

NDP 2011 overview (draft)

The 16th annual National Day of Protest to Stop Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation (NDP) stepped out in 2011 into a whole new climate of rebellious anger and mass resistance of the kind not seen in this country in many years, brought about by the Occupy Wall Street movement, a national upsurge of mass protest against growing economic inequality. The October 22nd Coalition (O22), building on 16 years of experience in resisting unjust authority in the hands of law enforcement, encountered whole new sections of society who were open to the message and mission of O22.

Also this year, two very promising upsurges of resistance to structural racism and racially-targeted mass incarceration arose in the months prior to NDP 2011: first were the widespread hunger strikes of prisoners in supermax prisons in California and elsewhere who were challenging the conditions of torture they were experiencing in long-term isolation units; second were the nationwide demonstrations against the legal lynching of death row inmate Troy Davis by the state of Georgia on September 21, 2011. All of these advances in mass protest and mobilization are happening in the global context of, and are to varying degrees inspired by, waves of protest across the Middle East and North Africa, and mass protests in Europe. Both of the Troy Davis protests and the prison strikes were supported by diverse sections of society, and O22-related activists and affiliates played a positive role in several cities in building the movements that sprung up around them.

Meanwhile, NDP 2011 continued in the tradition of years past of building strong ties to communities that have traditionally been the targets of the most severe police brutality and repression: poor and working-class communities and communities of color. Families of victims of police murder continue to play leading roles in reaching out to and giving voice to communities who are under the crushing heel of the police, while new forms of resistance to racist police harassment and brutality were brought forward in places like NYC.

The climate of discontent that has given way in these instances to open protest and an interruption of business-as-usual are all very promising and welcome developments. However, they are all taking place within a climate of increased official repression in the form of fascistic anti-immigrant laws passed in several states, the widespread adoption of local and state ordinances prohibiting the videotaping of police, raids on progressive and anti-war activists resulting in serious charges, and most recently, the vast and sweeping powers now claimed by the US government to seize and detain citizens indefinitely and without trial under the National Defense Authorization Act. We are in a new period of official repression that is very different from the time when the October 22nd Coalition was founded. However, these same conditions have contributed to the rise of new forms of resistance which we have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to join, support, and build.

Some history of the October 22nd Coalition

The October 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation was founded in 1996 by a group of organizations and individuals out of the understanding that police brutality and murder was a national epidemic, and that while it must be resisted on a local level, there needed to be a national response that connected all of these local struggles in a way that recognized the scope of the problem. On October 22nd of that year, the first National Day of Protest was held in over 40 cities, bringing forward people of all races and nationalities in powerful demonstrations nationwide. Public service announcements featuring celebrities, musicians, and family members of people killed by police were filmed and aired on MTV. From the very beginning, family members of people killed by law enforcement formed the backbone of O22. NDP gave them a platform to speak to the reality of police violence and murder that was almost never seen in news coverage of incidents of police brutality.

O22's strength has always been bringing together people and communities who are directly under the gun of police brutality with people from all other sections of society into a broad, diverse, and creative movement to oppose the epidemic of police brutality nationwide. In cities and towns where there are organized O22 affiliates, the connections built between family members and the broader community have become a powerful force, and have had, and continue to have, a significant effect on the public understanding of the epidemic of police brutality and murder.

In the context of O22 reaching out to Occupy movements around the country, the connections made between people under the gun of the police and people who before may have been more socially isolated from police brutality by relative racial and class privileges—but who were getting a quick, brutal lesson in what the police do every day in poor communities and communities of color—were an example of O22 doing what it does best. The importance of what O22 achieved here should not be underestimated, nor should the potential power of deepening those connections fail to be acted upon. NDP 2011 owes a lot of its success to building those connections, and O22's rich history of connecting diverse communities under a strong commitment to standing firmly against systemic oppression gives us a special role and responsibility for strengthening the movement as a whole.

Two broad social forces building toward NDP 2011: Occupy, and those “under the gun”

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement came onto the scene in late September, when at first several hundred, and soon thousands of people camped out in Zuccotti Park in the heart of the Wall St. financial district. Despite being all but ignored by the mainstream press, the protests quickly gathered significant momentum, denouncing the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots, or as it has now been popularized by the Occupy movement, between the 1% super-rich and the 99% majority. By mid-October, Occupations of public spaces were launched

in scores of cities across the US. From almost the very beginning, this new movement was met with violent police repression, knowledge of which spread quickly via the internet, whereupon it was picked up and broadcast by more honest journalists in the mainstream news organizations.

Early on in the Occupy movement there were promising signs of multi-racial/multi-national and cross-class alliances being built. A demonstration and “Day of Outrage” of a thousand people in NYC marking the execution of Troy Davis marched from Union Square in Manhattan to Zuccotti Park, where they were met with loud cheers of support from hundreds of people of the Occupy Wall Street movement, who at that point had been there only a few days. *[did national O22 or O22-NYC play an organized role in this? –Scott]*

As time went on and the movement grew, Occupations in places like NYC, Oakland, Portland, LA, and Seattle found themselves under increasingly violent police attack. Grassroots video recordings of the use of violent crowd-control tactics such as sound cannons, tear-gas canisters, and charging phalanxes of riot armor-clad cops hit both internet sites like YouTube and the nightly news. For many Occupiers, especially the large numbers of white and middle-class youth who were driven to protest by an increasingly bleak economic future, this was the first time they had experienced or even seen police violence up close. In these cities, NDP was taken up eagerly, leading to the beginnings of a meaningful joining of a movement largely rooted in the middle classes with a movement rooted in the reality of oppressed communities.

In places like Seattle and NYC, many people in the Occupy movements had never seen police brutality and repression first hand until the cops in those cities began cracking down on them directly. This repression had a profound effect in those cities in moving people toward taking up the cause of NDP as their own, not just as individuals, but in the organized collective form of the General Assemblies of the Occupy movement. This organizational support led to large turnouts in Seattle and NYC, and in the case of Seattle, led to the largest NDP in its history, more than doubling the size of last year’s previous record attendance of around 500 people.

In other cities, Occupations had assumed a more accommodating stance, and in these cities the General Assemblies, the decision-making assemblies of Occupations, strove to maintain “friendly relations” with police and other local officials. In Greensboro and Minneapolis, there was some support for NDP amongst the Occupy movement, but concerns for “maintaining good relations with the police” presented serious obstacles for building solidarity with communities who are daily under the gun at the hands of law enforcement. However, serious connections were built between O22/NDP and Occupy in all areas where O22 has a year-round presence. A statement on the Occupy Boston website supporting NDP captured the sense of the potential power of this connection: “Not only will we be rallying against the police repression of our movement, both in Boston and nationally; more importantly, we’ll be rallying against the police violence experienced by poor folk and communities of color every day in this country.”

As Occupy began facing increasing harassment and often savage attacks by police, the brutality and lockdown of oppressed communities across the US continued without a pause. O22 organizers were able, as in all years past, to bring people forward from the communities who were catching hell from the police, including from families of the victims of police murder. In NYC, a three-year campaign by the NYPD of racist harassment of hundreds of thousands of Black and Latino New Yorkers called "Stop and Frisk" sparked a movement of resistance called "STOP Stop and Frisk", which was launched on October 21st, with significant support from the month-old Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as support from the neighborhoods being targeted by these policies. "STOP Stop and Frisk" organizers have described the racist harassment policies of the NYPD (and other cities where such policies have been enacted) as a "key feeder" into the national practice of racially-targeted mass incarceration of Black and Brown people, and in the course of building for NDP 2011, successfully brought this issue to OWS and NDP.

The Call put out by O22 for NDP 2011 noted the California prison strikes as an example of resistance that people working to stop police brutality, repression, and the criminalization should uphold, and indeed, the fact that this was a movement started by prisoners against not only the conditions they themselves were facing, but the conditions of people locked down nationwide, is an inspiring example of exactly the kind of phenomenon that O22 has always supported. Reports came from inside of the prisons and were quickly spread via social media throughout society. Support demonstrations grew in cities and towns across the US, including outside of the prisons where these abuses were occurring. [*Again—any official O22 involvement here?*] Here as with the Troy Davis protests, there was a multi-national/cross-class character to these protests. All of this contributed to the climate of outrage that informed NDP 2011 (and, especially in NDP events in California, made up a significant part of the demands of the protests). Given the particular history of O22 in standing with those under the gun to build a broad-based movement, we have a special responsibility to build support for such actions, and help organize resistance to these unjust and inhuman practices, and not just during the National Day of Protest.

The nationwide rollout of police-state laws targeting immigrants also resulted in numerous mass demonstrations, especially in the state of Arizona, whose fascist SB 1070 became the model legislation which was soon adapted by the states of Georgia and Alabama and passed into law. These laws were also denounced in the Call for NDP 2011, and served as rallying points for local NDP events nationwide.

All of the cities that sent in reports to the O22 National Office for this, the first online edition of *Wear Black*, had success building NDP with communities under the gun. In Seattle, the murder of Native American woodcarver John T. Williams, which had been recorded on the cop's dashboard camera, had been major news for the better part of a year, and was the source of a lot of public outrage. In Atlanta, the killing of 19 year-old Joettavious Stafford the week before NDP

brought out large numbers of defiantly angry people. In Boston and Houston, victims of police brutality and families of incarcerated people spoke out powerfully at those cities' NDP about Black and Latino people being targeted and dehumanized by the cops, courts, and prisons. In Greensboro, the mother of a young Black man who was killed by a sheriff's deputy in 2001 led the NDP march through the Smith Homes public housing area.

The connections built amongst the victims of police brutality and criminalized youth through O22 is in itself a powerful force. It is the backbone of our organization, and the strength and perseverance of O22 families in the face of being demonized, victimized, and forced to live with the terrible loss of their loved ones inspires justice-loving people of all walks of life, not just in their local cities and towns, but across the country as well. As O22 brought the powerful voices of families into the midst of the Occupy movement, the resulting connections have been very inspiring. There's a lot to build on here going into 2012 and beyond. As O22 regains its organizational strength and reach, we have a crucial role to play in the movement to turn back the increasingly dire epidemic of police brutality, political repression, and the mass criminalization and incarceration of poor communities and communities of color.