

# Intersections

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## Whose Streets? Gentrification in Seattle

by Jacquelyn Hermer and Andrew Hedden

Seattle today is a tale of two cities. For developers, government officials, and many new residents, Seattle is about its places of plenty: shopping opportunities, property values, beautiful views, and potential profits. Look beyond the skyscrapers and a different image of Seattle emerges: that of a blue-collar port city with an immigrant soul—a place of strength, survival, and struggle against racism and poverty. When these two Seattles collide, it's called gentrification: the displacement of poor and working class people by upper-income residents. It's a conflict over values, over purpose: who is claiming the city?

Before gentrification, there was Jim Crow segregation. The Central District (CD) was one of the few areas black residents could live. As they moved there, the predominately Jewish community fled. Now, with gentrification, wealthy, predominately white residents are returning. This dates back to the 1970s, when deindustrialization forced US cities to reorder their economies. Since then, Seattle officials have scrambled to build a profitable economy around those who don't even live here: suburbanites, tourists, and international investors. In the 1990s, a decade that also saw the city lose large amounts of its working-class residents, over \$700 million in public money went to developers to build upper-class amenities like convention centers, museums, and retail stores.

The trend continues today, as rising housing prices push people of color further south—even out of Seattle altogether—and new sweeps on homeless encampments physically remove people from public property. Yet people are resisting across the city. In February 2008, when the new South Lake Union Trolley was tagged with graffiti, it was not hard to see it as a statement against the city's priorities and the millions of dollars spent on a trolley that goes nowhere except Paul Allen-owned real estate. But the resistance goes well beyond small isolated acts.



In Little Saigon, Seattle's Vietnamese district, lies the Goodwill site on Dearborn St. and Rainer Ave. This prime piece of real estate is the location of a proposed new development, including a huge shopping mall and 550 housing units. Fearing the project threatens the vitality of their neighborhood, community members formed the Dearborn Street Coalition for Livable Neighborhoods. After several years of protest, the Coalition and the developer recently signed a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) to ensure good jobs, low-income housing, traffic mitigation, and support for Little Saigon.

Elana Dix, an organizer with Puget Sound SAGE, one of the coalition's 40 organizations, explains, "Reshaping how redevelopment and growth happens in the city is a good way to build a movement for workers." According to Dix, the CBA is a potential model for other neighborhoods in the city threatened by harmful development. She also admits, though, the strategy is limited to instances where a large development is planned. Fighting gentrification in other areas proves harder if the forces changing the area cannot be attributed to a single site or developer.

This has been the case for the Hidmo Eritrean Restaurant in the CD, which has experienced attacks from neighbors and the Seattle Police Department (SPD). Two years ago, sisters Rahwa and Asmeret Habte created Hidmo, "conceived from love of culture and structured after the village model of family." Their restaurant has grown into a community center that has supported the growth of local Hip Hop by hosting five regular shows, including an all-female Hip Hop show, a youth writing circle, and African music.

Lately, however, the Hidmo has been unjustly targeted as a "nuisance" business and an attraction to a "dangerous criminal element" by new white neighbors. About a year ago, the Habte sisters were summoned to a meeting, held in a police station, to hear racist fears from some of these neighbors. The Habte's responded by hosting a community gathering and extending invitations for future events to concerned neighbors.

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# Northwest Anarchist People of Color Gathering

*A report-back by Brooke Stepp*

The weekend of Friday August 15th through August 17th marked the renewal of a specifically anarchist presence among people of color in the Northwest. The gathering took place in Portland, Oregon over a three-day period. Around twenty people of color from all over the region attended the gathering coming from as far away as Eugene and Bellingham. Olympia, Seattle and Portland were also represented at the event. The focus of the weekend was to define what an APOC (Anarchist People of Color) organization looks like, specifically in the context of the Northwest, and also to define what it means to be part of an APOC identity. Friday night was focused on a social event at a fellow APOCer's house where folks could hang out with one another, eat food, and get to know everyone who would be part of the gathering. This was in sharp contrast to many other activist events that take place. The focus here instead was on building community and feeling comfortable around one another rather than insisting on immediately "getting down to business." Despite the amazing community-building that happened that weekend, there was much business that had to be addressed.

Saturday began with a report-back from the NE APOC gathering that happened just before the one in the Northwest, followed by lively discussions about the APOC of the past. APOC, as an idea, began over the Internet on a listserv in 2001 by Ernesto Aguilar and was inspired by anarchists of color throughout history, such as Lucy Parsons, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, and Ricardo Flores Magon. In 2003, the first formal gathering of Anarchist People of Color at the national level occurred in Detroit, Michigan at Wayne State University. Although some factionalism occurred at the conference (see [illvox.org](http://illvox.org)), a sense of purpose emerged from the conference in general. After hurricane Katrina in 2005, plans fell through for another national conference that was to be held in Houston, Texas. Resources could not be gathered to change the conference's venue in time. Thus, 2009 will mark the renewal of APOC at a national level. The gatherings that are taking place now in the Northeast, Northwest, and soon in the Southwest are precursors to this renewal.

In the past, APOC has not been associated with any sort of centralized group, but instead is a network made up of individuals and collectives. There are many different ideas concerning what APOC is, what it should be, and what it means to claim an APOC identity. In fact, the diversity of opinions present throughout APOC is one of the reasons why it is an important presence in left revolutionary movements today. At the recent Northwest gathering, participants articulated many of these points that make APOC essential and relevant. One of these ideas, and one that is particularly salient, was the fact that an APOC organization gives people of color working for social change a chance to come together and take back our communities. It gives us the impetus to create revolution in the here and now. In other words, coming together with other people of color who have similar experiences is incredibly empowering and gives us insight that we didn't have before that we can then use in our own communities. Furthermore, an APOC presence allows people of color to reclaim our anti-authoritarian past and ideas from what has become a movement with a majority-white face. This reminds us, and the world, that people of color all over the place were living in anti-authoritarian societies long before Proudhon or Bakunin ever wrote it down and called it anarchism. Therefore, APOC is extremely important because it allows people of color to look back and take pride in our history that has been erased through colonialism, imperialism, and domination. It shows the world that anarchism is not just for and by white people. It is for all people. Lastly, an APOC presence allows a place for people of color to find support outside of our mass movement work.

The left in the United States is composed primarily of white folks. Because of this, people of color involved in these movements face a lot of difficulties from flat-out racism to being marginalized and not understood by their comrades who have completely different experiences. APOC serves as a place for people with similar experiences in relation to race to come together and find much-needed support and guidance.

One issue that came up at the gathering that will need to be discussed and analyzed further both in the Northwest and at a national level is the term APOC itself. What does it mean? What does the "A" mean? How does this label make people of color feel? Some people prefer the terms "autonomous" or "anti-authoritarian" to "anarchist." The reasons for this are plenty and include issues of inclusivity and appearances. Many people of color in the U.S. today do not wish to be associated with what has become the stereotypical white North American anarchist movement that is less about community and more about creating a lifestyle out of anarchism. Because of these common notions of what anarchism is, many people of color feel that the term alienates us from the communities we come from. Furthermore, it was pointed out at the gathering that we shouldn't feel obligated to define ourselves by our relationships to racism, colonialism, and imperialism, because all people of color have different relationships to these histories. In other words, all people of color are not the same and we all have our own complex pasts and stories. However, what all people of color do have in common is the fact that we are not white in a society that elevates whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, money, etc. above all else and defines everything in relation to these "norms." Because of this, there is common ground for us to work together around issues that affect people of color in particular such as immigration, access to healthcare, gentrification, sexual violence, gang presence, war in our communities, and the prison industrial complex.

The weekend ended with brainstorming about how our current work on issues as diverse as working with youth, poetry and spoken word, hip hop, Industrial Workers of the World, infoshops, homeless outreach, prison work, education, and student movements fits into an APOC identity in the Northwest. We brainstormed particular groups that are already working around issues that affect us as people of color in the region. We identified groups such as OLIN in Portland who do Zapatista solidarity work, Communities Against Rape and Abuse in Seattle who are an affiliate of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, Seattle Solidarity Network who are doing a lot of positive work against gentrification, and Olympia Industrial Workers of the World who are doing support work for day laborers in the area. At the conclusion of the weekend, we had developed a small community among APOCers in the Northwest, a plan to publish a periodical, some concrete ideas to be thinking about, and a date for the next gathering in December of 2008 in Olympia, WA.



For more info  
on APOC,  
check out  
<http://illvox.org>

# Hope, Change, and Direct Action

by Greg A and Jeremy

This election year, millions of new voters are demonstrating newfound hope and a strong desire for change. For many, this campaign is their first political act. We must preserve this first glimmer of hope in the 21st century over the next four years, even as the war drags on, millions lack healthcare, employers attack the right to unionize, and the Democrats forget promises and neglect inequalities of every sort.

Obama has tapped into a deep hunger for change using grassroots organizing to excite and mobilize supporters to the point of attracting an unprecedented 2,000,000 small donors. If he wins with his current level of support, the Democrats could follow through with their promises. But will they? Even the most honest politician can only respond to money and power. As long as the wealthiest 5% in the U.S. have more wealth than the bottom 95% combined, we can't compete financially. Also, it's unlikely that the Democrats will achieve the 60 seats required for a filibuster-proof senate, and they have repeatedly caved at the hint of a Republican filibuster.

So how can ordinary working people make real our desire for change and create a 21st century worthy of our hopes?

Direct action.

Whether it's the war, dignity in the workplace, fighting oppression, or fighting economic disparities, direct action is about working people creating power for ourselves, instead of relying on the rich and powerful to grant it. This strategy works whether or not the Democrats win and whether or not they keep their promises. We can use direct action to push the Democratic Party to act, and then ultimately move beyond it.

Here's an example. One of Obama's promises is the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which, despite its failings, puts some teeth in labor law. Right now, when a majority of workers seeks union representation, employers have months and months to mount an anti-union campaign and illegally fire pro-union employees. But under the EFCA, if a majority signed authorization cards, winning union recognition would require a simple card check. The EFCA would also award triple back pay for illegal firings.

More important than the law itself, though, is the idea that workers have a right to organize. We build power by organizing and standing in solidarity against attacks from employers. With the law, we have to take direct action to enforce our legal rights. Without the law, direct action is our only hope.

Another promise is Obama's timeline for withdrawal from Iraq. Full withdrawal in 16 months will happen only if the American people step up resistance to the war. Why? The Democrats are terrified that if they withdraw, Republicans will shift blame for all failures to them. So they will withdraw troops only if our direct action raises the financial and political costs of more delays.

We can reduce military recruitment by continuing to wage anti-recruitment campaigns in schools across the U.S. We can even slow the flow of supplies through port militarization resistance, as in Tacoma and Olympia. Through our direct action, we can also help shift public opinion against the war.

One unspoken promise is that electing Obama will somehow let us put racism behind us. That's as absurd as the idea that women politicians will make feminism obsolete, but we have been hearing the term "post racist society" despite continuing institutional racism that causes segregation, discrimination, economic disparities, and the high incarceration rate of young people of color.

Rather than ignore institutional racism, we can fight it with independent grassroots power. Direct action on the part of those most directly affected can win immediate gains as well as strengthen the community. In New York City, for example, the Harlem Tenants' Council (HTC) has been organizing community forums and using direct action to fight gentrification and evictions. And El Movimiento por Justicia del Barrio, an organization in East Harlem inspired by the Zaptistas' Other Campaign, has also been using direct action to fight oppression against the Latino community.

Whichever way the election goes, 2009 will bring new opportunities for advancing change. By using direct action and embracing the newfound sense of hope, we can move beyond the Democrats to create a grassroots movement for collective self-liberation.

## Whose Streets?

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Unfortunately, the Habte business has continued to receive a disproportionate amount of attention from the SPD. With nightly visits, the police continue to harass the restaurant by randomly carding patrons, ticketing people for smoking outside, and persistently threatening to pull the liquor and health licenses

The stories of the Hidmo and Little Saigon represent only two stories in an ongoing battle over what Seattle looks like. They are only stories in a larger battle over what the cities of the United States look like. All across the country working class people and

communities of color are also being displaced by sky-high rents, mass evictions, and low-wage jobs.

Will the struggles of working people take priority, or will the business motives of the rich?

A version of this article originally appeared in *Eat the State!* Thank you to Elana Dix, Lynn Domingo, Rahwa Habte, and Lynn Sereda for their generous help with this article. Support Hidmo Eritrean Cuisine: 2000 S. Jackson St., Seattle. For more information, please visit: Dearborn Coalition: <http://www.dearbornstreetcoalition.org>; Puget Sound Sage: <http://www.pugetsoundsage.org>; Hidmo: <http://www.hidmo.org>.

# Crude Profits

by Joshua Neuhouser

A great environmental and social catastrophe has been brewing in northern Alberta. As the price of oil skyrockets, drilling companies are trying new, experimental methods for obtaining crude. One of these is the extraction of crude from the tar sands lying beneath the Athabasca river basin. To extract oil from the tar sands, forests must be leveled. Alberta's rate of deforestation is now second only to that of the Amazon. In practices similar to the Mountaintop Removal Mining of the Appalachians, the rich topsoil is carted away for disposal. The oil-rich sands lying underneath are taken to processing plants where they are boiled at extremely high temperatures until crude oil can be separated from the sand.

The process is very water intensive, and water used to extract tar sands is contaminated forever. Already the water level in the Athabasca River has dropped three meters, and production is expected to increase five times in the upcoming years.

Indigenous communities across Canada have already been experiencing massive shortages of drinkable water, and the tar sand developments will only make it worse. Nearby Fort Chipewyan provides a tragic example of what is to come. Cancer and leukemia rates increased five times since the developments began, and citizens are unanimously demanding an end to the extraction of tar sands. Canada's government has refused, because in their eyes public health is less important than "the market." Said Chief Eli Moonias of the Nishnawbe, "I wonder how different the response would be if the residents of Toronto were without access to water."

Pipelines are also a source of controversy among indigenous groups, who assert that they do not reap the benefits of the pipeline, but will be the ones to suffer the consequences of any ruptures. Chief Patrick Mitchell of the Stellat'en stated that "I only speak for my own First Nation here, (but)...we would look to physically stop any work being done" on the proposed Gateway pipeline. The Trans-Mountain Pipeline, which runs down to Ferndale and Anacortes in northern Washington, is also to be expanded.

The tar sands development is not providing needed jobs to the region. On the contrary, Alberta's business community is terrified that there will not be enough workers available to carry out their plans. To construct the needed processing facilities, guest workers are being brought in from overseas, and they receive no protection from Canadian labor laws. These guest workers, who now outnumber traditional immigrants, are kept segregated from unionized workers and receive the most dangerous jobs. They do not have the right to organize or apply for a work permit, which would give them protection from their employers (as well as the ability to quit and find work elsewhere in Canada), never mind citizenship. Already two Chinese men have lost their

lives in an easily preventable accident when a container fell on them. No one knows their names.

Guest worker programs are becoming popular the world over, from Canada to Dubai, and recently the US Congress has debated adopting one in our country as well. However, these programs are little more than a new form of indentured slavery, with one crucial difference—in colonial America, a worker who had completed their term of servitude became a free citizen afterwards. Modern guest workers are instead deported when their boss no longer needs them. The Alberta Federation of Labor, which is actively opposing the tar sands development, has stated, "We believe the labour movement has a responsibility to defend these workers. We believe they deserve the same rights as any Canadian worker...independent of the wishes of the employer that brought them here."

For more information, check out these websites:  
<http://oilsandstruth.org/>  
<http://tarsandsfreebc.org>  
<http://noii-van.resist.ca/>



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Portland, OR 97208**

**Dear Sally Darity,**

*I'm in a desk job with good pay and benefits, and I like my manager. But it's getting harder to make ends meet, because of inflation and rising health care costs. My coworkers are talking about organizing a union, but I just can't see myself on a picket line. Plus I'm worried about losing my job. What should I do?*

**Puzzled in Point Defiance**  
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**Dear Puzzled,**

*Unions are for everyone -- blue collar, white collar, pink collar. If you have to work for a living, you deserve respect, some say in how you do your job, a fair wage, health care, and (dare I say it?) a pension plan that the employer can't renege on when the going gets tough. But it's fair to be worried about your job. When a union organizing drive starts, the managers -- no matter how nice they are as people -- won't be acting in your best interest. The best way to protect yourself is to educate yourself about union organizing, learn your rights, and to join with your coworkers in solidarity. Get to know everyone. Don't exclude anyone due to race, gender, or religion, because you will need every last person to win. The good news is that when you all work together, you'll have the power to dictate your working conditions and fight for a living wage.*

**Sally Darity!**

[Dear.SallyDarity@gmail.com](mailto:Dear.SallyDarity@gmail.com)