



## MAX RAMEAU: Occupy to Liberate

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November 14, 2011

4

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*The Occupy Strategy Lab of Organizing Upgrade is excited to share the thoughts of movement innovator and strategist Max Rameau. With his experience founding the [Take Back the Land](#) movement and advancing land-liberation and eviction defense strategies, Max is well positioned to provide some insight into how organizers can and should strategically connect with the Occupy movements. Over the last few months, Max has been engaged in strategic thinking, dialogue and planning with Occupy movements in Miami, DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Wall Street. This article is part of a series in which Max explores the potential for movement building within the Occupy movements. Forthcoming pieces will address the Basis of Unity (between #Occupy and Liberate) and a proposal for a 2012 Spring Offensive.*

The last few years have been hard for us: record foreclosures, high unemployment, drastic cuts in social services, and government actively doing the bidding of big business at the expense of regular people.

With a combination of bewilderment and frustration, concerned global citizens had asked one question over and over again: when and where are people in the US going to rise up and take to the streets?

Turns out, the answer was September 17, 2011 on Wall Street.

Of course, for all it's simplicity and elegance, that answer is not entirely accurate. Communities of color, albeit in smaller numbers and with less media, have taken to the streets for years around issues of police brutality and the impacts of the economic crisis, particularly gentrification,

foreclosures and evictions.

Since 2007, The Take Back the Land movement has identified vacant government owned and foreclosed homes and “liberated” them by breaking in and transforming vacant houses into homes for families. Our objective is to transform land relationships to secure community control over land and elevate housing to the level of a human right. With the crisis deepening, many more organizations are liberating land or waging eviction defenses with increased success.

This one grand crisis, then, has elicited two very different responses, each strong and each relevant to its core constituency. With the combination of low-income communities of color and working and middle class whites taking to the streets, this society is on the cusp of a major social movement, the likes of which have not been experienced in the U.S. in more than a generation.

Far from homogeneous, this budding movement is evolving towards parallel, but interrelated campaign tracks: #Occupy and Liberate. The two look similar in many regards, but are distinguished by three important characteristics: composition, primary frame, and target/base.

**1. Composition.** #Occupy has mobilized mainly, though not exclusively, disaffected young and impacted working and middle class whites. Liberate is mainly low and middle income people of color.

**2. Primary Frame.** #Occupy’s primary frame is the economic system and the injustice it produces. Liberate frames issues in terms of land control and use (such as housing, farming and public space);

**3. Target/Base.** #Occupy targets those symbols, institutions and persons responsible for perpetrating the economic crisis—the 1%—through the “occupation” of public and private spaces, most notably New York’s financial district, the Oakland seaport and individual bank branches. Liberate’s base are the victims of the crisis, who are protected via land liberation and eviction defense.

Social movements are not single celled creatures on a linear path, but dynamic complex organisms with multiple moving parts, each responsible for a different series of tasks. Such a division of labor must be understood,

appreciated and fully embraced. This movement is a complex organism with two tracks, and each track performs unique and critical functions.

Two intractable images of the housing crisis include the banks responsible for this financial mess and the homes from which families are evicted. This movement must take the fight to the banks, protesting and occupying them on their turf. Those same banks are occupying our communities, neighborhoods and homes. We must end that occupation through Liberation and eviction defense. The crisis simply cannot be resolved by choosing to fight on either one front or the other.

Not only must we both #Occupy and Liberate, but the chances of success for one-track increases exponentially with the actual success of the other. Therefore, the Occupy-Liberate dichotomy is not an antagonistic one; it is complementary.

We must occupy the 1% and liberate the 99%.

That is not the job of one organization, but the mission of everyone's movement.

There is growing awareness of the two tracks, their characteristics, strengths and limitations. As we struggle to properly understand and define this relationship, we must resist the tendency towards two competing orientations:

The first tendency is to examine both tracks, note their size, frames and composition and conclude that each track actually represents its own separate and unique movement essentially unrelated to the other. The second, and polar opposite, tendency is to remark the similarities in approach and tactics and conclude the tracks are effectively identical and must be merged into a singular monolithic track. Both tendencies are wrong.

We must take care not to expect large numbers of Blacks, Latinos, indigenous, and other oppressed nationalities or immigrants, each with particular historic relationships to the police, to "occupy" banks and financial institutions. In fact, it is not clear that #Occupy could have succeeded if first executed by people of color. We must also resist the temptation to allow 1,000 young white kids to "occupy" historically people of color communities, still reeling from the more onerous occupation of gentrification. At the same

time, we must find creative, effective and empowering ways to work together through parallel, supportive and even joint actions and campaigns.

While engaging the dual tracks in parallel actions is a prerequisite to building a holistic and powerful movement, it is not sufficient to guarantee trust and success. Two sets of actions, even during the same time frame and in the same city, will not result in an instant movement.

Forging these dual tracks into a cohesive movement with mutually supportive actions, requires at least three basic understandings:

**1. Basis of unity.** Why are we fighting and what are we fighting for? Do we want the same things or are we just doing the same thing in order to get to different places. What is the basis of our unity.

**2. Framework of unity.** How are we working together? How are decisions made? What do we do when one track disagrees with the other?

**3. Next steps.** What are we doing next? We propose a 2012 Spring Offensive.

We must Occupy to Liberate.

*Max Rameau is a Haitian born Pan-African theorist, campaign strategist, organizer and author. He is one of the founding members of the Take Back the Land movement and is currently with Movement Catalyst, a movement support organization, providing campaign development and other support to social justice organizations.*

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**Valery J. Jean** · Executive Director at Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE)

Straight to the point, as usual! Sharing with our members at tonight's campaign meeting.

[Reply](#) · [1 Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 15, 2011 at 11:58am



**Neha Pax**

Much support on your endeavors. Check your wall when you have a chance. Inbox doesn't seem to work best for us.

[Reply](#) · [1 Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 15, 2011 at 11:03am



**Hana Worku** · University of Minnesota

Thank you for writing this-- been waiting to hear a better dialogue between the work that has been going on, (has been ongoing) with TAKE BACK THE ALDN and the recent, more publicized flurry to #occupy. let this continue.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 16, 2011 at 11:33am



**Hana Worku** · University of Minnesota

**Jake Virden**

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · November 17, 2011 at 2:29pm



**George Johnson** · Franklin County High School

Now I know this is my man Greg, Mr. Rolle, been liberating sh\*t since the 60's. Coiner of the "famous" slogan "Let'em Go!".

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 17, 2011 at 2:52pm



**Stephen Malagodi** · [Subscribe](#) · Boca Raton, Florida

clear thinking from our friend Max Rameau.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 15, 2011 at 8:23am



**Steven Fischbach** · Boston University School of Law

Especially for my FB friends who are fighting foreclosures and are part of #Occupy.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · November 15, 2011 at 12:42am

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## 4 Comments



Ron j

Nov 15, 2011,  
1:05

This is a good strategy generally speaking. I think somewhere the role of the war industry needs to be brought in.

[\[Reply\]](#)



malagodi

Nov 15, 2011,  
8:23

Excellent post, Max.

I think the common denominator is one that is fundamental to all political struggle: political power is established through control of physical space. That is one reason why both TBTL and Occupy have been sustainable. Just as a battery is the place where energy can be stored, taking physical control of 'real estate' is



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Nov 18, 2011, 11:08

absolutely necessary for the actual holding of power.

In my neighborhood – in which no one knows their neighbor – the foreclosure signs are everywhere. One always sees the signs, but never the people. If it had been an actual neighborhood where interconnected people had some control over the space, no unjust evictions would be possible.

Keep up the good work Max, your ideas are right on target.

[\[Reply\]](#)

[...] time to Liberate ourselves from the occupation of our communities by banks and a government that only serves the 1%. [...]



[Human Rights, the Occupy Movement, and Lessons from the Ella Baker Model of Organizing « Frontlines of Revolutionary Struggle](#)

Nov 18, 2011, 19:33

[...] has helped to spearhead the December 6th Coalition, which is organizing a national day of action to “Occupy to Liberate” vacant and foreclosed housing throughout the United States to realize the human right to housing in [...]

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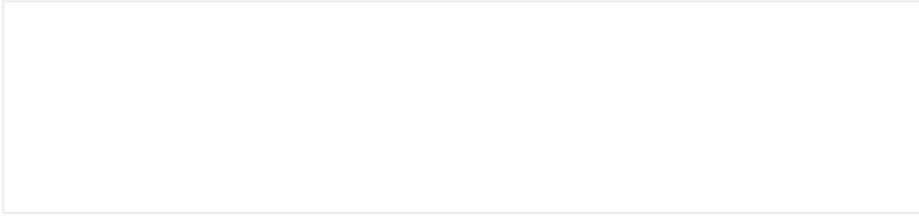
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