

“WE SHUT THE CITY DOWN”

Six former Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM) members reflect on the mass direct actions against the 2000 RNC in Philadelphia



'Plum' raises arm as she explains 'solidarity' at protesters' press conference, flanked by Sandra Barros (left) and 'Split Pea'

October 2010

Dear friends,

Less than a year after the global justice movement dramatically announced its arrival in the U.S. by shutting down the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, thousands of activists from the global justice movement took the streets of Philadelphia for direct action against police brutality and the prison industrial complex on August 1, 2000, during the Republican National Convention. We called it R2K. Instrumental in the planning and participation were members of the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM), a multiracial radical activist group based in the City University of New York (CUNY).

With “Where Was the Color in Seattle?” (<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/seattle/color.htm>) Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez challenged the emerging global justice movement to grow its roots deep. SLAM had some ideas for how to do that. Along with people of color and allies in Philadelphia, SLAM argued for R2K to focus on issues vital to communities of color in the U.S. (See “Activists of Color in the New Movement: Lessons from RNC Organizing” by Philadelphia activist Amadee Braxton, available at <http://www.freedomroad.org>, and the film A is for Anarchist, B is for Brown at <http://www.scribe.org/catalogue/anarchistbbrown>).

More than 400 activists were arrested during R2K, many in a raid on puppet-makers early August 1st. While in jail for up to 3 weeks, many activists were physically and sexually abused. Because police destroyed hundreds of puppets, including skeletons representing the loss of 138 people George W. Bush had executed as Texas governor, the corporate media told the world we had no message. But we also created a new independent media, with collective use of internet, camera, radio and writing skills, which became Philly IMC. And while in jail, organizers met with “general population” detainees and publicized a list of demands: no more waiting 2 or more years to go to court, no more beatings, prompt medical attention, and more.

I conducted these interviews in July 2010 with 6 people of color who participated in R2K as SLAM members. The views expressed here reflect a range of perspectives on direct action, strategy and tactics, racism in the movement, reaching beyond activist scenes, and direct democracy. For more info about SLAM, please visit the SLAM Herstory Project at www.slamherstory.wordpress.com. Audio segments from these interviews are on the site, so you can hear these words in the voices of the people who said them.

Many thanks to Reclaim print shop, to Beth Pulse and Dave Onion for the R2K+10 exhibit photos, and to the *defenestrator* for printing a shorter version of these interviews. Credit for the amazing R2K propaganda images goes to founding/longtime SLAM members Jed Brandt and Christopher Gunderson. And to everyone out there, thanks for reading!

—Suzy Subways

Kazembe

Kazembe Balagun is a writer and cultural organizer from the Bronx, NY, who works at the Brecht Forum.

SLAM had years of experience with militant direct action before R2K. Can you talk a little about that?

SLAM put itself out there as an organization that utilized direct action in its day-to-day existence. Even before R2K, you had a group of seasoned veterans who were engaged in direct action around issues like Open Admissions to the City University, police brutality in the community – to put it in context, Amadou Diallo was shot by the police 41 times, and there was 41 days of civil disobedience. SLAM members were part of that. We disrupted CUNY Board of Trustees meetings. On July 4th, 1999, in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, we took over the Liberty Bell. Altogether 17 people were arrested that day, surrounding the Liberty Bell, and it made national and international news. There was a process of training we went through, and it was also training in consensus organizing, because in order to do these actions, you really need to trust the people you’re with. There’s a reason they call it an affinity group. In terms of training, at that Mumia demonstration, there was a conversation and wrangling around what we were going to do if the police attacked us, what we were going to do if people came and said some racist shit, how we were going to defend each other and care for each other.

What inspired you to participate in R2K?

The year before R2K, there was the Battle of Seattle. And before that, the stuff that was happening with SLAM was happening nationally. There was a huge upswing in student activism, and there was a huge interest in anarchism and direct action. And 2000 was an election year. The Republican National Convention decided to hold their convention in Philadelphia, which was very symbolic for them in terms of “the cradle of liberty.” For activists, we know Philadelphia as the place of Frank Rizzo parading Black Panthers naked in the streets at gunpoint. We know Philadelphia as Wilson Goode dropping a bomb on the MOVE center and destroying entire square blocks in the Black community. We know Philadelphia as the place Mumia, a journalist, writer and educator, was framed for murder and placed on death row. So to see the Republicans going to Philadelphia – many of us took it as a direct challenge to us to bring those politics around prisons and political prisoners to the forefront of the national consciousness.

Do you think that was part of the reason for the repression?

The ruling class and law enforcement saw the potential of a broad-based movement connecting anti-globalization with political prisoners, trade unions, and the peace movement – with a militant



REBECCA BARGER-TUVIM / Inquirer Staff Photographer
 After being released from custody yesterday, a protester who gave his name as Kazembe (right) was greeted at Franklin Square by Terry (left) and got an embrace from "Rogue."

direct-action core – as being threatening to running business as usual. The guy who was police commissioner of Philadelphia at the time, John Timoney, was in New York City before that and was brought on when the Miami FTAA protest happened. The learning curve of the police grew exponentially, and Timoney represented that, in terms of what police tactics to use: disrupt communications networks, massive shows of force, basically militarize the city.

Were you arrested at the Puppet Warehouse?

I was part of a team that was going to lock down on a major intersection, and we were in the Puppet Warehouse, and there were a bunch of SLAM folks there. It was funny, because usually when we did actions, it was just SLAM, but now we were with hundreds of global justice activists and white anarchists, and they definitely had a different style. SLAM was a people of color, women-led organization.

I remember going to the Puppet Warehouse, the idea was that the puppets would parade down, and then we would take the streets. It was crazy because we were sitting there arguing, and then all of a sudden I hear this thumping noise, and I see everyone running to the door, and someone shouts, "Oh shit, we're getting raided!" So people locked the doors, and we were surrounded by police. So

of course, we do what activists do – have a meeting. We're having a meeting about whether to give ourselves up or make a run for it. They didn't have a search warrant, so technically, we could have ran out. But within three hours, they were able to get a search warrant. So we got arrested.

What was your arrest and jail experience like?

It was 110 degrees that day. They had us in a school bus for hours. And subsequently, I passed out. I might have been dehydrated. I lost consciousness for like 5 seconds. People advocated for me, and I got dragged out of the bus by my arms, and my shirt, and my hair. They took me to the hospital. They had me handcuffed to the gurney. That summer I had read Assata's book, and I remembered her talking about being handcuffed to the gurney. Then they sent me back to the Roundhouse. That cell should have only fit three people at most. We had about 5, 6 people in that cell. I spent about three days in jail. It was a really tough experience. I suffer from very deep excema, and my excema kind of exploded and my skin was a mess. I couldn't sleep. We didn't have any access to water or phone calls.

By this time, my parents are bugging out. Somebody had called my uncle, who was president of the Willow Grove branch of the NAACP. Somebody called him and said something to the effect of, "Can you talk a little bit about your nephew?" He didn't say nothing. But the fact that someone just called him seemed weird to me. "Your nephew's in jail, do you know anything about this?" I just think it could have been something going on beyond the Philadelphia police department.

But also, the jail was fun, because we were doing jail solidarity. People started singing, chanting – the sisters were really holding on strong. When we were being processed, we could hear them. They saw me, and one of the trans sisters was like, "Kazembe!" Everyone was looking out for each other. And people didn't go easily. They had to drag some people out. Some folks got naked, some didn't give their names. Some people were really resistant, to a point. When they took me out of the cell [to be processed], they brought four officers, and as we were being dragged out, this anarchist brother locked arms with me. So they had to break him off and drag me out. To me, that was the spirit of solidarity right there. This was someone I didn't even know.

Direct action, done correctly, can foster solidarity across racial and gender lines.

What are some of the lessons of R2K?

A lot of folks went through a lot of trauma. Afterward, people in SLAM got really reflective. And it was unfortunate, because a year after this, Bush gets into office, and then 9/11 happens. So the whole entire tone and strategy of the world changes. I think back then, people were a little more patient with each other. Even though we were driving each other insane, at the end of the day we were like, "This person's my comrade." There were some difficult people in our affinity group, but we never kicked them out. We struggled with them. The Direct Action Network (DAN) folks had a lot of access

to information in terms of doing this type of civil disobedience or direct action. We also brought this level of direct action, and we brought an analysis that connected feminist critiques and anti-racist critiques to the global justice agenda. And I don't think you can talk about R2K without talking about the Quakers. When I got out of jail, the Quakers staffed a place where people could be eating food,



resting, drinking juice. That's what happens when you have a movement. Folks were really jamming, in a sense. It felt really good.

I think the lesson is that A) direct action is so central to the work of dismantling the state and capitalism; B) direct action, done correctly, can foster solidarity across racial and gender lines, and that's something we definitely learned; and C) we really need to maintain this sense of communication and national network, and be really innovative in terms of strategy. We consistently go back to Seattle, but the world has changed since Seattle, and the police state's learning curve has increased since Seattle. What are we going to do in terms of re-imagining our tactics?

Out of R2K also came the birth of Critical Resistance East and all this other great prison abolitionist work. R2K did help foster regional and national conversations on race and incarceration. It also taught us ways we can practice solidarity with social prisoners. I still think that the prison issue is a big issue, because when you're talking about prison abolition and restorative justice, you're really talking about, "How do we provide solutions to this society?"

Nermeen was a SLAM member for 5 years. She is a mother and works with senior community members in Queens.

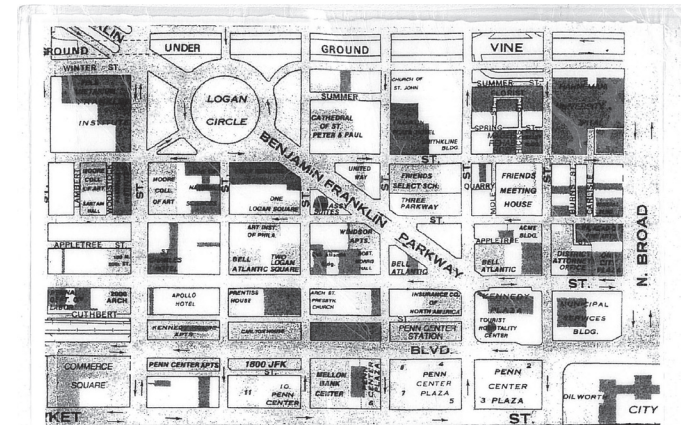
What was your plan for August 1st?

Everybody had wanted to be in one of those flying squads that was moving around for the protest, and I thought a lockdown would be much more effective. Most of SLAM ended up choosing to participate in different ways, whether it be media, or those who wanted to do something more flexible than a lockdown. I ended up doing a lot of things on my own. I had to advocate for more people to switch over and join me there. The puppet-making was beautiful and also strategic, because we were hiding things inside some of the puppets – PVC piping, which we were supposed to be chaining ourselves inside. So while a puppet might look like a big tree, our hands would be inside the tree. We wanted it to be both expressively artistic and practical at the same time.

I remember I was jealous of the flying squads. I did communications ("com" or radio) with a lockdown because that's where people were needed.

When the puppet space got raided, I was with Alejandro outside, smoking a cigarette. I never did get arrested. I ended up meeting up with SLAM folks and doing the flying squad thing. I think a lot of people want to do what's glamorous. It's glamorous to be like, "We're just gonna cause havoc and turn over garbage cans!" and the truth is, I feel like message-wise, lockdowns are strategically a much better concept, because it gives you time. When you're a flying squad, you're moving. When you're locked down, if a reporter comes and asks you a question, you have an arsenal of things you can say and make your message clear. In retrospect, now I'm totally against flying squads. At the time, it seemed really glamorous, but I don't think it's as useful as old-fashioned civil disobedience.

Kai was instrumental in making me feel like I could do what I was planning on doing, even though I never got to do it, which was kind of the crazy thing. We really did have this great plan. I can't remember half the details, but I remember us all fighting and talking about these details two months in advance. When they raided, we were in the last stages of getting ready to leave the puppet space.



We were going to be leaving in a few minutes.

A lot of our friends spent the whole protest not being active, being arrested. And we still managed to block traffic – people were stuck in traffic for an extremely long time and couldn't get to the

If everyone had been able to do what they were planning, Philly would have been at a standstill for the better part of a week.

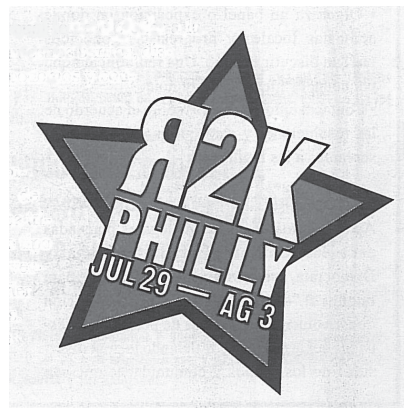
convention. We really did disrupt the convention. They were really spread out across Philly. They did it at an arena, but that was for the big event. The smaller events [were in different locations], because the arena didn't have different places inside, like Madison Square Garden does. The main arena wasn't in the center of town – it was off a little bit. And they had a space for us where we could picket if we chose. Of course, we paid no attention to that. We decided we were just going to strut across the city, and really bring the city to a halt.

And even with the hundreds of arrests before the actions took place, we still managed to shut down the city for hours. I remember some kind of interview, and I remember us laughing hysterically because they were really angry that they had to sit in their car for hours and hours. And I'm like, but that was kind of the point! Our purpose is not just to make sure that you understand what we're saying. Our purpose is to try to disrupt your event, and to make sure that you're not going to get around us easily. And we were extremely successful in that.

If everyone who was arrested had been able to do what they were planning on doing, I think Philly would have been at a standstill for the better part of a week. Literally, there were barrels of cement, with PVC – I don't imagine them getting that stuff off of us, unless people decided to unchain themselves because they needed to pee. Especially with the limited resources, because the police were spread very thin. And you're talking about bringing a jackhammer into this stuff. Or moving us, which is going to take physically moving us and putting us on a truck – it's going to take them a long time. So I think we would have kept the city locked down for much longer than we did. But it still managed to be 3, 4, 5-hour delays for some folks.

I remember seeing you outside the Roundhouse when we started hearing the grisly stories about how people were being treated inside.

I remember all the spirituals – it was the first time I probably heard a lot of the southern spirituals, was outside the Roundhouse, while we were waiting for people to come out. Because I didn't grow up in this country. Most of my upbringing was in a different country, and I moved here when I was 8,



and even that was a very different kind of upbringing from a lot of SLAM people. I grew up in a white suburb. I wasn't exposed to a lot of things as a child. My parents were happy that I could sing in Arabic. Recently, I took the kids to the Smithsonian, and they did a whole thing about some of the songs that were sung during the Civil Rights movement – and it was a bunch of songs that I had learned during R2K.

It became a blur after a while, running on lack of sleep, and I had class that semester. I believe I have W/Fs – “withdrawal/fails” – because I never officially withdrew. When people got arrested, of course I'm concerned that everybody gets out, but I want to make sure that Sandra, Chris – I want to make sure my people are safe. I think people were a little surprised at how close SLAM was, because people were still there two weeks after.

Kai

Kai Lumumba Barrow works with Critical Resistance and has been doing organizing around the prison industrial complex (PIC), which is inclusive of police violence, prisons, jails, courts, surveillance, and political prisoners, since 1978. She also merges visual art and organizing in an effort to reach the imagination and to help spark liberation, whether that's imagining PIC abolition or being in the year 2078 with multiple genitalia.

My folks were organizers in the 60s and 70s, and I came up during that period, in an environment that supported ideas of revolution. I started organizing primarily around Assata Shakur's case and a little bit around Dessie Woods¹ and Geronimo Pratt.² In the early 80s, I went back to Chicago and started forming a Malcolm X Grassroots Movement chapter, and we started working with a coalition of folks around police violence, in particular the Jon Burge³ case. Years, we worked on this case, and got nowhere with it.

What inspired you to participate in a flying squad during R2K?

In my work with SLAM, we had done several civil disobediences around Mumia's case. We made these decisions that we were going to risk arrest, and there was a purpose behind that, particularly as predominantly people of color, women of color, young people of color going in with a political agenda. We along with other radicals were critical of how protest was happening in New York. At the time of Abner Louima and other high-profile cases, the protests became pretty much spectacle.

The pigs were just on some crazy pig shit, you know? They were just wilding, not that that's totally surprising, but sometimes there's a little bit more restraint, and they were just buck wild. With Anthony Baez, Abner Louima, and many other folks who were killed or maimed by the police in

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New York, the people would get upset, and the people would stage these marches. Louima was a Haitian man who was tortured at the 70th precinct, raped with a [broomstick]. The Haitian community was really outraged. The night before this huge protest, the newscast was hanging out in front of one of the work spaces where people were meeting and making signs. And they were like, "We're standing outside the meeting where tomorrow there will be a huge protest," and I was like, "What happened to protest? Now it has become spectacle." Myself and others didn't see a distinction between that and St. Patrick's Day parades.

Many of us started doing direct actions and civil disobediences to shift

that paradigm. SLAM took quite a few arrests – in Philly around Mumia, and in DC and New York. At this time, a lot of us made the decision that we didn't want to get arrested – that we wanted to do more disruption than go in with an organized arrest. I was also part of an affinity group of folks who were doing direct actions, mostly billboard redecorations and banner dropping. I was making pretty clear distinctions between civil disobedience and direct action. So being part of this flying squad was an opportunity to disrupt business as usual, and at the same time, not intentionally put ourselves in the hands of the state. It's tactical, it's not a strategy. It's like, what tactic works best for this situation? I'm glad people made the decision to get arrested. It's all about making a statement, and it's all about making some intentional decisions around disrupting business as usual. We made a decision that we

wanted to stay out, if at all possible, and to be present on the street more than behind bars.

And you didn't get arrested, right?

Nope. Imagine that!

When SLAM was discussing tactics for R2K, you were fairly supportive of the black bloc, right?

One of the things I dug about black bloc was the thing I think everybody dug about black bloc: their fearlessness. I dug that they were willing to move as if they had nothing to lose. The critique of that is that they were, I think, predominantly white. They functioned as if they were predominantly white. They functioned as if they had predominantly come from a middle-class background, but I could be stereotyping here, I don't know. But that kind of freedom to say, "I don't have shit to lose, and I'm going to do what I came to do, which is disrupt." I'm seeking a certain amount of freedom, and that's what the black bloc represented to me. They were purposeful and courageous. The other thing I dug about them was that they were tight. For the most part, I didn't hear leaks about who black bloc was. Another critique is that they were cool. And being cool brings a certain cult of celebrity. But I think they were cool because they were effective. In the Philly action, we would get somewhere and the shit had already been dealt with. We were like, "Damn, the black bloc beat us to it." To come into an environment with the purpose of disrupting this entire shit, similar to graffiti, saying, "This is no longer your space. I'm taking this space." And to come into that space after black bloc had been there was to come into a space that had been reclaimed. And I have respect for that. I still do.

Was R2K going to be about police and prisons from the beginning?

No. It was a really good political struggle, because a lot of the comrades who were organizing these actions were really focused on dealing with anti-globalization. This was post-Seattle. There was a lot of energy and excitement about raising questions around neoliberalism and globalization. And then there were some of us who felt like, yes, that's true, however, we felt like we needed to link these issues of global capital to conditions of people of color in the U.S. And we felt like one of the most prevalent places to make that association was related to the prison industrial complex, because you couldn't talk about racism, white supremacy, capitalism, and not talk about the PIC.

And then it became a real struggle, because some of the anti-globalization people felt like, "This dilutes our message." We were like, "No, what you're saying – to *not* privilege this – further invisibilizes the struggle that we've been engaged in as colonial folks since we've been here." One of the things that really came out with that was some pretty heated and good conversations around

**We had to be like,
"Look, we are bringing
what this movement
does not have."**

*Anna Ortega is an aunt, sister, daughter, radical social worker, and activist.
She is studying about herbs and natural healing.*

sovereignty, self-determination, colonialism as played out in the United States – all that. What the folks who were really pushing for globalization, globalization, globalization, not dealing with domestic issues – what they offered was, “Let’s just do an umbrella, a meta-message,” and we rejected that. Particularly being in Philly, and although I am critical of dealing with political prisoners as individuals, in terms of the larger PIC struggle, it seemed highly relevant that we emphasize Mumia’s case. There was a lot of international energy around Mumia’s case. Like, I had been in Chiapas at one point, and the Zapatistas were asking us about Mumia. And he had had two death warrants signed. Being in Philadelphia and to not privilege Mumia’s case, in this particular moment, when the Republicans were pushing for more law and order, when the Republican governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, who ended up being the Harmland Security person – and respecting local struggles, respecting that people in this city have a stake in some of these issues.

And also, we had to be like, “Look, we are bringing what this movement does not have, which is people of color, predominantly young people of color, predominantly female-bodied and queer and poor people of color, who are coming to this action from our own particular experiences, our own analysis, which is completely different from the analysis that is currently existing. And that has value. And you can’t talk about pushing for a movement that is about getting rid of exploitation and not deal with people who are most affected by these policies. We’re bringing those voices, and their bodies are going to be on the line on this.”

We fought a lot around that, and eventually the resolution was, “We’ll have August 1st as a day of action around the prison industrial complex,” – and it listed out all these issues inclusive of Mumia – “and other folks will take other days.” As jacked up as that day was, in many respects, one of the best things about it was the political education we participated in, in just kind of an experiential way, in organizing this kind of an action. Honestly, it turned a whole lot of people off. And it turned a lot of other folks on. It was a learning moment.

What was it like doing legal support?

People were locked up, and we weren’t just going to abandon our comrades, so those of us who didn’t get locked up had to be accessible and available, and get our folks out. I think I was in Philly a total of three weeks. I was like, “God, I live here!” Not only dealing with the decision-making, and hearing that people, like an hour after – I’m being facetious, but seriously, it seemed like an hour after people were arrested, they were like, “We’re going on a fast.” And we were like, “No, escalate to that!” And people’s parents coming, trying to get lawyers and everything – it was just madness. The parents were like, “Why do you have our kids up here doing this shit?”

1. In 1975, Dessie X. Woods, a Black woman, killed a white man who attempted to rape her. She was sentenced to 22 years but because of a strong support movement was released in 1981.
2. Black Panther Geronimo Pratt spent 27 years in prison before he was cleared. The FBI had him under surveillance at a Panther meeting hundreds of miles away at the time of the murder he was convicted of.
3. In June 2010, former Chicago police commander Jon Burge was found guilty of lying about torturing prisoners into making confessions. Burge has been accused of overseeing the systematic torture of more than 100 African American men over several decades.

When I was invited to participate in R2K, I had never done direct action before, and I had never ran the risk of arrest in that way. So I went for a long bike ride and sat among the trees, and I just really considered it. It became clear to me that the different issues, police brutality and making a statement about how we wanted our world to be different – and I had a lot of trust in the people I was working with – that’s why I did it. I wanted to be united in that way, and to make a statement together with the people I trusted and that I’d organized with to say what we wanted this world to be like. It was a very empowering feeling, very strong feeling, to be alive in that way.



What was your role going to be on August 1st?

We had two different things. There was going to be the flying squad, and I was going to be helping people get freed up when they got pinned down, or I was going to be in the puppet space, where we were constructing the different pieces to be locked down. In having a conversation with the people who were going to be participating in either of those things, it seemed to make sense for me to be in the puppet space. But I knew there might be even more of a chance of getting arrested being in that space. And that's exactly what happened. The puppet space got surrounded. Some people got out just in time – they went to smoke a cigarette. The smokers survived!

Kazembe described being dragged out of the school bus. Were you on that bus too?

Yes, I was. That was horrible. They put these little plastic ties around our wrists, and they were really tight. Some people were saying, "This is too tight," and sometimes the police would adjust them, sometimes they weren't adjusted. Kazembe was screaming a lot – I think he was screaming in pain. I saw him in the aisle passed out, and then they were dragging him off the bus. Everyone went berserk on the bus when that was happening. There was definitely a moment of "Wow, there's nothing we can do – we can't stop them. Our hands are all tied." I was worried about him bleeding or hurting his head when they were dragging him off. That was devastating to see.

What was it like in the Roundhouse?

We had codes, like people could say, I think "purple" or something like that if they felt like they couldn't take it anymore and they needed to get out. They would let you go if you gave your information. We had decided we would start doing solidarity within for people who were getting charged with higher convictions, instead of a misdemeanor, a felony. So we weren't giving our information – we all just wanted to be in jail with each other. There were hundreds of us. It was really intense to be there. I just needed to sleep, I just felt really depleted, and there was nowhere to rest. It was something that I chose to do, but it felt intense to say, "Well, this is where I'm staying, even though I don't want to be here."

They kept giving us Wawa iced tea. I had such an aversion to that stuff – still do. I don't like Wawa. That's really when it hit me about the prison industrial complex, like there are all these products that are available that are part of the system, that are benefiting from the system. Seeing that was mind-blowing. Once we were inside the [county] jail, there were different hair products for Black women, and it just felt like, "Ugh, Johnson and Johnson – they're getting paid off of this too!"

That was my first experience also getting a glimpse of the different types of discrimination that happen within the prison system. Queer folks, and genderqueer folks in particular, were treated differently. One person who was brought over to the female section was really upset because they identified not as male, not as female. People said, "How did you get here? Aren't you a guy?" or "Are

you a woman?" And I remember the person saying, "No, I'm neither. I'm none of these." At that point, there wasn't really a conversation or dialogue that people were part of, understanding or supporting people who identify that way in that situation.

We got moved around a lot. We were held in some trailers, and that's where a lot of beauty came out. We did yoga. It felt really good to move our bodies – those aching muscles and hearts. People were using song a lot, and that was so uplifting. I never experienced song in that way. It was beautiful to sing as a group of people going through something. Spirit is really resilient.

Later, did you get to interact with the "general population" in the prison system?

I think I would have preferred to actually have been not with an activist at that point, because I think that's when conversations about race got really intense. Like this one woman, we really struggled with each other. She was white, I'm Black.

The first night, she really freaked out, and she actually jumped onto my bed, shaking to death at having to be there overnight. I was like, "You've got to breathe, we can make it through this." Afterward, she was like, "You have so much strength, it reminds me of these pictures that I took of these Black nannies holding white babies." And I was like, "What the fuck are you talking about?" That was just driving me up the wall. I was just saying how I don't think those pictures are beautiful. You think those are pictures of beauty and nurturance, and when I hear of those pictures, I think, "Where was that woman's baby? Who was holding her children while she was holding your children?"

The women in the Philly prison system said, "There were college programs [here], and they're getting cut."

It was really mind-opening for both of us having these conversations. And we just struggled through it. We were locked in a cell together, so where were we going? We just had to face each other. And that, I think, was really powerful. There was nowhere to run, we had to survive this together and have these conversations together, and deal with each other. And we did. She was a really powerful person in her own right.

Once we got into the prison, that's when we more were able to connect, so even though I was in a cell with an activist, when we had recreation time especially, that's when I really got to connect with the women who were in the Philly prison system. They immediately said, for example, "We've gotten more food because you guys are here. Usually there's one egg, and today there's two. They're trying to make it look better. Once you get your pen and paper, we want to tell you about our story. There were college programs, and they're getting cut, and we need those."

I felt very related to the women who were there, like I could have known them from anywhere. They took me in too. In the recreation area when we were playing volleyball, they told me how important

that time was for them. If the ball when out of the lines, they couldn't get it because they would be given more time in jail. And I was like, "Really? You can't go right there and get it? It's right there, it's right past the line."

It was just astounding to me, the type of control that was present from the corrections officers. So I got the ball. I just noticed my privilege in that moment too. I knew I would be leaving. I didn't know when. I was one of the people who were there temporarily, so no one said anything to me when I did it. They saw that also. That was really hard. Definitely knowing I had privilege, and also how they were experiencing that. Like, "All you guys are going to be leaving. You'll be leaving, and we'll still be here." They definitely wanted their message out about their programs getting cut, to go to college or get their high school diplomas, needing more food, those kinds of things. And the women who spoke to me were really happy that we were there. It felt like, "Good, somebody is looking, noticing."

Sandra

Sandra Barros is a student living in Miami. She was a founding and longtime member of SLAM.

What were some of your experiences with direct action in the years before R2K?

I feel really excited to talk about the direct action and jailtime experiences in R2K in the context of the work we were doing in New York. SLAM was a mainly student, people of color, women of color led organization that was based at CUNY, and I think one of the things that was really special about SLAM is that since its inception as a student organization in the mid-90s, it really embraced the idea of direct action. I had probably participated in arrest situations at least five times before coming into R2K. We were facing all sorts of issues, from tuition hikes and cutbacks in really important programs like Open Admissions to really deep community issues like immigration rights or police brutality. We felt it was important to organize the constituencies that we were a part of, whether that was students or the communities we served, and say in a very direct, immediate way that we were not going to stand for the changes they were trying to make to the university, for the resources they were trying to steal from the community, and just for the oppression that was coming down in New York.

And SLAM used direct action as a really successful tactic. For us, direct action meant everything from a mobilization and a rally to somebody who we were trying to bring our issues to, like the Board of Trustees at CUNY, or blockading the Brooklyn Bridge in protest of the killing of Amadou Diallo. I think what was really unique about SLAM and a lot of the progressive people of color led organizations in New York at that time was that that action was really driven by a sense of dignity that came across in how we carried ourselves, how we carried out the action, and the media that accompanied it, the culture that surrounded it. Very concretely and symbolically, we would take actions that, if you

participated, it literally transformed your life. It allowed you to say in a very concrete way, "Wow, I stood up for what I believed in, and I protected my community. I stood up for my community."

I really appreciate what you're saying about dignity.

I think about direct action today and the media coverage it's receiving. I think our job as organizers is to make sure we contribute to framing things in a way that is about saying, "We're taking action because the destruction in our communities can't be tolerated, and so we're standing up to that with dignity." And trying to bring across, you know, what is the kind of world that we want to build? If we don't want this corporate-dominated world that we're living in today, literal corporate destruction, then what kind of world do we envision? How do we see our communities? What kind of economy do we want to see? What kind of service system do we want to see? What kind of school system? What do the libraries look like? What do the parks look like?



Something that really inspired me in terms of direct action was the mobilization in 2000 around Amadou Diallo. SLAM was organizing at Hunter College, which is one of the colleges at City University. There were students from the Christian Inter-Varsity Fellowship club, and not only had they never been arrested before, but they had never even participated in a mobilization around tuition hikes. You had students coming out of the woodwork saying, "This is against my basic values, this is something that I need to stand up for, for myself as a human being." The media coverage was tremendous. And it was not framed as "these kids who are destroying things," it was framed as indignation against the murder of Amadou Diallo. So I think that direct action, and not to be cliché and talk about Martin Luther King, but I think it needs to be said that it really is fueled by this deep, humanistic core value of the kind of society that we want to see happen, and to say that we're willing, right in this moment, to say, "We want to build that society, and that's why we're putting our bodies on the line."

Why did SLAM participate in R2K and push the organizing toward a focus on police and prisons?

R2K was really seminal in that it brought together the global justice direct action movement that saw its birth in the movement in Seattle and the grassroots movement working in people of color and immigrant communities. SLAM played a leading role amongst people of color led organizations to say, "No, we have to be a part of R2K. We have to bring our issues to the table because they *are* the issues."

NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION AT THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST THE CRIMINAL INJUSTICE SYSTEM

A new movement is being born. In Seattle we shut down the World Trade Organization. In New York we rose up against police terror in communities of color. In Washington, DC we stood up to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In California we fought the mass incarceration of our youth under Proposition 21. **This summer we will again use our bodies and voices to confront the system.** While U.S.-dominated institutions like the WTO, the IMF, and World Bank wage war on the global poor, a parallel war is waged daily on the poor and people of color in the U.S. by a criminal justice system that enforces **racial and economic injustice.** **This August** we are calling for **direct action** at the Republican National Convention to confront the U.S. criminal justice system. For more information, get in touch on the quick.

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We felt that R2K was very natural for SLAM to be a part of, and we were saying, “Our communities are being affected, so we’re going to participate in shutting down the Republicans.”

Historically, the people of color Left and what might traditionally be seen as a white anarchist scene were seen as separate and disparate. What we learned from R2K is that we actually have so much to learn from one another. I found the Direct Action Network in particular to be very highly organized and sophisticated.

There were really amazing structures

of organization that were not only strategically and tactically important of actually shutting the city down, but that were amazing experiments in democracy. We would all be allowed to participate in these real efforts at saying, “What do we want this to look like?” We all had a part in creating that.

SLAM had the insight as a student-based, grassroots, women of color, queer folks of color group in New York to say, “We need to build these bridges. We need to connect to these other movements in order to have the strength to make an impact.” For these different communities and sectors of the movement to come together is what’s really dangerous.

Were you arrested in the Puppet Warehouse?

I was arrested in the Puppet Warehouse, yeah. I had been going to these amazing strategy meetings where I learned how the consensus process could be used really well. One of the interesting things for me was the idea of trying to work in consensus in a context of a minute-by-minute heightened mobilization. I think that there were a lot of good efforts but a lot of mistakes made during that time. The idea of consensus was taken – I think was utilized in such a mechanical way that we couldn’t even make real decisions that would bring the best results for what we were trying to do, which was have a mobilization that could also potentially hurt us and make us unsafe. So for me, part of my story was seeing in these efforts at democratic participation – that they’re not just concepts that we talk about. They can’t be used mechanically. When we were at the Puppet Warehouse and it was being raided, there ended up being a very large sort of impromptu meeting, and what we really needed to do was get out of there very quickly. It just turned into like an 80-person meeting, with folks – self-identified direct action anarchist folks – just kind of fighting over, you know, what is consensus, and who’s allowed to speak in this moment, and kind of shutting people down.

But really these were just like young activists who were scared and not knowing what to do. I can look back ten years later and say that. Any time I talk about my anarchist comrades, it’s never disparaging. It’s really out of an effort to just bring honesty to the table in my learning process.

What was your experience in jail like?

We had such an opportunity to interact with the entire jail system. Immediately we were in the context of all of these police officers and all of these – just regular secretaries and whoever worked in the Roundhouse. It just hit me immediately how these were Latino folks, Black folks, working class white folks, and they really looked at us like they had no idea what was going on. I realized that this was really going to be our job – and when I say “our job,” I mean the maybe handful of women of color who were in jail. Our entire approach, and specifically myself and a woman who went by the name of Plum Blossom for the action, was both to build bridges with our white anarchist comrades and build with the people who were inside of the jail. That was not just prisoners, but that included the staff who was there. Because that could be our brother, that could be our sister. That could be our next-door neighbor. So, for example, we chose not to resist the arrest process. There were folks inside who got naked, and it was all part of bottling up the system. It was a strategy, and I could understand the logic. But I think for us, that immediate relationship with people who were directly involved with the prison system was much more important. So if I could have a conversation with a cop, and let him know what was going on, I knew that that would have more of an impact than, you know, me kind of stomping around and taking off all my clothes.

We had the opportunity at one point to be in general population, and we were in a prison cell that was sort of open, almost like a large, open dorm room. You had bunks and gathering areas, a television was on. And I remember that there was a woman – one of the lady prisoners was braiding Plum Blossom’s hair. We had people offering us food, asking us if we needed anything, and we made a point to sit and talk with them about what was going on. What were they watching on television? They were like, “Yeah, we saw those cop cars, and we saw people slashing the tires.” People were junking these cop cars, and they were really excited about it. They were really excited to see it. But the truth is, they had no idea why that was happening. And when they heard us talking about, “This is about you – you know, like, why are you here? What is this about? Why is this jail filled with queer women, with Puerto Rican women, with Black women?” – when they heard us talking about that, you know, they couldn’t believe it.

People were junking these cop cars, and [the women in jail] were really excited to see it. But the truth is, they had no idea why that was happening.

The men were actually organizing – they came up with a list of demands for what was happening

Mariano

Mariano Muñoz is a CUNY student who works with children throughout the city of New York.

What part did you play on August 1st?

I was somewhat rolling with the legal team. I'm legally oriented, and because of my status – I was undocumented at that time – I thought I shouldn't be arrested because I would face imminent deportation. So I was doing legal support. On the day of the action, I was sort of like a double agent, in the sense that I got dressed as a reporter and I got my Indymedia ID. I had some other ID from a New Jersey newspaper. And I had a camera on me.

I was on the periphery of one of the flying squads that was actually a decoy to try to buy some time for another flying squad that was going to do the blockade, trying to block some streets. So once everything started – once you see your friends being attacked by the police, it's within you to kind of get involved. Even though I didn't plan to do any direct action, I was part of some of that as well. It was really risky. But once you're put in that situation, you just want to look out for your buddies.

Then I would just go to the side and wipe the sweat off my face and just kind of, like, take some pictures, and the police would run right by me and chase the people who were moving. I would stand still and just wait for the melee to go by, and then join them a couple blocks down the road. I didn't commit any crimes, and I didn't see any crimes committed except those being perpetrated by the police.

What kind of police abuses did you see?

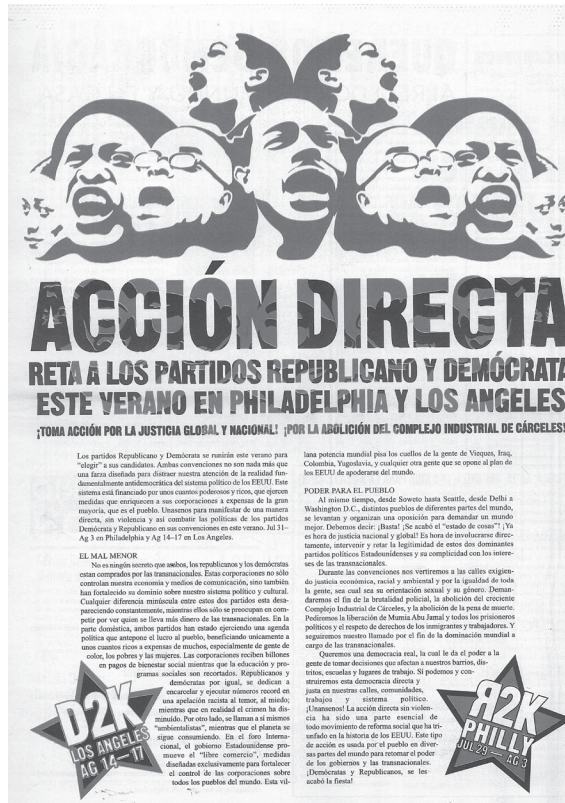
Philadelphia was in more or less a tacit state of siege by the police. You couldn't be a regular citizen on that day. If you were under suspicion of anything, you would get picked up. People got picked up crossing the street, and they weren't even part of the protests. If you were part of any protest, you were immediately cuffed and put in a paddy wagon. The police were afraid, and when they get afraid, they repress violently. I saw people get pushed and punched, handcuffed just for being around. People who were exercising their freedom of speech to stand on a corner and yell some slogans would get bum-rushed by police.

The police are always the ones that are going to riot – people just react to the violence that is being inflicted upon them. So, say, if I get to a corner and I start yelling, "Free Mumia!" and then all of a sudden I'm in handcuffs. Completely illegal and bogus. They'll bum-rush you and charge you with assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest. And it's your word against the word of three or four cops. And if you don't have it on video, you're in trouble. Luckily, a lot of those charges were dropped.

in prisons for the men in general, not the male activists. It gave us a unique opportunity to learn what it was actually like to be inside of the prison at that time.

Did you feel like you could talk more to the guards in the prison than police in the street?

Yeah, I felt like when we were in prison, I just felt like they did not come to us with an antagonism. There was an initial detachment from us. When people were aggressive toward them, or defiant, they responded in kind, and I feel that with the efforts we made at just making connections, they just treated us like, OK, you're cool people, and I'm doing my job. Which is absolutely different from any treatment that I have received in the streets. And I don't think that the difference in the cops' race is a small thing. I think that in my experience of being arrested in Philly, the cops they have on the outside tend to be white, and the cops on the inside tend to be people of color. That's my experience with R2K.



What was it like working with R2K Legal?

As soon as the arrests started, Kai got me inside the legal room, and once they got to know me, I was able to walk in by myself. We would just go back at night. The legal office was very crowded during the day, but at night, it was understaffed. I spent a few nights filing all the reports that came in during

One of the precincts let a good dozen people out immediately after I visited them.

the day, so by the time the lawyers and paralegals came in the next morning, they would find everything in order, so they would be able to move a little faster.

We also went around the precincts, and that's when I played somewhat of a lawyer character. I didn't introduce myself as a lawyer, but I acted as if I were representing some of the people who were in jail. We were trying to get a head count of who was being held

where. So I would go down with my briefcase and ask to talk to some of the kids that were arrested and say I had talked to the parents, they were very nervous, they wanted to speak to their children. Sometimes I would get some cooperation, most of the time I wouldn't.

We didn't know where people were being held, we didn't know how they were treated. A lot of people had medical restrictions and dietary restrictions. A lot of the people inside, in order to protect some of the more vulnerable protesters, they were withholding their names. Because of that, they weren't given their phone calls. Unbeknownst to us, after leaving one of the precincts – this we found out I think months later – apparently, the cops there thought that – yeah, I guess I was a representative of the people being held inside. They were probably minors, if I had to guess. They got really scared and let a good dozen people out immediately after I visited them, because they knew that they were doing something illegal and they had no proof against these kids.

How did it feel hearing some of the stories of what was happening to people inside?

Less than a year prior to R2K, Seattle happened, and they also rounded up a few hundred, but in that instance, everybody was let free. A lot of them didn't give their names, and after a two or three day stalemate, they were all released. Going into Philadelphia, we hoped it was going to be a similar instance. As the days passed, we realized that it was going to be the complete opposite. They were playing hardball, and they weren't letting anybody out that wasn't giving their names. The access they gave to the lawyers was very limited. And as people came out, we would hear very very gruesome stories of physical abuse, mental abuse, and sexual abuse. Some people were being hit with astronomical bails, like a million dollars for trying to block traffic. So they were definitely trying to drain the movement's pocket.

What do you think were some of the lessons of R2K?

We didn't have a lot of community support. That was an oversight on everyone's part – people from Philadelphia and people coming from New York and all up and down the Eastern Seaboard. Residents from Philadelphia didn't really know what we were doing there. Working class folk in Philly didn't know, and it was traumatizing for them as well. I saw it in the streets. The aim was to disrupt the city, no more business as usual, and unfortunately, working class people – we live from check to check.

So it's really troublesome if you can't get to work that night. It'll cost you your job.

There were huge traffic jams. And a lot of outsiders – people who weren't from Philly, and they had caused a big headache for people that were trying to get to work, get their children to childcare. Some discussions were made after the fact that one of the lessons to be learned was

maybe to do more groundwork, more community work, before organizing such a big action. You can't expect the corporate media to cover protest from your point of view, but before the fact, things could be done, knowing that we're going to have a media whitewash during the actions. Ultimately, the people affected most are always going to be the people on the bottom. As working class people, maybe you have family and two or three jobs, and you may not have time to organize, even though you understand the need, and you may be in agreement with the slogans of the movement. But if you're made aware of what's going on, you can plan around it, at least. We could have done a better job letting people know what was going to happen, and what kind of police repression was going to happen as well. I think a lot of people didn't know, and they started to look on us as a nuisance rather than freedom fighters, people interested in social justice. That's something we have to look at for future endeavors.



Peter Chung of New York City talks to protesters at Franklin Square Park at Seventh and Race Streets. The vigil yesterday across from Police Headquarters was in solidarity with the people who were still jailed after being arrested last week during the Republican National Convention.

FACT SHEET: PHILADELPHIA ARRESTS

INFLATED CHARGES: Some protesters were held for as long as 15 days in Philadelphia jails on misdemeanor and felony charges inflated far above historical charges for nonviolent civil disobedience.

PHYSICAL & SEXUAL ABUSE: Arrestees consistently reported physical and sexual abuse by police and prison staff, as listed below. Many of these reports were independently corroborated by legal observers inside the jail. Attorney Larry Krasner, who witnessed jail abuses, can be reached at (215) 636-9500.

PUNITIVE HIGH BAILS: One protester faced \$500,000 bail on a charge of "ringleading"! Other bails remain set at \$100,000. These bails are the highest ever set for nonviolent civil disobedience, long understood to be a staple of civil rights organizing.

REFUSAL TO RELEASE PRISONERS AS PROMISED: Of the original 480 arrests, a couple hundred individuals were held in jail awaiting bail for over a week. Police Commissioner Timoney claimed that arrestees were refusing to give their names but would be released on their own recognizance if they identified themselves. However, many in custody who had given their names were not immediately released.

HUNGER STRIKE: Many prisoners engaged in a hunger strike for over a week. Hospitalization offers prison authorities more opportunities for physical abuse of prisoners.

STATEMENT OF NEED FOR THESE ACTIONS: Kate Sorensen, Terrence McGuckin, and Paul Davis were all targeted by Philadelphia's "pre-emptive" GOP convention arrests on August 1. Each also were key participants in a recent ACT UP office takeover and lockdown at the United States Trade Representative's office in November 1999. The action was designed to send Charlene Barshefsky-the US Trade Representative-off to the doomed Seattle WTO Rounds with a clear image of domestic opposition to US trade policy blocking international access to cheap, generic AIDS drugs. Only weeks after the protest, President Clinton announced a change in trade policy in favor of "flexibility," given the ramifications of the global AIDS crisis. Al Gore - still haggard from the activist zaps along the campaign trail - told the UN Security Council in February 2000 that "the AIDS activists were right": the Administration should have done more about AIDS in Africa.

Direct action results in major shifts in the terms of debate, in favor of people with AIDS. So when public officials equate blocking traffic, clogging transportation routes, blocking hotel entrances, and stopping business as usual with "terrorism," "rioting," and "conspiracy," we must fight back. In the history of the AIDS crisis, and the history of the queer liberation movement, we have never won anything by asking. Every positive advance has been the result of struggle. But the tools of struggle and resistance are being taken from our hands.

SOLIDARITY WITH THE GENERAL PRISON POPULATION: The protesters incarcerated with the general prison population forwarded information about conditions in the prison. The general prison population has issued the following list of demands: the right to a speedy trial, no more waiting two or more years to go to court; prompt medical and dental attention, no more waiting weeks and months for essential medical care; decent food, no more undercooked food, no more dirty or broken trays; end overcrowding, no more packing six prisoners each into the multi-purpose rooms; end abuse by guards, no more beatings of a single handcuffed prisoner by ten guards; reliable phone service, system is constantly down preventing contact with lawyers and family; an end to headcount lockdowns, these are used to deny us phones, showers and visits; prompt credit of monies sent to us from outside and from county payroll; reasonable commissary prices, no outdated food; prompt response to sanitary problems, with toilets, sinks, showers, we need cleaning supplies; real rehabilitation programs.

DEMAND THAT ALL CHARGES AGAINST PROTESTORS BE DROPPED!

Contact us at:

August 1 Direct Action Coalition 212-629-1775 www.freemumia.com aug1directaction@onebox.com

For the latest information see:

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