, and since I knew many of them already it would be easy to be allowed in personally.

In my previous documentary projects I had began to develop a production style that was looking more and more effective in certain areas, especially when focusing on characters and creating a structure that was based on scenes. The concept for this project would then be to really allow characters to tell the stories and ideas, and to shoot with the idea that individual actions would make self-contained scenes that would be structured into a narrative. Along with that I had some different ideas about what other aesthetic and production elements would be included, but I did want to make music a driving part of it.

The project ended up taking place of 17 months with dozens of shoot days and a couple hundred hours of footage, making it the largest work I had ever done.

It changed constantly during the production, but the focus on characters and scene structure was always at the center of it and drove my decision-making. The final film ended up being adapted from real world circumstances, the way that the characters and I changed over that time, and how a real social movement was born and evolved.

Developing a Style

There's a unique element at play when you are beginning a project that is tied to an academic program. You want to create something that can be seen as a culmination of your education, which means both challenging yourself and showcasing your talents. There was an internal debate as to whether or not I wanted to take on new production challenges that were different than previous projects I had taken on, or to look at where I was strongest and then try to take those up a level. The decision I eventually made with my first proposal was a little of both. I would create a project that was centered on the things I thought I had experience with and had executed successfully. This meant drawing out characters and their stories through intensive interviews, discussing social issues with personal narratives used to draw a connection, and using event situations as a way of creating set pieces. I was going to build on this by including highly stylized recreations and include animations as a way of increasing the production value and strengthening my production background.

The reality of the production put both of these ideas into focus. The first several days of production were incredibly controlled as we were figuring out exactly how the shoots were going to go. This began by filming two press

conferences, a meeting, and a brief rally. Once we entered into the real events around Occupy Rochester it became clear that scenes that would end up in the film were going to be constructed from moments of confrontation, and those situations of confrontation were going to lack outside control.

The first major march for Occupy Rochester, which was the Zombie Walk that ended in over thirty arrests in Washington Square Park, was chaos the entire time. Though I had secondary sound I had to lose it almost immediately, and quickly gave up on the tripod. Instead I used an assistant to help with camera issues and to give me stability. Every time I made a choice to return to the tripod I lost mobility and gave up important events that were shaping both the growing movement and were critical to the film. A choice was presented very quickly that if I was to remain in the middle of things I was going to have to remain completely free to move, which meant lowering the production value and maintaining hand held camera motions during dramatic events. This allowed me to interact directly with the characters as a *person* rather than just a filmmaker, and this allowed them to open up and to give me a perspective as an insider. This was invaluable, and from then on I was able to gain a clear image on how I was going to produce each segment. This was especially true when there were going to be legal issues, such as direct action or civil disobedience where arrest was possible. Tripod, lights, and non-sync sound were used when the situations had less interference, but I needed to have a strategy for how to remove any “weights” and go hand held when I needed to. This also affected the camera choice, where the Canon XF-305 ended up being perfect because it attuned better to hand motions and the quality of image was going to be

consistently good. The Canon 5D and 7D, as well as the Lumix GH1 and GH2, were used for b-roll almost exclusively or in situations where we felt that a shallow depth of field was going to be acceptable throughout. The XF-305 also allowed for Auto controls that were fairly accurate, and this was important in situations of low light. While auto-focus and auto-iris were never used during the production process unless there was running involved by the cameraperson, the “full auto” setting had to be used when we were in extreme low light situations. For example, during public occupations in a park or families moving into a house without power, it was the only way to get an acceptable image. From there it was easy to adjust it in post-production. At the same time light was treated differently, and keeping with the new shooting style it often allowed the night scenes to have their own look by having heavy reds and yellows overlay the image.

The realities of shooting the scenes allowed the function to determine the style. From here the idea of putting in heavily stylized recreation and animations seemed completely out of place, and would have trouble re-creating the intensity that we saw in actual confrontations and illegal direct actions. The cameras chosen were versatile enough to capture images that were almost universally usable, even though stability was often sacrificed for access. The moments when aesthetics were an issue were less in moments when conscious choices were made to use on board sound or natural lighting, but instead when outside microphones or lights were used and failed. Lavalier microphones often had problems during sit down interviews and instead the on board microphone had to be used, which was never ideal in a staged setting.

This also reduced the crew size significantly. The original decision was to have several Directors' of Photography instead of a single one because many shoots would be spontaneous and we would not be able to maintain a consistent shoot schedule. Events such as eviction defenses would often get very little notice, and therefore I would need to be incredibly responsive. The plan was to then find several cinematographers that I could keep in contact with and when events would come up I would see who was available. This tended to work out well, but often times I would have to act as the cinematographer and just take an assistant with me. I had always planned to be one of the participating camera people, but this happened more often than not. This had an implicit affect on the style as many major scenes had me at the helm of the camera, which meant that my internal connection with the subject meant the camera needed to be thrust into the middle of things. This altered how I worked with the other cinematographers where I asked that they work very close to the subjects, often times positioning the camera closer to people than they would normally be comfortable.

Non-sync sound was used occasionally for cohesive scenes, but usually it was more of a burden on the production than it was a benefit. It would restrict movement dramatically and not allow us to follow action as it was happening or to respond quickly. When using a boom pole and shotgun microphone we were also not able to get a large blanket of sound, which was the best bet in a chaotic situation. This meant that using an attached shotgun to the Canon-XF was the best choice, and only using non-sync when we were using DSLRs.

These are some of the most chaotic possible situations that I could imagine, often times where police are rushing in and people are yelling and running. This meant that having an awareness of my situation during production was important and many things were lost. It was important to make sacrifices for access, which meant that I had to simply allow for shaky camera and audio at times. If I was to be concerned with stability and clear audio at all times I would have been making a different film, one that looked at the subject from the outside. This style actually plays to the benefit at times since it immediately communicates a certain visceral feeling to the audience about what it feels like to participate in mass actions.

Segment by Segment

The key idea of the project, which was the main focus of the proposal, was that it was to be produced with coherent scenes that could often reflect a narrative sensibility. This was not just an essay documentary with a thesis supported by interviews and statistics. Instead, those elements needed to only support characters and scenes that outlined actual events in a story structure. The main elements here were to be the concept of direct action and disobedience, so those needed to be seen in real ways as they were happening. When events like these occur they are scenes in the participants' lives with a real structure: a beginning, middle, and end. That structure was then to outline how we would approach the filming of the project, and how we would approach each shoot day. It also allowed me to create a preliminary

outline for the film that, though it changed several times, allowed the massive editing process to become manageable and focused.

The first coherent “event” day was again the first Occupy Rochester march and series of arrests. The end result of this day was not known in the beginning as many participants simply thought that they would have a press event, march to the park, and begin the semi-permanent encampment. Once they arrived at the park there was a notification that they would be arresting “trespassers” who attempted to stay past the park’s official closing time. From here I extended the day and followed it through the General Assemblies where they discussed the approach, the negotiations with the police, the stand off and arrests, and the aftermath. This made up a cohesive scene that was then treated semi-autonomously as a way of maintaining the integrity of its portrayal. The first edit of that scene came shortly afterward so as to keep the memory of the events, as it was being cut, which was important, as my role of the filmmaker had shifted from onlooker to participant. This also opened up to the way that commentary, criticism, and development would happen through social media (which will be discussed later). Many scenes were then approached the same way if they were event based. If a scene did not end up in a final cut of the film it could be mined for b-roll associated with an interview or montage, but only after the context had been provided. Now that protests had been introduced as a subject of the film, other protests could be shown without a detailed explanation of everything that occurred.

These scenes ended up making the bulk of the film, while interviews and cultural commentary simply structured the film and created a skeleton. Leonard, as

one of the main characters, had both sit down interviews and scenes of active events. This included the opening sequence where he discusses his house, the episode from the middle of the film where he confronts Wells Fargo, and the scene at the end where he goes to court in a final bid for his home.

Sign of the Times

In an effort to draw both on the cultural inspirations behind Take Back the Land and Occupy Wallstreet, as well as to give certain aesthetics that have cultural significance, a focus was made to include contemporary music that would drive the narrative. The project itself has outside appeal, which was also a benefit during fundraising. I contacted several hundred musicians, record labels, producers, and managers to get rights to songs, which came through en masse. I had a large library to choose from and found songs that really spoke to the subject matter and the ways that the scenes were being constructed. The project has political implications so free rights were often given up by artists that shared certain views about the foreclosure crisis and wanted to contribute in any way to a project that would address this. Often times artists even shared around information about the film and my fundraising pages. From here we ended up with around 20 individual songs from a range of styles that are complimentary and set an emotional background to many of the scenes. This was especially true in the montage sequences where it was more important to give a sense and sensibility than hard facts about events. We knew the how and why of the protest, but now it was important to have convey

some of the transgressive feelings that come with being part of a growing movement.

Social Media, Financing and Crowd Sourcing Criticism

The scene-focused shooting pattern was set in place from the start, but this format began to develop a new element that became central to the project. Right from the start I created a social media campaign, largely because we needed to support the fundraising attempts. We began with a fairly lofty Kickstarter goal that we met, and then later an Indie GoGo campaign. Both of these required that we connected with as many individuals as possible. One of the things that made this project seem like it could be successful right from its first idea stages was that it could tie into a possible funding network. There would be a number of different organizations and social groups that would have a vested interest in the success of a project like this because its possible effect on social movements and as an educational tool. The very existence of a film looking at the housing movement as it is about to see a potential period of growth is going to be huge on its own, which means that small amounts of money may be available without any influence desired.

I began by making a large list of groups that may be interested, which included left-wing political parties, activist groups, housing organizations, soup kitchens and shelter, and dozens of other sub-categories. This equaled to around 1,300 organizations, all which were emailed with the information of our project and a link to the Kickstarter. Next a Facebook page for the film was created with information about the film. This was regularly updated with news about housing

justice and the Occupy Movement, along with things like photos and fun things that were correlated. These were tied with multiple other social networking services like Twitter and Tumblr to create a comprehensive web that supplemented the lack of a regular website, and got a lot more traffic than a regular site would have. This allowed for our first blast of funding that purchased things like hard drives, production tools, and transportation costs.

As the film progressed the Facebook page, as well as the other social media departments, was constantly updated with production information. After the first cohesive scene was completed there were requests for footage put out by a variety of national news sources. I decided to do a rough cut of that first scene relatively quickly, intensely editing over a couple days. That footage was then sent out to different media sources and then shared via social networking. This got national coverage and posted on websites like The Huffington Post, Fire Dog Lake, and The Nation. It went viral on social media, being shared on pages and groups of different occupations and activist networks. The video, in its form, quickly became one of the pieces that became part of the narrative for both the local occupation and the movement internationally.

From here the event, and the footage, began to be seen in a new light. Commentary began to shape my own perception of the event, how the characters were being seen, and how it fit in the larger socio-economic context. This developing criticism began to get to the heart of the produced segment as people began to really flesh out what they liked and disliked from the presentation. Since it was seen by a diverse range of audiences on a list of different locations I could

aggregate what I was seeing as a response and create a general profile of what people were seeing from the content and the style that the video was created in. This drove changes in the way the next scenes were filmed, as well as how subsequent edits of the original scene were made. These were really an additional force in the shaping of the project, though they did not replace more conventional critical settings like one on one viewings with academics or activists.

This began to also create a social “buzz” about the film, which gave me further access to a number of people and situations. As the project gained a certain amount of recognition through this process it became easier to approach people to participate in the film and even to provide their own media, like still images or music. It also began to extend my professional credentials about the subject, leading directly to other endeavors. This included the offer to write a chapter on housing movements for a new book on social movements around austerity movements, which will be out in 2014. From here I wrote for several publications, which has acted as a pilot into other fields. The film acted as a research and activity center from which I jumped into other types of media, which in turn generated interest and content for the film. This created a media web where all of the pieces were complimentary as the focus on housing justice was the glue that held them together.

This is a force that does not just enhance one particular element of the process, but can take it all the way through post-production and distribution. The real benefit of enhancing the online presence is that once you have made it adequately available to the public you have people who have integrated your content into their social media lives. This is critical since it allowed me to amass a

following as I go into the exhibition stages. When screening at film festivals, possibly getting distribution deals, self-distributing, or even raising money for any combination there of, this following will gain legitimacy to the project and can possibly give it the momentum it needs to succeed. This is especially true in the niche market of activist centered documentary, where those communities will remain even more committed to the project. This also ties the project to social movements, other filmmakers, authors, and more, since there is a community of commentary that this film can then be entered into. This again, allows it to ensure a place in the community beyond its initial completion. It will also help to ensure a practical branding for me as a filmmaker and author, which will be incredibly important as I head into the next project. I can then announce to the current following upcoming projects and can immediately tap into a certain collective interest to transfer to something fresh.

The Character of Commentary

The film has a few commentators, two of which hold a high profile status (Elaine Bernard and Noam Chomsky). The original idea of the film was to have a total of five commentators that have nothing to do with the core story and organizing efforts. We ended up with only three in the final film, which most people who screened the film in its various stages were perfectly fine with. Most people who offered opinions advised reducing the commentary and increasing the personal characters, a comment that became important as later versions of the film developed. The inclusion of commentators in a political documentary can often times be less than appropriate, and can even be a way of including a “star” factor by

including well known people discussing social issues. This is not usually an admirable quality since it is often done to ensure audiences and distribution deals, but not necessarily because those people have the most to say about the issue. The people that I included were chosen for their ability to discuss the economy more broadly instead of housing specifically. The housing movements and their radical character come as a direct result of the financial collapse of 2008, and the foreclosures that followed through 2011. This is not a major part of the film since it has been so widely covered previously and is not something that would be addressed any better in this project. Instead we have a couple academics that are trusted and who can speak concisely to explain the core issues of the economic context, therefore setting the stage for the main characters. They are relaying relatively simple facts, yet their implicit authority allows those things to be taken more easily and with less explanation.

This also has a secondary effect by creating an association between their public persona and the project itself. For example, if you see Noam Chomsky giving commentary that explains an economic issue, the point of view of the project is immediately shifted left for the viewer. This means that any assumption that there will be an attempt at centrism in the current socio-political framework is immediately dashed when this person is describing our situation in broad terms, allowing the audience to simply move into the piece knowing that there is a clear political perspective. This is a form of semiotics where the audience immediately understands that an issue is going to be approached counter to a few perspectives on economics, and therefore they are not expecting a rounded debate as to the

nature of corporate regulation and fiscal policy. This is not a balanced film and has not interest in being one, so the sooner this is declared in the film the better so we can move into a substantive look at the characters and the political tactics of direct action. The debates in the film are how best to attack the corporate systems of class inequality, not whether or not foreclosures are fair.

Interesting enough, utilizing certain people in the film also included them into the social network that permeates from it. Their participation, as well as people who aided the film in more remote ways (Astra Taylor, Michael Hardt, Slavoj Zizek), are all now connected to the project and will have a direct need to see the film.

Setbacks and Re-Starts

The project itself saw an incredible amount of roadblocks along the way, though relatively little from the subjects. I was already close to Take Back the Land and what would become Occupy Rochester, so I was kept in the loop as actions were happening since I was at all planning meetings. This still allowed for some things to be missed, especially if I did not estimate how important they would end up being. This includes the first weekend of Occupy Wallstreet, which I chose to skip since I thought it would be a small weekend protest.

The biggest set back that followed us through production was the difficulty working with one of the subjects: Catherine Lennon. Cathy saw a foreclosure on her home several years ago after her husband died of cancer. Wells Fargo, who bought her loan from Country Wide, refused to give her standing and pushed through a rash foreclosure. Take Back the Land found her when canvassing a foreclosure list and

she said that she wanted to stay in her home. She refused to leave and people arranged an eviction watch and encampment at her house. This delayed the eviction several weeks, and then the police came with around twenty squad cars and issued a slew of arrests. After a few days people got together and moved her back into her home, and she has been there every since. Wells Fargo and Fannie Mae eventually caved and negotiated with her, returning the property to her and lowering her payments. Cathy has then become involved speaking at many events, including things that were filmed at Occupy Rochester and other protests. She was the first person to grant permission of an interview, though she started rescheduling. She rescheduled fourteen times, often when a full crew was on the way to her house. I ended up not getting the interview, which meant she was not in the shorter cut of the film. This is still the only missing piece from the larger project and something we will have to find a solution too if we move into the feature length version. This longer cut will focus on three people's foreclosure stories, while the shorter one just looks at Leonard's.

Leonard himself became hard to get in touch with, and it would have been nice to loop some of his interview and to do a secondary one. More of Leonard's story would have been great, but experience with him was actually quite limited. The Windom Bey family, who I filmed with extensively, was actually quite involved and was intended to be the film. There were no sit down interviews with them as I chose to simply ask them questions during active situations, but in the final cut of the short film their situation was too complicated and it did not seem fleshed out enough to be the sole foreclosure story. Leonard's was the most concise, but still

could have been better. This could, however, be remedied by utilizing some extended footage from broadcast news sources.

Additionally, the technical issues became monumental. I began the project working on Final Cut Pro, which I also had on my home computer. The project swelled and became quite large, in its final version hitting 3 Terabytes. My home computer eventually had trouble handling the full project, so I just worked on the school computers. I was then let know that they would be removing Final Cut Pro and I had a choice to make about what I was to do. After some thought it seemed like going to Adobe Premiere would be the best bet, which was software I had never used. The project transferred well for the most part, but there were a lot of problems with things like sound, placement, archiving, and other technical tools that it added several weeks of work simply to get it into the same position that it was in when editing in FCP. This became true again when it came time for color correction as there was no direct link to Apple's Color, and my attempts to send it back to FCP and then to Color were a failure. I eventually went with Adobe SpeedGrade, but the computers were not powerful to take the entire project over at once so I had to restructure the timeline and send it over in newly nested clips one at a time. This meant that individual scenes were being color graded on their own. Each scene took at least an hour to send over and an hour to render, and since I did not know the software well I ended up doing only minor grades and an increase in contrast.

About a year into the project my main hard drive was damaged and I went through a long, and very costly, process of trying to recover what was on it. This was unsuccessful in the end. Though most things were backed up well, a few things

had been missed and I lost a couple protest actions and a couple of interviews, one of which I had to perform again. For two of Leonard's scenes I had to go to the test export I had made of them for online posting and then use the color renders I had from their temporary color correction. This meant that I used the compressed audio and overlaid all of the color renders one at a time, which brought it back to a similar visual state. This was true of the first scene introducing Leonard as well as the Wells Fargo protest. This caused some problems, mainly with the first scene, since it had music underneath it and so the dialogue and soundtrack were on the same track. It caused additional problems finishing the edit for the Wells Fargo sequence, which was cut down to a third of its original length. These problems were eventually solved and some concessions were made in an effort to make them work.

Generally, the size of the project was an issue throughout. The final cut for its original presentation of 34 minutes has around 800 individual shots. This came from almost 80 shoot days, as well as archival footage and photos, and outside music. This was a massive project and even the more powerful computers I was working on had some issues. This meant that I could expect the editing program to crash several times during most editing sessions and that other unseen errors were going to occur. It also was difficult to keep organized, but I set a plan for its Bin structure early on and tried to maintain it. The main organizational issues came when it transferred from FCP to Adobe Premiere and saw that things were rearranged and renamed.

The size and length of the project all came up with departmental problems where there was some contention about its perceived length as a feature film. This

is one of the elements that lead into the creation of the shorter version, which ended up stronger with the time I had. Scenes became more concise, characters more focused, and many things were left out that were not directly related.

Solidarity

The Occupy Rochester encampment was first ruled illegal because it was in violation of the park's restrictions, mainly against camping and about its listed hours. The first attempt at setting up an encampment brought the police and a few dozen arrests. This was not the end as another global day of action came up and local labor brought in support. There was again a large scale march, this time including most progressive non-profits, churches, and unions. Again, an encampment was discussed and there were numbers calculated to see if people should try to occupy the park after 11pm and risk arrest. At this point the first arrests were looking legally questionable on several different points, including multiple violation of First Amendment rights. This was the first occupation in New York State to be broken up, and one of the first in the country generally. The NYCLU were already filing briefs and they had sent legal observers to this march to monitor violations by the police if there were any. It looked like one more major stand would actually win the park over, forcing the local government to concede to this public pressure.

It was with this second group of arrestees that I joined in, got taken into custody, and had to post bail. What I decided to do was to get the amount that would be assumed for bail, which was \$200 for most people, and have that cash on hand with my assistant. Then I would stay within the park's boundaries with the

camera as long as I could before the police were going to make a clear advancement in. Right before they did I would hand off the camera, with instructions to my assistant for how the footage of the arrests was to be conducted. This is what happened, and she was able to follow me as I was being arrested and led to the holding trucks. Here I was packed in with four other people in a small shelf of a space before I was taken to the jail.

The decision to do this took dealt with multiple consideration, not the least of which was about how it played into the production process. It should be noted that voluntarily joining in the protest in its most confrontational level is not something a regular journalist should do. Though objectivity does not always mean that you have to see two equal viewpoints about an issue, it certainly doesn't mean going full force behind one ideological side. This was perfectly fine with me since I had, at no point, tried to assume that this was a story with multiple sides. I was coming at it from a clear angle and wanted to stay within that framework from start to finish. As one journalism student said when I showed this scene for feedback, "There is a difference between being balanced and being fair." I was a journalism undergraduate and have worked in that field at different times, and I think that fairness was always on my mind even if I did not attempt to be balanced.

The bottom line here was that a choice was going to be made about whether or not I was a part of a movement, or simply an observer. As has been stated earlier, part of my decision to make the film was because of my own connection with the activism itself and my passion for the issues. If I wanted to show committed solidarity with my subjects then I had to be willing to participate in the same way.

This also created a strong bond of trust where there would be few situations where my motives could be questioned since I had shown a certain amount of commitment. Secondly, I also felt that this was an important tactical choice for the situation that was taking place. It was not just a moralistic show that I was willing to also make a sacrifice, but instead I saw the value of this specific action in a larger context of tactics. It also played directly into the conception of the film as documenting visual forms of activism. My participation was simply adding to this presentation, and by this there was an element of me as an important actor in a drama. This was not artificial, of course, since it had a pointed purpose.

Discussion about Characters and Story

As the project began to be more focused and the clearer story thread for the shorter version was fleshed out there was a lot of discussion about exactly what should be included and excluded. Leonard began one of the main threads, as he was an affected person and the context for the housing movement as a whole in the film. The first rough cut that was created excluded any scene and mention of Occupy that was not directly related to Take Back the Land. This was preferred by some committee members that were designated with giving feedback and criticism, while others took issue with the removal of Occupy. I included Occupy sequences as an important part of the production plan, they were central to the editing, and really important to me as a way to understand the movement and the characters.

I decided to make a final change where I removed one scene and added four short ones about Occupy that were in the original long cut. This meant that we went

into a longer discussion of Occupy in the center of the film. At screenings some people expressed the same sentiment that the Occupy footage, while compelling on its own, felt like a sidestep to the more important story of Leonard. This actually echoed some perceptions from within the housing movement that thought large scale actions like Occupy were not as substantive as focusing on the stories of working people who already have these struggles against capitalism in their lives. Other people who saw the project as it was, usually more connected to the movements on the ground, appreciated the presentation as it was now with a large amount devoted to Occupy.

My actual feeling about it is a compromise between the two, and really only could have been perfectly realized with more production and a larger product. The Occupy footage may not have been as overwhelming if it had not taken up as large of a portion of the film, as would have been true in a longer version. Also, if scenes with Leonard were put in between some of the Occupy scenes then it would have kept him at the forefront of the story. This would also have been true if most the active people in the Occupy scenes had been introduced earlier in the film. The longer version of the film really does focus on the larger movement aspects and large-scale, public actions. It also would have had the other characters going through foreclosure (since three sets of foreclosure survivors were actually documented), so you would not lost the personal characters when going into the Occupy footage. It could also be remedied by either shortening the Occupy footage as it is, or going back to the previous cut where Occupy is only in the background as a support for the main subject of Take Back the Land. This has not been uniform in

its discussion, so for festival purposes the version as it was screened was only minorly altered to remove post-production errors.

A longer version of the film will be cut together (around 60 minutes), and the criticisms of the shorter version will be one of the main elements that go into the changes made. This will likely mean highlighting characters more specifically and toning down the Occupy footage. As some people have pointed out, we have already seen a lot of Occupy Wallstreet as a public entity, but we do not know a lot about housing direct action or the people going through foreclosure. This would mean that I would return to a focus on Hubert Wilkerson, a formerly homeless man who organizes in Take Back the Land. He was almost completely cut from this version, but is a compelling character and important to the discussion. Cathy Lennon would need to return to the longer version as well, though I would either need to scale her section back or ensure that I can get her interview. I would also include the complex story of the Windom Bey family who, through a city error, acquired thousands of dollars in code violations that were added to their taxes in a city foreclosure. The three stories add distinct things to the film, and these two also participated in the large actions that are tied to Occupy Rochester. This would draw the connections between the housing issues and the Occupy spectacle more distinctly and would make it more indispensable to the final film.

The real disagreement often comes between the types of audience watching it. People more concerned with film appreciate the character stories best, and those who are active in organizing like seeing a film that has an internal view of public protest actions. My instinct is to again broaden up the project so it appeals as a film

to an audience that may not be politically affiliated, though my own personal sensibilities appreciate the uniqueness of the way the Occupy scenes were filmed and presented.

Abstractions Upon Abstractions

This is not a political film in the conventional sense. There is a political component, and a clear point of view, but its primary purpose is not to make an argument about housing justice. This should seem obvious from the beginning of the film. By allowing a clear point of view that reflects an anti-capitalist sensibility, our starting point is that there is an unacceptable amount of housing inequality at a systemic level. The film is really then about the idea of direct action. What this really means is that we attempt to create a character out of an abstract concept that ties political identity with engagement and community.

Direct action, while hoping to avoid redundancy, is acting directly. It is avoiding mediation through institutions of either capitalism or the State and acting directly to meet the needs of individuals or the community. This runs completely counter to the solutions to the housing crisis poised by both the institutional left and right. The idea presented here is that struggle should happen outside of the accepted political channels and instead happen directly in the community, by either liberating empty homes or defending against foreclosure and eviction. This is a different concept and hails to other elements of struggle, such as the union concept of taking the struggle for fair working conditions out of the political sphere and instead locating it in the workplace itself. This is clearly just an idea and not a

substantive character, so the challenge was in how to give it the force to create a film around it.

The decision that I made was to look at a movement that shows direct action in such a clear and “common sense” way, with Take Back the Land being the best contemporary example. Through that the characters seem obvious as people involved behave not like politicians, but with a certain dramatis since there is risk and passion involved in direct action. For the affected people, there is the personal crisis of foreclosure at play, so their motivations for action become incredibly crystalized. The method and means of direct action are based in these people’s actual experiences and personality, so the discussion about the concept is really through the ways in which they are engaging in struggle. Direct action is supported as a social program because it can adapt to situation sand personalities, it creates a life that is less mediated, and it has the ability to locate the broad struggle into a context that is very specific. All of this occurs as we see these people taking up their circumstances, whether it is Ryan Acuff developing a social movement or Leonard Spears trying to stay in his home.

I began to change the way I determined success in this discussion. It was less important for the audience to locate the terminology and more important for them to absorb the human stories since the direct action, as it were, was in their lives. The way they lived, the drama of their situation, and the triumph of their spirit was all an element of this action, and the character of this abstract concept became the facts of their story. If direct action was at the core of their narrative and character, then it was best to keep their story and personality at the core of the film.

Looking at the Final Film

The final product that I have delivered is much closer to the original version of the film than I thought it would be. After the project started and the Occupy Movement provided a massive growth in movements targeting economic inequality with the use of land occupations, my project became massive. A feature-length project became the target once connecting semi-autonomous scenes onto the skeleton of interviews and montage could see the project. When shared with a serious committee the difficulty of actually doing a feature project in the prepared time period and format was going to be difficult, and it reminded me that the most important principle to live by in filmmaking is that concision is always the best choice. This often feels counter intuitive in political documentary where every piece of footage seems like a critical document of an important event that has taken place. This is not what filmmaking is based on, however, but instead trying to create a new item that moves beyond its parts. The final film is an object that represents the choices made, both in creating the clips as well as arranging them. It was better then to remove many scenes and shorten others, even if there was quality material that was important to me. The documentary editing process is much more like a screenwriting project than narrative editing, which means you often go through dozens of drafts. You can remember some of the same lessons from narrative screenwriting here; such as ensure each scene progresses the characters and main narrative. An old adage for screenwriting is to locate your favorite line and remove

it, and this was always in my mind as I removed wonderful clips that just did not have a place in the final film. There is still a longer version in the works, but it is a completely separate entity that will have to be considered differently because the characters will be expanded and the pace and character of the film will be altered. It will not simply be an extended version, but a wholly new project that approaches the same material.

My main process for editing, as well as for writing, is to edit long and then to scale back. This allows me to work out a narrative for each scene individually and the film as a whole before I begin taking out everything that is unnecessary. For this film I set very clear time goals for each scene. This meant that a scene that may have been running fifteen minutes I determined that it could not be longer than five minutes before it overstayed its welcome. Once I got it there I would make a strong assessment, sometimes with outside opinions, and then see if I wanted to scale it back further. Some whole scenes were removed very close to final delivery, choices that were hard and necessary.

The final film was one I was proud of and stays true to my vision of a project that looks at direct action through characters and narrative. It includes a look at the broad range of actions, ties our individual housing movement to the larger social actions and socio-political issues, and reflects a recent history where massive systemic change seems possible. The passion of the characters, and even myself as the character behind the camera, seems palpable and makes many moments have lasting electricity. There are still some serious disagreements about what is important in the film, especially about the importance of the Occupy scenes versus

those that are focused on our main characters. This is debatable and different amongst different audiences, and this debate will inform the next approach at this footage and subsequent projects that meld political and personal stories. The first screening process went well and there were some clear discussion points made, though some of it was disconnected from the difficulties of the production environment. Aesthetics are mixed in a film like this, and the main thing I would have done differently is to simply do more to avoid some of the technical errors that were made.

The project is now going out to film festivals, many of which focusing on social issues and student films. It will be sent to a nice range of film festivals for the short version and I will see what the response is there, though it may be a good option to distribute it through a progressive/radical publisher for DVD sales. I would then do a self-distribution plan for the longer version with Distribber for iTunes, Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon Prime distribution. For this the goal would simply be to break even since the self-distribution plan usually costs a base of \$3,000, but would serve as a major career milestone.

The point of a thesis film is to show professionalism in your ability to lead a project and to show your creative skill. With this project I created something that can be a major piece to push the beginning of my career, but it is also a fully realized project that can contribute to a canon of radical filmmaking. There has never been a project just like this and it takes an approach this is rarely seen. The subject is new and the movement is growing, and this film can act as a participant just as I attempted to do when producing it.

Original Thesis Proposal

Shane Burley

Documentary

Format: HD

Run Time: 30-35 Min

“Expect Resistance”

MFA Thesis Proposal

Approved for Submission by

Cathleen Ashworth

Synopsis:

The end of the 2000s were marked by an end to the illusion of prosperity as an unregulated free market crashed, forcing people out of their homes, and saw those who caused this financial meltdown have their bank accounts reimbursed. In light of this we began to see home foreclosures and evictions happening at a rate never seen since the great depression, marking a new nightmare for working class families. Cities like Rochester saw this incredibly hard, which is now home to over 2000 foreclosed homes and a rising homeless population. Out of this crisis has emerged a new national movement, Take Back the Land. With this communities come together to accomplish two goals: resist evictions when they occur and to move homeless families into foreclosed homes.

My film will present this crisis as it is happening. As the community begins to grow its movement we will see the stories of those who it touched and how they have come together to survive anyway. The documentary will intertwine the real lives of those that have been victims to this financial crumble, activists who have dedicated themselves to resisting this, and even those who may be profiting on this. The center of this story will be the people who are participating, and an intimate look at the measures they will take to defend their homes.

Treatment:

A hand is inserted into PVC piping, which has a rusted metal chain extending out of it. Another hand is helped into the opposing end. This is the beginning of a lock down. Several local activists chain themselves to the only available entrance of a recently foreclosed home. All other entrances have been barricaded, and the only way in is over those willing to stand in the way. Under quick orders the police begin pulling up one at a time, cars lining the street. They are met with the voices of the community. "Housing is for people, not for profit! Take back the land!"

My film will be directly built out of the moments of confrontation that mark a movement that attempts to solve a community's problem: rising homelessness. The story of this is one that is told with a number of different personalities. First, we will focus on families that are both dealing with upcoming foreclosure and recent homelessness, respectively. We will see their struggles and look at their stories, which echo a common tale among the working class of the 21st century.

We will meet Cathy Lennon, who is facing immediate eviction from their home after foreclosure. As their family is about to be put out onto the street they have choices about how they are going to address this situation. They decide to stay in their home and demand that the bank renegotiate their mortgage, even if that means direct confrontation with the police. After Cathy's husband died of brain and lung cancer, Countrywide refused to give her standing over the home and did not accept mortgage payments. She was foreclosed on and had nowhere for the thirteen people living there to go, until members of Take Back the Land contacted her and offered up another way. During her eviction a group of activists organized civil

disobedience in an attempt to block the entrance, and after she was fully evicted they broke back into the house to move her back in illegally. She has been there ever since, and her case against Fannie Mae has now been taken to the Supreme Court.

This will lead us not just into a narrative about their experience, but about how a community responds when its members are under attack. This will be taken through the process of how Take Back the Land, as a movement and as a political strategy, try to keep both of these families in their homes. The struggles with the police, the illegal squatting that has become a mainstay, and a look at why these measures are taken in this climate.

All of this will be presented in a clear context of the banking crisis. Experts, academics, and journalists will give some discussion as to what happened and how companies like Fannie May and Freddie Mac are profiting off of this increased housing swindle. Other movements outside of Rochester, such as Boston and Portland, will allow further insight into how direct action is the answer for communities that have no other option. In the Rochester community an opposing side will give clarity to these issues as banks, police officers, and local representatives will discuss their personal relationship with these communities and how this movement fits into their own neighborhoods.

Through this we will inevitably look at the Occupy movement, especially its manifestation locally. The tactics, ideas, rhetoric, and people, are common between both movements, and as confrontation and activism is constant in Occupy it has created a climate of constant political discourse and disagreement. Together, these

movements create the visual thrust of the film. Showing resistance activities, talking about them in their organic nature as actions of people in crisis and suffering oppression, and the moral and legal components to this type of direct action, will weave together a social narrative that aims to use the activities in Rochester as a way of looking at the social change and issues nationally.

In the end we will focus on the final sets of confrontations that occur, and try to channel a conclusion into actions that address the banks directly. The exact nature of this will depend on the process of filming, but whether this is an orchestrated interview with banking officials or a protest event targeting the bailout, the film will finish with activists making a large-scale call to action.

Rational:

The banking bailout stands as the largest transfer of wealth from the general population to the rich in the history of modern finance. In this way, the banks are in debt to the taxpayers, yet foreclosures are happening on a consistent basis and austerity measures are challenging the commons. In this world the idea of people coming together spontaneously to defend their communities is one that no longer seems foreign to most people.

Style:

The film is intended to be cinematic at all levels and avoid many of the stylistic clichés that plague documentary filmmaking. As the culmination in my education, it is a chance to present this story using a variety of tools and methods. As filming occurs, there will usually be a two camera set up that will be well planned ahead of time. In cases of events, protests, stand offs, and other items the landscape

will be planned for and a shot list and shooting plan will be prepared so that filming will have premeditation to it.

As the process goes along, concepts for recreations, pixilation, time lapses, and other types of filmmaking will be integrated to tell a story that is just as much emotional as it is quantitative. Interviews will be a fundamental part of it, but they will not dominate the narrative, as this is something that will be implicit in the drama that occurs. The conception then for most of these items is to create segments that play out with the common flow of narrative scenes, and then create an overarching structure that returns us to much of the flavor of documentary.

In a general sense, this will be presented as a collage mixing different types of film stock, filmmaking types, stock footage, news reel, interview, and other items to tell something that is much more complex. The fundamental core will be a scene based approach, yet this can be layered with other elements as needed. Music will drive this almost all the way through and will keep a sense that this is implicitly visceral.

Logistics:

The filmmaking process will almost always be in the Rochester area. Take Back the Land works with relevant individuals and families, and those that are in need will be presented to me. Over the summer months I will work out the specifics of who will be involved, and who would like to steer clear of the filming process. I will be made aware of all events and actions as they happen, and therefore can be ready to film those. We do not want to over extend the filming process, so we will

narrow down to just a couple families or groups of people so that we can be fairly committed to their process.

For outside communities the filming process will only be done over a week's time. After communication with those specific local activist communities we will determine when the best time to film there is and then complete short episodes around those areas.

There is an extensive amount of footage for Take Back the Land, especially from Indy Media, and that will begin to be acquired and arranged this summer before production begins. I already have a great amount of support from those involved in Take Back the Land and they will help meet many of the production challenges that is there. I will keep myself independent of the group, however, so that I can have an honest hand as the filmmaker.

E-Mail of Permission:

from [Ryan David Acuff](mailto:racuff@gmail.com) <racuff@gmail.com>

to	"SHANE BURLEY (RIT Student)" <sxb1831@rit.edu>	hide details Apr 27 (5 days ago)
date	Wed, Apr 27, 2011 at 1:49 AM	
subject	Re: Take Back the Land	

totally down. sometime i'll send this to group but I'll think they'd be down too. I'm not sure exactly what you have in mind but as you know there always issues of security culture in what we do and who what does and doesn't get taped. but it would be great if stopped for even 5 minutes of a wednesday meeting sometime and discussed the details. but i say hell ya!

Note: Permission has been confirmed at this time for all subjects in the documentary and all groups included.

Thesis Timeline

Summer 20011

Research

Preliminary tests with techniques

Pre-Interviews with Characters

Develop shoot and post-schedule finalization

Make all contacts

Fall 2011

Week 1: Location scouting, begin developing shooting style with crew, finalize equipment choices

Week 2: Begin shooting, prepare for primary interviews, shoot timelapses

Week 3: Shoot first interviews, local events, start edit process

Week 4-8: Shoot with families and any events that run concurrent

Week 9-10: Interviews with officials, bankers, politicians in area, log and capture footage

Thanksgiving Break: Research, contacts, outline change, log and capture

Winter 2011/2012

Week 1-3: Shooting Locally, work on titles and acquiring music

Winter Break: Revise outline, determine changes in storyline, make new contacts.

Week 4-6: Shoot locally and develop starting edit

Week 7-8: Shoot pixilation and planned b-roll

Week 9: Shoot in Boston

Week 11: Edit

Spring Break: Shoot in Portland(Maybe), redo outline

Spring 2012

Week 1-3: Shoot locally as needed, serious story editing

Week 4: Shoot in in New York City

Week 5-7: Editing, pick ups

Week 8: Titles, color correction

Week 9-10: Audio mixing, insert music, codec compression

Week 11: Screen

Film Budget

Director-Shane Burley

Expect Resistance

Shooting Ratio - 25:1

Production (30 Days, in staggered order)

Format – P2 cards

Post Production, including compositing, titles, color correction, DVD authoring (6 months, while active production continues)

Account#	Fee	Overall Total (Cumulative)
100 Story		
Story and Script	0.00	0.00
200 Talent	0.00	0.00
Executive Producer	0.00	0.00
Producer	0.00	0.00
Director	0.00	0.00
Narrator	0.00	0.00
Extras	0.00	0.00
300 Production Personnel		
Camera Operator	0.00	0.00
Gaffer	0.00	0.00
Grip	0.00	0.00
Makeup/Prosthetics Artist	0.00	0.00
Assistant Director	0.00	0.00
Assistant Camera	0.00	0.00
Special effects	0.00	0.00
Sound Recordist	0.00	0.00

400 Travel and Locations

Cast and Crew Meals	350.00	350.00
Petty Cash	350.00	700.00
Travel Expenses	1100.00	1800.00
Miscellaneous Expense	300.00	2100.00

500 Production Equipment

Camera and Support	200.00	2300.00
Lighting	30.00	2330.00
Grip	75.00	2405.00
Sound Package	0.00	2405.00
Special Effects	0.00	2405.00

600 Art Direction

Props	100.00	2505.00
Set Dressing	0.00	2505.00
Makeup Supplies	25.00	2530.00
Costumes	0.00	2530.00

900 Sound and Music

Composer	0.00	2530.00
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1000 Titles and Opticals

Art Work Cards	0.00	2530.00
Artwork	0.00	2530.00
Title Photography	0.00	2530.00

1100 Editing and Finishing

Editor	0.00	2530.00
Effects	0.00	2530.00
Post-Production Equip	700.00	3230.00

1200 Office

Duplication	100.00	3330.00
Office Supplies	100.00	4130.00
Film Festival Submission	700.00	

1300 Contingency

Contingency	15%	619.50
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Total **\$4,749.50**

Active Interview Subjects

Academics/Commentators

(These are subjects that have either granted full permission or have already been interviewed)

Noam Chomsky – MIT

Elaine Bernard – Harvard Law

Amit Ray – RIT

Michael Hardt – Duke

Cornell West – Princeton

Activists

This indicates activists that are doing formal sit down interviews of length. So far, the film will include around two dozen segments from on the spot interviews at protests, rallies, and other events. These are not listed here as they do not lend to the structure of the film.

Ryan Acuff – Take Back the Land

Hubert Wilkerson – Take Back the Land

Brian Lenzo – Occupy Rochester

David Krause – Occupy Rochester

Jacob Spezio – Take Back the Land

Public Officials

In an effort to keep things local, the only government officials that will be interviewed about this will be from the Rochester area so they can respond specifically to the activities of activists there.

James Shepard – Rochester Police Chief

Tom Richards – Mayor of Rochester

Affected People

This again reflects the primary interview subjects, though several other people will be discussing their foreclosure and/or homelessness. Cathy Lennon is the primary story, though there will be two other families going through foreclosure presented as well as several homeless people moving into vacant, bank owned homes illegally. These people will have to remain anonymous if they are taking illegal actions to maintain access with the subjects.

Music

Music has been secured from a number of well known and influential artists based on a festival and student license, which would be renegotiated if a distributor was acquired. Flobots, Matt & Kim, Digital Hardcore Records, Voodoo Glow Skulls, and around fifteen other bands have given blanket rights to using music. Beyond this there will be a composer who will do original music for moments that need it.

The project will try to maintain the use of popular music over traditional scores as this represents the activist culture and the sounds of the music on the streets. This will intermix with audio that is captured correctly in locations as

drums, singing, and spontaneous music is again part of the patchwork of activist culture. We want to maintain a collage feel throughout the film and using a variety of songs, some known and some unknown, will continue this. All agreements have also been made without any financial transactions, which keeps the budget down.

Final Budget Reflection

The budget for Expect Resistance was a patchwork of funding sources, but was primarily made up of donations. There was a Kickstarter campaign that raised around \$1,500. While hundreds of organizations and artists were solicited, the vast majority of that campaign was funded by activist friends and family. A second campaign, this time through IndieGoGo, brought in another \$250. I personally funded many of the production situations myself including transportation, extra hard drives, and minor production tools. This amounted to an estimated \$1,200 in total, though this was so incremental that it was difficult to estimate. It created an even larger problem since the filming was so directly integrated into my life as I had worked for so long to implant myself into the movement. There were moments when it was unsure what qualified as a personal expense and a production expense, so it was important to keep lists and keep budgets tight.

Later in the production process I applied for a couple grants, one of which I received. The Callahan-Reynolds Production Grant brought in \$750 and made a huge difference in bringing in the final tools for the film. As I am continuing the promotion of the film and connecting with many organizations now that I have more personal and professional credibility with them, I am going to run a final fundraising campaign to meet film festival and promotion costs. This may also go to achieve a final interview that I still feel is missing from the larger project.

The final budget as of now is around \$3,500, which is more than a thousand dollars less than the \$4,749.50 that was estimated on the original proposal. If we

add an additional fundraising campaign it may bridge some of this gap, though many of the expenses that are intended to come from this additional funding source were not included in the original budget. Some of this budget difference comes from certain things running more affordably than intended, but also because some things were simply removed from the production. Since Occupy Rochester and Take Back the Land were happening simultaneously, it was easier to stay in town to focus on important scenes of direct action. Travel became more difficult and less necessary as the project went along, and many things ended up simply being left behind after the style and characters were established.

Interview With Noam Chomsky

Conducted on 10/26/12

Shane Burley:

I am working both with both Take Back the Land and local housing non-profits to create a big housing focused movement. The two primary things that we do in Take Back the Land are foreclosure resistance, setting up blockades, working with families, trying to get neighborhood solidarity. And also finding empty bank-owned homes and moving homeless families into them. So one of the things is that it is a very direct thing, it uses direct action. What is direct action, and why does it end up being so important as a kernel for movements like this?

Noam Chomsky:

Direct action carries the message forward in a very dramatic fashion. For one thing it can help people. So resisting foreclosure sometimes does help people get into their homes, but it also dramatizes the issue in a way in which words don't. Direct action means putting yourself on the line. That's true of civil disobedience and many other types of action, which indicate a depth of commitment and clarification of the issues, which sometimes does stir other people to do something. That's what resistance and civil disobedience were always about. In fact, direct action has often been the preliminary to really major changes. Revolutionary changes, in fact. In the United States the sit-down strikes of the 1930s were a major impetus for passing significant New Deal legislation. The reason is that manufacturers could perceive

that a sit-down strike was just one step before taking over the enterprise, kicking out the owners and managers, and saying 'we'll run it ourselves.' Which can be done, and it's the real revolutionary change. Changes the structure of hierarchy, domination, ownership, and so on. And direct actions of the sit-down strikes were dramatic indication of that.

The same was true of, say, the civil rights movements. Things that had been going on forever, hundreds of years, but what sparked it were a couple incidents of direct action. Rosa Parks insisting on sitting in a bus. Greensboro, North Carolina a couple years later. Black students sitting at a lunch counter, and these things then took off and became major movements with a lot of consequences. Without the direct action that probably wouldn't have happened. You could do as many speeches as you like and it wouldn't have had the effect of those actions.

SB

One thing we have also been talking about is that this is built out of necessity. People need a place a to live. Do you think that this kind of necessity helps with the idea of direct action, making it more fundamental?

NC

It should, if done properly, bring home to people that human rights are being taken away by a social and economic system that has no real legitimacy. I mean take foreclosure, take a look at the legislative history. As you know, when the bank

bailout was legislated by congress, the TARP bailout, it actually had two components. One was to bailout the bank, essentially the people who created the crisis. The other half was to do something to help their victims. Of those two components only one was implemented, the first one. And people ought to know that. It's the second one that counts. Yes the perpetrators were bailed out, how about their victims? They're left hanging out to dry. And I think almost anybody can see the extreme injustice of this, in fact criminality if not illegality of it.

SB

In the language, when we are discussing the issue, we draw on the idea of housing as a human right. It's the slogan we use. We call on the U.N. Convention on Human Rights(Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Why do you think this "human rights framework" is important for talking about housing?

NC

Well there is a kind of a gold standard on human rights. It's the Universal Declaration in 1948. Its important for American's to understand the status of that declaration. It was not a Western imposition. It was arrived at by consensus over a very broad range, including input from elsewhere. In fact, much of the initiative came from elsewhere. Some from here, Eleanor Roosevelt in particular. But it was agreed upon and affirmed by congress. It has the highest legal status you can say. It's got three parts, all of equal status. The first part is political and civil rights, so the right to vote and so on. The second part is social and economic rights, and that

includes the right to housing, the right to healthcare, the right to education. All fundamental rights, and by world standards are easily as significant as voting rights. Maybe more so. The third section is cultural rights. The right to preserve your culture, to protect it and so on. Well the U.S. attitude from the beginning has been to dismiss the third component, not even talk about it. It's never discussed. And to reject the second component. So U.S. officials have disparaged and dismissed the social and economic provisions. That's true especially under the Reagan and Bush One administrations. Jeane Kirkpatrick, the U.N. Ambassador under Reagan(1), just dismissed the socio-economic provisions with ridicule. It's a letter from Santa Clause. That's exactly the same as throwing out the civil and political rights and saying their nothing, just a lot of words. Paula Dobriansky(2) in the first Bush administration, she described social and economic rights as 'a myth.' That there are no such rights. The only rights are civil and political rights, and it's just a myth to think that these are rights. Morris Abram, who was the delegate to the international U.N. human rights group(3), they were debating something called the 'right to development,' which basically paraphrased the Universal Declaration. He voted against it; I think the U.S. was the only country to vote against it, with, again, very disparaging remarks. Saying it's preposterous. Incitement. You can't talk about social and economic rights. They don't exist.

So the U.S. has been one of the strongest opponents of social and economic rights, which is a core part, one-third, of the Universal Declaration. Actually the U.S. is opposed to two-thirds since it doesn't discuss the cultural rights. We should know

that our country is in the lead in undermining human rights. That's important, especially given the standard rhetoric from political leaders, intellectuals, media, and so on about how we defend human rights all over the world. We don't defend them at all in principle. We defend them against enemies. So we are all in favor of human rights in Easter Europe or Iran, and say that's fine. But not in our domain. Not here.

Foreclosure is one case in point. The right to housing is a core part of the Universal Declaration. Its particularly obscene here, for the reasons I've mentioned, because in the foreclosure case these people were cheated. They were cheated by the big banks, who created the crisis on the verge of criminality, some of them actually criminal. They created the crisis; induced people to undertake obligations they couldn't possibly fulfill, and are now throwing them out in the streets, even though congress legislated there should be assistance to the victims.

SB

One thing I think is interesting is the housing movement starts to take shape, likely because of the 2010 crisis, but the character of it takes shape along with the Occupy Movement. They are both about taking over spaces. Either trying to reuse space, or take it back from another entity. Do you think there is actually something significant about this idea of actually occupying a space?

NC

They both have that theme, but as you say it's a different type of occupation. In the Occupy Movement, it was to take a public space to use it for developing structures of solidarity. Mutual aid, debate, discussion, organization, a place to reach out into the community to bring about badly needed changes. In the case of the housing movement, its much more concrete. It's a matter of giving people a roof over their heads.

There are straightforward ways to deal with the foreclosure. First, a number of people could be granted the right to rent their old houses and pay rents that are not that high until they reconstruct their finances and are able buy them back. That could be done. There are other simple means that could be applied. So I think for the anti-foreclosure movement should have a very strong appeal to the general public if the issues are formulated clearly and properly.

And there's just the straight human side. Why should people be thrown out of their houses because the banks are crooks? Then they get bailed out, of course.

SB

Do you think communities of color have been especially affected?

NC

Sure. Victimization increases with poverty, it increases with race. We can't overlook the fact that despite some progress, racial oppression is still a major

feature of American society. It hasn't gone away. Just take a look at the distribution of people in prison.

SB

There is kind of a sweep effect that ends up happening, where one house becomes empty, two become empty, it becomes six...

NC

It begins to destroy the neighborhood, so everybody has a stake in it. It's a real reason for everyone to cooperate to prevent it from happening. It's wholly indecent as far as the original family is concerned. It is also unnecessary because there are clear ways of dealing with it, and then there is kind of a domino effect. It destroys the neighborhood.

SB

As we are starting to see the, I guess I shouldn't say the "end" of the Occupy Movement, but we are walking away from that kind of rhetoric and the occupations, what do you think effect do you think it has had on movement building? On the way that we discuss the issues.

NC

Well, the Occupy Movement was very brief. It started a year ago, lasted for a couple months. It had a brilliant tactic. It was very effective. It had an enormous impact.

Far more than I would have guessed, I must say I was surprised. It spread all over the country to hundreds of cities. All over the world. I gave talks in Sydney, Australia to the Occupy Movement. It just galvanized a lot of energy, activity, and so on.

But it was based on a tactic, and tactics don't make movements.

Tactics, for one thing, they kind of a half -life. They have diminishing returns. You can't apply them forever. The same is true of the most famous of the Occupy Movements, in Tahrir Square in Egypt. I was just there the day before yesterday. People are still there. Tahrir Square is still a symbol of ongoing struggle, but you can't keep occupying Tahrir Square. For one, people in the neighborhood just get angered and irritated by it because its disturbing their lives. The effectiveness of the tactic begins to diminish, so you have to turn the tactic into a set of principles, which you then pursue with different tactics. And I think that's the stage in which the Occupy Movement is today. As it is in the case of Egypt, where they're debating, discussing, asking how to go on under the new circumstances. Not necessarily rejecting re-occupying of Tahrir Square, but moving in another direction. Occupy needs to do the same thing.

The Occupy Movement is far more diffuse and diverse. It doesn't have the central character that, to some extent, the Egyptian Movement had, or the Tunisian Movement. Its got similar problems all over the world. Spain, Greece, Portugal,

England. In some places its had real successes. Take Quebec. In Quebec the Student Movement, which is not part of the Occupy Movement but I think was stimulated by it just as Zuchotti Park was stimulated by Tahrir Square. The Quebec Student Movement had remarkable success. It should be better known. Initially it was a protest against a sharp rise in tuitions. It expanded, and gained enormous that could have led to overthrown the government and a significant change in a whole range of policies. That's an enormous achievement. That should be better known, and it can stimulate other things.

SB

What is interesting about them is that they turned an idea of an occupation into a permanent, long-standing social movement that was going to be there after this took place. It was going to continue to maintain that student power, not let it dissipate after a large victory, but maintain that presence.

NC

It was a popular movement. Students have often been kind of a stimulus and a source for broader activism, but it can't succeed until it goes well beyond the students. That was the case, for example, for the civil rights movement.

Greensboro, North Carolina was students. SNCC spearheaded the civil rights movement with students. The Freedom Riders, not all, but the majority were young people and students. Over time it grew and became a mass popular movement, and had major achievements. Like all movements, it was limited and never achieved its

real goals. They were aborted. In fact, right when the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King turned to class issues they were crushed. There are lessons there. And everyone knows Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech in 1963, but not many people know what, in many ways, was a more important 'I Have a Dream' speech of his in 1968. The evening that he was assassinated. That evening he spoke to a large crowd. He was in Memphis, Tennessee to support a public workers strike. A sanitation workers strike. He was moving towards establishing a Poor People's Movement. Not black, Poor People's Movement, which would address the fundamental issues of housing, that was a crucial part of it, poverty, malnutrition, and so on. Actually, one of steps was an early housing movement in Chicago. Urban Chicago. He used his usual biblical style rhetoric. He described himself to the crowd as like Moses, standing on a mountain. He could see the Promised Land. The land of freedom and justice, and overcoming poverty and oppression. He could see it, he was not going to get there, but you'll get there. He spoke to the audience, then he was assassinated right there.

There was supposed to be a march on Washington, a 'poor people's march,' which he was to lead. His widow, Coretta King, led the march, and, from Memphis, it went through the places in the South where the major struggles had been. Birmingham, Selma, and so on. Ended up in Washington, and set up a tent city(4). An Occupy Movement. They set up a tent city in Washington. They were going to appeal to congress to legislate bills that would deal with the fundamental class issues, like poverty and housing and so on. They were allowed to stay there for a while and

then congress sent in the security forces. They smashed up the tent city in the middle of the night and drove them out of Washington. That's a part of the civil rights movement that you don't hear about on Martin Luther King Day, but it's important. It won major victories, but it couldn't break through Northern racism and insistence on class privilege.

And we are right there now. Occupy is a sort of a Poor People's Movement. Of course, there too the tent cities were broken up. People were driven out, but you have to go on.

SB

If you look back, this is not the first time that people have done things like eviction resistance or occupying houses. Can you talk a little bit about where in the past this has happened, and maybe internationally?

NC

In the 1930s it happened all the time, and in large parts of Europe left groups, often anarchist groups, have taken over buildings. Reconstructed them so that homeless people could live there. These movements have never reached a point of take off where it becomes a general thing to do, but they've been effective in many places in limited ways. You never know when it's going to take off. You couldn't have predicted that in Greensboro, North Carolina. You couldn't have predicted it with Rosa Parks. You couldn't have predicted it with Zuccotti Park.

SB

Do you think that now there's an open discourse about radical politics that anarchism has a voice in the discussion?

NC

It certainly opened the doors, but whether it has a voice in the discussion depends on how people walk through those doors and develop the opportunities and possibilities that are available. So, yeah, there's openings. And people have also sensed in their own existence the possibilities of mutual aid, solidarity. One of the most important things about the Occupy Movement, I think, was just to create the kinds of bonds and associations that will be necessary for a more just and decent society. People just helping each other, instead of 'I just want to enrich myself add to my number of commodities.' I'm going to join in a soup kitchen or a library or a public discussion, and we'll all do it together. We can win together. That's critical.

Notes:

1. Jean Kirkpatrick was nominated by Reagan as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.
2. Paula Dobriansky has worked as a foreign policy expert in the administrations of five presidents in total, with her position ranging. Her statements were made when acting as Secretary of State for Human Rights

and Human Affairs, which she did for both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

3. The official title for Morris Abram that is being referenced is Representative of the United States to the European Office of the United Nations, which he was appointed to be George H. W. Bush. He served from 1989-1993.
4. Called Resurrection City