

# FAQ

## (UN)OCCUPYABQ

**Albuquerque's  
direct action  
direct democracy movement  
inspired by  
Egyptian Uprising 1.2011  
Democracia Real YA 5.2011  
Occupy Wall Street 9.2011**

The (Un)occupy Albuquerque movement began on October 1, 2011 when 400 Burquen@s took to the streets in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street. We consensed on a name change at our General Assembly on October 16, 2011 out of respect for the region's indigenous communities which have been forcibly occupied by the United States for centuries.

**[unoccupyabq.org](http://unoccupyabq.org)**

### **1 “We’re all humans – I don’t see color. Can’t we just come together as one?”**

Sure, as long as we do so without erasing the histories and current lived realities of oppression that exist among us, in our communities, in this country, and in the world.

If we just say we are “all the same,” we ignore or minimize the differences between us and refuse to accept very real power imbalances; this means it will be difficult to come together to effect change.

In order for us to build a movement that breaks down systems of oppression, we need a braver, deeper view of the world. We call this having a political analysis.

## **2 “Occupy’ is just a word, why give it so much power?”**

When Occupy Wall Street chose the term “occupy,” it called up the destruction of the past 519 years and threatened indigenous involvement in the movement. Indigenous people all over the world and any population living under occupation — Australia, Africa, New Zealand, South America, Central America, North America, Palestine — cringe at the word.

As Mathias Colomb Cree Nation activist Clayton Thomas-Muller put it, “A native person sure as hell didn’t come up with the name of this movement – or a Palestinian, either. ‘Occupy’ is offensive.”

New Mexico is home to one of the largest populations of indigenous people in the country, violently colonized, first by imperial Spain and then by the United States.

(Un)occupy Albuquerque recognizes the pain colonized people around the world feel every time the term “occupy” is used. Our name change is an act to stop this process of re-wounding and to try, as people of color and White allies, to take responsibility for our actions.

The term “occupy” also hides the history of colonization of places such as Hawaii and Puerto Rico which the U.S. continues to occupy, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan which have witnessed unnecessary wars, mass murder, and occupation by the U.S. and European military, contractors, and private security firms.

Activists in these places have spoken about the problematic nature of the term “occupy” and asked those calling for economic equity on U.S. mainland to do some soul-searching with regard to their use of this term.

## **3 “People who keep bringing up issues of race are pushing their own agenda. It’s divisive.”**

Calling out racism and other forms of oppression does not create division in the movement – it sheds light on the cracks in our false unity. Division came with the colonization and ex-

us work together.” (Attributed to Lilla Watson, yet probably comes from a collective process of Aboriginal activists, Australia – 1970s).

## **9 “This is depressing. I thought I was a good person and now I find out I’m racist. I feel like I can’t do anything right.”**

We know. Yes, it can be a blow to our sense of self to realize that all is not well. Be gentle with yourself – spend time with honest friends and committed allies. Take heart in the knowledge that you are walking in the footsteps of some of the most courageous, brilliant, creative, funny, and humble people the world has known.

If that doesn’t do the trick, maybe think about the fact that we are living in one of the greatest moments in history. Together, we are part of a transformation of beautiful and magnificent proportion.

Be brave. Be hopeful. Our current political and economic system is anything but natural and inevitable. As humans we have lived differently for many centuries, and we will live differently again. We can do this. We are doing this. We are.

*Much gratitude to the many members of the (Un)occupy Albuquerque movement and our fellow activists, bloggers, and scholars whose inspiration and work helped create this document: Jona Olson, Joel Olson, Allan G. Johnson, Jalil A. Muntaqim, Rinku Sen, Waziyatawin, Eda Uca-Dorn, Saara Azadi, Thanu Yakupitiyage, Bobby Whittenberg-James, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Occupy Philadelphia, Occupy Boston, Decolonize Oakland, #OWS People of Color Working Group*

Koch brothers (worth \$100 billion), but you don't have to run from Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or fear indefinite detention. You aren't followed in a store, pulled over for being brown-skinned, denied housing, tenure, or promotions.

And another thing about privilege – even if we don't recognize it, we recognize when it's taken away. Those of us with privileges have more to lose if power really shifts. That's where we've got to check ourselves - do we want real change or just a bigger piece of the economic pie?

## **8 “What is an ally and how can I become one?”**

Allies are people who are aware of their privilege and have taken responsibility to learn about oppression. An ally puts their lot in with oppressed people and says, “My well-being is tied with yours.” An ally knows that unless all of us are free, none of us is free and that no lasting change is possible without oppressed people being at the center of the movement.

An ally listens to and helps educate other privileged people so that oppressed people can have a break if they choose. (Oppressed people often spend a lot of time and energy explaining themselves to privileged people; this can be tiring and frustrating).

The process of becoming an ally requires a deep commitment to education and self-awareness. The first step is to look at your own privilege in relation to others. If you are racially privileged, seek out information about racism from those who have been doing the work; if you are privileged as a male, read up on sexism.

Three words of advice: Don't let guilt overwhelm you; Resist the temptation to expect people of color or women to be your teachers in this process; and, understand that being an ally is not about helping others who are “less fortunate.”

“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let

plotation of indigenous peoples of this land.

As long as colonization exists, systems of oppression, including racism, will also exist. The past is more than history. It continues to live today in systems of oppression – structural distributions of wealth and power, cultural ideologies, laws, practices, beliefs, and attitudes that justify, defend, and perpetuate the system of white privilege.

The white population of the United States holds an enormous unearned advantage of wealth and power. Regardless of who we are as individuals, what we do, and what happens beyond our direct control, this advantage cannot be separated from the history of race and racism in this country.

We can give lip service that we are all working together, but until work is done to make sure everyone is at the table and those systematically pushed to the margins are put in the center, we will not be able to create the world we say we want to live in.

## **4 “What do you mean by ‘white’? I’m not comfortable with that word.”**

By “white,” we mean both the system of social, economic, and political power in the United States, and the group of people who by virtue of their skin color, are included in and benefit from that system.

All U.S. institutions give preferential treatment to people whose ancestors came from Europe over peoples whose ancestors are from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world; and exempt people of European descent - White people - from the forms of racial and national oppression inflicted upon peoples from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world.

This is called systematic racism.

Race distinctions, impacted by geography, history, and politics, are complex and arbitrary. Racial self-identification is just as complicated.

The U.S. Office of Budget and Management defines “White” as persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. Thus, Lebanese,

Palestinian, Algerian, Moroccan, and Egyptian peoples are expected to mark the “White” box in the U.S. census even though they rarely, if ever, benefit from White privilege.

By the same token, Irish, Germans, Jews, Italians, Spaniards, light-skinned Hispanics, Slavs, and Greeks, considered “White” by today’s standards, have been brutally discriminated against throughout history.

## **5 “Occupy Wall Street is about corporate greed, not race.”**

The U.S. is a colonial, imperial nation built on stolen indigenous lands and the institution of slavery. Colonization and racism are at the core of the economic inequality we see today. Any movement to end corporate greed and economic injustice must also work to end racism, colonization, and all forms of oppression.

Dr. King wrote: “I am in Birmingham [jail] because injustice is here. [...] I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes.”

Colonization refers to behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economics that establish, maintain, and profit from the exploitation of indigenous peoples and people of color and their land and resources. Colonization and racism are not separate but work together to justify the exploitation of a group of people. As a result, racism is the strongest evidence of the effects of colonization.

Economic injustice and racism have deep connections. For example, the housing market bubble burst in 2006 and the recession that followed affected people of color more than whites.

From 2005 to 2009, inflation-adjusted median wealth fell by 66% among Hispanic households and 53% among Black households, compared with just 16% among white households (Pew Research, 2010).

As a result, in 2009 the typical black household had just \$5,677 in wealth (assets minus

debts); the typical Hispanic household had \$6,325 in wealth; and the typical white household had \$113,149 (Pew Research, 2010).

## **6 “I’ve been oppressed because I’m white. People of color are racist, too.”**

To say people of color are racist is to ignore the historical and current system of social, economic, and political power in this country.

Although individual people of color may be prejudiced against white people and may even act on their prejudices to insult or harm a white person, they do not, as members of an oppressed social group, have the power to oppress white people.

Racism has two components, (1) prejudice toward a particular group and (2) societal power over the targeted group. Only white people, as members of the dominant social group in the United States, are capable of perpetuating racism.

## **7 “Just because I’m white and male doesn’t mean I’m privileged.”**

Privilege is the flip side of oppression. It is the unearned advantages we receive because of who we are. Those of us with privilege, whether because of race, gender, class, education, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, or age, rarely recognize it. We didn’t do anything to earn the privileges we have and because we are part of a dominant group and there are always people who have more power or money than us, we don’t think of ourselves as privileged.

Whiteness and other privileges are the things we take for granted. They are things we don’t have to think about but we do benefit from.

Privilege is a relative term. For some white people, the benefits are greater or lesser than they are for others, depending on social class among other things.

You may not have the same privilege as the