Praxis Project

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Due: November 29, 2011

Professor Mar Peter-Raoul
Phil 103, World Views and Values

“We have it in our power to begin the world over again”
-Thomas Paine, author and revolutionary, 1776
Journal Entry 1 – My Praxis Project
Friday: October 14, 2011, 9:02pm - Updated Continually

When I started this project, I wanted to spend my time helping a person or family in need. My idea was to meet someone who is struggling to get by and get to know them, hear their story, and try to help them by giving them a little bit of kindness and hope. I was then going to share my experience, and try to persuade other people to reach out to those in need. In a nutshell, I wanted to change people's lives with kindness.

As I got hands on experience, it seemed like everyone I met was struggling in some way or another. When I visited the soup kitchen, not only were the “clients” struggling, walking by with their tired eyes, thanking you when you hand them their food; but so were the volunteers, discussing their concern about affording to send their kids to college while making sure to put more than one type of dessert on each tray so the “clients” would have a choice. As I started researching, the statistics I found and articles I read further pointed to the fact that an astonishing number of Americans are struggling in some way or another to get by. Almost all Americans are struggling to get by.

Then Professor Mar and I went to Occupy Poughkeepsie one afternoon. It was my first time encountering anything like it, people of different backgrounds coming together. In the air a passion that was hard not to feel. As I listened to them talk, I realized the things they were upset about are the same things I have come to realize these past few days. I had heard about the Occupy Wall Street movement, but that was the first time I really looked into it. As we left, I knew that the Occupy Movement had sparked my attention, and when Professor Mar said, “you should do this for your praxis project!” I knew it was decided. I guess a little kindness may not be enough.

I don’t know if it’s my ability to relate to the cause, the people involved (walk with the dreamers, the believers, the courageous… Let their spirit ignite a fire within you to leave this world better than when you found it -Wilfred Peterson), the excitement something new, or the chance to help change the world, but I am fascinated by the Occupy Movement. After doing more research, everywhere I look something seems to relate to the movement – whether it something I read on the news, learn in any one of my classes, or hear in the grocery store or walking down the street.

These Occupiers have suppressed their antagonism toward the unjust system for too long; and these Occupiers represent the people. Since September 17th 2011, they have been protesting to eradicate the inequality in society, a protest that does not seem to be slowing down. For my Praxis project, I am going to research the Occupy Movement; a movement that I think will become a Revolution. I am going to focus on the need for change, as well as the implication of action.

“If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

-Fredrick Douglass, author, former slave, and abolitionist, 1857
“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; It must be demanded by the oppressed.”
-Martin Luther King Jr, A Letter from Birmingham Jail

In A Letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. describes nonviolent direct action as a force to “create a kind of tension in society” that makes people confront an issue; “it seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

Martin Luther King’s core issue, over five decades ago, was injustice. In his letter, he describes the four basic steps for any nonviolent campaign: collection of facts, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action. Through the application of these four steps, the Civil Rights Movement was born.

Many parallels can be observed between King’s theory and the Occupy movement. While the Occupiers stand for many different things, their causes revert back to the same issue of injustice. As in any protest or movement, individual behaviors will vary from the collective goal, but as a whole the Occupiers are using a similar nonviolent direct action technique as described by King. While the Occupy Movement does not have as much publicity or following as the Civil Rights Movement did at it’s prime, nothing is born in a day.

Below, I have provided some important facts and observations about the Occupy Movement, while relating it to King’s four steps.


The Occupy Movement protests for change in many aspects of our society. In the article “Occupy Wall Street’ Protestors Confront Nightmare,” Professor Seemi Ahmad sums it up pretty well, saying that the Occupiers “see an America with rising income inequality, stagnant wages, rising poverty levels, high unemployment, mounting costs of education and a burden of student loans.” Facts and statistics provide proof of the authenticity of these views. While there are too many relevant facts and numbers to include them all, I have listed a few below.

**Rising Income Inequality:** In 2008, the top one percent held over twenty percent of the total pre-tax income in the United States. The following table, created by inequality.org from information from the Congressional Budget Office shows that the disparity in wages continues to grow (at, I personally think, shocking rates).
Stagnating Wages: According to the Household Economic Survey released in June, average household incomes have risen only 3.4 percent over the past two years, while inflation rose seven percent over that time (meaning households have lost spending power of 3.6 percent).vi

Rising Poverty Levels: According to a study in September by the US Census Bureau, 42.6 million Americans are now living below the poverty line. The official poverty rate went up 1.2 percent from 2009 to 2010 to the current poverty rate of 15.1 percent, the highest since 1993.vii

High Unemployment: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate is approximately nine percent. Since February of 2009, the unemployment rate has been consistently above eight percent, reaching numbers higher than America has seen since 1983. 13.9 million people are currently unemployed in the United States.viii

Mounting Cost of Education and the Burdon of Student Loans: "More than 36 million Americans currently hold almost $1 trillion in student loan debt.” Public and private university tuitions both continue to rise, and the cost of public universities is up 8.3 percent last year.ix

2. Negotiation.

Before taking action, King and other Black leaders repeatedly tried to negotiate with the city fathers; but after a while, they realized that they were “the victims of a broken promise.” He said, “as in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action.”

The view of the Occupiers is a little different. In a way, they feel as if they do not have the power to negotiate with the government, because the government often caters to (what they refer to as) the 1%. Bank bailouts, political lobbying, and Wall Street’s close ties with political figures are a few examples of why they feel this way.
One of the major criticisms against the Occupy Movement is that they do not have specific demands. This was addressed at a General Meeting I attended at Occupy Poughkeepsie, and the basic response among the Occupiers was that it is too late for compromise, a bill or a law will not cut it – they want a change in the way things are done. A man who works at Vassar Hospital (and had helped in a medical tent at Zuccotti Park) shared a story about a colleague who told him they need a “mission statement” while discussing the Occupy Movement, specifically Occupy Poughkeepsie. He said that when he hears comments like these, he wishes people would take the time to visit an Occupy location and talk to the people – that then they would understand.

According to *This Changes Everything*, a book on Occupy Wall Street; “Few among the 99% now believe government works for their benefit – and for good reason. With the 1% commanding an army of lobbyists and doling out money from multimillion-dollar campaign war chests, government has become a source of protection and subsidies for Wall Street. No wonder there isn’t enough money left over for education, repairing roads and bridges, taking care of veterans and retirees, much less for the critical transition we need to make to a clean energy future. The system is broken in so many ways that it’s dizzying trying to name them all. This is part of the reason why the Occupy movement hasn’t created a list of demands.”

3. Self Purification

Martin Luther King placed a special emphasis on self-purification. In the letter he says “we began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves ‘are you able to accept blows without retaliating?’ ‘Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?’”

I sat in on a General Meeting at Occupy Poughkeepsie where they addressed issues relating to self-purification. The group discussed time for meditation and “round table meetings,” a time for sharing, teaching, and learning both facts about the movement, and ways to affectively deliver their message.

One of the members of the meeting, a young man named Pat, referred to their Occupation as “intentionally living in poverty.” By living outside in the cold, with no house, bed, running water, food, heat, or bathroom, they are sacrificing basic luxuries to prove their point. Intentional poverty can be compared to some of Gandhi’s tactics, specifically fasting, which were studied by King. Examples of self-purification can also be seen in Occupy movements around the country.

According to “A Roundup of Occupy Protests,” from CNN, nineteen protestors were arrested in Woodruff Park in Atlanta, Georgia during a police crackdown. Later that night, over eighty people were scheduled to meet back in the park for a “Nonviolence Training Seminar.”

According to author Marina Sitrin, who visits and writes about Occupy Wall Street, “as far as what a day looks like, there are workshops, information sharing, a mid-day and evening general assembly, and at least two marches.”

4. Direct Action
Direct action is pretty self-explanatory because it is the aspect of this movement that has brought it so much attention. Marches, events, protests, Occupations, bank boycotts, blocking bridges, etc. are all examples of this direct action.

“Dear 1%,
We Fell Asleep for a While.
Just Woke Up.
Sincerely, the 99%.”

-A popular sign held by Occupiers throughout the country, 2011

Journal Entry 3 – The Friday Morning Vigil
Friday: October 28, 2011, 9:41pm

Two important things happened today: my first Friday Morning Vigil meeting and my first encounter with Occupy Poughkeepsie. I separated these into two journal entries simply for the purpose of organization.

At Friday Morning Vigil meetings, a few friends come together each Friday to sing songs, pray, and show love and support for each other. It was my first time meeting everyone there except for Professor Mar, and counting the two of us there were a total of seven people. I was nervous when I first arrived but Dennis, who leads the meetings at his house, could not have made me feel more welcome. He has a warm, caring presence – like every single other person in the room. I sat next to Gabby, who was very talkative, happy to tell me all about her family, birds, and new home. Sue and Russell sat on the couch, both very interested about any updates on the lives of their friends. Gail sat next to Professor Mar, all of us together forming a circle. Gail is a Reverend, who according to Professor Mar is a huge influence on our local society. She, like Professor Mar, makes it very clear that she cares about people. They both have the tendency to share stories, upcoming events, pictures, book recommendations, etc. that they think will interest you – that will inspire you. And they do.

As I continue to get to know these seven people, I know I have not even touched upon who they are and what they go through, but I do know one thing: that they are the 99%. Each person in the room was struggling with something, sometimes fighting to get by. It inspired me how they stuck together, and were there for each other. At the time of the meeting, I had not yet decided to change my project idea, but it was the perfect precedent for the event that did, my visit to Occupy Poughkeepsie.

Journal Entry 4 – Occupy Poughkeepsie
Friday: October 28, 2011, 10:30pm

After leaving Dennis’s house, I followed Professor Mar to Occupy Poughkeepsie, located off of Market Street about a mile from the Mid Hudson Bridge. We were not there for long, but we had good timing – for we got to sit in on a general meeting. A general meeting is a time where the Occupiers, often on different committees, get together and discuss thoughts, ideas, and needs.

This general meeting consisted of about ten people, both male and female, in their late teens and early twenties. A redhead named Adam took the floor, and brought up concerns, ideas, and information on upcoming events. They discussed things from a
nighttime security system to finding someone to donate a garbage can, from the inevitable
cold weather to preparing for upcoming events at local institutions. They had plans to
Occupy Dutchess, the local community college, and Professor Mar informed them about an
upcoming event at Marist where they may want to set up a booth. The final thing they
discussed were their schedules – how to set up booths, attend events, cover the Occupy
location, book bands and performers, and get all of this information to the people - while
visiting Wall Street, Albany, and still going about their daily lives. Most of these people are
going to college, working, or both; a re-occurring theme for the Occupiers is their need for
people and support.

One thing that surprised me about the general meeting is how well it was prepared. The Occupiers had lists of names, events, and phone numbers, and documented any
important information or ideas. There was a designated speaker, but each person seemed
to contribute something to the meeting in a unique way. All ideas were respected, and
everyone seemed comfortable voicing their piece. From the impression I got, this
movement is really about the people. It seeks to leave no one behind, and does not
discriminate against any race, background, or belief.

“Go be that starving Artist you’re afraid to be. Open up that journal and get poetic finally. Volunteer. Suck it up and travel. You were not born here to work and pay taxes. You were put here to be part of a vast organism to explore and create. Stop putting it off. The world has much more to offer than what’s on 15 televisions at TGI Fridays. Take pictures. Scare people. Shake up the scene. Be the change you want to see in the world. You’ll thank yourself for it.”

-Jason Mraz, singer and songwriter, 2009

Journal Entry 5 – The Lunch Box and Hillcrest House
Monday: November 7, 2011, 9:20am

Yesterday, my mom, brother, and I went to the Hillcrest House, a shelter where they
provide food, and in some cases a shower and a place to sleep, to those who do not have a
home. This past Tuesday, I went to the Lunch Box, a soup kitchen where they serve lunch
Monday through Friday for anyone who needs it.

In both cases, I noticed a few things that surprised me. The first was the differences
in ages among the people who came to the shelter and food kitchen. They varied in age,
from mid twenties to late sixties. The second was that many of these people were
employed, and still did not have enough money to put food on the table. Many of the
people I met just looked like any average person, I would have never known that they were
struggling if I passed them on the street. “It’s not easy [getting by in today’s world]”
someone said to me – it really opened my eyes to the fact that these issues are not as
removed from society as I thought they were. These issues are affecting people just like me.
As I discussed in my introduction, it also surprised me how the volunteers were having
problem’s getting by as well. Their conversations ranged from the price of gas, to their
spouse’s overworking and lack of free time, to convincing their kids to save money by going
to a community college.

Yesterday, when we arrived home my mother called my aunt and I heard her
describe exactly what I was feeling: “I’m glad that I went but now that I’m home sitting on
the couch watching tv, it almost seems like I was never there. Yeah, those people got a hot meal, but many of them are going back to no home, and what about a meal for tomorrow? It almost seems pointless.” That's when I came to my second realization of the day: that we can volunteer all we want, which may help temporarily, but something needs to change in the way things are run to really make a difference. It should not be okay for Americans to be constantly hungry, to be living without homes. A meal or two is not enough; these people need the chance to change their lives, they need opportunity to live a life to be proud of.

In *Soul of a Citizen*, Paul Loeb talks about this exact issue, about how volunteering for a cause is not enough. He says "Yet at least some of the energy we spend on volunteering should be directed toward the roots of the crisis we address."xiv I will further discuss *Soul of a Citizen* in a later entry, but I believe that the Occupy Movement is helping address the roots of these issues of hunger and homelessness, of the difficulty many people face trying to provide themselves and their families with a healthy life. No one deserves to struggle every day to live, often without food or shelter; this should be especially true in America, where we pride ourselves on a high standard of living, freedom, and opportunity.

="Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air... but only for one second without hope."xv
- Hal Lindsey, author and evangelist, Mid 19th Century

**Journal Entry 6 – Occupy Poughkeepsie**
**Friday: November 11, 2011, 11:52pm**

Today, I stopped by Occupy Poughkeepsie to see how they were doing, and to inform them about an upcoming event at Marist. When I arrived, there were about five people sitting by the tents chatting, less than half whom I recognized. I spoke to Red Head Adam again, and he was very helpful and happy, he even let out a cheer when I mentioned Professor Mar’s name. He gave me a flyer for People’s Day and asked me to come and spread the word. I did not stay long, but as I was there two different cars beeped to show support, and a woman stopped by to drop off coffee.

What surprised me this time was how nice these people are. They go out of their way to greet everyone who stops by, make them feel welcome, and discuss opinions and ideas. I was also surprised at how diverse the group seems to be. Among the few people present, there was one man who stood out to me. He was in his sixties with a white beard and a cowboy hat, he talks loud and laughs a lot, and positive energy radiates from him, making it impossible not to feel. Pat was also there; he is a few years older than me, wearing a military jacket. It is very clear that he plays a big role in Occupy Poughkeepsie.

**Update (November 27th):**

I just want to take this time to discuss one of the most common criticisms I’ve heard about the Occupy movement, both in the media and in every day conversation. I have heard time and time again things about the Occupiers, such as that they are “lazy,” “druggies,” “hippies,” or “bums.” During a visit at Occupy Poughkeepsie, Ryan, a boy my age, told me that the most common insult they hear is “get a job!” He even made a comment about how unoriginal that joke has become.
Every single experience I have had with Occupy Poughkeepsie has been a positive one. The people I meet are a major reason why I am so interested in this movement, and so inspired to help out. Adam seems to go out of his way to remember people’s names, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen him without a smile on his face. The man in the cowboy hat, when I asked if they need anything, said all he needs is a smile. They are always offering me coffee and food, or to help carry something if I need it. Someone once explained to me that they try to go out of their way to make everyone feel extra welcome, because any advice, support, or opinions are helpful and appreciated.

Not all Occupiers are unemployed; people from all different backgrounds support the Occupy Movement. With that said, I think that what jobs people have or where they live is irrelevant to purpose of the movement. People in our society are programmed to judge people based on how much money they make, what job they have, by material items. This is a major issue in our society, a society where people can work four jobs and still struggle to pay bills, a society where someone can graduate from college over 100 thousand dollars in debt. Where does that leave room for anything BUT work? What about bettering ourselves, bettering the world?

I do not think that those who do not support the movement are wrong, but I think it’s wrong to insult it. No, the movement is not perfect and neither are the people. But these people are standing up for what they believe in, pushing for a change that most agree we need. By placing judgments and insults, it says more about the critics than the Occupiers.

“Think of what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world had cookies and milk about 3 o’clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.”

- Robert Fulgham, poet, 1988

Journal Entry 6 – The People’s Day
Saturday: November 12, 2011, 7:57pm

When I walked to The People’s Day this morning, I could see the commotion as soon as I turned the corner onto Market Street. As I approached, the man in the cowboy hat (see left) was the first person I saw. He was as happy as yesterday, and made jokes while welcoming me. He held a giant sign, and pumped up both the people at the event and the passersby.

There were people of all ages on both sides of the street, holding signs, smiling and waving at passing cars. As I walked by, the people all greeted me and were very happy. They wanted to know where I was from, what school I went to, and the most common questions people asked me were “where are the rest of the students?” and “where are people your age?” Someone handed me a sign that said “TAX THE RICH,” and I stood there for a while, waving as the cars drove by.

Then I walked down to where the festivities were taking place. To the left, a decent sized crowed gathered around a man, playing guitar and singing a song. To the right, on the basketball court, people were preparing for a march on Main Street. People wore masks or
carried them above their head, there was a giant horse and a mask of a woman with a spinning “dress.” I soon learned that everything there was a something someone brought or donated, a large amount by a woman who owned a puppeteer shop.

I met people who had traveled from many different places to attend The People’s Day here in Poughkeepsie. Children and adults alike held signs and joined together in common cause, of all races and backgrounds.

Over and over again, the aspect of the Occupy Movement that people seemed to talk about the most is the energy. One woman, about forty who lives two hours north, said about the overall movement that “wherever you go you can really just feel the energy, and everyone seems so in sync.” Another man stated that the “energy is hard to ignore.”

The most interesting woman I met was 99 years old and in a wheel chair, holding a sign that said “$ Talks, The 99 Walks.” Different people, interviewing her or just chatting, constantly surrounded her. The one thing she did tell me, with a giant smile on her face, is that “your [the 99%] energy and your desires are going to change the world.” When I told her I hope so, she looked me in the eye and said, “your hope will be a reality.” She talked about how glad she was that the people are coming together to fight injustice, and how she was even happier to be able to be a part of it.

Together, people marched down Main Street, held signs, spoke, and shared stories. Many stopped by for information or to see what is going on, and everyone I met was very happy to support this cause.

I was impressed by the numbers of people who came out to support Occupy Poughkeepsie, and I could really feel this energy that everyone was talking about. Coming together with the community gave me a good feeling, and today made me realize how diverse the 99% is, and how powerful we can be.

- “It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things.”
  - Teddy Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States, early 19th century

Journal Entry 7 - Together, We Can Make a Difference
Sunday, November 13, 2011, 2:00pm

“There is no greater antidote to powerlessness than joining with others in common cause.”
  - Paul Rogat Loeb, Soul of a Citizen

In Soul of a Citizen, Paul Rogat Loeb explains that people often do not stand up and fight for a cause, not because they do not care, but because they feel they cannot make a difference. There is a sense of powerlessness in our society, Loeb explains, and this feeling is not a natural human trait, it is something that is learned. We need to get over this sense of powerlessness and fight to change the world.
He emphasizes the fact that we do not need to be perfect to make a difference. It may not be easy, it may make you vulnerable, but “when we begin to act on our beliefs, we set out on a journey whose rewards we can’t anticipate.”

While many people feel that they are waiting for the “perfect” time to act, with everything going on in life there may never be a “perfect” time. You do not need to be an expert on the subject, a saint, or a person with special skills or power. All it takes is getting out there, and according to Loeb, “when you start to act on what you believe in it can ignite skills in you that you never knew you had.” The journey for change starts with one small step, and the time to act is now.

“To revert to passivity is to squander our chance to shape history”
- Paul Rogat Loeb, Soul of a Citizen

Loeb says that we should figure out what we believe in and connect with local groups with similar goals. He emphasizes the fact that when people come together as a community, we yield the best result. Not only does community involvement increase our chance to make a difference, but Loeb argues that “community involvement is the mirror that best reflects our individual choices, our strengths and weaknesses, our accomplishments and failures. It allows our lives to count for something.”

I would argue that this community involvement is an example of Democracy at it’s finest. And this community involvement can be observed with the Occupy Movement. The 99% consists of people of all different ages, races, and political beliefs, both locally and around the world coming together. They hold frequent meetings, where everyone has a say and decisions are voted on. Rather than relying on the government or other people to intact change, the people are re-claiming their power and together trying to make a difference together.

“They tell us everything’s all right, and we just go along. How can we fall asleep at night, when something’s clearly wrong? When we could feed a starving world with what we throw away. But all we serve are empty words that always taste the same.

Hey, yeah, yeah, hey, yeah. We must stand together. Hey, yeah, yeah, hey, yeah. There’s no giving in. Hey, yeah, yeah, hey, yeah. Hand in hand forever.

Hey, yeah, yeah, hey, yeah. That’s when we all win.”
- From song “When We Stand Together,” by Nickelback, famous rock band, 2011

Journal Entry 8 – Occupy Poughkeepsie
Friday, November 18, 2011, 11:00pm

Today was a cold day, so around dinnertime I picked up two pizzas and a few bottles of soda, and went down to Occupy Poughkeepsie. When I got there, there were about fifteen people. A few were holding signs by the main road, two sitting on a bench on the side street, and the rest were down by a fire at their general spot. When I arrived, as usual, everyone was very happy and hospitable. This time, there were plenty of people I had never seen before. While most of the Occupiers were around my age, there were a few who were older, late thirties or early forties. Most people introduced themselves to me, and
immediately started sharing stories and opinions. One girl was in the middle of telling a story when I arrived.

She had gone to Wall Street the day before, and was a part of the group who linked arms to block Wall Street from opening. From what she described, it sounded well planned but a little chaotic. Two of the people she went down with got arrested because they refused to move, and she said that she tried to stop violence between a police officer and a protestor, and got punched in the face by a police officer.* She was okay, and optimistic about the situation. She said "some people said we were successful, some said that we didn't do anything. I think it helped; we made some people up to 45 minutes late for work. And we got a point across."

The most inspirational person I met last night was a Native American named Santon-nay (my spelling is probably not correct). He had a guitar and sang “Every Dream is like a River” by the fire. Constantly, he reminded people that he loved and supported them, offered encouragement, and emphasized the importance that this Occupation is not a place to hang out, it is a place to take action.

I then got a tour of some of the tents. Outside of the main sleeping tent was a homemade shelf, where people put their shoes before entering. When I went in, the blankets were all folded and placed in two piles. Up to twenty people sleep there each night. Their kitchen tent had plenty of food and water, and a place for dirty dishes. One thing that the Occupiers can always use more of is water. My apartment is very close, so me and two of the Occupiers took the empty bottles back there to fill them.

One of the people that helped carry water bottles was Ryan, an energetic and talkative boy about my age. On the ride back, he described to me that he feels the government is more interested in money and corporations than it is its people. It stood out to me when he said “wealth is not money. Yeah, money's important too but wealth is people.” Ryan also gave me a basic run down on some signals they use for their general meetings:

- The words “mic check” are used to stop people from talking
- To hold your hands straight out in front of you and wiggle your fingers is a “temperature check,” to discover how people are feeling about the given subject
- A hand in the air with wiggling fingers represents approval
- Crossing your arms in front of your chest means disapproval
- A finger in the air means the person wants to speak next
- To move your arms in circles around each other means “wrap it up”

When we arrived back, I got to sit in on another one of these general meetings. This time, it was way more organized than the first meeting I sat in on with Professor Mar. Ryan took the lead, and he had a laptop with a list of things to discuss and vote on. At one point in the meeting, everyone went around and introduced him or herself, shared how we were doing, and anything else we would like to say.

The first topic they discussed was a list of rules they had come up with the night before. These include “no drugs” and “no sexual harassment,” which sparked from negative media attention. There was a debate on whether or not they should post these rules. One side thought yes, to show the community their commitment to organization and compliance. The other side said no, that that is giving critics what they want, and that it
goes against what they are fighting for. They wanted people to have to come down and see and hear for themselves; rather than a list telling them what to do they wanted to hold each other accountable. In the end, no list won.

Another topic they discussed were Occupier’s blocking of bridges the night before. A short debate took place as to whether or not they should block the Mid Hudson Bridge. Although their point may be proven, the Occupiers were worried that they would lose support in the community. No decision was decided on.

Another topic they discussed was foreclosures. According to the official Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, a reason why they assemble is because “they [the government] have taken our houses through an illegal foreclosure process, despite not having the original mortgage.” At this general meeting, Occupy Poughkeepsie discussed sitting in on home foreclosures, and demanding to see the original mortgage. They had a plan to get more information, and would follow up at a later date.

One topic that got particularly heated was their need for more action. A newcomer, his first time at any Occupy location, made a comment about how they were not doing enough. Some people agreed, and some people got angry. One thing that everyone could agree on was the fact that while Occupying, it was always important to make progress. While at the Occupy location, they agreed to hold each other accountable to continue to make signs, gain and spread information, stand by the road, and constantly be working toward their greater cause. Pat, the man with the army coat, spoke the most at the meeting, and at one point offered encouragement by saying “we have God, truth, and love on our side.”

The Vassar Doctor, who I mentioned earlier, proposed one idea that I really liked. He feels that the media is barely covering the Occupy Movement because the government does not want it to gain momentum. Normally, on the Today Show, behind the hosts fans stand and wave at the camera or hold signs that say things like “Hi Mom,” etc. His idea was to get a group of people to go down to the city with signs about the Occupy Movement, including ones asking why NBC won’t cover the movement. He wanted to have people behind the entire window with signs about the Occupy Movement, to force them to address the issue. This idea was a new one, and immediately gained full support. He emphasized the importance of not posting the idea on the internet or sharing it with Occupy Wall Street, for if it got too much attention the police and station would find out and stop it before it could happen. After the conclusion of the meeting, a group of people got together to discuss the idea further and figure out what needed to be done to move forward (pick a date, make signs, figure out who would go, etc.)

In total, the meeting lasted about two hours. I was very impressed with their organization, and their commitment to taking action. It does not seem like the Occupiers are going anywhere, despite any drawbacks – including the cold weather.

*Although I did include this story about police violence, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I do not see the Occupation as a battle between Occupiers and authority. Police officers have to do their jobs, and as I mentioned earlier – individual actions do not represent a group as a whole. I believe that there are many police officers who can relate to the Occupier’s goals, many who are the 99%.

As I was at Occupy Poughkeepsie, I saw first hand a perfect example of this. The fire chief came down, because he had gotten a call about the small fire we were gathered
around. He was very friendly and happy, made jokes, and showed support – he said that as long as they have a grate over the fire and are “using it for cooking,” it is no problem at all. He could have given them a hard time, but made it clear that he was not going to cause trouble for no reason, and was just responding to a call.

Occupy Poughkeepsie, at this general meeting, mentioned the importance of working with people of authority. Although, in the beginning, they got a few tickets, for the most part the police have let them be and quietly supported their cause. Occupy Poughkeepsie is committed to working along with them. According to the Occupy Poughkeepsie website:

“In solidarity with working people who have to work on Thanksgiving Day, we made up a big meal of turkey with all the trimmings, mashed potatoes, green beans, and pumpkin pie and delivered it to the nearby Poughkeepsie police station who received it with surprise and graciousness.”xxi

While my plan was to stop by for a few minutes, I ended up staying at Occupy Poughkeepsie for four hours. Again, I was inspired by their passion and energy. I would recommend that anyone stop by, preferably around seven (that’s when they hold their general meetings), it may spark something inside of you.

“It is in all of us to defy expectations, to go into the world and to be brave. To want, to need, to hunger for adventures. To embrace change and chance and risk so that we may breathe and know what it is to be free.”

-Mae Chevrette, 25 year old artist living in Boston, Massachusetts xxii

Journal Entry 9 - The Core Of Being Human
Friday, November 25, 2011, 3:34pm

Yesterday, I stopped by Occupy Poughkeepsie to drop off cupcakes and wish them a happy Thanksgiving. I wish I could have stayed, but my mother was having a huge dinner and I spent Thanksgiving Day with my family. They said that they had been given an enormous amount of food, and were expecting a lot of people.

Today, I am not going to talk about my experience with the Occupy Movement, but rather emphasize the concept that humans have the right to be free and equal. Think about what you wanted to be when you were young. I wanted to be a princess, but my back up plan was a teacher. My brother wanted to be a pilot, my best friend a pediatrician. Parents tell their children “you can be anything you want.”

“You can be anything you want.” It’s the American Dream, but this dream is not a reality for most Americans. My brother is a prime example. According to the documentary “Capitalism: A Love Story,” it is not uncommon for a pilot to leave school 100 thousand dollars in debt, but starting salaries are sometimes less than livable. In the documentary, one woman discussed how she is getting paid about twenty thousand dollars a year, and by the time she can pay back her student loans, with interest, it could be almost half a million dollars. She has graduated college, achieved her dream job, and still works at a coffee shop on the side to get by.xxiii

Stories like that make it hard to argue that something needs to change. All humans are equal, and all people should have the same freedom and opportunity to pursue their dreams.
In my notes for philosophy class, I wrote:

Existentialism – the core of being human is freedom

While that is a very simplified definition of a rather complex movement, it is a theme that can be observed throughout history. Even the UN Declaration of Human Rights states, in Article 1, that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The Occupy Movement attempts to restore these rights.

Journal Entry 10 - Conclusion
Wednesday, November 30, 2011, 3:00pm

Although my project is due today, my interest in the Occupy Movement will continue. I am upset that I haven’t had the chance to go to New York City yet, and still plan on going in the future. I also plan on remaining in contact with Occupy Poughkeepsie, and over winter break I hope to get more involved with them.

One thing that I want to emphasize is that everyone should go experience the movement before passing judgment. The news and media have a tendency to twist stories, to show them from one point of view. One opportunity that this project gave me was the chance to interact with many different people. Every person has a story, and no one person deserves more opportunity than the next.

I included quotes at the end of many entries, either that I thought were relevant to that entry or the movement in general. I included the person’s name, job, and the year that they said the quote – because I think that this shows how these issues are almost universal. I included quotes from presidents to poets to former slaves to rock stars, as far back as the 1700s to today. These issues of freedom, justness, and coming together are not going to go away - they are things we have believed in and been fighting for throughout all of human existence.

With this movement comes an opportunity to change the world. Only time will tell – but I sure hope it does.

Journal Entry – Conclusion
Wednesday, December 14, 2011, 1:00pm

Since I turned in my praxis project, a few things have happened at Occupy Poughkeepsie.

Wednesday

On Wednesday, December 7th, Occupy Poughkeepsie was evicted. At 3:30am, Poughkeepsie police showed up at Hulme Park where the Occupiers had been staying for the past couple of months. There were about six people sleeping in the tents; the police woke them up, asked them to leave, and tore down their “home.” Nobody was arrested or received tickets, but all of their possessions were brought to the station, some of them destroyed in the process.
I talked to Brent, one of the people who were sleeping when the police arrived. He said that there was no violence, but he did make some negative comments to the police. He, along with almost everyone else who I talked to, felt that an evacuation at 3:30 in the morning was the wrong way to force them to leave the park.

That evening, Occupy Poughkeepsie arranged an “emergency meeting” to discuss what to do next. It was a cold and wet night, with snow in the forecast, so the meeting was held at the Christ Episcopal Church on Carroll Street. There were about sixty people at the meeting, including councilwoman Gwen Johnson, who had stopped by a GA I attended earlier in the week to warn Occupy Poughkeepsie that the mayor and other elected officials had their minds set on ending the occupation. There were also a lot of faces I had never seen before.

One of the major issues of the meeting was what to do next. After much discussion, it was decided that we would open a separate Occupation in New Paltz for those who live there, but still focus most of the attention on Poughkeepsie. Poughkeepsie is a blue-collar area in the center of the Hudson Valley, and a prime place for this movement. Because of the weather, risk of arrest, and lack of a back-up plan, it was decided that OPK would not re-occupy Hulme park until they could hold a big event, have a big following, and would come back stronger than ever. But the park will be re-occupied eventually. For now, attention will be focused on occupying foreclosed homes, sponsoring events, and coming up with a plan for the future.

There were a lot of people at the meeting who stood up simply to thank the occupiers. People were inspired, and the eviction made them want to help even more. Representatives from Union 1199 announced that they wanted to fund a rally the following Thursday, with Occupy Poughkeepsie as the focus. A lawyer stopped by with information on becoming a legal observer, and offered a training the following Saturday. A work group was created to write letters to local authorities and media outlets. And, what personally touched me the most, the people in the community took it upon themselves to make sure the Occupiers had a safe place to stay. They arranged a safe house for people to sleep, in a rural area about a half an hour away, and transportation to and from. At the meeting, I sat next to one of the Occupiers who had been Occupying for the past week and a half. During the two-hour time frame, four different people offered him a place to stay.

It was amazing to see so many people coming together. People of different ages and races were all at this “emergency meeting,” and more people spoke up than any other GA I have attended. In the face of the eviction, the future of the movement is as promising as ever.

**Saturday**

This Saturday, Occupy Poughkeepsie and Occupy New Paltz held a protest and rally in New Paltz, and opened a new Occupation there. I was not able to attend, but I heard that it was successful, with a good turnout. This morning, I texted one of the Occupiers to see how it was going, and he responded “its pretty small right now but its only day 5.” He seems to have hope for growth, and for a good reason.
The Future

The Occupy movement is a collection of smart, creative, diverse people who are coming together to fight for each other. They are full of passion, and they are taking steps toward change – all over the country, and all over the world. There will be challenges, but I honestly believe that together we can rise above them.

At the most recent GA I attended, we discussed the importance of balancing the impulsive, creative passion that drives this movement with organization and planning. A man who had been active with social movements in the sixties emphasized the importance of keeping a clear head and focusing on the cause; he claims that “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” discredited their cause then, and he doesn't want it to cripple us now. There was a general consensus at this meeting that this movement cannot fail, and it will not die. Something has been started, and even if something happens to the Occupy movement itself, something new will spark up in its place. Change is our only option.

So, this is a new step in the Occupy movement, and a perfect ending to my project. Because, as with all endings – it’s just another beginning.
Works Cited


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