



# OTHERING & BELONGING

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF HUMAN CONCERN

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## ISSUE 2

### **Belonging as a Cultural Right**

Arlene Goldbard

### **Equity as Common Cause**

Elisabeth Farrell, Tom Kelly, Joanne Burke,  
Curtis Ogden, & Karen Spiller

### **The Endurance of the Color Line**

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### **How Can We Support Our Children?**

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### **Oppose Othering!**

Rebecca Podlech

### **Divided and Platformed**

Susie Cagle

**Othering & Belonging is published by the  
Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society  
at the University of California, Berkeley.**

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<b>CITATION</b>	<i>Othering and Belonging</i> . Berkeley, CA: Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley, April 2017. otheringandbelonging.org. issn 2474-6061

*The work of the Haas Institute is generously supported by the following:  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation; Atlantic Philanthropies; The California  
Endowment; East Bay Community Foundation; Ford Foundation; Greater  
Kansas City Community Foundation; Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund;  
The Kresge Foundation; Marguerite Casey Foundation; Northwest Area  
Foundation; Open Society Foundations; Panta Rhea Foundation; Public  
Welfare Foundation; The San Francisco Foundation; Silicon Valley  
Community Foundation; Tides Foundation; W.K. Kellogg Foundation; and  
Y & H Soda Foundation*

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ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2017

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# CONTRIBUTORS

## AUTHORS

### Belonging as a Cultural Right

**Arlene Goldbard** is a writer, speaker, consultant and cultural activist whose focus is the intersection of culture, politics and spirituality. Her blog and other writings may be downloaded from her website ([www.arlenegoldbard.com](http://www.arlenegoldbard.com).) She was born in New York and grew up near San Francisco. Her two newest books on art's public purpose—*The Wave* and *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & The Future* were published in spring 2013. Prior books include *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development; Community, Culture and Globalization*; an international anthology published by the Rockefeller Foundation; *Crossroads: Reflections on the Politics of Culture*; and *Clarity*, a novel. Her essays have been published in *In Motion Magazine*, *Art in America*, *Theatre*, *Tikkun*, and many other journals. She has addressed many academic and community audiences in the United States and Europe on topics ranging from the ethics of community arts practice to the development of integral organizations. She serves as Chief Policy Wonk of the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture ([www.usdac.us](http://www.usdac.us)) and President of the Board of Directors of The Shalom Center ([www.theshalomcenter.org](http://www.theshalomcenter.org)) She was named a 2015 Purpose Prize Fellow for her work with the USDAC. She was named one of the YBCA 100 2016.

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### Equity as Common Cause

**Elisabeth Farrell** is a Project Director at the University of New Hampshire's Sustainability Institute, where she has worked for over a decade, managing projects and initiatives related to sustainable food systems, culture and sustainability, energy and climate change, and biodiversity. Her work over the years has helped to advance many Institute endeavors, including the book *The Sustainable Learning Community: One University's Journey to the Future* (2009) and the University's undergraduate degree in EcoGastronomy. At present, she devotes much of her time to managing efforts for the Food Solutions New England (FSNE) network. Elisabeth holds a Master of Public Administration degree and graduate certificate in Sustainability Politics and Policy from the University of New Hampshire, a Master of Fine Arts degree in writing and literature from the Bennington College Writing Seminars and a bachelor degree in anthropology from the University of New Hampshire.

**Tom Kelly** is the Executive Director of the University of New Hampshire's Sustainability Institute and the University's Chief Sustainability Officer. Co-editor and co-author of *The Sustainable Learning Community: One University's Journey to the Future* (2009), Dr. Kelly has been working in the field of

higher education and sustainability for more than twenty years in the US and abroad. Current activities include working with UNH colleagues and many related partners on projects across the university's curriculum, operations, research and engagement activities; examples include developing regional approaches to sustainable food through Food Solutions New England and energy systems through Climate Solutions New England, incubating sustainability science, and emphasizing the central place of culture in sustainability and sustainability education and pedagogy. In addition to an undergraduate and master's degree in musical composition and conducting, he holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

**Joanne Burke** is the Thomas W. Haas Professor in Sustainable Food Systems at the University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute and Clinical Assistant Professor and Director of the UNH Dietetic Internship. Dr. Burke provides leadership to engage the University community in efforts to advance sustainable agriculture, food choices, nutrition, and economic and social wellbeing on campus and beyond. She is a member of the FSNE Process and Network Teams, and also serves on teams to support state-based food system planning in New Hampshire through the New Hampshire Food Alliance. Her areas of interest focus on community nutrition with an emphasis on food system capacity, food security and food system sustainability, food and nutrition practices, racial equity and social justice, and the integration of research into the dietetics and nutrition curriculum. In 2013, Dr. Burke received the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice

Group's prestigious Excellence in Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Award.

**Curtis Ogden** is a Senior Associate at the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC). Curtis brings to IISC his experience in education, community development and organizing, leadership development, and program design. Much of his work at IISC entails consulting with cross-sector multi-stakeholder efforts to strengthen and transform food, education, economic and civic systems at local, state, regional, and national levels, including: Food Solutions New England, Vermont Farm to Plate Network, Hunts Point Resiliency, National Public Education Support Fund, Cancer Free Economy Network, and Inter-Institutional Network for Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability (INFAS). Through his role at IISC, Curtis provides design and facilitation support to the FSNE Process and Network Teams and is lead facilitator/trainer of the FSNE Network Leadership Institute. In addition to his work at IISC, Curtis is on the Advisory Board of EmbraceRace and a member of the Research Alliance for Regenerative Economics.

**Karen Spiller** is Principal of KAS Consulting, which provides mission-based consulting with a focus on resource matching and strategic planning for health and equity-focused initiatives. She works with diverse stakeholders, including community residents and businesses, state and local agencies, policy makers, corporations, foundations, community-based organizations, and healthcare providers. Karen serves on the FSNE Process and Network Teams, and is FSNE's Massachusetts Ambassador. She also serves organizations in various

roles that include The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts, and Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.

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### **The Endurance of the Color Line**

**Soya Jung** is senior partner at ChangeLab, a grassroots political lab that explores how US demographic change is affecting racial justice politics, with a strategic focus on Asian American identity. She has been active in the progressive movement for the last twenty years. During the '90s, she worked as a reporter at the *International Examiner*, communications and policy staff for the Washington State House Democratic Caucus, and executive director of the Washington Alliance for Immigrant and Refugee Justice. She was the founding chair of the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, which formed in 1996 to restore food and cash assistance for low-income immigrants and refugees in Washington State. During the 2000s, Soya was the director of grantmaking at the Social Justice Fund, a public foundation supporting progressive organizations in the Northwest, and consulted for various institutions. She also serves as the board chair of Grassroots International, which funds resource rights in the Global South.

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### **Responses to the Inaugural Article on Othering & Belonging**

**Susan Eaton** is director of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at the Heller School. At the Sillerman Center, Susan and her colleagues engage funders and their advisors, socially concerned scholars,

and nonprofit practitioners to increase and enhance grant making to social justice causes. Susan is an author, most recently of the book *Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees and America at Its Best* about efforts that welcome and incorporate immigrants into their new communities across the United States. Prior to her appointment at Heller in 2015, Susan was research director at the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School. Her writing has appeared in numerous scholarly and popular publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Sunday Boston Globe Magazine*, *the Nation*, *Education Week*, *Education Next*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Harvard Law and Policy Review*, *Race Poverty and the Environment*, and many others. Susan holds a doctorate in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

A Roman Catholic theologian and social ethicist, **Alex Mikulich** devotes his scholarship and activism to address white privilege and racism in the Catholic Church and society. He is coauthor of *The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-Incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (Palgrave, 2013). He coedited and contributed to *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Orbis, 2007), which won the 2008 Theological Book of the Year from the College Theology Society. He is an invited affiliate member of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium. He frequently serves as a keynote speaker, workshop facilitator, and consultant for institutions seeking to develop deeper institutional commitment to racial equity. He is assistant director of the Office of Mission and Ministry and director of the FaithActs Youth Theology Institute at Loyola University New Orleans.

**David Clingingsmith** is associate professor of economics at Case Western Reserve University. He is an empirical economist whose research focuses on the social aspects of economic behavior. His work uses field and lab experiments as well as observational data. His research publications and writing have appeared in outlets such as *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *The Economic Journal*, and *The Journal of Human Resources*. Clingingsmith received his PhD in Economics from Harvard University and also holds an MA in Anthropology from the University of Chicago. Since his appointment to the Weatherhead School of Management, he has taught Advanced Topics and Writing in Economics; Designing Experiments for Social Science, Policy, and Management; World Economic History; Intermediate Microeconomics; and The Economy in the American Century. In 2009, he received the Explorations Prize from the Economic History Association.

**Dennis Parker** (@DennisDParker) is director of the ACLU Racial Justice Program, leading its efforts in combating discrimination and addressing other issues with a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Parker oversees work to combat the “school-to-prison” pipeline, the profiling of airline passengers subjected to searches and wrongfully placed on watch lists, and the racial bias in the criminal justice system. Prior to joining the ACLU, Parker was the chief of the Civil Rights Bureau in the Office of New York State Attorney General under Eliot Spitzer. He previously spent fourteen years at the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Education Fund. Parker has also worked with the New York Legal Aid Society. He teaches Race, Poverty, and Constitutional Law at New York Law School. He graduated from Harvard Law School and Middlebury College.

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### **Explicit bigotry goes mainstream: How can we support our children?**

**Allison Briscoe-Smith** completed her internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco, at San Francisco General Hospital, where she specialized in child-parent psychotherapy and working with traumatized populations. Throughout her training, her studies focused on child psychopathology and diversity issues. After her postdoctoral work, Dr. Briscoe-Smith was the program director of a mental health program serving children as they entered the Alameda County foster care system. She was a professor of child psychology at Palo Alto University for four years and served as the director of Children’s Hospital Oakland’s Center for the Vulnerable Child for three years. She is now an adjunct professor at the Wright Institute and a consultant to nonprofit organizations seeking to become trauma-informed and culturally accountable. Dr. Briscoe-Smith’s research has focused on trauma/post-traumatic stress disorder and how children understand race. She has worked broadly on these topics and has served many families and schools on matters salient to these issues.

**Maureen Costello** brings over thirty years of education and publishing experience to her roles as director of Teaching Tolerance and member of the Southern Poverty Law Center’s senior leadership team. Beginning with her years as a history and economics teacher at Staten Island’s Notre Dame Academy High School, Costello has committed her career to fostering the ideals of democracy and citizenship in young people. After leaving the classroom, she directed the Newsweek Education

Program, which was dedicated to engaging high school and college students in issues of public concern. Immediately before joining Teaching Tolerance, she oversaw development of the 2010 Census in Schools program for Scholastic Inc., in partnership with the US Census Bureau. Costello is a graduate of the New School University and the New York University Graduate School of Arts & Science.

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### **Subverting Established Views: OPPOSE OTHERING!**

**Rebecca Podlech** was born in East Germany in 1986 and now lives in Berlin. She studied translation, Slavic literature, film, and history in Munich (Germany) and Prague. Her master's thesis examines women filmmakers in Socialist Czechoslovakia and the subversiveness from within an oppressive patriarchal system. After jobs at law firms, parliament, university, and as a freelance translator, Rebecca now works for different film festivals as an editor and member of selection committees and coordinates the goEast project OPPOSE OTHERING!. Her main areas of interest are performatism, strategies of opposition, resistance in the arts, and transgenerational legacies in central and eastern Europe.

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### **Divided and Platformed**

**Susie Cagle** is an independent journalist and illustrator, and a frequent contributor to *ProPublica*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and many others. She was previously a 2016 John S. Knight Journalism fellow

at Stanford and a technology columnist at *Pacific Standard* magazine. She is currently working on an illustrated book about boom-and-bust economics in California. Susie's work has been featured on National Public Radio and in *Wired*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Washington Post*, and has been honored with awards from the Online News Association and the Society of Professional Journalists. Susie has a masters in journalism from Columbia University, which still doesn't offer a cartooning class.

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### **ARTISTS**

**Sara Rahbar** (*Cover and Responses to the Problem of Othering*) is a contemporary mixed media artist, living in New York. Originally from Tehran, her work stems from personal experiences and explores ideas of national belonging. All images of Rahbar's work are courtesy of the artist and Carbon 12.

**Damon Davis** (*Belonging as a Cultural Right*) is a multi-media American artist, musician and filmmaker based in St. Louis, Missouri. He is a founder of Far-Fetched, a St. Louis-based artist collective, and his work, *All Hands on Deck*, helped shape public perception of the Ferguson Uprising as part of the broader international human rights movement.

**Arash Yaghmaian** (*The Endurance of the Color Line*) is a visual artist who focuses on socio-political and cultural issues. He was born in Iran and he lives and works in New York. His personal life experiences in dealing with addiction, war, and migration have taught him to have a deep appreciation and understanding of life. Through his own personal struggles he has learned how to

capture images of his subjects with dignity and empathy. His work explores and captures social and cultural realities through visual documentary storytelling and fine art.

**Yto Barrada** (*Explicit bigotry goes mainstream: How can we support our children?*) studied history and political science at the Sorbonne and photography in New York. Her work — including photography, film, sculpture, prints and installations, — began by exploring the peculiar situation of her hometown Tangier. Her work has been exhibited at Tate Modern (London), MoMA (New York), The Renaissance Society (Chicago), Witte de With (Rotterdam), Haus der Kunst (Munich), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Whitechapel Gallery (London), and the 2007 and 2011 Venice Biennale.

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## EDITORS

**Andrew Grant-Thomas** is codirector at EmbraceRace, an online community of parents, teachers, and other caregivers to children. He is also a race and social justice consultant with a wide range of educational, nonprofit, philanthropic, and research institutions. Previously, Andrew has directed work at Proteus Fund, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, where he was editor-in-chief of its journal, *Race/Ethnicity*. Andrew earned his BA in Literature from Yale University, his MA in International Relations from the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

**Rachelle Galloway-Popotas** oversees strategic communications at the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley, where she helps amplify the Institute's work through a variety of tools and projects, including publications, online media, and events. Rachelle oversees the editorial and aesthetics for all the Institute's publications and multimedia work, and has been the curator and lead on several of the Institute's projects including the Othering & Belonging Conference and multimedia journal. Rachelle has worked in the nonprofit communications field for almost 20 years. She specializes in developing a communications infrastructure that will support growth and innovation, and being an organizational storyteller, working with organizations to help define and develop their own institutional voice and identity. Rachelle has bachelor degrees in political science and graphic design. Rachelle is a member of the Caddo Nation.

**Stephen Menendian** is the assistant director and director of research at the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. Stephen leads and oversees many of the Institute's projects and burgeoning initiatives, including the Inclusiveness Index and opportunity mapping project. Stephen has also developed and authored several *amicus* briefs on behalf of the Institute, most recently a social science brief filed on behalf of the University of Texas in *Fisher v. Texas*.

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Much has happened in the months since we published the inaugural issue of *Othering & Belonging*.

**DONALD TRUMP WON AN** unexpected victory to succeed Barack Obama as US president just as a peace agreement ended Latin America's longest conflict in Colombia. Brazilians and South Koreans impeached their presidents, while President Erdoğan of Turkey accelerated his authoritarian rule, launching a massive purge targeting his critics. Beach resorts in France made news worldwide when they banned the burkini, and 2016 registered as the hottest year on record. President Trump proposed deep cuts to US foreign aid that, if enacted, promise to exacerbate conflict-driven famines in Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan, arguably the world's most serious humanitarian crises in seventy years. The Zika virus spread to more than seventy-five countries, including the United States, and Prime Minister Theresa May triggered the process by which Great Britain will exit the European Union.

These developments, and so many others across the globe, are rife with the dynamics of *othering*, whether along markers of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, immigration status, nationality, geography, or a combination of these and other dimensions of personal and group identity. In the responses to these developments, we also find strains of *belonging*—enough, perhaps, to ground our hopes for a more inclusive future.

If there is a theme to this, the second issue of *Othering & Belonging*, it might be hope. Hope built not only on the aspirations articulated by groups around the world, but also on the emergence of new organizational formations whose practices are meant to enact inclusiveness and belonging. We start with the stories of two such formations.

Arlene Goldbard, chief policy wonk of the US Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC)—*not* a government agency!—offers “Belonging as a Cultural Right.” Goldbard shares USDAC's origin story, with particular attention to the formulation of its Policy on Belonging. In “Equity as Common Cause,” Elisabeth Farrell and her colleagues describe the painstaking journey made by Food Solutions New England from its origins as a predominantly white regional food systems network with no more than tangential interest in race issues to its present incarnation as a deliberately multiracial organization with racial equity at its center.

As very much works in progress, USDAC and Food Solutions New England offer lessons we hope readers will find instructive regardless of their own areas of endeavor.

The featured article in our inaugural issue, “The Problem of Othering” by John Powell and Stephen Menendian, provided a rigorous exploration of what othering and belonging entail, why they matter, and of the “forces that contribute to othering and interventions that might mitigate some of the excesses.” Because such an analysis goes to the heart of our purpose with *Othering & Belonging*, we reached out to thinkers and doers from a range of disciplines and professional sectors to solicit their reactions to the piece. We thank Soya Jung, Susan Eaton, Alex Mikulich, David Clingingsmith, and Dennis Parker for illuminating many of the strengths, and some of the possible lacunae, in Powell and Menendian’s analysis. Their reflections buttress our conviction that a framework centered on othering and belonging has much to recommend it.

The rhetorical and literal violence roiling social and political waters in the United States take a heavy toll, the effects of which are felt widely. At a time when incidents of harassment and bias remain common and are often directed against children, especially in schools, a great many parents, teachers, and other caregivers are seeking the tools they need to effectively support the targets of these aggressions. We turned for observations and advice to clinical psychologist Allison Briscoe-Smith and Teaching Tolerance director Maureen Costello, who offered plenty of both. We entitled the exchange, “Explicit bigotry goes mainstream: How can we support our children?”

Resistance to othering takes myriad forms, with the arena of arts and culture often supplying especially powerful and compelling examples. Rebecca Podlech’s “Subverting Established Views: OPPOSE OTHERING!” describes a collaborative project by central and eastern European filmmakers under the banner “Solidarity, Belonging and Empowerment Through Film.” Her short piece includes a teaser from one of the films in the project.

We close this issue with Susie Cagle’s editorial cartoon, “Divided and Platformed.” With reference to the role of Facebook as a platform for the proliferation of “fake news” during the 2016 presidential campaign, Cagle argues that the impulse to belong can be exploited—and has been. Provocatively, she suggests that the “web did not rewrite the rules of society—it just revealed that, in this form, our natural human desire to seek comfort and belonging, taken to scale, can be toxic.”

Progress toward societies and a world characterized by wider participation and more inclusive membership won't happen as a matter of course. The success of struggles toward those ends will rely on clear-eyed thinking and strategizing, vigorous organizing, persuasive communications, painstaking community building, and on thoughtful movement building and policy making. That the worlds of research and scholarship, advocacy and activism, arts, science, business, politics, and grassroots community all have vital contributions to make is one of the core premises of *Othering & Belonging*.

To all our truly diverse contributors, supporters, and readers—thank you! We hope that you will alert others in your networks to this forum and invite them to submit their own contributions.

Yours in Belonging,

Andrew Grant-Thomas, *Editor-in-chief*

Rachelle Galloway-Popotas and Stephen Menendian, *Editors*

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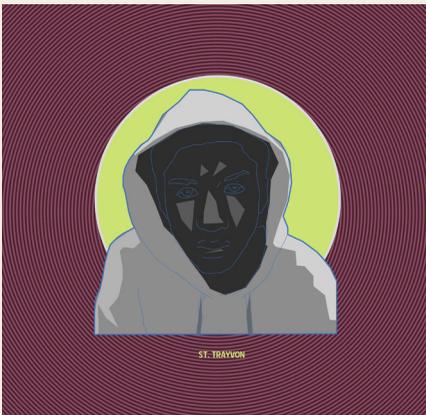
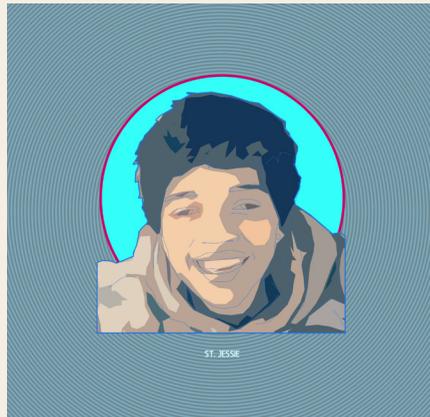
## **ARTICLES**

# Belonging as a Cultural Right

**Arlene Goldbard**

Artwork by Damon Davis

The US Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC) may sound like a government agency, but unlike the National Endowment for the Arts, it can't be eliminated with a pen stroke by the president. The USDAC is the nation's only people-powered department—a grassroots action network inciting creativity and social imagination to shape a culture of empathy, equity, and belonging. Through national actions and local organizing, the USDAC engages everyone in weaving social fabric and strengthening communities through arts and culture, builds capacity and connective tissue among socially engaged artists and cultural organizers, generates momentum and public will for creative policies and programs rooted in culturally democratic values, and infuses social justice organizing with creativity and social imagination.



**Damon Davis** | clockwise from top left: St. Tamir, St. Michael, St. Jesse, St. Aiyana, St. Trayvon, and St. John.

**TEN DAYS AFTER THE** 2016 presidential election, the people-powered US Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC), where I have the privilege of serving as chief policy wonk, launched *Standing for Cultural Democracy*, our ten-point policy and action platform. One by one, members of our national cabinet picked up a lightsaber and took to the stage at CULTURE/SHIFT 2016, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis and the USDAC's first national convening on community arts. The venue was chosen in large part because the region has shown this nation so much about the importance of human and cultural rights and because it is home to so many dedicated and accomplished cultural organizers. Two hundred people cheered every point.

Platform Point 5, calling for investment in belonging and cultural citizenship, starts with this assertion: "Our chief cultural deficit is belonging." It urges every public institution and private organization to adopt a "policy on belonging," one that establishes standards of belonging to ensure that all public statements and policy and program decisions "assert, protect, and embody the primacy of belonging to the health of local culture and community . . . guaranteeing full belonging to each and every community and resident within our borders."

The Policy on Belonging was proclaimed by Roberto Bedoya, cultural affairs manager for the city of Oakland and secretary of belonging on the national cabinet. He'd taken office just a few months before. Only weeks after the convening, Oakland's December 2016 Ghost Ship fire ended the lives of thirty-six mostly young artists attending a gathering at a carelessly converted and poorly inspected warehouse. The USDAC responded with a piece in *The Hill* citing policies in our platform that could address the gentrification and displacement that have created Oakland's disaster of belonging.

In that piece, we cited Platform Point 8. It calls for adoption of a "cultural impact study," analogous to an environmental impact report, requiring assessment and amelioration of potential damage to cultural fabric before authorizing development or rezoning. It amazes us that while an endangered plant or insect can halt incursions into the built environment, there is no comparable standing in law or policy for human cultural rights and well-being.

How did *Standing for Cultural Democracy: The USDAC's Policy and Action Platform* come to be? What impact can it have? I'll tell the story from the perspective of the Policy on Belonging. It begins with the creation of the USDAC and the first iteration of its annual civic ritual, the 2015 People's State of the Union.

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## Founding the People-Powered Department

**THE USDAC'S PUBLIC LAUNCH** took place in October 2013, with a press conference led by Norman Beckett, deputy secretary of arts and culture (a.k.a. Adam Horowitz, USDAC chief instigator, who first conceived of the people-powered department). The press conference was held at the annual convening of *Imagining America*, a national

association of higher-education institutions and community groups involved in culture and community engagement. A few days later, right-wing pundit Glenn Beck denounced the department on his television program, sharing the USDAC’s Statement of Values as an example of a vast conspiracy by “well-funded radicals.” (As our budget was approximately zero at the time, we could only wish.)

That press conference was preceded by more than a year of research and planning with a handful of dedicated volunteers. We knew that if the USDAC were to succeed, we’d have to learn from past efforts at cultural organizing, and that had to start with interviewing artists and activists who’d been involved and could offer wisdom on how a twenty-first-century movement for cultural democracy might be built. Guided by their experience, we began scaffolding a volunteer-driven project that could engage people in both local and national organizing toward:

- welcoming each individual as a whole person;
- valuing each community’s heritage, contributions, and aspirations;
- promoting caring, reciprocity, and open communication across all lines of difference; and
- dismantling all barriers to love and justice.

Our research made it remarkably clear what the USDAC’s core values should be.

## **PLEASURE AND PURPOSE ALIGNED**

The USDAC is simultaneously an organizing project and a collaborative art project. As we like to say: “This is an act of collective imagination. Add yours.”

We play off a government frame with quasi-official trappings: national cabinet, cultural agents, regional envoys, and so on. Cabinet members choose their own titles. For example, Makani Themba, minister of revolutionary imagination; Lulani Arquette, catalyst for native creative potential; Judy Baca, minister of sites of public memory; Bob Holman, minister of poetry and language protection; and many such others. One might imagine the creativity of these titles would be a dead giveaway, but when I announced some years ago on Facebook that I had been appointed chief policy wonk, I got perhaps one-hundred congratulatory messages on receiving a public honor, most of them seeming entirely sincere.

The aha moments generated by the gap between expectation and reality have been a good organizing technique. People say, “I didn’t know the United States had a Department of Arts and Culture,” and once they read further and realize it isn’t an official arm of the public sector, it’s a quick hop to saying it should be. This is the macro-manifestation of our own aha moment, the realization that cultural organizing—which uses arts-based methods to engage people, express their concerns and aspirations, and involve others who care about them—is a uniquely powerful mode precisely because it engages emotions as well as intellects, bodies, and spirits, offering simultaneous pleasure and purpose.

I think of art as sacred play, a practice that engages the whole person in contrast to the many conventional activities that invite only our fragmented selves. In a social context, art making and arts experience can cultivate much-needed empathy and social imagination—the capacity to put ourselves in the other’s place and feel something of the other’s truth, the capacity to envision a social order different from the one that powerful forces would like us to see as natural and inevitable. The threshold for participation in community cultural work is low. People come together because they want to share stories or music or paint and draw, for example, and the satisfaction of deploying those art forms with others who desire belonging, love, and justice leads to a heightened disposition to take part again.

When I look at conventional activism through a cultural lens, I often marvel at how people expect to nurture a sense of belonging by using cultural forms that telegraph exclusion. The public hearing where experts pronounce authoritatively and the rest of us line up to hold the mic for one or two minutes—this sort of thing is a cultural form for which few acquire a taste. If pleasure and purpose were the boundary conditions for activism, just imagine who would take part and how it would change.

People say, “I didn’t know the United States had a Department of Arts and Culture,” and once they realize it isn’t an official arm of the public sector, it’s a quick hop to saying it should be.”

### **RADICAL INCLUSION**

Through our research, experience sent an unmistakable message: start out as you mean to go on. The historical map of arts and cultural organizations is dotted with groups that start as overwhelmingly white and later rush to remedy that bias with typically failed attempts to “diversify.” Often, the invitation reads as “come make us look good” rather than “let’s cocreate,” and often, the answer is, “No thanks.” Who wants to be used as a signifier rather than engaged as an equal partner?

We knew that from the start, multiple art forms, ages, races, ethnicities, faiths, orientations, regions, abilities, and more had to shape the work. For instance, I am forty years older than our chief instigator, Adam. Clearly, it would be a challenge to craft messages and structures that appealed to both our generations. But we had a strong hunch that if we succeeded, we’d also be able to scoop up the generations in between. This has proven correct: each of our actions since has drawn participation from students to elders. Indeed, one of the great successes of *CULTURE/SHIFT* 2016 was



ST. TAMIR

**Damon Davis** | St. Tamir

participants' experiences of arriving so soon after the election, dazed with uncertainty, and easily crossing generational lines to console, support, and learn from each other.

When we put out our first call for cultural agents in 2014, more than one hundred individuals applied to serve as these volunteer local organizers, taking part in a learning cohort and organizing Imaginings—art-infused planning dialogues—in their own communities. We were surprised at the volume of response, but not its breadth. Each of the three cohorts of USDAC cultural agents has reflected our intentions, with a majority of women of color, with folks from both small towns and urban centers, and with many types of artists, educators, and organizers. There was a consistent disparity, to be sure: the vast majority of applicants were women, and no cohort achieved a proportionate number of men. (Though we can speculate about its origins, none of the popular theories—low compensation and job insecurity in progressive cultural arenas, an evidently greater proclivity to volunteer on the part of women—suggests a useful idea of how to resolve this imbalance. It's one I encounter in every cultural convening I attend, in higher education, and in the majority of community-based organizations. Does the invitation to belong resound differently for men?)

To name the condition of belonging without barrier, we use the phrase “cultural citizenship,” always being careful to say one doesn't have to be a citizen in the legal sense to belong. The concept of citizenship is contested, of course, because even using the word reminds people of all the ways immigrants and refugees have been stigmatized and excluded as “illegal” and unwanted. But we are not inclined to surrender contested words to those who use them as clubs to beat others into disbelonging: democracy, art, culture, and citizenship are fundamental human rights. In a condition of true cultural citizenship, everyone feels at home in their own communities. All heritages are honored for their contributions to the collective culture. Difference is embraced as a source of richness and wisdom. And wanting to know each other takes the place of fearing the other.

We live in a society in which the fullness of cultural citizenship is denied, even to most people who possess legal papers entitling them to vote and travel. How many Americans long to see their own communities of people portrayed on television as something other than criminals and degenerates? How many students are offered a version of history that consigns their own heritage to a footnote? How many are denied the right to culture as expressed through fundamental acts of expression and association: walking or driving while black, dancing together in a nightclub, visiting with friends while waiting for public transit?

## **MULTIPLE LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS**

Gazing out at the cultural landscape, we saw many groups doing powerful local or regional work, and a few organizing on a national level. But generally, the two didn't connect up. As with other forms of progressive organizing, within a national frame, the

scope of individual participation was often distant and superficial: sign this petition, click this link, read this message letting you know if a bill passed, and donate money.

The challenge of a movement for cultural democracy is that it is all about *culture*, a collective creation most fully expressed in all of life's textures, in person. Culture describes the ways that human beings form communities, communicate, enter into relationships, and create the crucible in which identities and meanings are forged. You can't do that by clicking a link. Therefore, we knew we would need to adopt an approach that:

- engages everyone in weaving social fabric and strengthening communities through arts and culture;
- builds capacity and connective tissue among socially engaged artists and cultural organizers;
- generates momentum and public will for creative policies and programs rooted in USDAC values; and
- infuses social justice organizing with creativity and social imagination.

Our approach had to be prefigurative and realistic, demonstrating to the greatest extent possible the quality of reciprocity and mutuality that so many people desire in the world and that we are working to bring about. We could not adopt modes of interaction that repeated the gross or subtle injuries of the dominant system: treating people like categories instead of individuals, like numbers rather than living beings; speaking for people rather than together creating channels and invitations for all to speak their own words in their own voices; treating challenges that affect individuals and groups differentially, as if they were separate from each other or subsidiary to whatever may be deemed the most important challenges to freedom and justice; or adjusting to an absurd system and insisting that everyone play by its rules.

“Our chief cultural deficit is belonging.”

It became clear that just as we needed a network of local organizers and communities to support and learn with each other, we needed a national cabinet rooted in lived knowledge (as opposed to credentialed expertise that may dismiss the value of ground-level experience in favor of research at a distance, *about* rather than *of*) to act on local wisdom. Cabinet members could hear what those communities held dear or felt to be threatened in these times, and help translate that knowledge into national ideas, both policy and action interventions. We think of our model as a perpetual circuit: local work generates information that informs national deliberations, resulting in policy and action proposals that can be tested at the local level, yielding experience that refines the national perspective, improving community work—and so on.



**Damon Davis** | St. Trayvon

## People’s State of the Union

**THE USDAC’S FIRST NATIONAL** Action was founded on a principle that incorporates belonging and infuses all our work: democracy is a conversation, not a monologue. The first People’s State of the Union (PSOTU) in 2015 set the pattern. In November of each year, we invite people across the United States to hold Story Circles during a ten-day period beginning in late January, sharing stories that reveal something of the state of our union as they experience it. Their stories are uploaded to Story Portal, where anyone may peruse and use them. Then a group of invited poets, inspired by the stories, composes the collective *Poetic Address to the Nation*, which is performed, live-streamed, and published. The 2017 *Poetic Address* was presented on March 11 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, demonstrating the second principle shaping the PSOTU, that all our lives are the material of art, and all our experience is worthy of being uplifted into poetry.

A Story Circle is a small group of individuals sitting in a circle, sharing stories—usually from their own experience or imagination—focusing on a common theme. As each person in turn shares a story, a richer and more complex story emerges. By the end, people see both real differences and things their stories have in common. A Story Circle is a journey into its theme, with multiple dimensions, twists, and turns. Theater makers, such as Roadside Theater and John O’Neal, have been central in developing the practice for use in creating original performance and community telling and listening projects. For instance, both companies typically use their own method of story circles to elicit stories that yield incident and dialogue for use in devised theater.

It could be said that sitting in a circle sharing stories is one of the world’s oldest forms of cultural practice. It’s easy to imagine ancient ancestors passing a tale around a campfire. We’ve made Story Circle into a proper noun to acknowledge the specific techniques the USDAC has adapted for our purposes.

When we invite people to come together to share stories, certain concerns are paramount. Unstructured dialogue on contentious issues, such as the state of the union, tends to break down quickly into a contest of opinion. To avoid this, we are careful to specify that stories come from direct experience, with a beginning, middle, and end. The difference this makes is remarkable: when I tell a story that starts out “One day, I was walking along and met a woman . . .,” there are no grounds to contest my account. I am the world’s foremost expert on my own experience, and the Story Circle framework embodies that honoring of each person’s truth.

We offer a free toolkit and training to anyone who wishes to take part. Each person in a Story Circle has equal time—generally three minutes or less—to share a story in response to a prompt. Prompts are generous in conception, questions that everyone is equally free and able to entertain, but once offered, they are not enforced: any story a teller chooses is the right story to tell. For PSOTU 2017, these were the prompts:

- Share a story about something you have experienced that gave you insight into the state of our union.

- Share a story about a time you felt a sense of belonging—or the opposite—to this nation.
- Share a story about a time you broke through a barrier to connect with someone different from yourself or with whom you disagreed.

Circles are small, optimally around eight people including a facilitator and a scribe if the stories are to be captured for future use (with tellers' consent, of course). They are emphatically not performances. We urge people to focus on deep listening, not on crafting one's own story, assuring everyone that a story will arise when their turn comes. Participants are asked to observe a few simple guidelines: total attention to each teller; no contradiction, cross talk, or comment—even positive—that pulls attention from the teller; a moment of silence between stories to allow them to settle. After everyone who wishes has shared (usually once or twice around the circle), the group reflects on what is revealed by the body of stories: What touched them? What stood out as notable differences or common threads? What might be learned from the aggregate of stories shared?

By now I've been privileged to hear hundreds of stories in dozens of Story Circles. The practice astonishes me with its simplicity and power to embody real belonging. Equalizing time and attention means that the middle-school principal and the sixth grader sitting in the next chair have a rare experience of reciprocity. The principal may start out by thinking, "Oh no, now I have to listen to this kid!" while the sixth grader may come in thinking, "No one told me the principal would be here!" But inevitably, in the telling—in the polite insistence that the principal heed the time limit, in each person's surprise at what a deep and revealing story the other shared, in the sixth grader's delight at finally getting total attention, warm and respectful, from a group of adults—those feelings change.

The metastatement of the Story Circle and the PSOTU is that everyone deserves the experience of belonging without barrier. Perhaps it is that glimpse of true belonging afforded by the Story Circles that authorizes people to share so many stories of belonging and what Roberto Bedoya has called "disbelonging." Consider this 2017 story uploaded by Shelle from Albuquerque, New Mexico:

*The question of belonging hit me very hard today. Generally, I have always felt like I belong to many groups—belong as an artist, belong as an educated white woman, belong as a bilingual New Mexican. My children are biracial, so I feel like I belong in the conversation about black identity and racial equity—it concerns me every day. I am married to a Hispanic man, so I belong to his family and culture, and I feel that deeply. But now, today and lately, I feel that sometimes I belong to a group, and other times I don't belong to any of those groups.*

*I think of my biracial boys, as youngsters, who are now teenagers. They say what I said to my parents, like, "You don't understand what I am going through." And when my boys were very young, I realized this would be true for my boys in a way that was much deeper than it was when I said it to my parents. And during this election cycle, I carry this sense of being sure where I belong.*

*The morning after the election, my husband and I were getting ready to board an early morning flight to Chicago (and I was sad and fearful to leave my black teenage boys that day). My seventeen-year-old son got up after a long night of election results (he was checking on his phone throughout the night), and he said to all of us (my sisters-in-law were also there), “Let’s all share our biggest fears this morning after this election!” He said he’d go first. “I’m most afraid of national stop and frisk.”*

*No one said anything for a full minute. What could we say? And I was afraid, too—of that (and of so many other things) and that my beautiful young man/son was afraid. He grew up with a black president and sense of empowerment—and on the verge of his adulthood, it all feels and sounds completely different. And I don’t know how to hold those two realities in my mind—my elementary school biracial boys watching the inauguration of the first biracial president and my young adult black sons living in a rise of racism and hateful, public rhetoric.*

Analyzing the yield of all three PSOTU iterations to date, so many different stories speaking of the same fears and desires—that led us to the opening sentence of Platform Point 5: “Our chief cultural deficit is belonging.”

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## The Policy on Belonging

**WHEN WE SET OUT** to base policy and action proposals on the stories people across the country had shared with the USDAC, we understood that the USDAC’s policy initiatives had to break with the conventional model. They had to focus on policies and actions that promoted universal social goods instead of singling out certain people and organizations for special support.

In the global policy arena, cultural policy has significant scope, encompassing telecommunications, education, training, preservation, regulation, and research, as well as funding—a whole universe of cultural aspects reflecting the inclusive nature of culture as a concept. Indeed, in the broadest sense, it’s accurate to say that everything not given as part of nature belongs to the category of culture. Consider the way this understanding is encoded in the cultural programs of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for instance, the largest international agency with cultural policy-making responsibilities. UNESCO Initiatives focus on diversity, sustainable development, world heritage, and much, much more. The commercial cultural industries, such as broadcasting, publishing, film, and television, are part of the ecology just as much as museums, dance companies, orchestras, and community arts centers.

In contrast, here in the United States, there’s been a determined effort to sequester the nonprofit arts from the vastly larger and more influential commercial sector. Almost



**Damon Davis** | St. Michael

always, when advocates talk about this policy arena, they mean it very narrowly, as arts not culture: grants for artists and nonprofit organizations, arts-in-schools programs, and not much more.

There are complicated reasons why this view is promoted. To mention just one example, when the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established in the midsixties, with a Cold War chill in the air, the major institutions and funders advocating for a federal agency were frightened that they'd be defeated if legislators thought they were leading to some form of state art. They were careful to position federal funding as a junior partner to private philanthropy and box-office income, to always assert that the private sector should lead.

As I write, the present occupant of the White House has called for elimination of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, agencies targeted by Republicans since Ronald Reagan became president. As always, threats to eliminate funding that amounts to a fraction of 1 percent of federal *discretionary* spending are framed as cost cutting. But since they actually have no fiscal impact, we must understand them as symbolic gestures, garnering headlines and distracting the electorate from noticing that we have spent more than three annual NEA budgets a *day* on war since 2001, or that new tax breaks for the wealthiest will more than cancel the minuscule savings proposed.<sup>1</sup>

We knew that the USDAC's policy initiatives had to be framed in this larger context, rather than follow the failed conventional approach of special pleading by direct beneficiaries for their own budgets. Attempting to say something beyond "Support us; we're wonderful," most past arts advocacy has been couched in weak arguments for art as an economic stimulus. Advocates say those who buy theater tickets also contribute to the economy by buying parking and meals when they attend performances, but of course, going to a football game has exactly the same impact. Although this approach is a failure—in absolute dollars, the NEA 2016 budget hasn't changed since 1980, but its real value has declined by more than half—advocates loyally pursue it.

The impact on belonging and cultural citizenship has been deeply distressing. When public policy follows private-sector proclivities, the beneficiaries tilt toward those who offer reflected glory to wealthy donors. Elite and largely white organizations—the red-carpet opera companies, ballet companies, major museums, and symphony orchestras—continue to receive disproportionate public and private funding, paying lip service to diversity but showing no inclination to surrender privilege.

Instead of following the conventional arts funding pattern of plucking the best fruits, we have chosen to water the roots, advocating initiatives that benefit everyone, including artists along with many others. And the most important root to nurture is belonging.

In *Standing for Cultural Democracy*, we quoted Roberto Bedoya's (undated) essay for Arts in A Changing America:

*The state of our society is under a great deal of stress triggered by the continuing recession and its challenges to our economy, the growing plutocracy's abuse of our civil rights, the Cultural War 2.0 battles over women's rights to control their own bodies, the rights of Union workers, the rights of Mexican American students*

*to study Latino literature, the right to be free of racial profiling, the right of gays and lesbians to marry their loved one, immigrant rights . . . you can add your own example of the politics of dis-belonging at work in civil society.*

We added this call to action:

*To sustain a functioning civil society that even aspires to full cultural citizenship, the challenge of belonging and dis-belonging must be acknowledged and addressed. There is a long way to go to achieve even the first step here, awareness. Has any city or state adopted a policy on belonging, let alone invested in new initiatives to cultivate a universal sense of belonging?*

To cultivate belonging, we proposed five actions, excerpted below:

- **Adopt a policy on belonging** for public institutions, such as municipal or state governments, and private organizations, such as community centers. Adopting such a policy is the foundation for any action taken to extend and deepen belonging.
- **Support long-term artists' residencies** at the neighborhood level by artists with experiences and skills in community cultural development to assess the state of belonging in their communities and creatively conceive and test ways to strengthen it. This includes recognizing and supporting the contributions of local artists and culture-bearers, as well as preparing and supporting allied outside artists to enter communities, listen deeply without preconception, and respond to specific needs and opportunities in each place.
- **Support community-based centers** that engage people directly in art making and art experiences as laboratories for belonging, offering ideas and experiences that can be replicated or adapted widely as sites of belonging that anchor a community, integral to strategies to resist displacement, preserving and strengthening existing social fabric.
- **Support creative use of underused spaces** such as schools, houses of worship, and public plazas, reimagining the untapped commonwealth these spaces represent, making maximum use of them for learning, making art, public performances, and other gatherings.
- **Repurpose disused spaces** such as vacant lots and empty storefronts as pop-up community cultural centers, engaging people in art making and art experiences as they go about their day. A key consideration is to anchor these spaces in existing community culture so that they don't invite gentrification and displacement.

Taken together, these actions express our understanding of the challenge of creating true belonging: that like rights, policies are meaningless without sufficient resources

to safeguard, express, and extend them. To declare that “everyone belongs” but fail to encode that principle in enforceable public decisions and actions adds up to a meaningless gesture that actually repeats the injury it ostensibly addresses.

If we assess the US cultural landscape, we see well-provisioned, prosperous communities side by side with neighborhoods that are home to immigrants or low-income communities, often communities of color, where underused public space is guarded by high fences rather than made available for community use. We see largely white and well-off neighborhoods, where city planners would never consider rezoning in ways that disrupt social fabric, side by side with less privileged neighborhoods, where planning decisions are undertaken without the slightest consideration of cultural rights, razing sites of public memory and rezoning to attract new tenants to displace those whose contributions created rich community.

The model Policy on Belonging we have offered for public and private adoption requires “all public statements and actions to assert, protect, and embody the primacy of belonging to the health of local culture and community, and mandat[es] that all public actions and statements reflect the letter and spirit of this resolution, guaranteeing full belonging to each and every community and resident within our borders . . .”

It begins by stipulating the past actions and current conditions that call for such a policy, goes on to define the relevant terms and conditions, and concludes with a participatory review process resulting in a decision to “reject the proposed action for negative impact on the right to culture, belonging, and/or full cultural citizenship; recommend one or more of the alternatives set out in the request for review or a superior alternative emerging from the review process, indicating approval if the recommended alternative is substituted for the original proposed action; describe mitigating action necessary for resubmission of the proposed action for approval; or approve the action as proposed.”

In this moment, with othering being decreed via executive order, belonging is more imperiled than ever. In January, when the travel ban on seven Muslim-majority countries was announced, the USDAC circulated a Pledge on Cultural Rights and the Muslim Ban:

*The first step in a top-down campaign to obliterate cultural rights in the United States has been taken. We are called to stand together in response.*

*On January 27, 2017, a presidential executive order was issued blocking refugees and restricting immigration from Muslim countries. Protest has been immediate and massive.*

*History teaches us that authoritarian regimes start their mission of domination with the right to culture: limiting cultural communities' freedom of movement and practice, condemning or restricting press freedom, condemning or restricting artistic expression, and denying the fullness of belonging to all but a privileged few. Artists and creative activists have key roles to play.*

The response was rapid and enthusiastic.

The message of defending and extending cultural rights and belonging has been carried through all our 2017 initiatives to date, both in the PSTOU and in the #RevolutionOfValues, the day of creative action on April 4, 2017, which is the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s groundbreaking speech, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence."

To declare that "everyone belongs" but fail to encode that principle in enforceable public decisions and actions . . . repeats the injury it ostensibly addresses.

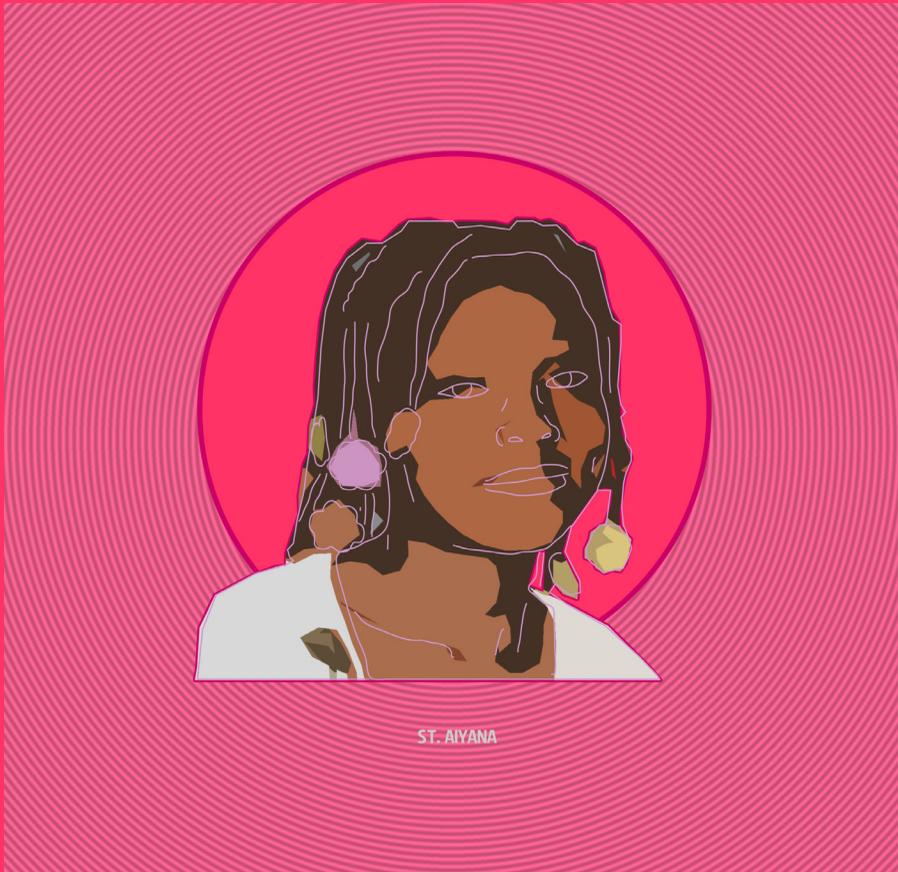
This spring also marks the launch of a concentrated USDAC campaign to adopt the Policy on Belonging, inviting all those who signed the pledge to do more than declare their commitment. In an alternate universe, such a campaign might go straight to Washington, focusing on adoption of a national policy. But current reality is that belonging must start with the smallest units of social organization and build up. We can't expect belonging to take shape *out there*, to be granted courtesy of some distant authority. But even in such perilous times, community organizations and institutions and agencies of local government remain more accessible and, therefore, potentially more responsive.

We want to extend this invitation to all readers of *Othering & Belonging*. Spend a moment exercising your social imagination: How would your community change if a policy on belonging were adopted and implemented by the city council, the school board, the local neighborhood center? Everything created must first be imagined. The Policy on Belonging begins as an act of collective imagination. Please add yours.

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## REFERENCES

- 1 More history and data sources are contained in "Symbolic Gesture Comes Out of Retirement," the USDAC blog post we published on January 20, 2017, when elimination of the federal cultural agencies was first threatened.



ST. AIYANA

**Damon Davis** | St. Aiyana



Education is key to the sustainability of New England. Nonprofit community and educational farms engage a wide range of people, especially children, with food and farming. It is critical that we get younger generations involved in being activists for the future of food. | Food Solutions New England

## Equity as Common Cause

HOW A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM NETWORK IS CULTIVATING COMMITMENT TO RACIAL JUSTICE

**Elisabeth Farrell, Tom Kelly, Joanne Burke, Curtis Ogden & Karen Spiller**

Photographs from Food Solutions New England

Marilyn Moore was working as executive director of an organization in Bridgeport, Connecticut, advocating for underserved women with breast cancer, when she began to appreciate more deeply that access to fresh fruits and vegetables simply was not available in many neighborhoods. This spurred her decision to join a statewide network focused on improving food systems, where she was struck by something else. “I noticed,” said Moore, “that I was the only person of color at the table. I wondered, ‘Where are the black and brown people and why are they not a part of the discussion?’”<sup>1</sup>

**NOT LONG AFTER, MOORE** attended a food systems summit organized by a regional network, Food Solutions New England (FSNE). There, she attended a session on addressing food justice and policy planning, joining others who had been asked to “come prepared to think broadly and push the boundaries” (New England Food Summit booklet, 2013). Though social justice had been a part of FSNE’s mission, the session tapped into and fueled the growing desire among many in the region to take these values to another level. Karen Spiller, also a woman of color, led the standing-room-only session and remembers thinking, “We have reached a pivotal moment in which there is a desire and demand to address the challenges of race in our food system, and this is coming from predominantly white participants.”

Following the session, Spiller affirmed the call to others on the FSNE organizing committee, that race and racism needed to be much more central to the food system conversations and work. Determined to seize the moment, FSNE organizers publically committed to putting racial equity at the center of its work going forward.

That moment marked the crossing of a major threshold and the beginning of a collective journey of learning and action that continues to this day. This is a story of that journey. This is the story of how one food system-focused network went about the work of implementing a commitment to racial equity, which deepened its awareness of the dynamics of *othering* and *belonging* in food systems—societally and in its own efforts.

On the *othering* side of the story, power dynamics, white privilege, culturally embedded exclusion, and de facto silencing characterized the early formation of FSNE. The *belonging* part of the story illustrates how a predominantly white network began to face its othering issues and begin a commitment to racial equity.

FSNE’s evolution, grounded in a commitment to sustainability as articulated by the network’s conveners at the University of New Hampshire’s Sustainability Institute (UNHSI), is rooted in ethics and cultural values. Along the way, this commitment has consistently provided an alternative to the dominant orientation that isolates food from questions of racial equity, social justice, and many other critical values, and continually reinforced a *systems perspective* emphasizing wholeness, connectivity, and interdependence.

The unspoken *othering* part of our story speaks to the pernicious invisibility of systemic racism, even when it’s in plain sight. Prevailing viewpoints tended to view food and race and ethnicity (henceforth referred to as race) as separate phenomena to be considered discretely.

From this perspective, it was assumed that a network focused on food should be just that: focused on food while leaving questions of race to others. This view is not confined to academic researchers but is largely embraced by the philanthropic, business, and public sectors and defines focus, rigor, impact, and common sense practicality. Yet this separation is misguided, as apparent in lived experience and in data that show how tightly woven issues of food and race really are.

As a regional food systems network, the mission of FSNE states that it “supports a sustainable New England food system in order to provide healthy food for all, racial equity, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities.”

While the explicit focus of the FSNE network is food, it sees its work implicitly as a cultural project, one aimed at transforming social norms to orient practices toward a sustainable regional food system. This work, the group says, is “inherently experimental and boundary crossing.”

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## Taking the Dive, Going Deeper Together

**FSNE WAS CREATED IN** response to identified need for greater connection, trust, collaboration, and innovation across food system efforts throughout the region.

The network formally launched through the planning of the inaugural New England Food Summit in 2011 around two elements: first, the question of whether the six-state region could develop a charter or some kind of declaration of shared values and aspirations for the region’s food future; and second, an invitation to each of the six New England states to form a delegation of twelve people to participate at the summit.

In order to explore the idea of a charter, delegates heard from a range of examples from within and beyond the region, including an early version of what ultimately became *A New England Food Vision*.<sup>2</sup> This vision explored how much food New England could grow while maintaining sufficient forest cover to ensure that healthy ecosystems continued to support a dynamic working landscape and public health.

Even in outline form, the vision captured the imagination of the delegates, and by the end of the summit the group had reached consensus on the importance of furthering its development and continuing annual summits to advance the regional dialogue and network building. The evolving vision figured prominently in a series of meetings, state summits, briefings and workshops, and at the second FSNE summit in 2012, where it was debated and further refined.

As FSNE worked to formalize itself as a network, including the creation of a regionally representative “design team,” it committed considerable time to building alignment around language, creating a glossary of common terms relevant to food systems, such as food, food security, food system, sustainability, and food justice.<sup>3</sup> A shared understanding was developed about what the regional vision was meant to be and the purpose of the network, carefully situating its work in a broader universe of efforts in the region. The hope for these efforts to deepen connectivity and alignment is that they would organically ripple out into people’s networks, which is precisely what has happened.

The third FSNE summit in 2013 was a watershed event for the network. A summary of *A New England Food Vision*, presented by some of its nine white authors, was given a

standing ovation by the more than one hundred delegates, many of whom had tracked the vision’s progress over the previous three summits.

In particular, people applauded the incorporation of a rights-based approach to food, nuanced treatment of alternative diets, and a commitment by FSNE to keep the vision evolving. As described earlier, near the end of that summit, Karen Spiller expressed the strong and growing desire among attendees that race and racism be much more central to conversations at the summit, and that not formally making space for this ran counter to the vision and the values of FSNE.

Members confirmed the need to go beyond general commitments to social justice and sustainability and name racial equity as a formal commitment for the network. The 2014–2016 summits took place in the more racially diverse states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut and included new delegations to bring more diverse perspectives to the conversation.

In addition, the FSNE network engaged in putting its racial equity commitment to work through a variety of steps, including recruiting more diverse core team members, educating ourselves more deeply about structural racism and white privilege, and establishing an ambassadors initiative that weaved connections with communities of color in the southern states. These and other actions are discussed in the next section.

But why did this network decide to do this work in the first place? FSNE decided to make racial equity a core value that guides its work because there was a growing awareness that race was a significant predictor of food-related disparities in the region (Satia, 2009; Neff et al., 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). There was also an understanding that focusing on class or economics alone could obscure racism as a deeply embedded driver of injustice. In addition, there was good evidence that explicitly tackling racism would lead to engaging other “-isms” given the intersectional nature of power and privilege in food and other related systems.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, FSNE’s identity as a network rather than an organization, and the central role of network practice and theory that have informed its structure and process, has highlighted the importance of considering patterns of connection and disconnection in our work.

In addition, FSNE’s commitment to place, and therefore a place-based approach to its work in the six-state region of New England, has forced it to speak to the concrete particularities of the region’s geography and demographics, institutions, culture, and history, which in turn has reinforced integration and interdependence. Finally, the fortitude, generosity, and patience of the few people of color who were early members of the FSNE network played a critical role and remain integral to our efforts.

Yet how is it that we arrived at the third summit in 2013 with a bold vision, a Network Design Team, and support from funders with such racially skewed participation? The answer is that it was frighteningly easy.

Two insights of network theory have been particularly helpful—“birds of a feather flock together” and “those close by form a tie” (Krebs, 2005). While this network theory observation is about how “nodes link together because of common attributes, goals, or governance,” the insight holds for perpetuating racial hierarchies and disparities. New

“I noticed . . . that I was the only person of color at the table. I wondered, where are the black and brown people, and why are they not a part of the discussion?”

England is a diverse region, but New Hampshire, like Vermont and Maine, which are often referred to as northern New England, are not diverse (91 to 94 percent white, non-Hispanic) (US Census Bureau, 2017).

As the initial convener and backbone organization, the UNHSI operated in an environment that, while valuing and working to increase diversity, nevertheless remains a predominately white community as is the wider population of food system practitioners, which together dulls our sensitivities and normalizes predominantly white colleagues and collaborators.

This normalcy is part of white privilege, which, as Peggy McIntosh recognized, is “elusive and fugitive” due, in part, to the fact that many white people have been taught not to see all of the advantage and dominance we enjoy as the counterpart to the disadvantage and oppression experienced by people of color. That normalcy obviously extends to the governmental, nonprofit, for profit, and philanthropic sectors of our food system, as well as to all other parts of our society.

So as we developed FSNE and *A New England Food Vision*, the well-worn and self-reinforcing path of white privilege allowed us to talk about social justice and food as a right while forming ties and flocking together with white colleagues from across the region from different sectors. As McIntosh also noted, “To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here” (McIntosh, 1988).

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## Turning the Tide: Innovating for Equity

**AS WE STARTED TO** think about ways to turn words into action, it was very clear that FSNE was essentially “diversity deficient” in the composition of its working teams. We immediately altered our plans to expand the teams to instead focus on recruiting more racially diverse partners. This included a new Emerging Leaders delegation at the annual summit, composed of racially and ethnically diverse individuals under the age of thirty.

The benefit of bringing in voices and perspectives from the margins of what had begun as a white food system movement was palpable and evident on multiple levels: the sense of alignment with core values by committing to racial equity was empowering and liberating for all, regardless of race. There was also a recognition that large areas and populations of New England’s food system that until then had had no voice in the network would be invited to bring their wisdom and knowledge to the network and help shape the identity and character of FSNE going forward.<sup>5</sup>

Besides recognizing the benefits of expanding network diversity, the FSNE planning teams also committed to developing goals to guide the racial equity commitment. A subset of FSNE team members, including now both white and black colleagues and our network facilitator from the Interaction Institute for Social Change, drafted goals and actions. The initial goals recognized the need to build both the will and the skill of all network members to address racism at many levels: personal, organizational, and sectoral. The need to construct a shared understanding of where committing to “racial equity and food justice” could lead us was felt by many. Even with our formal commitment, we hesitated to move forward given the whiteness of the group and an acknowledged lack of experience in addressing these issues. One step we took, as a Network Team, was to read John A. Powell’s *Racing to Justice*. For many white team members, the book opened their eyes to white privilege and power and the dynamics of othering. It also fueled people’s commitment to creating a culture of belonging.

As we built our trust, we developed relationships that were authentic. “What I appreciate the most,” said Marilyn Moore, who became one of our Network Team members, “is that a person of color is not the only one challenging, questioning, and leading the conversation on racial equity.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there was a “commitment to sharing insights, reviewing and deep-diving into material to ensure it is inclusive.”<sup>7</sup> Building the will and the skill was a vital first step to realizing our commitment to racial equity.

## THE AMBASSADORS INITIATIVE

In addition to relationship and skill building among the Network Team, we needed to find concrete ways to manifest the racial equity commitment publicly and authentically, to increase participation in and commitment to a health-promoting, equitable, and just food system. To do this would require network innovations—adapting existing practices and developing new ways of working together and with others that leveraged our deepening connectivity and alignment.

In January 2015, on Martin Luther King Day, we officially launched the Ambassador Team to extend the FSNE network and make *A New England Food Vision* a valuable tool for all communities. Three ambassadors from the FSNE Network Team were recruited from our southern New England states—one each from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, where the greatest racial and cultural diversity exists in the region. The ambassadors were meant to serve the important role of “network weaving” (Krebs and Holley), building bridges to underrepresented communities. With this step, we



Photo: Southside Community Land Trust



Photo: Cultivating Community, Fresh Start Farms

sought to create more of a “movement network” (Mazur and Leach, 2013) to ensure all citizens in New England are able to fully participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a health-promoting and equitable system.

The Ambassador Team began working together to identify and make meaningful connections with new and diverse partners, organizations, and individuals; to create a space for more racially diverse leadership and mentorship opportunities; and to ensure more connectivity between community efforts and the regional food system work. Current Ambassador Team members are Marilyn Moore, from the Witness Project of Connecticut and state senator from Connecticut’s Twenty-Second District; Karen Spiller, from KAS Consulting; and Julius Kolawole, from African Alliance of Rhode Island.

The ambassadors’ work has taken the form of “coffee chats,” presentations at state and local conferences and meetings, exhibits and tabling, university class discussions and church forums, online forums, and community monthly meetings. It has been critical to first acknowledge the existing contributions of community efforts to the regional food system movement. It has been equally important to make explicit the sometimes-invisible links of the food system operating at the neighborhood, city or town, state, and regional levels. Discussing the role that each of us plays in the transformation of our food system, with equity at its core, has helped to open the door for visioning a different future for how we feed everyone with dignity and fairness. “The nonnegotiable commitment made by FSNE to racial equity and food justice was a critical and bold declaration for our network. That, along with the intentional weaving and linking of the long-standing and vibrant activism deeply rooted in our communities around food and race with our regional food system work, has been food for my soul!” said Spiller.<sup>8</sup>

“What I appreciate the most . . . is that a person of color is not the only one challenging, questioning, and leading the conversation on racial equity.”

That engagement has resulted in more individuals and organizations being directly involved with *A New England Food Vision* and has expanded the FSNE network across the three states, in particular, and across New England as a whole. The ambassadors were intentional about creating pathways to more active contribution to FSNE, and they committed to using the summits of 2015 and 2016 as an entry point into the network. Fifteen individuals of color, known as FSNE Trailblazers, were invited to participate in the 2015 and 2016 New England Food Summits. Thirty Trailblazers are now advocates for *A New England Food Vision* and participate in the FSNE network.

## SELECTED GOALS THAT REFLECT COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY AND FOOD JUSTICE

1. To promote a shared framing and understanding of concepts central to food systems, racial equity, and food justice.
2. To provide leadership in identifying opportunities to build greater awareness of the persistent pattern of racial inequality and food injustice that permeates our food system, while actively building the capacity and commitment to policies and practices that lead to a more equitable and just food system for all.
3. To identify and/or develop broad-based, targeted strategies to ensure diverse engagement by citizens in New England, who become fully able to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a healthy, affordable, accessible, environmentally sound, and fair food system for today and future generations.
4. To build greater state, regional, and national awareness of the reality of white privilege and structural racism operating in the food system.
5. To enhance collaboration designed to promote food justice and racial equity.
6. To enhance local, state, and regional communication platforms and network development designed to address racial equity and food justice.
7. To commit to collecting, analyzing, disseminating, and curating qualitative and quantitative data and stories that serve as indicators or benchmarks related to racial equity and food justice.

Whether through writing blogs and stories for the FSNE website, hosting informational sessions and workshops, or participating in the FSNE Network Leadership Institute, the Trailblazers have made and continue to make significant contributions.

FSNE continued to increase diversity through the addition of thematic summit delegations that crossed state boundaries. The Emerging Leaders delegation was introduced in 2014, which brought eighteen leaders between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine to the summit, many of whom were historically underrepresented and people of color. This initial delegation included Abel Luna, an organizer with Migrant Justice, an organization that works on food justice and immigration issues in Vermont. Luna stood up in a plenary session and identified the largely absent voices of food chain workers. He observed that wages and benefits, as well as working conditions, have been historically unfair and unlivable, yet rarely addressed by the dominant food movement. With his help, we formed a new Food Chain Workers delegation in 2015. Food chain worker perspectives continue to shape the direction of our efforts.

## THE 21-DAY RACIAL EQUITY HABIT BUILDING CHALLENGE

In 2015, FSNE collaborated with the Interaction Institute for Social Change to create another network innovation by building upon the work of Dr. Eddie Moore Jr. and Debby Irving to offer our first annual 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge.

The Challenge seeks to leverage virtual and in-person “network effects” to normalize conversations and action on race and racism in our food system.

Over the course of three weeks, participants commit to dedicating time and space to developing more effective social justice habits, particularly those dealing with issues of power, privilege, and leadership. A collection of readings, audiovisuals, and prompts are offered online to help participants explore the connections between race, racism, and food systems. The Challenge provides an opportunity to discover resources, to share insights, and to become more knowledgeable, sensitive, and capable of celebrating diversity and addressing racism in our work.

In 2015, over two hundred participants signed up for the Challenge, and this year participation reached nearly 1,500 individuals from diverse organizations, states, and food system sectors from across the country. As our outreach for the Challenge has expanded, so have requests for additional information (Burke, 2015). Inquiries about and interest in the Challenge have come from people working on a range of environmental and social issues.

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## Ripples and Waves

**NETWORK INNOVATIONS ARE SOME** of the ways FSNE has worked to bring its commitment to racial equity to life. Ongoing capacity-building around and discussion at FSNE meetings have helped to normalize the conversation about race and racism in white- and non-Hispanic-dominant organizations and communities, encouraging them to take a closer look at their work and consider how they might need to change.

For example, the FSNE racial equity commitment helped inspire a network of university and college faculty and staff to develop a guiding “statement on equity in the food system.” This network, the Inter-Institutional Network for Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability, has formed key partnerships with the Food Chain Workers Alliance and enlisted support from PolicyLink and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.

The FSNE commitment to racial equity has also changed the way entities like state-based food system planners in the region view and approach their work. As one individual from the Vermont Farm to Plate Network said, FSNE has provided “multiple value-adds, but by far the best has been the focus on racial justice. We have a lot of work to do, but knowing it is being held up at that level has been big and will continue to have a ripple effect on the work we’re doing.”<sup>9</sup> The Vermont Farm to Plate Network put equity and justice front and center during its 2015 annual network gathering, which included a keynote presentation and training on systems thinking and structural racism.<sup>10</sup> The network has continued to integrate the commitment throughout the state in the work of its Food Access Crosscutting Team.

Other regional food system-related networks and organizations have followed suit in publicly committing to focus on the fundamental nature of racial equity to sustainable food systems.

Organizations like the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA) say supporting FSNE’s racial equity commitment requires bravery. The alliance is “a fishermen-led organization building a broad movement toward healthy fisheries and fishing communities.” Following a FSNE meeting in which members were asked how their work would tackle issues of race and equity, NAMA coordinating director Niaz Dorry included a letter in her organization’s newsletter encouraging supporters to “be brave and stand up” to ensure just and equitable fisheries and food systems” (Dorry, 2013). In doing so, she realized it would not be universally well received. “Must admit I am nervous about how this commitment [to racial equity and food justice] will further transform our work and approach. The language of today’s marine conservation movement is not written with racial equity and food justice in mind” (Ibid).

Dorry’s concern was not unfounded. Following her message, NAMA received its highest number of unsubscribes, as well as numerous personal responses (Dorry, 2016). After all, said Dorry, “most people we work with are fishermen and women who live in rural communities that are deeply affected by neoliberal policies, yet don’t recognize how the inequities they experience are rooted in historic and systemic racial inequities. They don’t see much they have in common with those who appear different from them. The tendency is to focus on the differences, not the commonalities.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet thanks to the bravery of Niaz Dorry, her NAMA colleagues and partners, and the FSNE network, her response to the backlash was resolute: “Clearly, we made some people uncomfortable,” she said. “Good. For too long, our comfort has come on the backs of many who have been uncomfortable for a long, long time” (Dorry, 2016).



Photo: Housatonic Community College | Food Solutions New England

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## Navigating and Moving Forward, Together

**IN 2015, FSNE BEGAN** a yearlong systems mapping process to better understand how to increase our network impact in supporting our shared vision and values. While there had been a strong desire to engage in some type of systems mapping earlier in FSNE's history, we had made a conscious decision to delay that step until we had made progress on developing more diversity and inclusion in the Network Team, who would be the ones to engage in the systems mapping process. It was clear to everyone that the outcome of any such process would reflect the diversity, or lack thereof, of participants. While we had not in any way reached the levels of diversity and inclusion to which we aspired, we nevertheless decided it was time to take this step.

In parallel to the systems mapping, the Network Team was asked to clarify FSNE's values, to state them clearly and succinctly to ensure alignment of the entire team and the growing network. We had already progressed in the systems mapping to the point of naming what the team agreed to be important dynamics of the food system that we felt should be the focus of our collective efforts and how we might best go about shaping those dynamics. Importantly, the mapping process had named a broad underlying goal of ensuring a food system that would serve the *human dignity* of everyone it touched. The process also identified three areas around which FSNE would develop an integrated strategy: democratic empowerment, a new food story or narrative, and just and sustainable economies.

Several elements of the story serve as indicators and artifacts of the transformation of FSNE's identity and the journey from *othering* toward *belonging*.

First, the explicit inclusion of racial equity in the purpose statement represents the shift from only referencing general principles of "rights-based" and "social justice" approaches in our 2014 vision, to naming racial equity as a core value that will be served, and in fact *driven*, by the New England food system that we collectively envision.

A food system that is a *driver of racial equity* cannot afford to simply consider production, distribution, marketing, and consumption in narrowly conceived market economic terms; nor can it limit its vision, values, and language to "racial good will" or to just acknowledging that white privilege is operating in our food system. It commits FSNE to using "a critical race lens" that disrupts the dominant food-movement narrative, which is generally white, privileged, and color-blind (Rush 1999; powell 2016; Holt-Giménez, 2011; Holt-Giménez, 2016; Giancattarino 2014).

Similarly, the inclusion of "racial equity and dignity for all" as an explicit value, and specifying that "racism must be undone in order to achieve an equitable food system," firmly and unequivocally commits FSNE to leading with questions of *common interest* as opposed to *self-interest* to address these *bigger-than-self questions* (Crompton, 2010). It also commits FSNE to a holistic outlook that accounts for the inherent complexity of our food system. For example, it requires us to ask who has access to land, sea, education, capital, technical assistance, markets, and healthy local and regional food, and who does not? How is racism operating in the system, and how can it be undone to achieve true

“Clearly, we made some people uncomfortable. Good. For too long, our comfort has come on the backs of many who have been uncomfortable for a long, long time.”

equity? And finally, *trust* is named as the lifeblood of collaboration that FSNE commits to building across diverse people, organizations, networks, and communities to support a thriving food system; and this assumes that *everyone* must be “part of the political community with the rights and privileges of membership” (powell, 2011, 155–156).

The early part of FSNE’s voyage as an organization has been about the awakening of a predominantly white network to the central place of *othering* and *belonging* in our food system and the obligation to put racial equity at the center of its work and to take actions to honor that commitment.

This commitment has been, for some, uncomfortable or even a threat; for others, a perceived distraction and confusing; and of course, for many others, a welcome relief. By grounding ourselves in this commitment and an ongoing process of trust building, we have given ourselves a way to right our course when we unintentionally deviate, and along the way we have cultivated genuine connections across diverse racial groups that have altered our collective identity and purpose in important ways. As with any voyage, ours proceeds with both a fixed destination and with humility and resolve for the journey.

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- 2 Presenters included representatives from Vermont Farm to Plate, the Michigan Good Food Charter, and Roots of Change in California.
- 3 The support from and understanding of network development by the Henry P. Kendall Foundation and Courtney Bourns, senior program officer, was a critical factor.
- 4 See, for example, Ceasar McDowell's TEDx talk, "Design for the Margins," at <http://interactioninstitute.org/design-for-the-margins/>.
- 5 Senior program officers Courtney Bourns, of the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, and Christine James, of the John Merck Fund, provided leadership in bringing their own organizations and other funders to the table, including the Merck Family Fund and the Island Foundation, among others.
- 6 This statement is based on personal communication on February 1, 2017.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See more at "A Racial Equity Commitment: Lifting Up Community in Food System Transformation," <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/blog/racial-equity-commitment-lifting-community-food-system-transformation>.
- 9 This statement was recorded in notes from the Community of Practice meeting in September 2016.
- 10 This statement was taken from personal communication with Ellen Kahler on January 12, 2017.
- 11 This statement was taken from personal communication with Niaz Dorry on March 1, 2017.

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# The Endurance of the Color Line

**Soya Jung**

Photography by Arash Yaghmaian

In the first issue of this publication, John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian write: “The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of ‘othering’” and “the only viable solution . . . is one involving inclusion and belongingness.” It is a simple and audacious argument.

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois prophetically stated: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” It is a well-known sentence that is rarely quoted completely. Du Bois goes on to describe the color line as “the question of how far differences of race . . . will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.” In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he says it is “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” and says, “It was a *phase* [emphasis mine] of this problem that caused the Civil War.”

Photo: **Arash Yaghmaian**

**IF IN CONJURING DU BOIS**, powell and Menendian suggest that we are now in another phase of the problem of the color line, then I agree. I read this as an invitation to take a global and historical view of the forces that have drawn and redrawn the color line, which Du Bois understood as a global system of exploitation, an evolving mechanism of human sorting that accompanied the development of Western national economies and empires. The color line sorts the free from the unfree, the owners from the dispossessed, discerning who belongs and who does not belong within the nation-state or within humanity itself. Political theorist Cedric Robinson later called this racial capitalism, a general description of the West's organization, expansion, and ideology of capitalist society as expressed through race, racial subjection, and racial differences.

Du Bois was an early forecaster of how the relationship between race, nation, and empire would drive major conflicts like anticolonial struggle and racial integration, and how it would inspire expansive freedom dreams. A consistent, yet commonly overlooked, mainstay of black radical politics has been the demand not simply to be included in the nation but to transform its very meaning by contesting capitalism and empire. That Reconstruction was left unfinished meant that this transformation never took place, and the rapacious logic of capitalism and Western empire continued to brutalize black bodies in ever-evolving systems of exclusion and exploitation. This systematic devaluation of black life, like Lani Guinier's miner's canary, augured growing ranks of the dispossessed that have crossed racial and national boundaries.

We, the living, have the advantage of hindsight in assessing the principal problem of humanity in this last century. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Riverside Church in which he publicly opposed the Vietnam War. It is my favorite King speech. He knowingly risks alienating significant portions of his base by denouncing not just domestic racism but also militarism and capitalism. King warned that these "giant triplets" formed a blueprint for "violent coannihilation" and called for a spiritual revolution of values fueled by a deep and all-embracing love. That he was killed exactly one year later has always haunted me. It is as if silencing his radicalism was a prerequisite for declaring the freedom dreams of black Americans achieved, for entirely swallowing up all arguments for dismantling the color line by denying its existence, driving its workings underground through new narratives of the deserving versus the undeserving of humanity.

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## The Violence of Belonging

**THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF** stories lies in their ability to shape how we see each other, and ourselves, as part of a shared national community. But to paraphrase historian Howard Zinn, nations have never been communities. American holidays, advertising, and textbooks make up a national mythology about multiculturalism that masks the realities of unresolved conflict. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz explains how the folklore of the

“gift-giving Indian” giving corn, beans, log cabins, and more to the project of American democracy functions to normalize violence:

*This idea of the gift-giving Indian helping to establish and enrich the development of the United States is an insidious smoke screen meant to obscure the fact that the very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an entire continent and its resources . . .*

*Settler colonialism, as an institution or system, requires violence or the threat of violence to attain its goals. People do not hand over their land, resources, children, and futures without a fight, and that fight is met with violence. In employing the force necessary to accomplish its expansionist goals, a colonizing regime institutionalizes violence.*

*An example from 1873 is typical, with General William T. Sherman writing, “We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women and children . . . during an assault, the soldiers cannot pause to distinguish between male and female, or even discriminate as to age.”<sup>1</sup>*

powell and Menendian take up the language of *othering* and *belonging* to articulate the challenges of the current period, weaving together cognitive science, the power of schema, and the tendency of demagoguery to thrive during times of political instability and economic rupture. Yet given the brutality of the current economic and political system, of the nation, something feels missing in both the problem statement and the solution.

Exactly one hundred years after Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Indian author and human rights activist Arundhati Roy published *War Talk*. In it she writes: “Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people’s minds and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead.”<sup>2</sup> The violence of nationalism is built on the logic of belonging. The failures of capitalism and modern liberal democracy stem from their reliance on belonging as the basis for differential valuations of human life. Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts this succinctly: “Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.”<sup>3</sup> Not everyone can be equal in value, so liberalism creates the folklore of race and nation to explain the borders between those who belong and the excluded/oppressed/dispossessed.

We learn to associate modernity with human progress, yet Dunbar-Ortiz situates the violence of North American settler colonialism as a distinctly modern project:

*The form of colonialism that the Indigenous peoples of North America have experienced was modern from the beginning: the expansion of European corporations, backed by government armies, into foreign areas, with subsequent expropriation of lands and resources. Settler colonialism is a genocidal policy.<sup>4</sup>*

## The violence of nationalism is built on the logic of belonging.

The modern world rests upon an idea of freedom that requires unfreedom. Grand declarations of equality have always accompanied profound realities of inequality. Critical race scholar Chandan Reddy calls this devil's bargain of the modern liberal state "freedom with violence." He explains how in the early part of the twentieth century, state regulation of labor and migration forced categories of humanity that justified state violence:

*By the interwar years, the modern regulation of population as the technique of ruling had made racial and national identity basic to the human person. Belonging to this or that community was now innate to the human subject. Even as modernity intensified the movement of peoples—and perhaps because of this intensification—the immigration state interpreted those movements through a lens that attributed belonging to all migrating bodies. All bodies had national origins, and the Immigration Act of 1924 . . . set numerical quotas by nationality as a way to regulate the arrival of impoverished immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Using social scientific knowledge as its fulcrum, the newly formed juridicoadministrative state restricted immigration, excluded some groups altogether, and carried out other illiberal practices, such as the sterilization of women, within US society, ironically through citing the forms of belonging that it claimed existed prior to political society: the various national, racial, regional, religious, or linguistic communities that the National Origins Act codified.<sup>5</sup>*

Our concepts of liberal democracy are tied to the idea of a differentiated humanity through this state-imposed mythology of race and nation, to our belief that each of us has an innate racial and national identity that defines our humanity. Through practice, we have become blind to our connectedness across and within borders. Realizing the solution will require us to build ourselves anew culturally and politically.

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### Race as Rivalry

**I HAVE BEEN GRAPPLING** with language. For years, working in the racial justice movement, I have hit the wall on words and meaning. The following quote from critical race scholar Daniel M. HoSang reflects my frustration when exploring the question of multi-racial solidarity. It too often involves the reification of racial categories that gets in the way of forging new antiracist identities and shared political goals.



Photo: **Arash Yaghmaian**

*In queer studies, “queer” is not a population, but a verb, a political vision and an action—for example, queering a relationship, or to queer a critique. Also in disability studies, it’s not describing attributes of people, but challenging the idea of normalcy. Ethnic studies has been emptied of its politics . . . Who’s in a room? We count bodies, and then say it’s an indication of racism because there aren’t people of color. The argument is that there is a particular experience as people of color, but that’s not true . . . We also treat White as a natural category, not as an ideology, a way of looking at the world . . . We no longer have a vision of transformation. Instead, we believe that the distribution of harms by race is somehow a justice vision. Would it be just if people were distributed in prisons on an equitable basis? That’s the culmination of the racial justice project. We need to envision broader transformation.<sup>6</sup>*

I’m no philosopher, but as a writer and former organizer, I know that language matters. Words like “felon” and “illegal” have profound material consequences. I have long been partial to Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism as “the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death,”<sup>7</sup> but have found that it reinforces two false ideas: that racism only hurts people of color and benefits whites, and that this, rather than the normalization of a differentiated humanity, is its greatest harm. I have tried experimenting with Saskia Sassen’s phrase “savage sorting,” which describes the cruelly simple outcomes of complex chains of transactions in today’s global capitalism,<sup>8</sup> but while it has a certain ring, it requires too much explaining. I have tested out my own language of “race as rivalry,” because what has been happening to the working class reminds me of Roman gladiator fights, or massive mixed martial arts cage fights. But in a culture that glorifies professional sports, this feels inadequate to capture racism’s inhumanity.

Assigning natural rights to some and not others is the folklore that drives blood-lust, rivalries over things that should not be at stake. The state-propagated idea of race and national origins as natural, as fixed categories of people who share innate essential qualities, is not only historically inaccurate but politically demobilizing. The reality is that we are “raced” in relationship to each other through a changing combination of rules, stories, accepted knowledge, and more. While these things may originate from those with power, we all participate in their perpetuation through day-to-day economic, social, and political action. Antiracist struggle requires not a reshuffling of categories but a replacement for the rivalries of capitalism, a new common sense and practice for how we live on this earth.

At around the same time of Dr. King’s 1967 speech, the model minority myth took hold of the American public imagination. It had been in formation for decades. Chinese and Japanese Americans who previously had been characterized as disease-ridden, untrustworthy, sexually deviant, and criminal were miraculously redeemed as exemplary nonwhites. This shift reflected a changing marketplace of ideas about race and nation, one in which US elites needed to tweak the racial common sense in the Cold War contest for geopolitical power. The model minority had to embody the *possibility*

of racial uplift while maintaining the validity of rules against which insurgent blacks and other threats to the liberal capitalist state could be justifiably punished.<sup>9</sup> It is an example of the violence that belonging has inflicted with interventions from multiple sectors: the academy, government, media, and ethnic organizations. In the US nation-state, othering and belonging are two sides of the same coin, binding the deserving to the undeserving in a system of brutal competition. Just as the state violence of immigration enforcement makes national borders real, our rivalries within the economy give meaning to racial boundaries.

Examples of this abound in the experiences of global migrants. The war that Dr. King risked his work and his life to denounce in the 1960s led to a refugee crisis that relocated Southeast Asian refugees to urban sites of economic and political abandonment, where the War on Drugs was decimating black communities. Refugee children of the 1980s grew up to encounter welfare and immigration laws in the 1990s that drove them into economic crisis, incarceration, and deportation in the 2000s. Longtime Cambodian organizer Sarath Suong points out how his parents, displaced from the killing fields of Cambodia to a refugee camp in Thailand and then to a reeducation camp in the Philippines, were groomed to be cheap labor by the time that they arrived in the United States. For Asian Americans, our entry into this nation, our arrival, has been as rivals. The biggest roadblock to multiracial solidarity is failing to recognize race as a system of state-brokered relationships within a global structure of deadly competition.

The biggest roadblock to multiracial solidarity is failing to recognize race as a system of state-brokered relationships within a global structure of deadly competition.

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## White Rage

**DONALD TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION HAS** wasted no time spreading chaos, fear, and confusion. Within days of taking office, the regime rolled out an anti-Muslim travel ban, suspended refugee admissions, green lighted construction of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, insulted America's international allies, attacked the judiciary and the media, and conducted a raid on a Yemeni village that left nine children and fifteen other civilians dead. While news outlets struggled to keep up with the torrent of White House gaffes and bombshells, Republican state legislators moved on numerous bills attacking unions, abortion rights, transgender rights, and public education;



Photo: Arash Yaghmaian



CHOOSE  
FACE

NAZI SCUM  
SHOULD BE  
PURIFIED

slashing taxes; rolling back regulations; criminalizing protest; and preemptively curbing the power of progressive cities to fight back.

Social justice movements have delivered on their own promise: to resist. The day after Trump's inauguration, a record-breaking four million people took to the streets in six hundred US towns and cities for a Women's March that also inspired satellite marches around the world from Nairobi to Beirut to Tokyo. Just days later, thousands of protesters showed up at several US airports to protest the detention of noncitizens from seven Muslim-majority nations that Trump attempted to exclude through an ill-fated travel ban. In communities across America, people who had never before participated in a march or rally stepped out of their comfort zones and into the streets. In this time of grave danger, we must not forget, as my friend and longtime comrade Eric Ward so poignantly put it, that *we* are the storm, and we are here.

Meanwhile the wave of hate violence that swept the country immediately following Trump's election has continued, most recently with the killing of Srinivas Kuchibhotla by white navy veteran Adam Purinton in Olathe, Kansas, who yelled, "Get out of my country!" before shooting Kuchibhotla and another Indian immigrant, believing them to be Iranian. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the number of organized hate groups has increased for the second year in a row. This year marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin, mistaken as "a Jap" by white former autoworkers Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz. Purinton's actions reveal that the connections between war, capitalism, and white rage endure. The promise of Asian American radicalism lies in revealing this.

This volatile moment contains important breaks from accepted norms. Irregularities include the Executive Branch's aberrant behavior in the form of "alternative facts," hostile press briefings, and rambling press conferences that lend credence to the refrain, "This is not normal." But they can also be seen in a mainstream media that has found itself under attack, with some journalists and editorial boards adopting insurgent positions. Media professionals are talking about their civic duty, reclaiming the banner of investigative journalism in service to democracy and not to market shares. Just weeks after the election, Marty Baron, executive editor of the *Washington Post*, said to his colleagues that "holding the most powerful to account is what we are *supposed* to do. If we do not do that, then what exactly *is* the purpose of journalism?"

Career civil servants from the State Department to the Environmental Protection Agency to NASA are actively dissenting, whether through leaks or rogue Twitter accounts. Former staffers from the Obama administration have emerged as sources of advice and insight into political resistance, through podcasts such as *Pod Save America* and projects like Indivisible. Democrats in cities and states have openly defied the Trump administration by declaring themselves sanctuary governments and launching lawsuits against Trump's policies. Corporate giants like Starbucks, Microsoft, Airbnb, Amazon, and others have spoken out against Trump's policies and adopted various forms of dissent, as have numerous celebrities.

Resistance has gone vogue.

These are positive signs, but resistance to rightwing authoritarianism must do more than settle back into the norms of liberalism if we are to address the problem of othering and belonging. The current crisis is screaming out for change, not for a reversion to the neoliberal status quo. Neoliberalism, represented most recently by the Obama administration but originating in a ruling class backlash against the Keynesian economic policies implemented in the middle of the last century, has led to a weakened labor movement, unprecedented inequality, resegregation, hollowed out economies both in former industrial manufacturing cities and in rural counties, a mass incarceration crisis, a mortgage crisis, and unending war. It placed othering and belonging on steroids, while signaling multiculturalism as a virtue by presumed national consensus.

The effect was a perception among precarious or dispossessed whites that racial justice meant multiculturalism, and that meant yoga studios, MacBooks, lattes, high-tech jobs, and other urban privileges that were out of reach for most white people. Leaders of racial justice movements saw the Kool-Aid for what it was and felt ever-growing frustration at the appearance of diversity with not only a lack of justice but active brutality in the form of gentrification, criminalization and police abuse, skyrocketing mass incarceration, and continued divestment from public services and infrastructure. Unfortunately, the demands of the racial justice movement were not easily discernible from the cultural consensus put forth by the neoliberal class, particularly following the election of Barack Obama, even though they were oceans apart.

Longtime organizer N'Tanya Lee puts it this way:

*The destruction of the Black left means that liberal folks are in charge of saying what liberation is for Black people. They get to be part of defining civil rights and racial justice in ways that have nothing to do with Black people's interests, really.<sup>10</sup>*

Now here we are.

Like black and brown rebellions from slave revolts to coolie mutinies to today's Standing Rock, what is happening in American politics now is a form of rejecting dispossession. The suffering and precarity underlying Trumpian white rage is the result of racial capitalism. The difference is that the Trumpian whitelash rejects dispossession, not to expand the possibilities of life, dignity, and self-determination for all but to reanimate an earlier phase of the color line, an exclusive definition of the nation that hoards life exclusively for its white citizenry.

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## Race Consciousness

**SOCIAL COGNITION RESEARCH MAY** capture our brains as they are, but this is the result of the world around us. Segregation and implicit bias are mutually reinforcing. Markets by definition require discrimination because they rely on rivalry. When that is the central operating logic of the economy, when your physical survival relies on your competitive ability to produce profit for the ruling class, then the human brain's propensity to categorize people racially is, in fact, about survival. This is the logic we must change.

The development of chattel slavery necessarily included norms of religion, gender, sexuality, family formation, ability, et cetera. Intersectionality is important because it is the key to unlocking the capitalist state's social control. Surviving the modern world has not demanded much of us in the way of universal empathy. In fact, it has increasingly required us to consent to the inevitability of someone else's dehumanization or absolute elimination.

Continuing to see ourselves as distinct groups independent of one another blinds us to the workings of the larger system, and to solutions. Like Robinson, Lisa Lowe has illustrated the importance and limitations of Marxist theory, writing: "In the history of the United States, capital has maximized its profits not through rendering labor 'abstract' but precisely through the social production of 'difference' . . . marked by race, nation, geographical origins, and gender."<sup>11</sup> Citizenship in the United States has always been racialized and tied to the promise of economic uplift. Thus, the violence of belonging through race, nation, and the economy must be problem solved together. Doing so is as much a cultural project as a political and economic one.

There is something beautiful and resonant in powell and Menendian's language of the "circle of human concern," yet it could be expanded to a greater sense of wholeness. powell and Menendian write that inclusion and belonging must go beyond tolerance and accommodation to "ultimately support the creation of new inclusive narratives, identities, and structures." One place to start may be to revisit those movements that have always had an expansive vision of such transformation.

In a speech published in 1984, black feminist, lesbian, author, and activist Barbara Smith said: "We are in a huge mishmash created by mad people at the top, and we are constantly trying to rectify the situation. I see the process of rectification as what Black feminism is all about: making a place on this globe that is fit for human life."<sup>12</sup>

Speaking to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1964, Ella Baker said: "Even if segregation is gone, we will still need to be free; we will still have to see that everyone has a job. Even if we can all vote, but if people are still hungry, we will not be free . . . Remember, we are not fighting for the freedom of the Negro alone, but for the freedom of the human spirit, a larger freedom that encompasses all mankind."<sup>13</sup>

Contrast this to the following statement by US Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina in 1849: "The two great divisions of society are not the rich and the poor, but white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class and are respected and treated as equals, if honest and industrious; and hence have

a position and pride of character of which neither poverty nor misfortune can deprive them.” This reflects the impacts of the color line, of racial capitalism, and of modern liberal society on our material conditions and on our consciousness.

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## Undoing Violent Coannihilation

**BLACK SUBJUGATION, SETTLER COLONIALISM**, and war diminish the universal meaning of life itself. Oppressed groups have fought to penetrate the wall dividing the free from the unfree, the normal from the aberrant, the world of the living from the world of the dispossessed, to make America’s declarations of equality less untrue. But the wall endures—the color line across which race does its “savage sorting.” On one side of that line, the world of the living is populated by the creative class, the winners, the gentrifiers, and the political descendants of yesterday’s colonial settlers. Today’s prison industrialists are descendants of yesterday’s eugenicists; today’s national border policies offspring of yesterday’s redlining.

In this world of the living thrives the real identity politics that brought down the Democratic Party in the 2016 election: the urban neoliberal, the progressive who is just fine in his skin, benefiting from the dislocation, dispossession, or death of another as long as there is a net profit on the balance sheet of progress—measured by GDP, average life expectancy, unemployment rates, and other data points. The logic, structures, institutions, and policies that produce this identity are the “giant triplets” that Dr. King predicted would lead to “violent coannihilation”—racism, war, and capitalism. These are the invisible sharp edges of power sorting the world of the living from the dispossessed such that phrases like “Black lives matter” and “Water is life” become necessary.

In this context, culture has descended into the grab bag of markets. The hegemon artfully takes the trinkets of various subcultures to fashion a superculture of the global marketplace: Western democracy anchored by America—intercultural, interconnected, idealistic, international, innovative, and intelligent. So many *i*’s that make up an *us* formed against *them*. The West took “bits of colored cloth,” fashioned a transnational flag, and expected all rational people to pledge allegiance to it, to the winners of globalization, to free markets, to tanks/guns/drones, to progress, to common sense.

I believe that the transformative potential we need lies in the growing global ranks of the dispossessed, who are not all the same and are not all experiencing the same things, but who are prey to the outcomes of an economic system that so few of us understand. This has always been true, but it has reached a different scale and pace.

This is where a new kind of human identity can emerge, not from an invitation to join the hegemon, not at the doorstep of the living. It will emerge from the knowledge among the dispossessed that I am not you, and you are not me, and that this is only a problem if our differences result in consequentially different life outcomes and if they determine the ability of one of us to eat, to live free of violence, to have adequate

# I believe that the transformative potential we need lies in the growing global ranks of the dispossessed . . .

shelter, to form intimate human relationships, to be healthy, and to imagine and create. The truth is that we need one another to do these things.

We have underestimated the carnage of the modern world. It is time to put ourselves together perhaps for the first time.

My friend Hannah Jones is a volunteer with Chaplains on the Harbor in Grays Harbor County, Washington, a former timber economy on Quinault Indian territory. She sent me an email on International Women's Day that moved me deeply. I read it several times.

*We saw the stretch of rail yard along the river where many homeless people set up camp, but are routinely harassed by police or have their homes destroyed by sweeps. We saw the hospital where one young man was turned away because he was profiled as "drug seeking," only to die at the third hospital he tried in Olympia. We heard how Child Protective Services has been charged with a lawsuit for trafficking children they take away from mothers in poverty. We saw the spot where a young man, being chased by cops, jumped into the river and drowned. He was not the first and he won't be the last. We threw flowers into the river at that spot, one by one, to honor and remember all of the people from the Grays Harbor community who have been killed by the violence of poverty. It's a clear view into how the state and the wealthy manage people who are considered useless. When they have no buying power to be consumers, and when their labor isn't needed.*

*And through this mess, people are surviving, resisting, and creating. There's a self-governing tent city held together by Larry, a former logger who was injured on the job years back. He talked with me about his conversations with men in the camp about their treatment of women in the homeless community. Emily, a budding organizer with Revival of Grays Harbor, almost single-handedly runs a cold-weather homeless shelter during the winter with her spare time. She knows everyone in town and hustles blankets, peanut butter, and anything else that could keep people alive. Most of the shelter volunteers are homeless themselves. Emily's love for her people and home is palpable, seemingly boundless, and fierce as hell. Reverend Sarah with Chaplains visits people in jail, delivers letters for them, gives sandwiches away under the bridge to members of the homeless community, holds people through immense pain, mourns the dead, and shows up for people when no one else will. Scott, Larry's friend in tent city, looks out for Larry and makes sure he exercises his bad hip.*

*Idalin, visiting from Oakland, talked with people from tent city about the commonalities between her struggle as a poor woman of color and theirs in Grays Harbor. Another woman from the New Poor People's Campaign, Shailly, brought her six-month-old with her from New York. He took everything in with wide eyes. We all ate together—people cracked jokes about baptists, reminisced about LA in the '60s, swapped war stories, played with the baby, and shared sage advice about the dangers of cops.*

*. . . I'm feeling deep down how profoundly feminist the work here is. It's not a shallow feminism. It's not watered down. It's not merely lip service to it (the word wasn't uttered today because sometimes when it's practiced, it doesn't need to be spoken). It's a deep commitment to each other, to care of a community, to a world beyond the narrow confines of work as a job, to connection despite stories that try to divide and alienate us, to the conviction that no person is expendable, to liberation, to holding people at their messiest, to fighting for a vision beyond mere survival. To playing with babies and cooking and eating and crying and planning and living.*

It is time to say everything we know. We need a way of relating one life to another life that we can see, smell, taste, and touch; a politics that embraces every one of us, that nourishes both sensuality and intellect, that rewards our curiosity about ourselves and one another, and that allows us to reimagine and practice what being with one another means. Liberalism, capitalism, and modernity are crumbling. In this time of rupture and fear and uncertainty, let us heed the wisdom of Pema Chodron, who warns against the impulse to put ground under our feet by reaching for the easy and familiar, modern liberal fixes. Let us instead get brave, curious, and rigorous in our analysis of who among us and how we can build a new society.

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**Sara Rahbar**

Flag #12, Land of Opportunity, 2013 (left)

Flag #49, A time of anxiety, 2010 (right)

# Responses to the Inaugural Article on Othering & Belonging

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

**Susan Eaton**

EMBRACING ECOLOGICAL INTIMACY

**Alex Mikulich**

OTHERING AND THE ECONOMICS OF INEQUALITY

**David Clingingsmith**

COMPELLING DIAGNOSIS, UNCLEAR PRESCRIPTION

**Dennis Parker**

Artwork by Sara Rahbar

Following the publication of the inaugural issue of *Othering & Belonging*, the editorial staff invited several very thoughtful colleagues to reflect on its lead article, “The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging.” The article engaged the crucial themes that spurred us to create this forum, and we asked our associates to speak to the degree to which John Powell and Stephen Menendian’s arguments and insights align with their own experiences and the lessons of their own work. The writers had wide latitude to fashion their responses. A lawyer, an economist, a theologian, an educator and former journalist, and a grassroots organizer accepted the challenge. We think you will be pleased that they did.

— THE EDITORS



**Sara Rahbar** | Flag #19, Memories without Recollection, 2008

## RESPONSE

# You Are Not Alone

## PIXELS OF BELONGING AMID THE PROBLEM OF OTHERING

Susan Eaton

**ON FEBRUARY, 8, 2017,** US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers in Phoenix, Arizona, handcuffed thirty-five-year-old Guadalupe García de Rayos and locked her in a white van. The next morning, after removing a protester who'd tied himself to the van's tire, officials deported Ms. Rayos to Mexico. She'd not been there in more than two decades, when she was just fourteen and she and her parents crossed the border and made the United States their home. In 2008, Ms. Rayos had been arrested and briefly jailed<sup>1</sup> for using the fake social security number that allowed her to get a low-wage job at a waterpark in the suburbs. Ms. Rayos, whose two children were born in the United States, had been granted leniency under the Obama administration, whose official policy focused upon deporting people convicted of violent felonies. Advocates speculated that Ms. Rayos's expulsion reflected enforcement of President Donald Trump's new executive order that expanded the category of deportable noncitizen to anyone charged with or "believed" to have committed a chargeable criminal offense.

"*No esta sola,*" protesters had chanted as they circled the van that caged Ms. Rayos inside. You are not alone. In their elucidating and principled essay, "The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging," John Powell and Steven Menendian riff on W. E. B. Du Bois to declare the

"problem of the twenty-first century" to be group-based "othering." Group-based othering occurs when identifiable groups of people become classified as fundamentally not belonging, not one of us. The authors identify particular conditions under which this universal psychological tendency becomes "activated" as a powerful, often dangerous and deadly, force that "undergirds group-based marginalization and inequality." Economic instability and rapid change may reduce the likelihood of othering, they say, but it is demagogic political leaders who "activate" it through a variety of means. Rhetoric, say. Or an executive order that exploits existing "othered" group identities. Or by pressing a vast deportation machinery, built up with public dollars over decades, into service to express othering through expulsion.

If the finer points of Powell and Menendian's essay were at all unclear, the first months of the Trump regime provide a grotesque explanatory caricature of the psychological inclinations and individual and institutional processes Powell and Menendian describe. (Their article was published several months before Election Day.) Since January 24, we have witnessed a spectacle of demagoguery, cartoonish in its buffoonery and also terrifying in its authoritarianism.

To be sure, a loud and urgent resistance is called for in all corners. But this is also a

confounding and intellectually disorderly period. And the best response for that may be equanimity. “The Problem of Othering” provides us a just-in-time gift—a measured, distinctly modern conceptual framework in which to organize our thinking and guide us over the long term toward action. The aspiration at the core of this article is a future defined by othering’s opposite: belonging.

“The most important good we distribute to each other in society is membership,” powell and Menendian write. “Belongingness entails an unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but to ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society. We call this idea the ‘circle of human concern.’”

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**“THE PROBLEM OF OTHERING”** shifted the perspective from which I had been seeing the act of deportation, something that I’ve been trying to write about for several months. powell and Menendian nudged me to conceptualize deportation and similar expressions of group-based othering, not merely as immoral or as rights violations but as expressions of existential turbulence.

Take Ms. Rayos, for example. She’d been othered by her legal classification—“undocumented”—certainly. Likely, too, she’d been othered due to her skin tone, her place of birth, and the low income her employer paid her. She belonged to multiple “othered” groups. But, in innumerable ways, Ms. Rayos, and the millions who share her othered group classifications, are members. She’d woven herself into America, connected by multiple strands: love, social relationships, memories, labor, and obligations. We actively wove her in too. She bought things and paid taxes on those things, which “we” used to help pay

teachers’ salaries in classrooms and for the upkeep of parks where kids play. By committing that deportable offense—using a fake social security number—Ms. Rayos was also holding up her end of the members’ social contract. As a person without legal authorization to work here, she paid into a system that would never benefit her directly but that would help support the rest of us, the we. She raised and loved children who loved her back. She had friends, coworkers, and neighbors. She was a friend, a coworker, a neighbor. As the protesters had chanted, Ms. Rayos was not alone. She was part of a whole. Part of the we. By expelling her, we expel part of “us.”

Othering mandates an utterly irrational dehumanization, a self-imposed blindness. It obliterates the complex, multidimensional person each of us is and the various roles we occupy as it disregards the variations between people who fit into socially constructed categories. A category for them. A category for us. And then systems and rules built upon myths about the categories. Then, voila! We open our eyes again, and we see social inequalities between groups that help reinforce the myths. Round and round we go.

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**“DEMAGOGUES ACTIVELY INCULCATE AND** organize. . . fear into a political force,” powell and Menendian write. “Where prejudice was latent, it is being activated; where it is absent, it is being fostered.” At the end of their essay, powell and Menendian write that “in periods of turbulent upheaval and instability, the siren call of the demagogue has greater power, but whether a society falls victim to it depends upon the choices of political leaders and the stories they tell.” I’d add that it depends, now months after Election Day, upon each of us.

It depends upon the choices ordinary people make and the stories we tell.

With that declaration in mind, I'm going to offer an array of pixels to what seems to me the less-developed picture in powell and Menendian's othering and belonging frame. The Trump regime may represent our most compelling contemporary American example of demagogic othering activation. But we find equally powerful counterexamples of belonging in communities across the United States. Some represent small pieces or first steps toward the structural transformations necessary for reducing group-based inequality and marginalization that powell and Menendian call for. I learned about most of these people and places via a documentation project I codirected called *One Nation Indivisible*. Not coincidentally, the nature and content of this work was profoundly influenced by powell's writing, speaking, and activism on matters of racial inequality, racial integration, and human relationships over many years. You can find far more details about some of these briefly described efforts and many more like them on the project website<sup>2</sup> and in a book that grew from that project, *Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees and America at Its Best*.<sup>3</sup>

Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter hosted a festive naturalization ceremony for new citizens. He threw a public party along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Beneath more than one hundred flags of nations that have or had a presence in the city, he helped swear in about twenty new citizens and raised the flags of nineteen more nations, including Botswana, Cambodia, and El Salvador.

That was our response to the insanity out in Arizona," Nutter said. "That was our message to the immigrants who built this city and the ones who would help revitalize it."

In 2010, Nutter's support for immigration—he'd publicly urged immigrants to move to Philadelphia—made him an outlier among elected officials. But now, seven years later, he is one of dozens of mayors and municipal leaders across the country—from Portland, Maine, to Boston, Boise, and San Francisco—who've publicly declared their support for immigration and their opposition to policies that would lead to racial profiling, make life harder for immigrants, or make it easier for federal officials to deport immigrants.

The day after then-candidate Donald Trump made a stop in Portland, Maine, and lamented the existence of refugees there, hundreds of people gathered in protest on the

As the protesters had chanted, Ms. Rayos was not alone. She was part of a whole. Part of the we. By expelling her, we expel part of "us."

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**SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER ARIZONA'S** governor had signed a law making it easier to deport people who are undocumented immigrants,

steps of City Hall. The mayor, Ethan Strimling, greeted the crowd in Arabic. He went on to say, "We cherish the Somali community here. You are welcomed here; you are cherished here. But more than you are welcomed and

cherished here, we need you here.”<sup>4</sup> In these places, public declarations from leadership are typically a first step toward substantive programs, practices, and policies. In cities and towns with particularly vocal belonging-oriented elected leaders, I also found that officials worked closely with immigrant advocacy groups to provide not only services but systems to enhance civic engagement, to support immigrant entrepreneurship, and to build relationships between new immigrants and longtime city residents. Declarations alone are obviously not going to transform the laws and policies that engender inequality between groups. But public declarations are still significant, if only because in an atmosphere of activated othering nationally, local silence sends a loud and unwelcoming message.

Some belonging efforts aim for structural transformation to reduce inequality and equalize access and status. In the diverse school district of Rockville Centre,<sup>5</sup> educators ended the system of academic tracking that had resulted in African American students and students with low socioeconomic status languishing in lower tracks. At the high school, educators instituted a rigorous International Baccalaureate program open to all students. In Mississippi, African American legislators have built a strong political coalition<sup>6</sup> with labor leaders and Latino immigrants over more than a decade. The coalition has been successful in getting antiracial profiling legislation passed in the capital city, Jackson, and in preventing passage of the kind of anti-immigration legislation that passed in Georgia and Alabama.

Another common belonging practice may seem less revolutionary. But it does carry transformative potential. It involves the intentional creation of space and time dedicated to bringing people with different identities together. The goals vary from place to place. But in most places, like Fort Wayne, Indiana,

and in dozens of self-declared “welcoming communities” across the nation, people often get to know each other and, in time, go on to identify and solve problems together.

In Fort Wayne, a faith-based nonprofit, The Reclamation Project,<sup>7</sup> bought and then its volunteers began to renovate a dilapidated historic theater in a dying downtown area. In fits and starts, staff and volunteers from the neighborhood transformed part of the old theater into a center for culture, arts, socializing, and services for residents of the neighborhood, which include African Americans, American-born Latinos, a spattering of white folks, and immigrants and refugees from Burma, Sudan, and Somalia.

“The goal is relationships,” the project director, Angie Harrison, said. “The point is reciprocity . . . Everyone has something to contribute.”

Some of these efforts begin simply with people sharing food or stories or making cultural exchanges through art, crafts, singing, or dance. This may seem like a small measure in the face of vast inequalities in wealth and power in our society. I suppose it is. But many organizers, who traditionally are interested in making big changes to law, policy, and practice, told me that purposeful socializing and relationship building was necessary in order to overcome the social distance between groups. In addition to negative cultural messages, isolated upbringings and prejudice in many of these places has likely been exacerbated by residential and school segregation, which Powell and Menéndez describe as a “central feature or revealing marker of societies” where othering is occurring.

In Omaha, Nebraska, the Tri-Faith Initiative<sup>8</sup> brings together three religious communities—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—to share a campus for worship. Each faith community worships in its own building—a synagogue,

a church, and a mosque—but the initiative reserves a fourth structure for social and educational events that bring the different faith communities together to better understand each other’s traditions, to share in celebrations, and to build authentic relationships.

“We’ve always been on the defensive,” said Karim Khayati, who emigrated from Tunisia to Nebraska in 1998 and is on the Tri-Faith Initiative’s board. “Here we’re not on the defensive. We’re taking part in something big, something that’s sending a positive message.”

Since 2001, teenagers from across Maine have gathered for two weeks at the Seeds of Peace<sup>9</sup> International Camp in Otisfield to learn about bias, stereotypes, and privilege; to develop leadership skills; and to get to know one another by doing typical things one tends to do at camp. They take out canoes. They roast marshmallows. They put on plays and sing and dance. And they fall in love. Since 1993, the camp has been known worldwide for bringing together young people from conflict regions around the globe to build relationships and break down stereotypes.

In 2000, an educator named Tim Wilson, who was Maine’s first-ever African American public schoolteacher back in the 1970s, took note of the growing diversity of his state, a change brought about mainly by the migration of people from Somalia and other African nations, in addition to concentrated Latino populations in a few communities. He worked with local philanthropists to create the Maine Seeds version of the camp, which is based upon the international model. Emblazoned on the wall of a small wooden building, the words “The Way Life Could Be” greet visitors to the camp, which is set among tall pine trees on a calm, clear lake. Ebullient young people, dressed in forest-green camp shirts, sit in circles and talk intently. They cheer each other during camper-led announcements about interfaith prayer

services, the upcoming play, and a cookout. The purpose of the program is to equip young people from a range of backgrounds—African American, Latino, white, Muslim, Somalian, Jewish, Christian—to build skills for leadership in the context of diversity, prejudice, power differences, and wealth inequality.

The hope is that the personal transformation and leadership training will enable students to make changes that facilitate equity and belonging when they return to their home schools. To this end, the program continues after camp is over, offering workshops and support for “seeds,” as the campers are called, to develop activities to bridge divides in their home schools. It’s worked. Seeds students have been instrumental in raising awareness about inequalities and inadequacies in English-language instruction programs in public schools across the state, for example. In recent years, several students initiated diversity awareness programs, organized public forums on race and bias training at their home schools, and pushed school districts to provide greater access to rigorous coursework for students of color and for students who come from families that earn low incomes. Seeds students testify regularly at the Maine State House in Augusta, where they have advocated for increasing education funding, providing more services for students and adults learning English, and increasing the minimum wage.

In some belonging efforts, practitioners transform thought and practice by centering the marginalized. After nurses, doctors, and administrators in Dalton, Georgia, realized they weren’t reaching members of the Mexican American community, they instituted a *promotora* model common in Latin America in which Latinas from the community become vital health care providers and liaisons between the Americanized system of care and the people who deserve that care. In Utah,

“[I]f you give our young people a place to blossom and grow and to really integrate, if you create the opportunities for all of us to integrate and to each come over to the other’s perspective a little bit, how can that not be good for everyone?”

educators responded to a growing population of Spanish-speaking students by bringing Spanish- and English-speaking students together to share classrooms and learn in both languages. The twenty-four two-way immersion programs are supported, in part, by the state of Utah, which passed legislation in 2007 that greatly expanded opportunities for language education.

“Look, our state has changed,” said Howard Stephenson, the conservative Republican state legislator who spearheaded efforts to expand language programs and learning opportunities for Spanish-speaking students. “The little rural communities, little towns are all changing. If you celebrate that, if you give our young people a place to blossom and grow and to really integrate, if you create the opportunities for all of us to integrate and to each come over to the other’s perspective a little bit, how can that not be good for everyone?”

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**THE STORIES WE TELL** these days need to do far more than evoke sympathy for a singular othered person. It’s not enough to smash stereotypes about othered groups or demonstrate how badly the Trump regime is hurting us. We have to remember that the story of

Guadalupe García de Rayos is not merely about a singular injured individual but about a valued member within a human ecology of interdependence. It is a story about a community that is less than it was now that she’s gone. The story is about all the ways that we are now less for expelling her.

To help us tell these stories, the Rev. William Barber, leader of the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, urges us<sup>10</sup> to “build a new language to pull people together” that reduces our reliance on easy bifurcations like “left and right.” In talking about the fight for a higher minimum wage in North Carolina, Barber says, “when we came together—black, white and Latino, Jew and Christian, Muslim and Hindu, people of faith, people not of faith, gay and straight, Republicans and Democrats—around this moral agenda, and we stopped talking left and right and liberal versus conservative, but what’s morally defensible, we won.” Years before, in his Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language,<sup>11</sup> the organizer, educator, and scholar Eddie Ellis demonstrated the transformative power of just one word.

*... we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons—all terms devoid of humanness which identify us as “things”*

rather than as people. These terms are accepted as the “official” language of the media, law enforcement, prison industrial complex and public policy agencies. **However, they are no longer acceptable for us and we are asking people to stop using them.** In an effort to assist our transition from prison to our communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves, we are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to **simply refer to us as PEOPLE.** People currently or formerly incarcerated, PEOPLE on parole, PEOPLE recently released from prison, PEOPLE in prison, PEOPLE with criminal convictions, but PEOPLE.

As Barber and Ellis imply, the new language of belonging challenges not just stereotypes but the very act of categorization and the hierarchies of value attached to those classifications. We need to listen to leaders like Barber and Ellis and to the inclusive mayors in our cities. We also need to tell stories about ordinary people who reject othering and intentionally choose belonging. As the Sikh minister, civil rights lawyer, and activist Valarie Kaur says, “Love is not a passing feeling; it is an act of will.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps one way to rise above othering, then, is by determinedly and repeatedly elevating and celebrating the human impulse toward belonging, which, as Powell and Menéndez remind us, is a choice rooted firmly in love. Yes, the great problem of the twenty-first century is othering. The question now is if belonging can become its greater victory.

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**Sara Rahbar** | Flag #7, Cycles, 2007

## RESPONSE

# Embracing Ecological Intimacy

Alex Mikulich

**AS A WHITE ANTIRACIST** Catholic social ethicist trained in theology, I approach my work as mediating “between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, theology is not the “crown of sciences” and does not transcend culture. Rather, I view theology as an ongoing process of critical reflection upon faith subject to collaborative creativity, constantly seeking to understand reality as it is, not as any person or culture may like it to be.

In the context of US empire, I think it is critical for people from dominant social locations to be explicit about their commitment to antidomination. For me, that means I must be continually (un)learning how I am complicit in multiple forms of oppression that Patricia Hill Collins names the “matrix of domination.”<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to popular custom, I claim neither innocence nor achievement. I hope this conversation contributes to a larger, shared struggle to become more deeply human and live in a way where all people and creatures may fully thrive.

I write from my beloved home of New Orleans, where intimate connections between colonialism, white supremacy, and othering are manifest in every dimension of social, political, economic, and environmental life.

Recall that the original plan of the colonial city New Orleans was designed as the center of a white-owned plantation society. As a seaport city that is largely below sea level, with flooding a regular occurrence, it should

be no surprise that slave-owning whites occupied the highest, and therefore safest, points of the city. At the same time, slaves lived in the backswamp of plantations, frequently the lowest, and therefore most dangerous, points in the city. The current pattern of segregation in the city has not veered far from the basic structure of the built environment three hundred years later.

A comparative study of maps of plantations compared to modern neighborhoods today illuminates the enduring legacy of a slave-owning society and its relationship both to the river and the built environment. As Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright observe, “poor blacks lived in the backswamps on the inland margin of the natural levee, where drainage was bad, foundation material precarious, streets atrociously unmaintained, mosquitoes endemic, and flooding a recurrent hazard. It is along this margin that a continuous belt of black population developed.”<sup>3</sup> The Crescent City has never overcome the legacy of vastly different outcomes for whites and people of color.

This gaping wound of racism is exacerbated by the industrial-age economics of fossil fuels that heavily favor the most powerful oil interests in Louisiana. These same interests hamper urgent efforts to address coastal land loss. We tend not to be aware, much less understand, how the history of a white settler nation destroyed the First peoples and way of life that might offer wisdom about how to recover the very coast Louisianans hold so dear.

I suggest broadening the view of “othering” through three interrelated points. First, I draw upon James Baldwin’s invitation to do “our first works over . . . reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: but *know whence you came.*”<sup>4</sup> Doing our first works over is a struggle to understand how our past endures in the present.

While powell and Menendian offer concrete historical examples to bolster social scientific insights, I believe that shared examination into othering needs to link particular histories with praxis, both to understand enduring dynamics of oppression and to envision and enact sustainable communities of resistance, belonging, and inclusion.

This turn to a history of othering, I believe, must also include an analysis of freedom’s ambivalence. We need to uncover how freedom functions in relationship to US empire, slavery, colonialism (internal and external), and democracy. The freedom to be “other” has never been free; freedom is only realized to the extent that social and political institutions, laws, and policies facilitate equity, justice, and now sustainability for the one and only planet that supports life.

Second, the forces and processes of othering tend to be profoundly anthropocentric. Too often we miss the profound

interconnectedness between the stars, the earth, and the human body. Being human is intimately bound to all forms of life.

Third, what are the conditions of the possibility of enacting communities of resistance, belonging, and inclusion? How, in this century fraught with violence and transformation, will we embody and practice sustainable communities of belonging and inclusion?

In the spirit of Cecilia Paredes’s beautiful artwork featured alongside the essay, I hope my suggestions illuminate layers of complexity, texture, depth, and color to the intersectional tapestry so beautifully woven by john a. powell and Stephen Menendian.

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## The Presence of Our Past

**IN THEIR OPENING LINE,** “The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem ‘othering,’” powell and Menendian echo the hallowed prophecy of W. E. B Du Bois: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” powell and Menendian, of course, extend the analysis by broadening Du Bois’s unveiling of whiteness and black double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* to elucidate how multiple forms of othering drive “territorial disputes, sectarian violence, military conflict, the

“Go back to where you started . . . travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: but know *whence you came.*”

spread of disease, hunger and food insecurity, and even climate change.”

powell and Menendian illuminate a comprehensive view of the divergent forms of othering that plague the world today. By highlighting climate change, I sensed the analysis might take up Du Bois’s description of whiteness in “The Souls of White Folk.” There, Du Bois describes whiteness as “ownership of the earth forever and ever. Amen.”<sup>5</sup> White supremacy intricately connects domination both of people and the earth.

We will not understand ourselves in dominant white American culture until we contend with our enduring role in the legacy of slavery and colonialism. To say this work will be difficult is an understatement because it means contending with the pain and terror that historically colonized and enslaved peoples have endured since the “founding” of the Americas. As my coauthors and I argue in our book addressing US hyper-incarceration, we will not address this reality responsibly until we understand how the US systems of criminal justice and incarceration carry the past in the present.<sup>6</sup> This necessarily entails examining whiteness and white supremacy.

White supremacy involves much more than the KKK. A fuller analysis of white supremacy must include the historical legacy of colonialism and commodification that endures in at least four dimensions of culture and society. These include how white supremacy 1) functions as an historical mode of white racial class formation and economic ascendancy, 2) constitutes a symbolic hierarchical order of white superiority that feeds upon antiblackness, 3) serves as a primary socialization process of individual and group white racial identity formation, and 4) organizes a segregated society through a dynamic interplay between both *position*—the social geography, location, and power of whiteness—and

*practice*—the ways whites are socialized to perceive and act within the world.”<sup>7</sup>

In his groundbreaking work examining the history of African American religions, Sylvester A. Johnson begins by describing how his study is intimately tied with “the architecture of empire—by which I mean the political order of governing through the colonial relation of power.”<sup>8</sup> Colonialism employs every form of military, political, economic, and psychological method to subordinate and dehumanize others.

In explicit terms of othering, Johnson calls colonialism “the essential matrix of racialization. It is what makes race.” More precisely, race is constructed in a politics or what Johnson calls a “biopolitics.” Drawing upon Michel Foucault, Johnson argues that racism is a state politics achieved through “internal colonialism” by creating “exclusive forms of political community.”<sup>9</sup>

A contemporary case in point is the fact that the United States harbors three hundred reservations within the boundaries of the contiguous United States. As Johnson explains, outside of indigenous studies, studies of empire that account for First peoples and their histories tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Internal colonialism is a key theoretical framework that has been “richly informed by colonized people themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

In February 2017, water protectors were forced out of the Standing Rock Sacred Stone Camp. According to Robert Brave Heart Sr., this is yet another “example of the many countless acts of genocide, racism, and injustices that indigenous peoples of this continent have endured for five hundred years. Despite that, we are still here and will continue to fight for our freedom, rights, and dignity!”<sup>11</sup>

Internal colonialism shapes the current US anti-immigrant climate. Might not an

internal colonial mind-set contribute to the pervasive assumption that all US Americans “are immigrants”? Too often both histories of immigration and slavery are forgotten. It is a white settler colonial state that led to the evictions, forced migrations, and genocide of First peoples. This amnesia corrupts our capacity to be human and extend compassionate welcome to others.

Du Bois’s critique of whiteness rightfully relates the dynamic of white supremacy to a nexus of domination structured within US empire, slavery, and colonialism. Du Bois noticed how whites conflated their racial identity and sense of self with the divine, and so he responded to white supremacy “with a counter cosmic vision” that considered “religion at the core of the social and cultural construction of whiteness.”<sup>12</sup> Christendom itself was an imperial formation that constituted the so-called age of discovery and, despite the Roman Catholic Church’s theological opposition to slavery, helped to facilitate colonial rule of peoples in Africa and the Americas.

The history of the religious and political sources of othering within Atlantic empires leads to another critical point that is too often elided in discussions of othering. Anti-blackness did not arise out of nowhere. As the African American Catholic womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland writes, “the racialization of flesh has shaped Christianity, and thus Roman Catholicism, almost from its origins: women, Jews, people of color (especially indigenous and black peoples) have undergone metaphysical violence.”<sup>13</sup> By metaphysical violence, Copeland means “the attempt to master the real by force” through the racialization and commodification of human flesh.

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## Othering of the Earth

**THEOLOGIAN WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS** traces intimate historical connections between Christian colonialism, abuse of indigenous peoples, and alienation from the land. The intimate ties between identity and specific geographical locations nurtured by peoples throughout the world were disrupted and dislodged by European colonists. When European colonists stepped upon lands they assumed they “discovered,” they were ignorant of the fact that they were seen as stepping on both the skin of the world and the skin of First peoples.

Jennings notes the painful irony of how North Americans now seek out First peoples to reconnect with the earth. He quotes Vine Deloria Jr.: “Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape, they had to destroy the original inhabitants.”<sup>14</sup>

The Christians who claimed to “discover” new lands ignorantly and arrogantly walked on the skin of others, entering “a frontier of strangeness. Already fearful and angled toward isolationist practices, they enacted a spatial vertigo, renaming places, peoples, and animals and reconfiguring life.”<sup>15</sup> Far from relating to the land as intimate kin, Europeans viewed lands and resources as undeveloped commodities to be tamed and conquered for the ends of empire.

In our current context of global environmental crises and how these crises contribute to migrations and conflict, I suggest that othering must also include the human history of domination over the earth and the resulting alienation between human and nonhuman life.

We live in a time of impasse, a profound limit situation, when established and traditional ways of living fail both human and nonhuman life.

In his call for a transformation from anthropocentric ethic to an ecologically-centered ethic in his letter addressing the global environment, Pope Francis describes “tyrannical anthropocentrism” as the “irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures.”<sup>16</sup>

The pope’s approach provides a way to interrelate the many and diverse ecological, social-economic, and cultural-spiritual crises that afflict the world. I suggest his approach also provides a way to ground a way of living inclusion and belonging that is sustainable for the planet.

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## Embracing Ecological Intimacy

**WHILE I WHOLLY AGREE** with powell and Menendian about the need for a turn to belonging and inclusiveness, that crying need begs the question of how to get there from the troubled, contested, and confused place the world is today. We live in a time of epochal transformations. I don’t believe current social, economic, or political paradigms are sufficient or sustainable.

How will we together cocreate the conditions of the possibility of authentic and integrated living that sustains life for all so that all may thrive in freedom and justice? Although

people of faith and people of no faith at all may not be aware of it, interestingly, both secularists and people of faith (like Pope Francis) are advancing an “integral ecological ethic.” Put in brief theological terms, an integral ecology recognizes that, ultimately, there is one earth, one life, and one love through which all may thrive. We are inextricably intertwined in ecological intimacy.

Both secularists and people of faith invite a shift from an egocentric and anthropocentric worldview to an ecocentric social, political, economic, and moral imagination. We live in a time of impasse, a profound limit situation, when established and traditional ways of living fail both human and nonhuman life. In US culture, as Du Bois understood so clearly, we cling to possession and control as the *only* way of living.

Paradoxically, as Carmelite contemplate Sister Constance FitzGerald explains, impasse itself may provide the condition of the possibility of transformation if we fully appropriate the experience of impasse with a fullness of consciousness and consent and “if the limitations of one’s own humanity and human condition are squarely faced and the sorrow of finitude allowed to invade the human spirit with real, existential powerlessness.”<sup>17</sup> We need to admit that we are made from dust of the earth and from the ground of that humility recognize our dependence upon the earth and all forms of life. Such humility, in turn, invites profound listening to cries for justice coming from both the earth and oppressed peoples

everywhere. If we listen together, perhaps we might notice how we might cocreate an emerging, sustainable future.

If “there is a way where there is no way” to draw upon African American spiritual wisdom, I believe that communities of resistance will need to be formed that reinterpret and reapply ancient spiritual practices of contemplation in new ways deeply sensitive both to the woundedness of the earth and all people. Then, perhaps, there may be real hope for a turn to the ecological intimacy that interconnects and invites authentic inclusiveness and belonging.

*I thank Andrew Grant-Thomas for the invitation to write this response. I am honored and humbled to enter conversation with John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian, whose scholarship and leadership inspire me and many others to envision and practice belonging and inclusion every day.*

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**Sara Rahbar** | Flag # 40, You Betrayed Me with the Same Hand that you Used to Stroke my Heart with, 2009

## RESPONSE

# Othering and the Economics of Inequality

David Clingingsmith

**THE TERM “SOCIAL INEQUALITY”** encompasses the many ways in which members of society have unequal access to resources, opportunities, status, and protection. Income inequality is one dimension of social inequality. Over the past two decades, economists have made substantial progress in characterizing the nature of income inequality in the United States, how it has changed over time, and the underlying forces that are responsible for it.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will bring these findings into dialogue with the conceptual framework for understanding social inequality developed by John A. Powell and Stephen Menéndez in the inaugural issue of this journal.<sup>2</sup> Their framework is built on the concept of “othering.” I will present an approach to understanding income inequality that is complementary to, yet distinct from, othering. I hope that examining how these approaches are related will improve our overall understanding of social inequality and spark further debate.

The concept of othering, as developed by Powell and Menéndez, is grounded in group position theory, which comes from sociology. This theory posits that humans have a universal tendency to assign themselves and others to social categories and to judge members of one’s own category or group as superior to others. This innate bias engenders beliefs and narratives about the inferiority of other groups that are deployed particularly when there is a conflict over

symbolic or real resources. These beliefs and narratives justify the priority of the claims of one group over another. Conflict of this sort, in turn, reinforces beliefs in group differences and produces new narratives. Social scientists have long referred to this process of stereotyping other groups as “othering.” Powell and Menéndez adopt this term.

Powell and Menéndez point to a wide variety of contemporary conflicts around the world in which the dynamics of othering appear to be important, including the persecution of the Rohingya people by the government of Myanmar, white supremacist attacks on African Americans, and renewed action by the Turkish state against its Kurdish minority. One need look no further than the writings of Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who murdered eight parishioners of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, to see how conflict over resources and prejudiced narratives are direct antecedents to racial violence.<sup>3</sup> Othering has real explanatory power.

Within economics, ideas closely related to othering have been part of the study of group-based discrimination for many years, and economists have produced evidence consistent with othering being responsible for part of income inequality in the United States.<sup>4</sup> However, the study of income inequality also shows that forces not related to othering are also important. These forces

relate to how the wages of workers with different levels of education are determined in the labor market.

Before we explore this link between inequality and education, I would like to ask the reader to engage in a thought experiment. Suppose that we lived in a world just like our own except that the human tendency to engage in othering was completely removed. What would the nature of social inequality in such a world be like? Would there be inequality of income, and if so, what would determine it? While Powell and Menéndian present an alternative social vision in their article, they do not address this issue directly. A plausible answer to such questions in contemporary America is that such a world would enact the ideal version of the American system, which, at least for the last forty years or so, has been thought of as a meritocracy. Many view othering as a distortion of this ideal vision of America.

The economics of income inequality puts this interpretation of an othering-free America in doubt in an interesting way. During the past fifty years, the per-capita output of the US economy more than doubled. This increase results from ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency by which labor effort and machines turn raw materials into finished goods and services. Economists call these improvements “technical change” because they often result from the adopting of new technologies. The widespread incorporation of computers into production processes is an example of technical change.

For at least the past century, technical change has increased the demand for more highly educated workers relative to less educated ones.<sup>5</sup> At the same time and partially in response to this increase in

demand, the education levels of workers have risen. Elementary economics tell us that when the demand for highly educated workers increases relative to the less educated, upward pressure will be put on the wages of the highly educated relative to those of the less educated. To be concrete, college graduates earned a 32-percent premium over high school graduates in 1950. Technical change increased demand for college graduates more than high school graduates, putting pressure on the premium to rise.

In such circumstances, young people will be attracted by the prospect of higher wages and seek out more education. In other words, the supply of highly educated workers changes in response to the increased demand brought about by technical change. The supply response has been very large. At the beginning of twentieth century, only around 10 percent of American thirty-year-olds had graduated from high school and only 5 percent had graduated from college. By the end of the century, those levels had risen to 86 percent and 30 percent.

Differences in wages by education level is thus the result of an interplay between the rising demand for more educated workers due to technical change and the response of the population to acquire more education. During the first half of the twentieth century, income inequality by education level fell as rapid increases in education outpaced the increases in demand for the more highly educated. As noted above, in 1950, a college graduate earned about 32 percent more than a high school graduate. During the latter half of the twentieth century and up to the present, the relative earnings of college graduates has

Suppose that we lived in a world just like our own except that the human tendency to engage in othering was completely removed. What would the nature of social inequality in such a world be like?

increased markedly. A college graduate now earns more than 100 percent more than a high school graduate.

Acquiring a college education requires a sacrifice of time and expenditure on living expenses. It is reasonable to expect that college-educated workers will be paid a premium to offset this sacrifice and expenditure. However, the 100-percent premium currently earned by college graduates is much larger than needed to compensate them for their sacrifices.

Further, note that othering is a less-compelling general explanation for an employer's decision to hire a college graduate to fill a position rather than a high school graduate, than the explanation that the college graduate has abilities needed for the position that the high school graduate does not. The notion of considering education level in hiring as not primarily a question of animus is especially clear when we consider occupations that require specific training, such as plumbers, crane operators, nurses, and engineers.

If compensation for sacrifice and othering do not explain why college graduates went from earning 32 percent more than high school graduates to 200 percent more, what does? Is it that college graduates today are more creative, smarter, and more capable

than their predecessors in the 1950s? No. Has college increased markedly in difficulty? No.

The explanation is that the increase in college graduates stopped outpacing the steady march of technical change, particularly after 1970 and particularly among men. And like any item for which a shortage is experienced, the cost of employing the college educated increased. Some reflection will show that increased inequality as a result of shortage is consistent with the idea of meritocracy. It is not ability or effort that college graduates have been rewarded for, but scarcity. From the point of view of an individual, the change in their fortune is mainly due to the actions of others.

A more concrete example may better illustrate the inherently arbitrary nature of the relationship between technical change and economic inequality. In the nineteenth century, professional musicians were employed entirely in live performances. The best musicians in the country could perform for, at most, a few thousand people per day. Since the demand for musical performance was much larger, many thousands of good musicians could earn a living practicing their art. The advent of recording and radio markedly increased the size of the audience the best musicians could reach. Earnings

inequality among musicians rose as a small number captured a large share of the total audience. However, nothing about the talent of the musicians involved had changed. Again, the change in inequality had nothing to do with othering but with the impersonal and anonymous forces of technical change.

one can reasonably use the term “meritocracy” to describe the inequalities produced by the labor market. If the reason for being opposed to othering is that othering disadvantages people for arbitrary reasons, then it is difficult to see why the same logic does not apply to market-driven income inequality. We

If we were to be fortunate enough to create a society that fulfills powell and Menendian’s vision, we would still be left with the problem of distribution.

powell and Menendian leave the moral argument against the practice of othering implicit, perhaps because it is widely accepted among educated people that discrimination against others on the basis of arbitrary differences is wrong. What they perhaps failed to anticipate is that there are sources of arbitrary social inequality other than othering, such as the typical operation of the labor market. They address the moral question more directly in the solution they propose to the problem of othering, which is a society based on “inclusion and belongingness.” Creating such a society requires us to ensure that the “circle of human concern” is widened to encompass all members of society and to engage in the project of “humanizing the other, where negative representations and stereotypes are challenged and rejected.”<sup>6</sup>

If we were to be fortunate enough to create a society that fulfills powell and Menendian’s vision, we would still be left with the problem of distribution. As we have seen, wages are determined in an important way by relative scarcity, and it is difficult to see how

ought to call a society that would result from combating othering an improvement, but it would still leave important questions about social inequality unanswered.

Further, contrary to powell and Menendian’s suggestion that “the right to belong is prior to all other distributive decisions since it is members who make those decisions,” it is not clear *prima facie* why we ought to give priority to solving problems of deprivation that result from othering over those that result through the operation of the labor market.<sup>7</sup> A more comprehensive and philosophically grounded theory of social inequality and justice would help here. For example, the capability approach popularized by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum would argue that we consider the roles played by income, belonging, social esteem, and so on in providing all members of society the capacity to achieve well-being.<sup>8</sup>

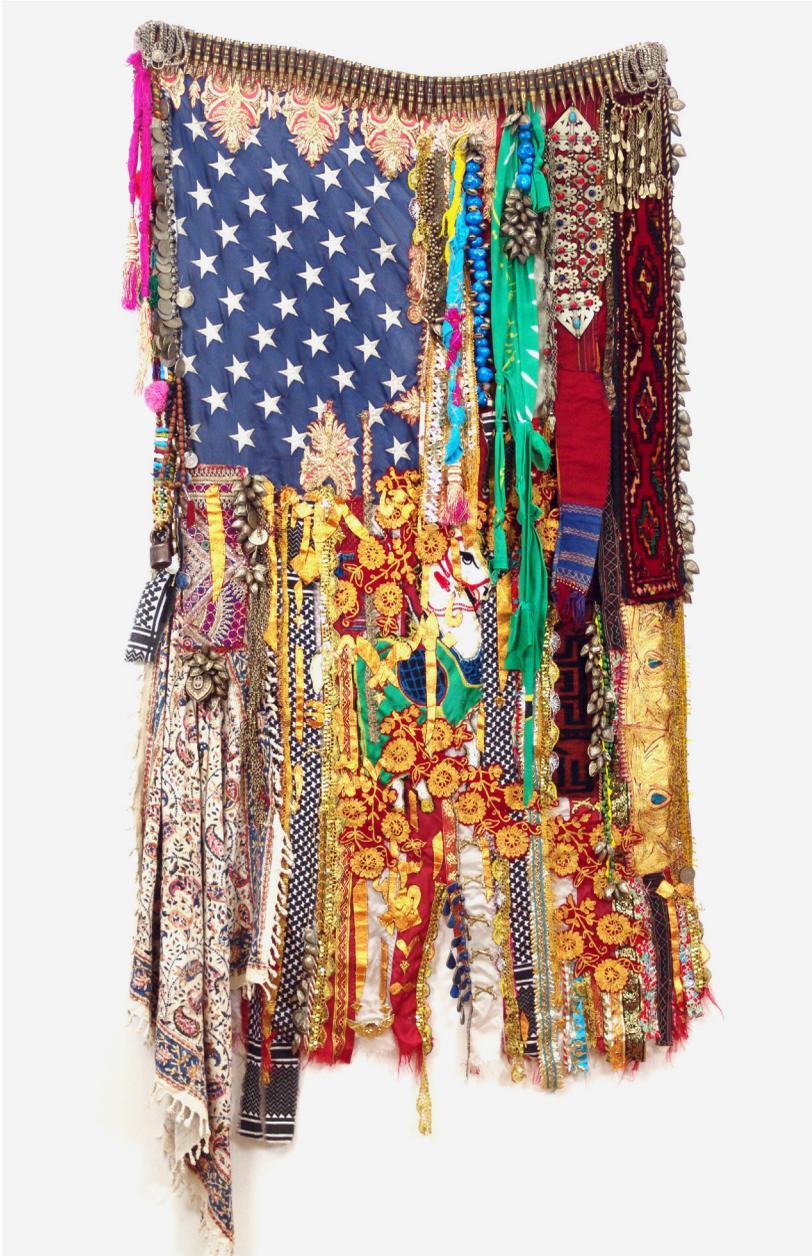
I believe that this exploration of sources of arbitrary social inequality in acts of othering and in the operation of the labor market serves to reorient us toward the underlying

philosophical and practical questions about how we ought to conceive of a society in which institutions and resources are oriented toward the fulfillment of all. In considering arbitrary inequality, we might reflect on the first article in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the key document of the French Revolution, which holds that “social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good.”<sup>9</sup> Holding to this principle enables powerful arguments not only for the amelioration of othering but also for distribution of social resources in a way that takes the needs of all into full account.

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**Sara Rahbar** | Flag #10, 2008

## RESPONSE

# Compelling Diagnosis, Unclear Prescription

Dennis Parker

**NO ONE FAMILIAR WITH** john a. powell and Stephen Menendian would be surprised by the extraordinary scope and wisdom of their article, “The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging.” Beginning with the statement that “[t]he problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of ‘othering,’” the authors give a nod to W. E. B. DuBois’s identification of the color line as the problem of twentieth century and signal an intent to confront issues even broader than those that DuBois set out to confront a century earlier. The breadth of their review, which includes the vast scope of troubles besetting the world, including all “global, national, and regional conflict,” is ambitious. Equally comprehensive is their conclusion, that all of the problems set out above, and others in addition, are all in some way informed by tribalism or “one or more dimension of group-based difference.”

I first read this paper before the November 2016 election, an event that will almost certainly be seen as a watershed year in the country’s history. Having spent my legal career involved in some aspect of civil rights work, I found the paper to be responsive to a question I had long puzzled over: How could the country continue to be afflicted by discrimination, particularly racial but also based on ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, despite decades of organizing, protesting, legislation, and countless

court cases? It was as if the nation had a disease and still remained seriously ill despite years of trying every known treatment.

For me, part of the value of “The Problem of Othering” is its willingness to take on this seemingly intractable illness that afflicts our nation while recognizing that it is not peculiar to any one country. It is, instead, a pandemic that, in addition to being widespread, exhibits varied and constantly shifting symptoms. Most importantly, the underlying cause of the malady is extremely complex. At its center is “otherness,” which powell and Menendian define as a set of processes that “undergird group-based marginalization and inequality.”

My life as a black man and work as a civil rights advocate both lead me to agree with powell and Menendian’s conclusion. If personal experience were not enough, the results of the 2016 election in the United States provided a sad affirmation of the destructive consequences of othering. The election followed a campaign of unprecedented division and derision of groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. The strategy of separation portended a difficult time of othering and exclusion. Sadly, nothing that has happened in the national arena since election day has allayed concerns about our past inability to address the problems associated with othering. In short, it seems clear that the diagnosis remains sound but that the cure, the implementation of a mutually

beneficial broad-based inclusion, seems even further from reach. It is as if, having identified an effective treatment, its use has been made impossible by prohibitive costs or other factors beyond our control. As a result, the paper seems to combine a clear statement of the source of many problems with proposed solutions that, at least for now, seem difficult to achieve.

This is particularly frustrating because the paper does so much to address many of the questions to which I refer above. As previously suggested, part of the beauty of the piece is the range of issues it addresses. Violence between religious groups in Azerbaijan, the massacre of black churchgoers by a white supremacist in South Carolina, hostility toward Islamic refugees in Europe—each tells a story about tribalization and demonization of people seen as “other.” Looking at it from the perspective of race in the United States, the concept of otherness goes far to explain those questions that have arisen from my work. The American Civil Liberties Union’s Racial Justice work has focused on a number of areas in which communities of color are excluded from access to broader participation in American society, particularly in the areas of education, law enforcement, and economic justice. Many of the problems we seek to address suggest that there is a common core of either hostility or, at best, profound disinterest toward those communities: the nation’s comfort with highly segregated schools with unequal resources, the apparently commonly held belief that people should be fine with being stopped by law enforcement officers for no reason, as if only communities of color should be happy to sacrifice their own constitutional rights in the name of “safety,” the continuing and growing wealth disparities between white families and families of color, the fact that the communities that were

most severely affected by the economic crisis of 2008 are the ones who received the least relief while the architects of the collapse were consistently shielded from bearing any negative consequences, and of course, perhaps most strikingly, the videotaped demonstration of example after of example of brutality by law enforcement. All of these and other examples were constant reminders of the failure to value the common humanity of certain communities.

These and countless other examples feed the frustration at the nation’s refusal to even acknowledge, let alone address, the gaping inequalities that continue to plague American society. After a period of attempted denial of the continuing existence of discrimination under the fantasy of a “postracial America,” I hoped that perhaps there was a silver lining in the countless videos documenting discrimination. Remembering the impact that television coverage of the Selma March and the Birmingham demonstrations had on the country and the world, I was hopeful that the countless horrific videotapes we endured over the past few years might have the same effect now. Surely, the sight of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice being shot by a police officer while playing with a toy gun would force people to think of their own children and the unimaginable pain of losing a child, which would, in turn, lead them to question the forces that would cause such deaths. I had hoped that each video of unarmed people being shot or strangled by police, each news story about people having their homes foreclosed upon as a result of the greedy malfeasance of financial institutions, each description of children of color attending underresourced schools and being expelled from schools or referred to the police for the most minor offenses, each instance of immigrants being questioned or surveilled without probable

“[I]t seems clear that the diagnosis [othering] remains sound but that the cure, the implementation of a mutually beneficial broad-based inclusion, seems even further from reach.”

cause of them committing any wrongful act, that each of these things might inspire some level of national introspection and recognition of the gross injustices and inequalities that still occur on a daily basis in the United States. But that self-examination has not yet occurred. In fact, a sign of our national resistance to introspection when it comes to continuing racial discrimination is apparent in the angry reaction of so many people to the call of movements, such as Black Lives Matter, for fundamental fairness in treatment and a recognition of basic humanity. That response, which interprets demands for fairness as being antipolice, is a clear indication of the difficulty ahead of us as a nation in creating an inclusive, compassionate society.

As logical as the paper's conclusion is regarding the need to promote belonging rather than separation, the precise ways in which that might happen seem unclear. In many respects, events over the last year have demonstrated how heightened the difficulties of creating a culture of inclusion will be. In its discussion of the way that othering is used as a strategy of gaining and maintaining power, the authors refer to the too-familiar efforts of then-candidate Donald Trump to use explicit or thinly veiled appeals to racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance as a means of activating support from disenfranchised white voters. The paper cites the outraged response of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan to candidate Trump's comments. At the

time, those responses seemed like an indication of how outrageous Trump's comments were and a suggestion that important representatives of the Republican Party appeared to be backing away from the discriminatory “Southern Strategy” initiated by Richard Nixon decades earlier.

Whatever qualms Romney and Ryan may have once had seemed to have disappeared after Trump's victory. It appears that their objections to Trump's discriminatory strategy arose less from a sense of decency than it did from a misapprehension of how strong an appeal the resort to othering would have. The recent silence of the two more mainstream Republicans in the face of the president's clear intention of carrying out his most divisive campaign promises suggests a difficult road ahead.

Added to the challenge of addressing the deliberate use of othering as a strategy for securing power are the discussions of factors, many of them wholly unconscious, which Powell and Menéndez describe, which predispose people to assign others to groups in ways that result in group-based inequalities. The innate tendency of people to “organize and collectively define themselves among dimensions of difference and sameness,” the existence of unconscious, implicit bias, and the complex “collective and social processes” that push people to identify with persons like themselves add to the cynical, deliberate efforts to exploit otherness for

purposes of creating and maintaining power to create a formidable barrier to achieving the type of just society envisioned in the piece.

It is, of course, unfair to expect a solution to enormous, deep-seated, and largely universal problems from a single paper. In fact, the paper does an enormous service by describing a unified and broad-reaching assessment of the issues that we must face if we are to avoid the disastrous consequences of othering. Its description of the need to create solutions that are systemic and that depend upon broadly defined principles of equality are also important. Exactly how we will overcome the abuse of power and the complex personal and societal forces that promote otherness remains to be seen. But this article is important because it makes clear how our future as a country and as a world depends upon doing so and provides us a meaningful and perceptive starting point for our efforts.

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## **INTERVIEW**



**Yto Barrada** | Untitled (painted educational boards found in Natural History Museum, never opened, Azilal, Morocco; fig. 1-6), 2013-2015  
chromogenic print | 70 cm x 70 cm (27-9/16" x 27-9/16") each of 6 prints  
© Yto Barrada, courtesy Pace London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Beirut; and Galerie Polaris, Paris  
Installation view of Yto Barrada: Faux Guide, presented at Pace London, Jun 26, 2015 – Aug 08, 2015  
Photography by Damian Griffiths

# Explicit Bigotry Goes Mainstream: How Can We Support Our Children?

with **Allison Briscoe-Smith** & **Maureen Costello**

Artwork by Yto Barrada



The 2016 US presidential campaign was marked by extraordinarily explicit expressions of animus and resentment toward “difference,” whether along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, nationality, religion, or ability. Many believe that Donald Trump won the presidency not in spite of but largely on the strength of his bigotry, his xenophobia, and his rhetorical assault on immigrants and Muslim Americans, in particular—and on the strength of his promise to back his words with corresponding policies.

And, of course, “Trumpism” is hardly the only way in which matters of identity shape the tenor of our times. Black Lives Matter. Blue Lives Matter. Native Lives Matter. All Lives Matter. Dreamers. Border walls. #HeretoStay. Deportation Forces. Muslim registry. Sanctuary cities and schools. Standing Rock. Many parents, teachers, and other caregivers have found themselves dismayed and unprepared to help the children they love navigate these turbulent waters.

**O&B APPROACHED** Allison Briscoe-Smith and Maureen Costello, two experts on children, child development, race, and social othering for their observations and insights.

**Just in the two weeks after Election Day 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) catalogued some nine hundred hate incidents, most of them directed at immigrants, blacks, LGBTQ people, Muslims, Jews, and women. And, of course, the vast majority of bias incidents aren't reported publicly. What is your sense right now about how kids are processing all this?**

**MAUREEN:** At the same time we reported those hate incidents, SPLC also reported on the results of a survey we sent out to teachers a week after the election. Over a period of two weeks, we received more than ten thousand responses. Nine thousand teachers reported that school climate had been negatively affected by the election, and eight thousand of them thought it would linger through the year. They reported that the vulnerable kids you ask about—immigrants, LGBTQ, Muslims, women, and African Americans—are having a hard time. Sometimes that's because they're experiencing outright harassment from peers, but even in the absence of harassment, they are deeply worried, anxious, and sometimes angry. They're dealing with two big issues: first, what the election seems to say about how valued, and valuable, they are to people in this country; and second, what kinds of policies are going to come down the pike.

That second set of worries is very real and hard for the adults around them to explain away. No one knows what is going to happen, in terms of immigration policy, or whether there will be a registry for Muslims,

or whether women and African Americans will face fewer opportunities and LGBTQ rights will be rolled back. The issue of feeling less valued also is very real. I've heard from countless educators that their vulnerable students feel dejected, heartbroken, unwanted, and hated. In some cases, they're trying to hide who they are. Some are missing school, and they're experiencing bullying and harassment. It's very troubling.

**ALLISON:** My sense is that children have been increasingly faced with explicit messages directed against particular groups, whether it's immigrants, brown people, or, increasingly, Jewish folks as well. Kids are trying to make sense of all of this. And I think it's coming up in terms of the questions they have about other people, the fears they express, but also playing out in terms of bullying. The message kids receive about who's powerful and who's not plays out in their dynamics. The SPLC also reported a lot of anxiety among black and brown kids and kids from immigrant families, who're also suffering high rates of bullying. So kids pick up on and use societal messages to understand themselves and their positions but also to relate to each other.

**What core mechanisms—cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, or otherwise—shape the development of a child's sensibilities toward identity differences (i.e., "others")?**

**ALLISON:** I think it's important to begin with the cognitive and understand that kids are not "little adults." They have different brains, cognitive functioning, and emotional processing and are oriented differently than adults socially. It's a key point: they are not little adults. Kids are really organized to make sense of the world according to difference;

they are looking for difference. But it's really we, adults, who socialize kids to fear difference. It's really on us to teach them that difference and "other" aren't inherently bad or scary, but rather something we can investigate, be curious about, and be in relationship with. So the core mechanism really is the development of the child's brain.

And then there's an important social dimension—Are they in a homogeneous or heterogeneous social environment? How much access do they have to their friends? What kind of implicit and explicit socialization messages are they getting from their parents, which also helps kids understand whether or not difference is bad? So, again, we must be explicit in helping kids understand that difference doesn't mean bad; it just means different. And those are the two mechanisms I pay most attention to: the socialization part and the cognitive part.

**MAUREEN:** Many of these are psychological processes that have resulted from human evolution. We know that, even in infancy, children develop a preference for faces that look like their main caregiver. Before they enter school, their social lives are centered around family or a limited sphere of people selected by the family and may have little exposure to difference. Moreover, they grow up in a society that has entrenched beliefs and narratives about racial, ethnic, and other differences—beliefs so entrenched that they are invisible to a child. We know that social biases begin to form as early as ages three to five, and children begin to attribute negative or positive traits to others based on how they look or how they fit into categories.

What's often missing is a proactive counter to the developing sensibilities. When they encounter difference, children are curious and want to understand it. Too

often, the adults around them are afraid to talk about it and send out messages that the subject is off limits or somehow shameful. That is a huge missed opportunity because the best way to balance our natural tendency to sort and categorize and to isolate ourselves from others is to work at positive identity formation and socialization that includes others. Adults too often let society or their silence shape children's ideas about difference rather than setting out to shape those ideas proactively.

**In the midst of an extended period of elevated expressions of explicit bigotry in US political and social life, many caregivers want to know what they can do and say to nurture children inclined to embrace rather than "other" their peers along lines of race, gender, religion, culture, and gender expression? What general advice can you offer?**

**MAUREEN:** Talk is powerful. Having an open disposition that invites questions about difference and being comfortable answering them is absolutely necessary. Having the willingness to bring the topic up, noting differences, and building useful and positive narratives in children's minds is even better. These narratives acknowledge difference and talk about stereotyping and prejudice. Children shouldn't be brought up to believe that differences don't exist or that they don't mean anything or that it's impolite to talk about them. They need age-appropriate facts about difference, relationships and exposure to people who are different, and information about how difference can bring on unfair treatment.

**ALLISON:** The overarching question I'm often asked is: What can I possibly say to help children understand what's going on and how not

I've heard from countless educators that their vulnerable students feel dejected, heartbroken, unwanted, and hated. In some cases, they're trying to hide who they are.

to “other”? I think parents need to be paying attention not only to what they're saying but also to what they're doing. How are parents carrying themselves? How do they interact across difference? Are they anxious and nervous when they encounter difference or are they open and flexible? Do children meet with difference in their homes and elsewhere? Parents have a big opportunity to model for kids how to interact with others.

Think about your environment: Is your environment a space that provides access to difference? Or is it predominantly homogenous? Do you have books that feature different types of people in different roles? I just saw an interesting video clip where a mother and a daughter went through a section of a bookstore and looked at how many of the books had girl characters, how many of those girl characters actually spoke, how many of them were featured centrally, and how traditional their roles were—how many were princesses being rescued, for example. There can be real thoughtfulness about representation in the home in terms of books, the kinds of pictures we have on our walls, the kinds of stories we tell. Parents also have the opportunity to identify and root kids in our own family values and how the family wants to engage others.

**What can adults do to promote resiliency in those children most likely to be targeted for bullying or other forms of *othering*?**

**ALLISON:** The big piece I like to focus on with promoting resiliency in the kids most likely to be targeted—Howard Stevenson talks about this in the context of storytelling—is giving kids access to stories of resistance and resilience. They need to hear the stories about how their parents and grandparents dealt with and overcame discrimination. Books are very important, especially with respect to issues of representation, but we can't relegate such stories to books alone, to the realm of fantasy. We must connect children to proximal stories of resistance and resilience, and to history: we have been through this before. We've been through iterations of this, and we're still surviving and thriving. Connecting with stories of how we've done that and are doing that is super important for kids.

**MAUREEN:** Sharing their own stories of vulnerability is a good start. Too often, we adults want to provide a set of instructions to kids. But it's very powerful to let them know that we haven't always had the answers, and maybe still don't. A parent can let a child know that she's bothered by something someone said and then think out loud about how she's going to deal with it. Most importantly, help kids talk about what they're



**Yto Barrada** | Untitled (painted educational boards found in Natural History Museum, never opened, Azilal, Morocco; fig. 4 of 6), 2013-2015  
chromogenic print | 70 cm x 70 cm (27-9/16" x 27-9/16")  
© Yto Barrada, courtesy Pace London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Beirut; and Galerie Polaris, Paris

feeling, mentally review their alternatives, and work out plans together. Take the child seriously and listen to her or him without brushing aside the bullying or talking about what the perpetrator intended or resorting to platitudes like “sticks and stones.” Resiliency comes from knowing someone believes you, sees you as a full human being, and helps you to find your strengths. And, finally, help the child form a rich web of social relationships.

focused on making the experience a good one for every kid.

**ALLISON:** There is huge opportunity in the context of schools. I think the schools that are utilizing approaches like restorative justice circles, opportunities for people to really engage and develop tools for mediating conflict and speak to their own experiences, are great. I think schools that have a big focus

We must connect children to proximal stories of resistance and resilience, and to history: we have been through this before.

**What kinds of antiothering or probe-longing policies or practices would you personally like to see implemented and enforced in more PK-12 schools?**

**MAUREEN:** I'd like to see school leaders set high expectations for all staff, from teachers to bus drivers, about the need to treat each child and each family with respect and dignity and back these up with training. Inclusivity and positive identity should drive lots of choices, from curriculum to books in the school library, to what's on the bulletin boards. Kids should be given lots of opportunities to learn and work with different peers and not be segregated into silos of special ed. or gifted programs or fast readers or jocks. There should be at least one student-led organization that promotes diversity, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance club or a Stand Tall against Racism group. Empathy, perspective taking, and hearing multiple stories and points of view should be practiced regularly. Ideally, I'd love it if schools were more like resort hotels, where everyone on staff is

on social and emotional learning, empathy, connecting, and antibullying—schools that have curriculums that attend to values and the character of hearts and minds—can do excellent work. And there are schools that teach about history and are thoughtful about representation and help our kids engage critically with history and with current events while being grounded in emotional literacy and an ability to negotiate conflict. And I'm actually really hopeful that we're on that pathway of doing this.

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## **ARTS**



**Dennis Stormer & Anda Puşcaş** | Looking at Others (stills)



## ARTS

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# Subverting Established Views: OPPOSE OTHERING!

**Rebecca Podlech**

Stills from the trailer for *LOOKING AT OTHERS*, directed by Dennis Stormer & Anda Puşcaş

**FILM IS A MEDIUM** prone to othering because it is highly visual, about seeing and being seen. And because it was almost always expensive to make films, the visual coding is highly shaped by the white male view—as John Berger’s famous quote, “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at,” implies. Although things were not always this way and have changed a lot in recent decades, above all in the digital age, established ways of looking still prevail and—in the context of our highly



**Dennis Stormer & Anda Puşcaş** | Looking at Others (stills)

visualized culture—images bear even more power. How can we change the way people look at an other?

At the German film festival goEast, a festival of central and eastern European film, we, supported by the foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future, try to raise awareness not only on the audience’s side through gender, race, and culturally sensitive programming and curating, but also directly with the filmmakers themselves. *OPPOSE OTHERING!* is the most recent of goEast’s projects for young professionals, having existed since 2016. Here, filmmakers collaborate under the credo of “Solidarity, Belonging and Empowerment Through Film.”

The project consists of three parts: *OO! Tandem*, *OO! Ally*, and *OO! Network*. At *OO! Tandem*, goEast connects twenty filmmakers from different countries in bi-national teams of two. These tandems present ten joint film projects on the topic of othering and belonging, attend lectures, and develop their projects further in workshops and training sessions. After the tandems pitch their films, a jury decides and enables the production of five projects over the course of the following year.

Among the *OO! Tandem* are films such as *VOICES*, a documentary about transgender men and women in Germany and Russia, who train their voices in order to “pass” and be publicly accepted. At the same time, the film gives them a voice—by making their efforts visible and airing their voices in transit—making them heard and seen in public. Both of the filmmakers studied film and defy heterosexual norms, as seen in this trailer.

Another example is the film *JOŽKA* about a retired miner and member of the Czech Roma community, who is fighting a seemingly hopeless fight against the pig farm built on the site of the former concentration camp, *Lety u Písku*. Here, during the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, hundreds of Roma were killed. The film team consists of a German-Kosovar Romani activist and a Slovak anthropologist.

Other projects include the docu-fiction *ANOTHER DAY*, about the pressure that a lesbian young woman experiences in Russia because of her sexual identity, but also as a woman. The documentary *BELONGING—NOT BELONGING* follows a deaf boy



**Dennis Stormer & Anda Pușcaș** | Looking at Others (stills)

in Sarajevo and his efforts to integrate into his school class; the short film *LOOKING AT OTHERS* examines the relationship between the inhabitants of a Roma village in Romania and the tourists that visit the village with Tzigania Tours, an American-run travel agency, “because when do you have the chance to drink a coffee with a gypsy?”

The second part of *OPPOSE OTHERING!* are the OO! Ally, a curated platform for completed films, animations, web or music videos, documentaries, clips, video art, and other formats that oppose othering and promote belonging and empowerment. The OO! Ally can encompass solidarity, belonging, and empowerment globally because it does not have the regional restrictions of an OO! Tandem film. Among them are vloggers like Jessica Kellgren-Hayes, a deaf, lesbian TV presenter from the United Kingdom, and *BAYCAT* from San Francisco.

All of the films, be it an OO! Ally or Tandem film, can be watched at *OPPOSE OTHERING!*, which will be extended over the course of the next years to provide a true platform for exchange and collaboration.

Last but not least, the third part of *OPPOSE OTHERING!* is the OO! Network. Here, festivals that share goEast’s interest in promoting belonging and inclusion connect with us and screen OO! films in their programs. Connecting to local nongovernmental organizations fighting every day for OO! causes is one crucial way we learn about what is going on in various communities in their countries.

Using the means we have—helping filmmakers make and promote the films that matter to their hearts, being a source of information and enlightenment for interested people—is our answer to othering. By means of the OO! Tandem, we hope to help build bridges between nations and between communities that may live next to each other but remain unknown to each other.

*The film LOOKING AT OTHERS is, in fact, the most ambivalent one concerning the topic of othering. The teaser can be accessed at [HTTP://OPPOSE-OTHERING.DE/2017/02/16/LOOKINGATOTHERS/](http://oppose-othering.de/2017/02/16/lookingatothers/).*



**Dennis Stormer & Anda Puşcaş** | Looking at Others (stills)



# DIVIDED and PLATFORMED

Susie Cagle

In the photo, Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg is walking through a small Alabama town with his wife, reading the local newspaper.

At first steadfast in his insistence that Facebook had done nothing wrong, and disingenuous in his claims that the platform didn't have much influence over the voting public, Zuckerberg now paid public tribute to the importance of truth, community, and the news organizations he had effectively usurped.

Three weeks since Donald J. Trump was inaugurated and 12 weeks since public opinion turned against Zuckerberg and his company's role in hosting the spread of false news ahead of the election, Zuckerberg was on a journey of tacit apology.

Research suggests reading local news is directly correlated with local civic engagement.

Over the next few weeks, Facebook debuted a vague warning label to accompany stories the platform itself deemed **false** and assured its 1.9 billion users, and the rest of the world, that it took its **responsibility** seriously.



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Before you share this story, you might want to know that independent fact-checkers disputed its accuracy.

Facebook did not acknowledge that its carefully filtered environment and algorithmic efforts to keep users captive but comfortable had created a unique market opportunity where it was at least as profitable, if not more profitable, to lie as to tell the truth to 1.9 billion trusting users.

Before you share this story, you might want to know that independent fact-checkers disputed its accuracy.

Our job at Facebook is to help people make the greatest positive impact while mitigating areas where technology and social media can contribute to divisiveness and isolation.



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The "fake news" fall-out was this platform crisis laid bare:



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a shocking reminder of the power and control we have abdicated to a private monopoly with a fiduciary responsibility to its investors and no tangible responsibility to the public it "connects."

## Platforms are companies, not communities.



Facebook provides useful tools to satisfy the natural human search for belonging and connection — the same urges that first brought us the web.



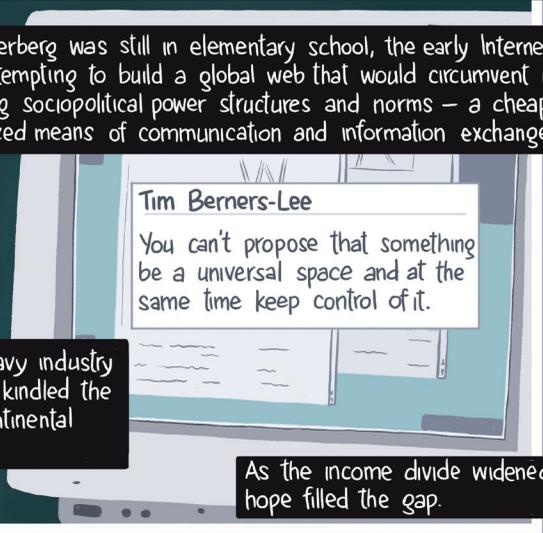
But it also exploits those impulses for tremendous profit at the expense of individual freedom and privacy alike.



If the early Internet's inherent promise was unfettered communication, then the modern Internet's inevitability was the concentration of that connection and its tangential profits.



While Mark Zuckerberg was still in elementary school, the early Internet pioneers were attempting to build a global web that would circumvent if not upend existing sociopolitical power structures and norms — a cheap, deeply decentralized means of communication and information exchange.



While globalization had laid waste to first-world heavy industry and many once-thriving cities along with it, it also kindled the fantasy of a new kind of future: A diverse, intercontinental abundance, where technology did the heavy lifting.

As the income divide widened, hope filled the gap.

But capitalism abhors a vacuum, and an uncaptured commons has no market value. That initial decentralization didn't so much create a new sociopolitical ethos, but a massive commercial opportunity, and the potential for networked super-monopolies the likes of which the world hadn't yet seen.

The companies that controlled connectivity grew and consolidated into multinational utilities and platforms before most people had ever logged on.



Where one giant has faltered, another has swiftly taken its place.

While we felt our way into what was supposed to be a newly atomized and liberated existence, we were recaptured — and at scale.

Modern media has long been subsidized not by people, but by products — advertising paid for the news, until it didn't anymore.

85% of online ads now served through Facebook and Google

62% of Americans say they get their news from social media

In turn, the social web gave us a host of new, apparently free tools to share information and build community across geographic, social, and political boundaries. But those tools have come at other costs.

In the wake of a shocking election, predicted with outrageous inaccuracy by the near-entirety of the U.S. media, reporters and pundits bore much of the weight of public bewilderment, distrust, and outright derision.

The press had long prior abdicated responsibility for judging truth by claiming impartial objectivity. And public trust in media had been falling for decades.

Our newly atomized and liberated existence further bred skepticism in old institutions.



**Tim Berners-Lee**  
On the web, the thinking of cults can spread very rapidly and suddenly a cult which was 12 people who had some deep personal issues suddenly find a formula which is very believable.

More sources of information shared on platforms that collate, curate, and present each source with equal merit traded on that skepticism.



A free commons could be the best antidote to bad information, a mosaic of millions of different perspectives and inputs, each piece contributing to the most accurate total picture.

But it wouldn't feel nearly as good as this.

In a near-full reversal from the 1990s panic over Internet anonymity, much has been made about the rise of trust online, facilitated by social tools.

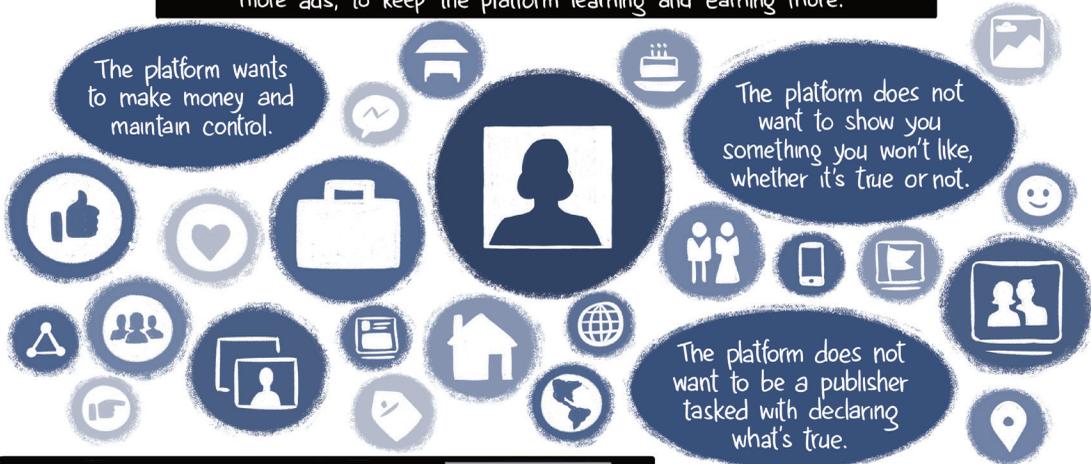
We now attach our real names to real details about our jobs, families, and lives.

We "connect" on familiar lines — a trust not new, but drawn along the same social borders as the old.

Society self-sorts — we seek out means and methods of feeling that we belong. We build communities based on shared values. We include and we exclude, with Facebook's help and without it.

But Facebook is eager to help.

The more you use the platform, the more the platform learns about you, and the more it refines your experience to be the most comfortable — to keep you there longer, interacting with more content, more ads, to keep the platform learning and earning more.



Despite Facebook's claim that it takes its responsibility seriously, by law it doesn't have to — it is a mediator, a financial actor, and a political actor, but a platform does not bear liability for the content it hosts, promotes, and monetizes.



Tim Berners-Lee

The web is already decentralized... We don't have a technology problem, we have a social problem.

Taking responsibility for the platform would run counter to its ethos: that all we need is the data, that reflection that is ourselves but also not — personal details, likes, dislikes, chosen by us explicitly and implicitly — curated by the omniscient and efficient algorithms that order the chaotic commons in our best interest.

Whether or not it does the work of social division, Facebook trades on those divisions.



And the platform only works at ours.

The Facebook economy — ads placed, data purchased, news faked — only works at the platform's behest.

So if we're getting what we want, why are we so upset?

We wanted to believe we drove our own experience of the platform — that we picked our friends, our news, our slogan T-shirts.

We wanted to believe companies that wield so much control over our lives were moral actors working in society's best interests.

We wanted to believe the tools worked for us. But they are only tools.

The web did not rewrite the rules of society — it just revealed that, in this form,

our natural human desire to seek comfort and belonging, taken to scale, can be toxic.

It's inescapably ironic that our global yearning for connection would serve to facilitate and accelerate deep social divisions. But these grand network effects only work when we all follow suit. And we don't have to.

Regardless of how much responsibility Facebook may shoulder or shirk now or in the future, we will have to change our relationship with social media in order to preserve truth —

complex, multi-faceted, and as frequently dissatisfying as it may be.



Tim Berners-Lee

I may have invented the web, but all of you have helped to create what it is today... And now it is up to all of us to build the web we want — for everyone.

We will have to stop unfriending loved ones who voted for a candidate we may find abhorrent.

We will have to seek a life unfiltered.

We will have to seek the center and hold it as best we can.

# **OTHERING & BELONGING**

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF HUMAN CONCERN

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