

# ***The Democratic Turn of the Century: Learning from the U.S. Democracy Movement***

*Ben Manski*

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Democracy movements arose in most regions of the globe during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Students of social change have studied many of these movements, but, remarkably, have so far failed to look at that of the United States.

What makes a democracy movement different from another type of social movement? One distinctive trait is the explicit choice of participants in naming their efforts as pro-democracy. But there are other common qualities as well. These movements transcend national and social borders, and in so doing unite disparate elements of society. They challenge existing conceptions of personhood, citizenship, and sovereignty, and expand the circle of standing and governance. They are universalist and evangelical, seeking always to bring popular participation and self-determination to new fields of life. And democracy movements return the question of revolution to the fray, by closing the gaps between issue advocacy, reform efforts, and revolutionary outcomes. Democracy movements, in the words of Richard Flacks, promote “the ability and willingness of people to take responsibility for the direction of society and its institutions, [and] the restructuring of society in such a way that the people are increasingly empowered to make history in and through their daily lives” (Flacks 1988).

I want to look at the contours and origins of the present U.S. democracy movement, and to identify certain theoretical questions that emerge from that description. I will examine the democracy movement’s integration of prefigurative and strategic politics, in order to illustrate the point that democracy movements are qualitatively distinct from other social movement forms. Democracy movements in general, and this democracy movement in particular, require specific attention and analysis. The present turn toward deep democracy is far from complete; understanding its pathways will prove essential if we are to confront future hardships.

## **Contours of the democracy movement in the United States**

Today, the flashing of Walt Whitman’s “sign of democracy” is visible across the United States. In the Rust Belt a major city has become so identified with public investment in cooperatives as to become known nationally as the home of “The Cleveland Model.” In thousands of communities across the United States, crowds of hundreds and thousands have gathered nightly in general assemblies, a horizontalist decisionmaking process reintroduced to North America from revolutionary Argentina and Europe. On a growing number of campuses

students have reorganized their student associations as “student unions,” bringing back a student syndicalist politics that last arose in the 1960s and last was widely practiced in the 1930s. In dozens of major cities citizens now gather in the tens of thousands to deliberate and vote on municipal budget priorities. Voting rights sit-ins have occupied state capitol buildings across the South and the Heartland, leading to a renewed push for a Right to Vote Amendment. Mayors and city councils from California to Maine have reasserted their ancient authorities of eminent domain and home rule to protect homeowners, workers, children, and ecosystems. A majority of the population of the United States either has voted for or is represented by legislatures that endorsed a constitutional amendment to nullify the doctrines of “money is speech” and “corporate personhood.” All these and more are elements of a living history.

Within the social sciences and humanities it is widely recognized that, to borrow a phrase from an earlier era of social struggle, there’s something happening here. Occupy Wall Street and the #occupy movement it generated have garnered the most attention, with scores of books and hundreds of social science articles examining its uses of technology, aesthetics, organization, and forms of discourse. The Wisconsin Uprising of 2011 similarly inspired significant research, particularly in sociology and labor studies. The movement “to make clear that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights,” and that “money is not free speech,” which rose to national debate in the aftermath of *Citizens United v. FEC*, entered the pages of law and public policy journals in the 1990s. A growing body of research understands contemporary U.S. voting rights, racial justice, civil liberties, student, union, immigrant rights, climate, and global trade campaigns as taking the form of pro-democracy struggles. Beyond this, the academy has taken increasing notice of the underlying *democracy crisis* that movement intellectuals have been concerned about for many years.

Yet that is where the inquiry stops. Remarkably, this growing body of academic work has yet to coalesce into a coherent area of inquiry. Instead, most researchers have studied individually each democratic uprising, struggle, and campaign. And the structural analysis of the democracy crisis has been conducted well apart from social movement research. Instead of the academy, it is the democracy movement itself that remains the greatest repository of records, inquiry, and analysis into its own origins, developments, and directions.

## **Origins of the democracy movement in the United States**

When Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy,” he was calling up the spirit of a struggle that had defined American history since well before Reconstruction or the Revolution of 1776. For much of the twentieth century, that spirit had risen powerfully with the labor movement’s call for industrial democracy, the women’s movement’s struggles for voting rights and equal rights, and the civil rights movement’s civil disobediences and marches (Winant 2001). In the 1960s, that spirit took up residence in the student and youth movements of the United States and much of the rest of the world. Yet even at the height of the 1960s-1970s New Left,

Third World, and feminist movements, in the years when democracy was in the streets and the ideals of participatory democracy were emergent, the explicit call of Port Huron and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) for a movement toward “greater democracy in America” was not immediately answered in the emergence of an equally explicit democracy movement. While the turn towards radical democracy was significantly imagined in the politics of the 1960s, the contemporary U.S. democracy movement was not conceived until the early 1990s, and its birth came still later, at the turn of the millennium.

There are many possible explanations for this delay. Some point to the setbacks of the 1980s, in which the conservative culture war’s division of the white working class and the Reagan White House’s war on unions, African Americans, and the poor, remade many progressives into reactionaries. Instead of democracy on the march, the U.S. Left found itself compelled to defend the social welfare state and labor peace. Others suggest that the rot in the coalition between Washington liberals and grassroots radicals had already set in by the late 1970s, as the Carter administration carried forward the policies of the entrenched security state and reached accommodations with a rising class of global capitalists. In either case, the outcome was the same. The desire for a concerted movement toward democracy went unrequited throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and democratic politics went into abeyance, refining ideas and practices at the grassroots, but failing to emerge as a national force (Taylor 1989).

And then Washington declared the Cold War over. This meant that the example of the Soviet bloc no longer could be wielded as a cudgel against radical politics, nor leaned on by rigid ideologues of the Left (Wallis 1990; Flacks 1996). It meant that the rising and apparently unchecked dominance of the corporation and the unleashing of corporate globalization posed an existential threat to aspirations for democracy in the United States. And around the globe, from Manila, Beijing, Prague, Cape Town, and many other locations, revolutions and uprisings gave the sign of democracy.

On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation issued a call for war against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the form of the First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle. This heightened the struggle between democracy and corporate rule, setting the stage for a process of collective inquiry, deliberation, and movement-building aimed at making democracy central to the politics of the many branches of the U.S. Left.

### **The 1990s: resisting corporations, rethinking democracy**

Instead of marking the end of history, as political theorist Francis Fukuyama had predicted, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact initiated a new period of struggle between corporate capital and people’s movements. From Washington, Wall Street, and Dallas came a multipronged push that included neoliberal trade policies like NAFTA and the Multilateral Agreement on Investments, domestic policies like the telecommunications and welfare reform acts of 1996, and everywhere, resource wars for oil and minerals. In response, as one slogan of the 1990s read, “resistance can be expected.” This resistance often began within

the social and economic sectors under most direct attack, and in many places transformed into sectoral counter-efforts focusing on democratization, including efforts to democratize the media, education, the labor movement, trade, agriculture, policing, corrections, philanthropy, and elections.

Resistance to the consolidation of mass media brought together new efforts like Countermedia, Free Speech TV, and Acción Zapatista, along with established projects like Paper Tiger, to launch Indymedia.org and other media democracy projects. A desire to see the internet used for democratic purposes fed the creation of the Institute for Global Communications (igc.org), EnviroLink, and the Center for Campus Organizing, each of which pioneered online organizing, expanding the new commons of the worldwide web. Campaigns to resist corporatized education arose, led by the 180/Movement for Democracy and Education, Teachers for a Democratic Culture, and Rethinking Schools, among others. In response to the corporatization of welfare, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and other foundational members of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign organized home reoccupations and mass direct actions at government buildings and banks. Corporate offshoring of jobs and a new wave of union-busting was met with organized mass resistance across the Midwest as a labor reform movement with roots in the 1970s gained traction via Labor Notes conferences, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Association for Union Democracy, and other associated efforts. In a closely linked development, the fair trade movement emerged as a response to corporate-dominated trade policies with the National Labor Committee, Global Trade Watch, Global Exchange, and Equal Exchange, all of which sought to create worker-consumer alliances to regulate trade. Farmers also united with consumers resisting the corporatization of agriculture and science by building community-supported agriculture and establishing controls over toxins and GMOs. The 1990s-era explosion in corporate prisons, incarceration, and police militarization gave urgency to campaigns for community policing, prison abolition, and the freeing of political prisoners, led by the Black Radical Congress, Critical Resistance, and the Anarchist Black Cross, among others. And in response to the corporate takeover of the Democratic National Committee, new national independent political parties arose, dedicated to "grassroots democracy," a pillar of the Greens, a "democratic revolution" in the words of the New Party, and "democracy [as] the struggle of our generation" as the Labor Party put it.

In the 1990s, corporate capitalism left no sector of society untouched. In the process, corporatization provoked popular resistance and inspired new pro-democracy initiatives. One organization instrumental in weaving together the genetic material of the emerging democracy movement was the Program on Corporations Law and Democracy (POCLAD). Founded by veterans of the New American Movement of the 1970s, the New Left of the 1960s, and significantly, the Progressive Party of the 1920s-40s, POCLAD became the first in a series of organizations that worked to make radical democracy central to the politics of the U.S. Left.

In 1993, POCLAD co-founder Richard Grossman co-authored a Thomas Paine-style pamphlet entitled *Taking Care of Business: Citizenship and the Articles of Incorporation*. In their

widely circulated and read pamphlet, Grossman and Frank Adams called for a new approach to social change work in the U.S.:

We are out of the habit of contesting the legitimacy of the corporation, or challenging concocted legal doctrines, or denying courts the final say over our economic lives..... What passes for political debate today is not about control, sovereignty, or the economic democracy which many American revolutionaries thought they were fighting to secure. Too many organizing campaigns accept the corporation's rules, and wrangle on corporate turf. We lobby congress for limited laws. We have no faith in regulatory agencies, but turn to them for relief. We plead with corporations to be socially responsible, then show them how to increase profits by being a bit less harmful. How much more strength, time, and hope will we invest in such dead ends? (Grossman & Adams 1993)

Instead, Grossman and Adams concluded, the time had come to recognize that, “Our sovereign right to decide what is produced, to own and to organize our work, and to respect the earth is as American as a self-governing people’s right to vote.”

Among other things, *Taking Care of Business* was used as a discussion piece for “Rethinking the Corporation, Rethinking Democracy” weekend retreats, or “Rethinks,” involving a handpicked cross-section of activists, organizers, and intellectuals from the labor, women’s, student, indigenous rights, poor people’s, civil rights, environmental, and other existing movements. POCLAD held scores of Rethinks in every region of the United States and thousands of activists on the front lines of sectoral anti-corporate and pro-democracy campaigns took part. The POCLAD Rethinks influenced the actions of participants and helped cohere a new politics. They also led to the formation of new organizations and networks.

This self-described “Second Circle” of pro-democracy initiatives took varying forms. The National Teach-In Clearinghouse coordinated five rounds of Democracy Teach-Ins from 1996-2001 at hundreds of college campuses and union halls. The teach-ins asked participants, “Is it possible to achieve democracy and social justice when corporations are allowed to control so much power and wealth?” Democracy Unlimited of Wisconsin, Cooperative, gathered over 180,000 signatures on petitions calling on Wisconsin’s Secretary of State to revoke the certificates of authority of Exxon, Unocal, and Pepsico to do business in that state. Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County, in California, went much further, initiating and winning a ballot measure that nullified corporate constitutional rights in that county and establishing an official county committee for organizing against corporate constitutional rights. The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund began to work with farmers and rural communities to nullify corporate constitutional rights and to assert home rule police powers to regulate particular corporate practices. The newly established Alliance for Democracy formed local chapters across the country whose goal was to “free all people from corporate domination.” Reclaim Democracy and consumer rights advocate Marc Kasky challenged the Nike corporation’s claimed “right to free speech” before the Supreme Court. A new publication called *Adbusters* issued calls for “Buy Nothing Day” actions. And existing organizations and movements like the Women’s

International League for Peace and Freedom, National Lawyers Guild, and Earth First! all created ongoing taskforces and campaigns to, in the language of the day, “End Corporate Rule.”

By the late 1990s, the various sectoral anti-corporate, pro-democracy campaigns were regularly interacting with the broad social movement-oriented POCLAD and Second Circle intellectuals and organizers, and all of them were in regular communication with activists and social movement organizations in other parts of the world. The place where they all came together in person was Seattle, Washington.

### **Born in Seattle: “This is what democracy looks like!”<sup>1</sup>**

It was the uprising that began the twenty-first century. Over 100,000 people gathered in Seattle over the week of November 28 to December 3, 1999 to shut down a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The result? Instead of launching a so-called “Millennium Round” of negotiations among global elites about the future of world governance, the Seattle confrontation unleashed a new spirit of democratic resistance and revolution. Throughout the week, Seattle’s streets were filled with marchers whose banners flew the colors of every hue of the social movements of the 1990s. At that historical moment, the unity in diversity was remarkable, especially the new alliances between labor unions and environmental groups, urban organizers and rural farmers, and people of the Global North and the Global South. More remarkable still was that these alliances succeeded in their ambitious goal of shutting down the WTO meeting. Led by thousands of young activists trained in the nonviolent wilderness defense campaigns of the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle protesters on November 30 effectively blocked the entrances to the Washington State Convention and Trade Center.

In response, the police cracked skulls, broke arms, attacked the protesters with pepper spray, plastic projectiles, tear gas, and stun grenades, and instituted martial law in much of the city. By the next day, tens of thousands of residents, angered by the police violence, had joined the protests. Next, scores of WTO delegates walked out in a show of support for the uprising, sounding the beginning of the end for the WTO meeting. Supporters of the Seattle uprising rallied in hundreds of communities around the world. By the end of the week, labor unions and community groups in western Washington had organized a regional general strike, the first such mass labor action in the area in nearly a century.

The Seattle uprising was to prove a turning point in world history. Before Seattle, corporatization rolled forward with an air of inevitability. It seemed obvious that transnational corporations would gain control of the global economy. Workers, communities, young people might resist—and resist they did—but they would lose. What happened in 1999 ended that prophecy. In the streets of Seattle, anti-corporate resistance that had been building throughout the 1990s emerged into the world with the birth cry of “This Is What Democracy Looks Like!” That new slogan, together with novel methods of mass democratic action such as the “people’s mic,” “action spokescouncils,” and independent media, became the words and the acts by which much

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this section also appears in Manski 2014.

social unrest has become known over the past 15 years. But beyond and below the heightened unrest and the globalized resistance of working people to global capitalism, “This is What Democracy Looks Like!” also spoke to new forms of organizing and movement-building.

In the United States, the nascent democracy movement met its first challenges in the 2000 elections. Many if not most activists who had been instrumental in the Seattle moment supported the Green Party’s presidential ticket of Ralph Nader and Winona LaDuke; others stayed out of electoral politics altogether, and still others supported other candidates ranging from the Democratic Party’s Al Gore to various socialist candidacies. Yet regardless of electoral strategy in 2000, the struggle over the Florida presidential recount brought together many key activists in launching a new wave of voting rights and election integrity campaigns, beginning with Democracy Summer in 2001 and eventually producing the 2004 Ohio presidential recount and the renewed push for a Right to Vote Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. (Manski 2006)

Veterans of the 1990s efforts eventually formed new organizations such as the American Independent Business Alliance, Community Wealth, Liberty Tree Foundation for the Democratic Revolution, Move to Amend, and U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, among others, and these in turn initiated new programs to organize small businesses for economic democracy, expand municipal and community ownership, launch student unions and higher education unions, defederalize the National Guard, strengthen municipal home rule, implement participatory budgeting, amend the U.S. Constitution, and expand the cooperative sector. Meanwhile, the Midwest Social Forum brought the World Social Forum process to North America, leading to other regional forums and, in time, to the first and second U.S. Social Forums (2007 and 2010), both of which featured a democracy track.

In November 2010, following the election of Scott Walker as governor of Wisconsin, the Liberty Tree Foundation began organizing a pro-democracy mobilization to be known as the Wisconsin Wave, in honor of the so-called “Anomalous Wave” of anti-austerity protests that had swept first Italy and then Europe in the previous years. The 2011 Wisconsin uprising revitalized the slogans and politics of Seattle and, together with the democratic uprisings of the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Chile, as well as the mass movements of other states of the U.S. midwest, inspired Adbusters to issue its call to occupy Liberty Square in New York City and others to call for the occupation of Freedom Plaza in Washington DC. The movement continues today on many fronts, but in an ever more coherent fashion, gathering within and in coordination with Occupy, a new series of People’s Movement Assemblies via the U.S. Social Forum process, the Solidarity Economy Network and New Economy Coalition, and a new set of national movement gatherings in 2011 and 2013, the Democracy Conventions.

The U.S. democracy movement is still young. True, its genetics are old, and its parents live. But the child is its own person and is behaving in ways both startling and remarkable. At the time of this writing, mass marches and shutdowns of highways, banks, police stations, government buildings, and shopping districts are proliferating across the U.S. and the world. The roots of the protests over the shootings of unarmed black men extend primarily from deep liberation struggles connected to but also distinct from those detailed in this article. Yet the

targets, tactics, slogans, and demands of these protests display the commonalities of social struggle in the U.S. today, transcending national and social borders, insisting that all people are persons, that all residents are citizens, that no one is illegal, that all movements are one, that “This Is What Democracy Looks Like,” and that the practical alternative to failed reform is revolution.

Pay attention to the direction of this moment, because it may illuminate what comes next. The illusion of the instant can ensnare the unwary and lead them to forget both context and continuity, without which we lack the capacity to develop the theoretical understandings that might prepare us for the years ahead. For this reason, studying the origins and emergence of the democracy movement can be thought of as a future-focused theoretical project.

### **Prefiguration and strategy: democracy as an end, not just a means**

For a sense of what theory might gain from this study, let’s turn to the revived discussion about the relationship between so-called *prefigurative* and *strategic* politics brought on largely by the rapid rise of the Occupy movement. Much of the current discussion has operated on a level of high abstraction or in comparisons of contemporary cases. Let’s see what we gain from bringing a sense of history and continuity to the discussion, going back to its origins:

The crux of prefigurative politics imposed substantial tasks, the central one being to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that “prefigured” and embodied the desired society.... Within and alongside the new left’s prefigurative impulse was what I have called *strategic politics*, which was committed to building organization in order to achieve major structural changes in the political economic and social orders. (Breines, 1982)

Wini Breines’ influential 1982 book, *The Great Refusal*, posited that the history of the New Left was characterized by an internal, unresolved conflict between prefigurative and strategic politics. If her contention about the New Left was correct, how should we understand the politics of the contemporary democracy movement?

The beginnings of an answer were provided by Gar Alperovitz some years before either Breines or Carl Boggs published their oft-cited works on prefigurative politics. In an essay entitled, *Notes Toward a Pluralist Commonwealth*, first published in 1972 and then republished on May Day 1973 in *Strategy and Program*, a two-essay volume shared with Staughton Lynd, Alperovitz argued for an alignment with a “New Populism” that called both for:

immediate reforming demands which can achieve small victories (and real improvements), illuminate tensions inherent in the political-economy, and —if linked with an explicit strategy— help suggest the limits of the current system and the need for a fundamental transformation ...

and for:

efforts to establish preliminary positive experiments which illustrate a basic structural alternative, slowly prefigure the elements of a new society, and, over the long haul, tie in with attempts to mobilize an effective new social movement and political alliance rooted in the vast majority... (Lynd & Alperovitz 1973).

Alperovitz's formulation is significant here as a clear articulation of a potential positive relationship between strategic and prefigurative politics – a *synthetic prefigurative-strategic politics* – that seems to have dropped out of Left consciousness by the 1980s, and yet which has re-emerged in the form of the U.S. democracy movement today.

Of course, the idea that prefigurative and strategic politics should be mutually reinforcing and not antagonistic was central to the New Left. The mid-1960s binary of SNCC and SDS moved forward as two democratic poles of a common front that both prefigured and required the new society. This front was a creator of, and created by, the democratic moment of the 1960s, highlighted by the Freedom Schools, Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), and the Black Panther Party's survival programs, as well as the Community Self-Determination Act of 1968. This was one in a series of such historical *democratic moments* identified by Richard Flacks (1988).

By the early 1970s, the New Left had experienced a series of splits, often within the same organizations, between vanguardist and democratic elements. The vanguardist elements sidelined prefiguration for strategies of centralism, clandestine cadre organization, and revolution *against* reform. The synthetic democratic elements, however, not only persisted; they expanded their work to new arenas ranging from the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the formation of community radio and housing projects, the New American Movement and the Tom Hayden-organized Campaign for Economic Democracy. These prefigurative-strategic campaigns embodied the very politics Gar Alperovitz and others had described in the early 1970s, and worked to realize throughout the following decade. By 1980, much of the Left was engaged in the politics detailed in the influential book by Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer, *Economic Democracy: The Challenge of the 1980s* (1980).

But 1980 cut off the expected democratic expansion. The sources of that break are well documented, including the culture wars, the rise of global capitalism, and the deradicalizing entanglement of much of the New Left in the political system itself. The Left that remained largely consisted on the one of hand of exhausted and much-reduced vanguardist elements committed to a strategic politics antagonistic to prefiguration, and on the other, of subdued and defensive elements that continued their prefigurative work in hopes of building alternatives to corporate capitalism, but without any immediate strategy for directly challenging the system. Throughout the 1980s prefigurative and strategic politics remained on separate tracks.

This counterposition aligned in many respects with the anarchist/socialist divide. Unless hyphenated (as in anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-communism, etc.), the anarchism of the 1980s tended to reject collective strategy as inherently tending toward statism and hierarchy. Correspondingly, unhyphenated socialists found prefigurative politics to be naive and accommodationist. This division surrendered a great deal of ideological terrain, leaving an open

field for corporate liberalism corporatism. Given this history, the return of a prefigurative-strategic politics in the 1990s, and its maturation since then, is not so surprising. Structural conditions had changed radically since the early 1970s. Corporations were ascendant, corporatization rampant, and the U.S. without peer. Under these conditions, and equipped with lessons and veterans from the 1970s-80s, a democratic moment could become a movement, with democracy as not merely a means, but an end.

Historically and in the current case, radical democracy has provided common ground congregating anarchist, socialist, populist, and liberal politics, and synthesizing them into a democratic politics that prefigures both the new society and a new, more mature movement capable of strategic action toward democratic revolution. Democracy movements, therefore, understand immediate struggle as prefiguration for later, more advanced, struggle. This in turn informs the strategic choices made in building the movement.

These are urgent times remarkable for the opportunities that popular forces have created for themselves. A movement imagined in the New Left, conceived in the rubble of the Berlin Wall, born in the streets of Seattle, and reaching young adulthood in the uprisings of 2009-11 continues to prefigure its own future and to seek the rapid democratization of the existing order. Those who fail to recognize the democratic turn of the U.S. Left, and the democracy movement that has emerged within it, will miss key lessons about the current moment and future possibilities.

### **Further questions in pursuing the democratic turn**

Earlier, I posited that as of now it is not the academy but the democracy movement itself that remains the greatest repository of record and analysis of its own origins, developments, and directions. Given the extreme challenges faced by any movement that contests the legitimacy of the U.S. establishment, the burden of inquiry into the problems and possibilities of the U.S. democracy movement and of the broader democratic tendency in our society cannot be left entirely on the shoulders of the movement's own organic intellectuals. Instead, it is time to begin an iterative research process centering on partnerships between researchers and practitioners. (Bevington 2005)

Consider how a study of the U.S. democracy movement might bring new insights to questions of agency, standing, and identity. For instance, what can we learn from how those who advocate democratization deal with the inherent subversiveness of democracy, which challenges us to continually question who is a person, who counts, who is part of the polity, and what forms of decisionmaking and freedom are appropriate? (Lummis 1996) What does identity formation look like when constructing a democracy movement; what are the subjectivities that are drawn upon as well as produced?

Think also of other questions that might prove equally important to movement organizers as well as researchers. Both will want to know how demands that directly challenge the establishment's legitimacy and authority – *democratic demands* – affect social movement access

to resources, movement sustainability, and internal dynamics. Similarly, how does the posing of democratic demands impact and interact with the relative success of achieving other types of social movement objectives?

What is an organizer's "job" when the movement's foundational creed stresses the independent intellectual capacities of the people? How about when the organizer's project is not *leaderless* resistance, but instead, *leaderful* transformation?

What is the role of the state, given that – as we have seen in the U.S. case and many others – popular constitutionalism serves as at once common and contradictory terrain for the various democratizing traditions of anarchism, socialism, populism, and liberalism? And again, what is the role of the state, given that the democratic turn has coincided with other critical developments of the early twenty-first century, including the rise of the surveillance and security state?

How do austerity and corporatization processes impact the development of democracy movements today? How does existing inequality condition the emergence and development of democratic forces? What does the climate crisis do to the strategic choice array available to pro-democracy activists?

What are the challenges to building a democracy movement in one country, and is such a thing advisable or even possible any longer (if it ever was)? (Smith 2008)

Finally, we may ask whether the democratic turn of the U.S. Left has been limited to those who are actively engaged in building a self-identified democracy movement or whether it in fact has included and impacted much broader sections of the Left and for that matter, of American or global society.

## **Conclusion**

“Stop yelling about a democracy we do not have. Democracy is dead in the United States. Yet there is still nothing to replace real democracy. Drop the chains, then, that bind our brains.”

~ *W.E.B. DuBois, The Nation, October 20, 1956*

As millions drop the chains of belief in a democracy they never truly had, there remains the reality that “there is still nothing to replace real democracy.” To build real democracy, a growing number of Americans have concluded, we need a democracy movement.

The democracy movement that formed in the United States in the 1990s and whose maturing influence we witness today is politically significant as a uniter of the divided political tradition of the U.S. Left and a challenger to corporate capitalism. This movement is also significant as an object and an instrument of study through which researchers may learn new things about social change. Democracy movement studies, and the study of the U.S. democracy movement in particular, may offer opportunities for collective action that otherwise we would miss.

~ [Ben Manski](#) is a graduate student studying sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Manski has a Juris Doctorate (2005) and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (1999) from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He serves as president of the [Liberty Tree Foundation for the Democratic Revolution](#) and has been a participant in various types of social movement work since the 1980s.

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