

A Different Kind of Morning in America

Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make genuine change...it is learning to address each other's difference with respect. – Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider, 1984

The last few months were a historic period for members of the Audre Lorde Project (ALP) community. Some of us participated in electoral organizing for the first time and some of us with more energy than ever before - door knocking, phone banking, fundraising, and organizing. When Barack Obama won the presidency, we saw a victory made possible through the efforts of millions of people, which was powered by hope on a scale many of us have not experienced before. The energy that people, and especially young people, brought was a testament to how much folks want to be active and engaged in the workings of the United States, and the United States in relation to the rest of the world. We noticed all around us, people breathing sighs of relief that there is a chance the U.S. will have a presidential administration which does not have contempt for people and dissidents; or an attitude that people are expendable, and accountability is a joke. We noticed that we were juggling multiple emotions – amazement, fear, skepticism, visions of a different future, and anxiety. We know that President Obama will inherit impossible expectations, the worst conditions that the U.S. has dealt with since the Great Depression, and the current versions of white supremacy which have never gone away. We also know that Obama ran as a centrist, and as someone who believes in neoliberal economic strategies.

As a result, we write this statement as a commitment to not be paralyzed by disappointment and disillusionment, but to organize more strongly, deeply, and strategically from this day on. We acknowledge that this statement strays from the traditional policy agenda of the LGBT movement in the U.S., and that is because Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) People of Color are everywhere – in refugee settlements and prisons, in factories and board rooms, in the service sector and the unemployment line, the picket line and protests in the streets. We are putting this out as an invitation to move forward on the lessons of the election, to continue to build local community spaces and transnational movements powered by the energy of many more people than we have seen before.

On the 23rd annual Martin Luther King Day, the Eve of the Inauguration

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. -Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the weeks leading up to the election, we held discussions with community members about the financial crisis and people's hopes and fears for the election. What people talked about is very much a map of the current conditions that are front and center in our communities' realities. We talked about the stagnation of real wages, an understanding that the ratio of people's income to expenses has gone down for the last thirty years, meaning that even when people earn more over time, our money pays for less. We talked about an unprecedented level of imaginary profit made by a very small number of people, and the cost of deregulation on homeowners, poor and working class people; and the deepening gap between the rich and the poor in the global south due to free trade agreements, structural adjustment policies, and currency speculation (<http://economicmeltdownfunnies.org/>).

We identified the impacts of these issues on our communities locally: people feeling trapped in jobs that they are afraid to leave; the rise in homelessness; the decrease in small businesses; gentrification (the process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and displacing original residents of the neighborhood) and the decrease in affordable housing; less resources for education and an increase in military recruitment; rising scapegoating, racism, transphobia, depression, hopelessness, and crime. We talked about the budget cuts which are affecting all of our organizations, and how in many ways homeless LGBTSTGNC people, especially younger people, elders and people with disabilities, are feeling these cuts to services most immediately.

As we hold these hard realities among others, as LGBTSTGNC People of Color based in New York City we identified some of the policy and movement commitments we will make during the next period:

Economic Crisis: We will fight for increased access to livable wage jobs for all people, including Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) people, immigrants, and young people. TransJustice, a project of ALP, is currently leading an Economic Justice campaign based on the fact that even before the recession, the unemployment rate for TGNC People of Color in NYC was estimated at around 70%. We understand that the current financial crisis has been forming over a long period, and to some extent was inevitable. It is much broader than the housing crisis, credit bust, and the nationalization of banks and large blocks of debt. We understand it includes our ability to buy food, afford housing and medical treatment, and access education and welfare. We are wary of the billions of dollars going to corporations for the bailout, while people face a crisis of survival.

(http://www.alternet.org/story/107000/wall_street%27s_bailout_is_a_trillion-dollar_crime_scene__why_aren%27t_the_dems_doing_something_about_it/)

Violence: We anticipate that an economic crisis combined with global unrest, disasters connected to climate change, and the continued growth of the police state in New York City leave many of us vulnerable. We recognize the negative effects that the economic crisis and the resulting budgetary crisis will have upon our lives and neighborhoods in terms of the potential of increased violence and survival crimes. We are concerned about the expansion of broken windows policing, where police use brute force and mass arrests to target quality of life crimes (fare evasion, graffiti, broken windows, etc) that are usually the result of poverty. These policies quickly turn under-resourced neighborhoods into police states creating an environment of distrust, fear, and alienation. This fearful environment impedes our ability to create safety for ourselves making us more dependent upon the police. Similarly, we don't want to see tactics like the ones we have seen post-Katrina in the Gulf Coast, where moments of crisis are used for heightened militarization and privatization. We know that in times of economic hardship, people who are already vulnerable become more so, and we are concerned about a rise in hate violence against LGBTSTGNC communities of color. However, we remain opposed to hate crime legislation due to the lack of evidence that increased penalties actually prevent violence; the understanding that these policies strengthen the prison industrial complex by disproportionately incarcerating people of color; and because these policies divert necessary resources from education, mediation, and transformative anti-violence policies that target the root causes of violence. We seek to advance strategies which focus on community accountability and transformative justice such as the Safe Neighborhood Campaign by ALP's Safe Outside the System Collective.

Privatization: We realize that due to a commitment to neoliberal economic strategies and the growing economic crisis, there are many sectors of the public infrastructure that are vulnerable to being taken out of public control and sold to the highest bidder in the corporate sector. This has already happened largely with health care, prisons, and military troops; and could very well become the education reform strategy. We oppose privatization because it makes public institutions function on the basis of profit instead of service to the people, and is often harmful to current struggles for indigenous sovereignty and autonomy. We recognize that anti-privatization struggles in the global South are connected to our struggles locally, as well as the fact that it is largely U.S. corporations that profit from them and use the same practices domestically and abroad. We urge the Obama administration to use the economic stimulus packages to increase the infrastructure and capacity of public institutions such as schools and inclusive and accessible healthcare and hospitals, and not use the anti-recession tactics as a tool for privatization of new sectors and jobs.

War and Militarization: We continue to oppose all the public and hidden wars of the U.S., the continued occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the expansion of U.S. militarization through the building of military bases and the War on Drugs. We are witnessing the escalation of tactics combining militarization, the manipulation of global economic objectives and the criminalization of migrants through both Plan Merida and Plan Colombia (<http://www.art-us.org/node/392>). As we recognize the mass deaths in Congo, Nigeria, and Mumbai, we acknowledge the impact of the War on Terrorism globally, and we continue our commitment to being part of efforts seeking to end the War on Terrorism. We are appalled by the ongoing attacks on the people of Palestine through the denial of equal rights inside Israel, division through the wall, the latest assault on Gaza, economic isolation, blockades of supplies and imports, escalating militarization throughout the occupied territories, and the continued refusal of Palestinian refugees' right of return. (<http://electronicintifada.net/>). We support organizations intensifying efforts through boycott, divestment, and sanction strategies (<http://www.bdsmovement.net/>). We oppose escalating military activities everywhere, including Palestine, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran. We urge the Obama administration to cut the \$6-8 million plus that is given to the Israeli government every day to further the oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people. (<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stats/usaid.html>)

Immigration: In the last year, violence towards immigrants has increased at the borders, through workplace and house raids, in schools, and detention centers. We continue to oppose all forms of enforcement, which target people who are trying to survive a deepening global economic crisis, and stand in solidarity with migrant rights organizations around the world. We will oppose any immigration reform proposal that includes a registration process, more militarization at the border and further criminalization of undocumented people. We will continue to build spaces for us to come together to collectively increase our options for survival and self-determination as immigrants, as well as continue our participation in the broader movement for legalization of all people. Towards that end we are a member of the National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, as part of our commitment to build mass movements, which can meet our goals for global justice (www.nnirr.org).

Losses and Opportunities: Much has been said about the significance of the passage of Prop. 8 in California. We were saddened and alarmed at the passage of the homophobic ballot measures, as well as the rollbacks on affirmative action, the rights of immigrants, reproductive rights, and the rights of workers. We were angered and pushed to engagement by the conversations which marginalized LGBTSTGNC people of color and used racism to justify the failure of organizing strategies around the country. We remain committed to building spaces for dialogue, struggle across communities, and working within communities of color around the city to address transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, and all other forms of oppression, which divide us and weaken our movements.

Marching Orders

Still feeling the energy and hope in our communities post-election, we realize there is no 1-800-Call-Obama line. We know we will have to continue with organizing and building movements big enough for all of us. Our work is to make spaces which help us sustain hope and the possibilities for survival as well as transformation. We know that when we as people look towards collective power as our greatest resource, much more is possible. Beyond moving forward with our existing work, at ALP we will be holding conversations about how we envision taking advantage of this period, and which strategies and tactics give us energy and take advantage of our creativity and spirit. We look to our neighbors in the global south, who are practicing different models of sustainability and democracy ([http://www.alternet.org/workplace/114799/what we can learn from social struggle in south america/](http://www.alternet.org/workplace/114799/what_we_can_learn_from_social_struggle_in_south_america/)).

We are inviting you to help ALP build community spaces which make it more possible for us to take care of ourselves and each other; learn about and develop alternative models of sustainability, cooperation, and mutual support; and organize for justice for our communities. We know that now more than ever we need powerful movements made up of all of us, because the state has not and does not hold our interests and needs at the center of its functioning.

Join ALP by becoming a volunteer, donor, and/or supporter:

www.alp.org (to donate - <http://www.alp.org/getinvolved/support/>)

<http://www.facebook.com/inbox/?drop&ref=mb#/group.php?gid=47712849504>

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. – Frederick Douglass