

# INDYPENDENT READER

*toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .*

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[Home](#) > MOVEMENT AND MOVEMENTS: introduction to the issue

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## MOVEMENT AND MOVEMENTS: introduction to the issue

### Issue:

Spring 2011: The Social Movements Issue [1]

### Contributed by:

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In a sense, every issue of the Independent Reader is the “social movements” issue—from the very beginning of this project the goal was to provide a forum, a platform, and a resource for the multitude of social movements that are challenging the status quo, imagining and agitating for a better Baltimore. But for this, our fifteenth edition, we wanted to step back from the issues and focus on the movements themselves.

The phrase “social movements” is an essential piece of shorthand for describing those collective efforts to remake history, but it might, if used too cavalierly, convey the wrong impression. A “social movement” is not a piece on a chessboard, a self-contained, self-sufficient, and organizationally closed institution. It’s not a party, or an NGO, or a collective: indeed, it’s not a thing, but a process, a movement, a living, breathing wave of change and struggle that crashes into history, sometimes winning, sometimes receding, and always at every moment reinventing itself in a continuous process of evolution. You can’t understand a “social movement” without understanding this movement: the context that animates it, the affects that circulate within it, the hopes and fears that drive it. And you can’t understand social movements in isolation: their power, more often than not, comes from a whole ecosystem of movements, building off of each other’s victories, learning from each other’s mistakes, forming alliances and working in solidarity.

Looking at the voices and movements in the following pages, I find myself personally linked in a myriad ways to these struggles and to the people behind them—I’ve rallied with some, kept hot chocolate flowing for a chilly afternoon action for another. I’ve studied alongside some of the contributors, taught others, learned from all of them. I’ve helped raise money for a few, shared dinner with most of them. I’ve heard their stories and told them mine. And the process of media-making—of movement media making—continues this continuous process through which individual movements become a movement, as a thousand and one small (and not so small) acts of mutual aid and solidarity weave struggles together. Just in the course of writing the single article I contributed to this issue, I found myself not only getting involved with organizing a conference on workplace democracy, but taking a new job with one of the projects I was interviewing; consider this a disclaimer!

With all the complexity and fluidity characteristic of social movements, we felt that it would be productive for this issue to focus on these movements themselves for once. What makes them tick? What can we learn from our failures? From our victories? Are social movements always recognizable as such, or do they germinate in unexpected places? What kind of

foundation—economic, historical, spiritual, intellectual, interpersonal—do they rest upon? It was with these questions in mind that we solicited articles for the current issue, and while what we've managed to pull together is far from comprehensive, we believe we've succeeded in assembling some vital perspectives on social movement and movements in Baltimore City and beyond.

Betty Robinson offers a community organizer's critical assessment on the failed attempt to stop the Remington Walmart, and what the movement could have done better. Reverend Heber Brown diagnoses the damage done by white supremacy in social movements. Radical sociologist Kevan Harris shares his experiences learning from social movements on the streets of Teheran. Anti-Zionist organizer Mark Gunnery examines the increasingly vocal movement of American Jews opposed to Israel's policies of occupation and apartheid. Aliza Ess gives us a glimpse of the thriving DIY movement for localized sustainability, I investigate how workplace democracy can link social movements and economic justice, Greg Rosenthal from the United Workers reviews a documentary film about grassroots responses to the economic crisis, and Corey Reidy and Clayton Conn have an in-depth exchange with members of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. And on top of all that, there's also an excerpt from political prisoner Marshall "Eddie" Conway's brand new autobiography, dealing with the extreme difficulties of organizing behind bars.

This issue also marks a new stage in the evolution of the Independent Reader itself —while we're still committed to producing a free newspaper that takes an in-depth look at issues important to social justice struggles in Baltimore City, many of the people involved with the project are shifting their focus to our newly-redesigned website at [indyreader.org](http://indyreader.org), where we're developing the capacity to cover struggles and stories as they unfold, and where we're able to use the power of multimedia to help tell all these stories more effectively. As always, the Independent Reader remains an entirely volunteer project, and if you feel, as we do, that radical media making is an essential component of any movement of movements serious about changing the world, we hope you'll consider getting involved.

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[1] <https://indyreader.org/issues/spring-2011-social-movements-issue>

[2] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/john-duda>