A number of criticisms about racism have been levelled at the North American anti-globalization movement. They include: The movement is disproportionately white. When confronted with the lack of diversity in the movement, whites tend to claim that their groups are already open and accessible, or propose to solve the problem by doing ‘outreach’. White-dominated organizations have exclusionary practices and when challenged refuse to respond, calling concerns about racism, sexism, etc., ‘distractions’ from more ‘urgent’ work. Activists who can afford time and money to travel to mass events must be affluent and they protest at low risk because they know their ‘white skin privilege’ will protect them from police brutality. White activists position themselves as the experts and are the visible spokespeople and de facto leadership. Cultural modes (lifestyles, intellectual styles, meeting styles, and protest tactics) preferred by anti-globalization activists are alienating to people of colour. Local communities of colour are put at risk by mass protests operating out of their neighbourhoods. Anti-globalization activists do not seem to care about domestic problems faced by people of colour within the US and Canada, continuing a tradition of organizing which ultimately perpetuates white supremacy. Activism around issues in third world countries is psychologically remote and therefore easier than activism around issues of race at home. Privileged activism on behalf of oppressed others is paternalistic and salvific.

Activists with these concerns have developed a set of proposals which include: Anti-globalization organizations should prioritize ‘anti-oppression’ training and organizing techniques. Challenging white supremacy must be the primary work
of movements which seek to challenge globalization. Instead of ‘outreach’ and ‘recruiting’ people of colour, activists should go find out what people of colour in their town are already working on. Activists should be equally or more committed to working on local struggles being waged by people of colour as they are to international actions. People of colour have been fighting globalization for 510 years and therefore are experts who should be looked to for leadership in fighting the current phase of globalization. These criticisms and proposals draw on three anti-racist theories – Black Power, multiculturalism, and Racism Awareness Training (RAT) – which were hegemonic in progressive political circles in the US and Canada before Seattle.¹

Saddened, concerned, and surprised that people were finding the movement in North America² to be racist, I started studying this phenomenon in August 2000. This analysis of the discourse on racism and anti-racism within the North American anti-globalization movement draws primarily on texts published in alternative press and on the Internet and secondarily from participant-observation at local actions and the following mass mobilizations: Seattle/World Trade Organization (WTO), November 1999; Washington, D.C./IMF-World Bank, April 2000; Los Angeles/Democratic National Convention (DNC), August 2000; Cincinnati/Trans Atlantic Business Dialogue (TABD), November 2000; Québec City/Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), April 2001; Washington, D.C./anti-war, September 2001; and New York City/World Economic Forum (WEF), February 2002. My perspective is from what could be called a ‘rank and file’ affinity group which is not privy to the internal workings of the Direct Action Network (DAN), the Colours of Resistance network, or any of the host city coordinating committees.

I’ll start with a timeline of the data I was able to collect. An article by Elizabeth Martinez on the 30 November 1999 Seattle WTO protests (commonly referred to among the activists as ‘N30’) is constantly cited by anti-oppression advocates. Martinez claimed that only 5 per cent of the N30 protesters were people of colour. She then explored a number of reasons: spokespeople included in media coverage leading up to the event were all white, activists of colour were ‘unfamiliar’ with the WTO, feared being accused of abandoning community issues to protest the WTO, and were alienated by the culture at the activists’ Convergence Center. Her coverage of these issues is exploratory and even-handed, including quotes by activists of colour who said they realized they could have learned a lot more if they hadn’t let themselves be alienated by (white) protest culture.³ In the hour-long IndyMedia film on Seattle, first released in January 2000, the vast majority of the talking heads were people of colour and the presentation of the WTO focused on the impacts for third world peoples (rather than on deregulation, environment, or sovereignty issues). The film included segments on the prison industrial complex and on media portrayals of youth of colour which go beyond the immediate project of portraying what happened in Seattle. This emphasis was consistent in the second, September 2000, edition of the film, This is What Democracy Looks Like.⁴
Colin Rajah’s review of race in the Washington D.C. 16 April 2000 mobilizations (‘A16’) quoted activists complaining of ‘a sea of white’ and that ‘Black and Latino leaders were not even asked to speak at the main events, let alone to really help lead the actions’. On the other hand, a detailed report on those events by Robin Hahnel claimed that those involved in A16 organizing made connections with local communities of colour not only by creating ‘special materials linking corporate sponsored globalization and IMF and World Bank policies to local economic problems like gentrification, job loss, and bank redlining’ but also by working in solidarity on a tenants’ rights campaign. A key event was the creation of a squat by A16 activists in an African American neighbourhood. Folks from the neighbourhood were angry about the squat because of the increased police presence it brought. Fellow activists critiqued the squatters for setting up a squat without being well-informed about the community. Whether the squat folks were typically or peculiarly ‘clueless’ was debated.

At the Los Angeles Direct Action Network (DAN-LA) Convergence Center for the Democratic National Convention in August 2000, I sought evidence of the need for principles of anti-oppression organizing and anti-oppression training for white folks. Very little specific evidence was available. Two earlier incidents were cited repeatedly: in Seattle some activists had made comments such as ‘Black people just want to shop’ and ‘people of color aren’t interested in direct action’; in New York, the Direct Action Network (DAN-NY) had ‘refused to translate materials into Spanish’. Chris Crass’ uncontested report on the LA DNC actions described the use of anti-oppression organizing as a major jump forward despite anti-democratic organizing, the alienation of many anarchists, and such timid protests that the media felt no need to cover them at all.

At the Québec City FTAA protests in April 2001, elaborate systems of gender and ethnic equity were used at the bilingual spokescouncils and the protests were trilingual. Issues of class came to the forefront as neighbourhood residents who had not agreed to any action guidelines joined the protest, some throwing beer and wine bottles across the fence at the occupying forces.

Since L.A. the language about racism in the movement has become steadily more intense. This could reflect an increase in racist events or increasing awareness of them. While it is unreasonable to expect activists to compile a comprehensive, systematic empirical study, the many articles written on the topic provide little documentation of the nature and extent of racist events. Two articles provide some data.

Gabriel Sayegh describes his involvement in DAN organizing in Seattle, claiming that although ‘[c]ommunity organizations of color were very active in anti-WTO organizing … We made no effort to work with these groups …’. In LA, he describes outside white organizers trying to take over the DAN-LA organizing on the basis that local people didn’t know how to organize a mass action. He concludes that ‘while the white Left has not been entirely successful in replicating another Seattle, it has found great success in perpetuating racism and upholding white supremacy … Were we to listen, we’d discover our real
successes: not in our attempts to shut down the institutions of global capital, but in alienating people of color in these efforts … our vision of “what democracy looks like” successfully excluded most people of color’.8

Sonja Sivesind wrote an article based on a year of interviewing US and Canadian ‘grassroots groups doing radical political work’. She concludes that, both before and after N30, the leadership of Seattle DAN was ‘unwilling to recognize, address, and struggle with the issue of white privilege and racism’. People who kept bringing up these issues and who wanted to have an ‘anti-racism training’ suffered hostility and an incident of physical intimidation. A street theatre piece invoked slavery in a questionable way and organizers refused to deal with challenges from people of colour about the piece.9 The Sonoran Justice Alliance in Tucson AZ was resistant to criticisms of the exclusionary effects of their meeting location and style, misrepresented statement signatories as a ‘coalition’, and took credit for an alliance built by other groups. At the Boston October 2000 presidential debate protests, the Freedom Rising affinity group ‘disregarded … ongoing local work by people of color’ and a group distributed a spoof newspaper which used radical people of colour in disrespectful ways. Sivesind doesn’t quantify her data, but summarizes it qualitatively as follows: ‘white supremacist ways of organizing have been perpetuated across the country in the name of Seattle’; ‘all across the country racism is tearing apart social justice work’; ‘examples of racism being perpetuated like this are endless’; and ‘in most all cities … seasoned organizers … were wary of the “know it all” attitude that came with the boom in participation’ after Seattle.10

Colours of Resistance (hereafter ‘Colours’) was founded around November 200011 and has become the most prominent vehicle for anti-oppression organizing in the North American movement. Colours has gathered documents written from the anti-oppression perspective, some of which are published only on the Internet but many of which were circulated prior to Colours posting. Colours hosted a conference in March 2001 in preparation for the Québec City protests. Some Colours affiliates were involved in an invitation-only conference on anti-oppression organizing held in Los Angeles in August 2001. Reports have not been circulated from either of these conferences. Approaching the June 2002 G8 meetings in Kananaskis, some ‘anti-oppression’ organizers were saying ‘[t]his time we should encourage people NOT to come at all, unless they are from the region’ and instead ‘make principled connections with those people and movements who are already fighting against their oppression, in our own communities’.12

This essay does not attempt to adjudicate the generalizability of documented claims about interpersonal and organizational racism. Given the shortage of data, for the time being I think it is safe to conclude that enough of this is happening to take it seriously. Any organization which people of colour in particular are quitting or where complaints about oppression-related group dynamics are repeatedly raised clearly has a problem. Racism Awareness Training (RAT) materials, such as Teach Me to Thunder13 or Challenging White Supremacy14 (which
was developed specifically for anti-globalization activists) should be used in organizations where complaints about oppressive group dynamics are raised.

Having said this, I want to make three cautionary notes. First, activists of colour are not the only ones who feel left out or locked out of insider activist circles. Vanguardism needs to be disentangled from the issue of white privilege. The second cautionary note is that youth tend to be arrogant, righteous, self-important, and insufficiently respectful to elders. These tendencies are inextricable from youths’ courage, vision, and determination which make important contributions to social movements. Young activists holding many different views in the movement (including ‘anti-oppression’) show these qualities.

The rest of this essay elaborates a third cautionary note. Marginal rigid ideological approaches are easily recognizable as sectarianism. But when rigid ideological approaches are hegemonic, they just appear as correct. A particular ‘anti-racist’ framework has become hegemonic in progressive and radical North American circles. This framework has become self-enforcing. Any challenge to it or dissent from it is immediately described as defensive or apologist and it’s a short trip from there to ‘white supremacist’. Since nobody wants to be labelled this way, people are reluctant to dissent, which gives a false impression of consensus, but, more importantly, allows for increasingly extreme statements from the hegemonic ‘anti-racist’ position to stand uncontested. Most unfortunately, the fear of being perceived as pro-oppression effectively stifles any critical discourse.

In hope of breaking open some space for dialogue, I want to challenge several logics currently circulating unchallenged. I distinguish between these logics and the facticity of interpersonal racist events and organizational dynamics which I believe do occur and must be addressed as described above.

1. The movement is ‘too white’

1.1 The identity politics of white anti-racism. Something is at stake for white anti-racists in working on a project that people of colour are not hugely interested in. White anti-racists have come to know and evaluate their radicalism in part by the multicultural vision of racially diverse organizations and movements. Likewise, the RAT perspective conceptualizes white spaces as inherently spaces of privilege. Any suggestion that they might be doing something that people of colour do not like or want to be part of is annihilating to white activists’ sense of anti-racist self. Maybe white activists need to feel OK about working on projects that people of colour don’t want to work on. The fact that people of colour are working on something that seems more important to them doesn’t mean whites shouldn’t do what they are doing. A richer conception of multiculturalism acknowledges diverse efforts to achieve liberation according to different communities’ visions while expressing solidarity by showing up and supporting each other when asked.

1.2 Multicultural vs. Black Power work. While multiculturalism teaches whites to measure anti-racism by how multicultural their space is, Black Power sends them off to work with white constituencies on their privilege. Fair trade, anti-sweat-
shop work, and debt relief are projects within the anti-globalization movement in which whites are working with other whites to deal with global racism. These projects teach privileged whites about the ways they benefit from the global exploitation of people of colour and challenge them to take action on a number of levels to disrupt the international systems that deliver the goods to them.

1.3 Leadership. Black Power exhorts white activists to listen to and follow the leadership of people of colour and to refrain from asserting expertise. The most significant moment of ‘leadership’ for the North American movements was the Zapatista uprising. The most familiar scholar to the North American movement is Vandana Shiva. Ken Saro-Wiwa was perhaps the first hero of the current wave of anti-corporate consciousness. So white activists are surprised to be accused by North Americans of not following activists of colour. How should white anti-racists deal with different calls to action coming from first world activists of colour, third world/postcolonial activists, and fourth world/indigenous activists?

1.4 Goals. ‘The fact is that if the movement against corporate sponsored globalization remains this white in the U.S. it will fail to achieve its goals’.15 This statement cries out for an explanation of why race trumps age, consumption status, class, and urban/suburban/rural as the strategic axis for organizing a particular movement. Robin Hahnel’s prediction of failure is echoed by Chris Crass and Sharon Martinas’ ‘Challenging White Supremacy’ approach, which asserts that ‘the major barrier to creating these mass movements is racism or white supremacy’.16 Martinas’ political work was strongly influenced by a RAT-style organization, the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, whose principles start with ‘[r]acism is the single most critical barrier to building effective coalitions for social change’.17 Crass, Martinas, et al. don’t talk about being part of a particular anti-racist group, citing an academic work, Robert and Paula Allen’s 1974 book Reluctant Reformers, as proof that US movements which fail to work effectively with people of colour will themselves ultimately fail. The Allens are consistent with other scholars who find that white working-class movements in the US have repeatedly chosen ‘the wages of whiteness’ at moments when interracial organizing could have won more material gains.18

But Hahnel takes a slightly different tack, arguing that while racialized organizational dynamics should be addressed, he is ‘not as discouraged by the lack of quick success’ in ‘creat[ing] a multiracial movement against globalization’. He argues that local activists of colour will continue doing community work. ‘The movement against corporate sponsored globalization, much less the Mobilization for Global Justice/A16, is not the whole movement for progressive social change in this country. Nor should we make the mistake of thinking we should be’. Recognizing that activists of colour are busy dealing with urgent local and national issues, we can also hope they will find the time and energy – and every opportunity – to participate in the anti-globalization movement, and be provided with every opportunity to make their mark on that movement at every level.

The North American movement against globalization is also not the whole movement against globalization. The preponderance of globalization direct
action occurs in the Global South and is waged by people of colour. Most activist scholars cited within the North American movement represent concerns of the Global South. The most powerful proposals for addressing globalization have been generated from the South: ‘Monsanto Quit India’, Jubilee South’s ‘Don’t Owe Won’t Pay’, incessant ‘IMF Riots’, the Like Minded Group’s ‘no patents on life’, Zapatismo, Sem Terra’s land occupations, the Declaration of Food Sovereignty, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions’ alliance with farmers, and the proposal for a debtors’ cartel.

If we take the lessons emphasized by the Allens and others to an international level, challenging white supremacy means finally overcoming postcolonial paternalism. North America is a small part of the international movement; ‘anti-globalization’ is not ‘ours’ to decide what to do with. Our job is to do what we can from here to support third and fourth world struggles to destroy the sanctity and legitimacy of exploitative international organizations (multinational corporations and institutions like IMF, World Bank, and WTO). Of course we will continue to work on local and national issues that we were working on before and some of us who are activated through the movement will be available to work on these issues as well.

2. *White* anti-globalization activists don’t care about issues that affect people of colour

2.1 *Anti-imperialist analysis.* ‘September 11 threw many young white activists … into a tailspin … Meanwhile, young activists of color jumped into action and created mass antiwar-anti-racist movements protesting the bombing of Afghanistan, supporting Muslims against racist attacks, and bringing a critique of global capital into peace work’.19 One of the painful lessons of identity politics is that identity is a bad predictor of folks’ politics, so such simplistic delineations are rarely true. The largest US anti-war/anti-racism mobilization is ANSWER, organized by the white-led International Action Center whose largest previous campaign was to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Two of the major US student activist groups, the 180° Movement for Democracy and Education and STARC (Students Transforming and Resisting Corporations) took anti-imperialist positions immediately after 9/11. The US anti-globalization movement’s initial faltering was due to wavering on the part of radical NGOs worried about alienating their funders, not to any lack of anti-imperialist sentiment on the part of grassroots activists.

2.2 *Making the connections.* Chris Dixon writes ‘[w]hether it’s global capitalism … or state authority … connections to everyday lives are frequently lost. What about privatization of city services as neoliberalism on the home front? … The connections are all there … yet many white, middle-class radicals simply aren’t seeing them’.20 The ‘white’ sectors of the anti-globalization movement include activism coming out of organizations like the American Friends Service Committee, which has been ‘bringing a critique of global capital into peace work’ for decades and the Jubilee USA Network (formerly Jubilee 2000), which decided at its 2001 meeting to endorse the South-South Summit Declaration (Gauteng, South Africa November 1999) even though they knew that some of
the US constituency would leave Jubilee, finding the Declaration’s demands for total debt cancellation too radical.

If it is true that white anti-globalization activists are ‘college kids’, what kind of perspective might they have on domestic race issues? The biggest movements on US campuses the last few years have been Free Mumia, the defence of affirmative action and ethnic studies programs, anti-sweatshop, World Bank Bonds boycotts, and student worker organizing (many campaigning jointly with service-sector workers). Such students are likely to be more familiar with Zapatismo than Chicanismo, the Ogoni than the Black Panthers, and the environmental justice movement than the feminist movement.

Asked by a South African radio programme to explain why US youth, internationally reputed for insularity, are involved in this movement, I interviewed a group of young anarchists. Bemused at the question, they consulted together and then patiently explained: ‘We know that what’s happening to third world people can happen to us. We’re really angry that we are benefiting every day from the exploitation of third world people and that we have no choices about it. And we believe in the liberation of all people’. One said ‘because I have a heart and it bothers me that people are in chains’. I cannot find a single piece of data from the anti-globalization movement that suggests anybody is not interested in making connections between international injustices and domestic ones. People know that Plan Colombia and structural adjustment are intimately linked with immigrant issues in the North. They know that the FTAA’s privatization policies, under the guise of allegedly unfair ‘appropriations of investor assets’, threaten the possibilities for progressive transportation policies of the kind that the LA Bus Riders Union is struggling for, as well as the possibilities for affordable housing programs being struggled for in communities across North America. And they know that domestic anti-terrorism legislation undermines the possibilities for achieving accountable policing policies.

2.3 Working on third world issues is easy/escapist. The best data I have to address this issue is my experience as a teacher introducing undergraduate students to both domestic and international issues affecting people of colour. The legacies of colonialism are much more complex to teach than domestic issues of continuing discrimination, cultural appropriation, and debates over the relationships between race, class, and criminality. It is also much harder to help students respond meaningfully to their concerns about what is happening to the third world because neocolonial ‘participatory development’ projects are a paralyzing activist minefield – it’s hard even to figure out where to send money! According to Anti-Slavery International, there are over twenty million people living in forms of modern slavery, including bonded labour and trafficking. But there seems to be an implication that if it’s happening far away, activists who prioritize concern with it are avoiding the hard issues. If anti-globalization activists respect people who work exclusively on local domestic issues – and it may be that not all respect this as much as they should – those people working on global issues ought be respected as well.
2.4 The need for local campaigns. Exhorting people to give up ‘summit hopping’ or ‘protest tourism’ and work solely on local actions presumes a false dichotomy. There are individuals and affinity groups who do ‘summit hop’. I estimate that there are about fifty activists each in the US and Canada who spend months setting up legal support and other logistics for each mass action; the rest of us show up for a day to a week and then return home to ongoing local work. The proposal to do only local organizing not only abandons international solidarity but also gives up the empowerment, radicalizing experiences, and sense of critical mass of national actions. (Mass direct action is an initiation into community and courage which could be understood as part of the second Black Power project, organizing a ‘white power bloc dedicated to the goals of a free, open society’.) It should also be noted that when groups take advantage of other groups’ organizing to try to talk people into abandoning that action and doing something different (like going home and just supporting existing local struggles), we usually call it ‘sectarianism’.

3. Protest culture is white culture

3.1 Whites don’t like it either. One of Martinez’s interviewees at Seattle is quoted as saying: ‘When we walked in, the room was filled with young whites calling themselves anarchists. There was a pungent smell, many had not showered. We just couldn’t relate to the scene’. Savegh put the problem more generally: ‘the Convergence Center was a space created exclusively by, and thus for, white people …. Predictably, the very center where activists were meant to learn skills to shut down the WTO was thus largely inaccessible to people of color’. Yet people of colour were not the only people alienated by the culture in the Convergence Center and other spaces. A minority of whites, and a minority of people of colour, are attracted to hippy and punk cultures. Few of us are comfortable living in public spaces for days on end.

In Seattle, the first scouts from my affinity group came back from the Convergence saying ‘that place is crazy!’ But we knew that it had not been designed with our comfort in mind. It seemed obvious that people were sleeping there who had no other place, people were dirty because they had no opportunity to get clean, and the atmosphere was intense because people were trying to organize something big quickly, somewhat clandestinely, and with improvised resources. Now our orientation packets for first-timers say ‘the Convergence is not a pleasant or comfortable place. Nevertheless you must spend a great deal of time there in order to help out and learn what’s happening’.

3.2 On the cheap. Convergence spaces tend to be dirty and unappealing in large part because very little money is spent making them nice. Likewise, in order to make participation in actions affordable, activists don’t stay in hotels or travel by airplane. Often our generous hosts and campsites cannot accommodate daily showers for everyone. Long days of action and meetings also limit the time spent on the appearance and cleanliness of activists and our spaces. Most of us smell better when we’re at home.

3.3 Consumption. This focus also avoids serious conversation about first world
consumption and global injustice. One letter to the editor in Colorlines contended: ‘Seattle DAN folks romanticize the wholesale abandonment of mainstream culture. They boast of dumpster-diving and television-smashing, dream of self-sufficiency … But of course, dropping out of society has a different appeal for those who have always-already been invited to participate fully than it does for those whose invitation is eternally lost in the mail’. No one could deny that having access to consumers’ goods brings comfort, and even a sense of dignity, to those so long denied them. But why would people of colour be exempt from dealing with the destructive effects of first world consumerism? The amelioration of inequality in the first world through widening the base of mass consumption relies considerably on the resources of the third and fourth worlds. Reducing first world consumption is certainly not a sufficient strategy for confronting globalization, but it will be part of any plan for global justice, the real cost of which is not the risks we take in the streets but allowing third and fourth world peoples to keep their resources for their own uses. Some people have worked on creating alternative forms of identity and celebration (‘Look what I found in the dumpster!’) to go along with their attempt to take responsibility for the racist effects of first world consumption.

4. Direct action is a privileged form of activism

4.1 Safety. It is claimed that as part of the benefits of white supremacy package white people get to choose when to interact with police, while people of colour are always already subject to excessive police attention and harsher sentencing. Thus choosing to do direct action or civil disobedience is an expression of white privilege. But every anti-globalization mass action has included ‘safe’, permitted options. The protests at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles included 27 legal/’safe’ activities. In New York at the February 2002 World Economic Forum protests, although a legal permitted rally was already organized by ANSWER, the direct action organizers put all their energy into a second, simultaneous legal/’safe’ march.

4.2 Direct action. According to Emcee Lynx, an Organizer of the Hip Hop Congress, ‘direct action has a long and proud tradition in movements of oppressed peoples for self-determination and autonomy (and the anarchist movement in particular) as action that directly accomplishes participants’ goals instead of demanding that someone else fix the problem for them’. According to this definition, ‘permitted marches and rallies are never direct action and – unless the purpose of the march is to assert the right to gather and march without a permit – unpermitted marches are not either’. Direct action can be distinguished from civil disobedience on the basis that ‘civil disobedience is indirect; it is based on the idea – advanced by Tolstoy (an anarchist!) – of a soul-force that changes people’s hearts and minds by acting nonviolently with pure intent’. Whereas ‘[d]irect action is the act of taking direct control over one’s own life and destiny and doing what needs to be done without taking orders from anyone or attempting to influence anyone’. Lynx asserts that both are necessary.
DAN-LA organizers, focused on the goal of ‘bringing a diverse and radical movement to the streets’, chose to organize only permitted marches (and no direct action) in an attempt to make the protests ‘safe’ for ‘unarrestable’ undocumented people, already ‘over-arrested’ people of colour, and people who could be facing ‘three strikes’ life sentences. What is confusing is the insistence that by associating non-radical tactics (‘safety’) with a radical ideology (‘anti-oppression’) they could appropriate the name for radical tactics (‘direct action’). We need to consistently distinguish between radical ideology and radical tactics; they are not synonymous.

4.3 Affluence & privilege. Traveling to protests, risking direct action, and being willing to spend time in jail have been interpreted as privileges and proofs of affluence. People who have chosen the security of regular jobs and the joys of children have been positioned as unable to ‘afford’ mass actions. Should people stay home because other people cannot afford to go? If we accept the logic being proposed here, we would also have to insist that people who have time, transportation resources, and surplus energy to organize local activism should refrain from doing so because they are relatively privileged compared with other people in their town.

More importantly, these one-dimensional characterizations betray impoverished conceptions of agency, diversity, and organizing. There are people in every social position who are unwilling to take risks. The burden is on organizers to design actions with a wide variety of roles and risks so that everyone who is interested can be involved and empowered. As one LA organizer interviewed by Sayegh put it: ‘The actions against the DNC would have happened whether white people showed up from out of town or not. We were just worried about what to do with them once they got here’. If we are interested in winning this struggle, we need every available resource. Do we deal with privilege by berating individuals for having it or by mobilizing their affluence, flexibility, and peculiar tolerances in a strategy designed to win this struggle?

4.4 Who wants to be safe? What is the relationship between privilege, willingness to take risks, and preference for radical tactics? It is paternalistic to suggest that marginalized people are not interested in and should not be invited to take risks. For instance, the gays who first fought back against police raids leading to the 1969 Stonewall riots (which inspired a new wave of gay liberation in the US) were not, in fact, the most privileged, with the least to ‘lose’. They were crossdressers of colour, the most marginalized and unsafe group. Also people’s ideas about risk evolve in particular situations. In Seattle, plenty of union members thought they couldn’t risk much and then their perspective changed in the situation.

Suggestions

It is my hope that this analysis will assist anti-globalization activists to move toward more careful dialogue about our theories of action and participation. General prescriptions seem trite here, but a few may be in order. First, we must be vigilant about rumour control as the spreading of rumours is a very inexpensive way to create divisions between us. Before repeating that ‘DAN-NY refused
to translate materials into Spanish’ too many times, send an email and check out what actually happened.

Second, whenever people are in pain or feeling marginalized, even if the articulation of that pain makes others uncomfortable, we must respond seriously and meaningfully within our organizations. We must deal with specific incidents of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. that arise in our organizing.

Third, we must be consistent in thinking critically about the development of hegemonic ideas within our own circles and always create space for dissent and diversity. Indeed, the more sure we may be about a particular approach, the more we must push ourselves to protect spaces for dissent, just in case we are wrong. (This is painfully clear in the context of ‘US patriotism’ right now.) Respecting dissent means refraining from trivializing, bullying, stigmatizing with the use of words like ‘apologist’, or psychologizing dissent as ‘defensiveness’ or ‘resistance’.

Fourth, stereotyping and wholesale accusations are not going to advance solidarity around political projects. Rather than promulgating logics describing international work as escapist, domestic work as short-sighted, or making suppositions like ‘Black people just want to shop’, or ‘white activists went into a tailspin’, we should challenge specific instances of failure to show solidarity.

Fifth, we need to initiate a slow, careful, and respectful dialogue about the question of organizing. Political organizing, like ‘anti-racism’, has a hegemonic form in which an ‘organizer’ makes one-on-one contacts with people, building a movement in a slow process of ‘empowering’ them to organize to deal with their issues. Some critics find this approach elitist, condescending, or even ‘missionary’. Alternative approaches range from using ‘fun’, cultural rupture, or militancy to get people excited about participating. Acknowledging these and other alternative approaches to organizing enables us to understand that direct action types do not disdain organizing, they just have a different idea about what might empower people. Spontaneously taking and holding space, witnessing the cops back down, building a barricade with strangers who speak different languages, creatively disrupting elite procedures or messages – these experiences empower and organize people too. Even breaking corporate retail stores’ windows can be understood as a ‘small winnable issue’ in the classic community organizing conception of slowly developing empowerment. Clearly, different kinds of organizing and activities appeal to different people. Having acknowledged this, we also need to remember that people who favour direct action may also be involved in the hegemonic form of organizing at some time.

Sixth, we must continue the already vigorous dialogue on ‘diversity of tactics’. This concept has been developed to provide equal respect to candlelight vigils, property crime, permitted marches, and everything in between. It is an approach which has yet to be perfected. Within a ‘diversity of tactics’ framework in Québec City, direct actions had the effect of tactical totalizing. Once the police started attacking, only two forms of protest were possible: throwing things at the cops or breathing in the gas (at various distances from the perimeter) in a valiant (and, for some, empowering) effort simply to be present. Scott Weinstein wrote
‘[a]s some of us predicted, when you mix tactics the most provocative tactic against property or the police absorbs all others’. Mark Engler argued that the lack of ‘non-violence guidelines’ and ‘discipline’ led to an ‘uncontrolled melee’ and ‘made spectators of those who might have had a supporting role’, limiting ‘the real diversity of protest’. Of course it’s not clear that ‘red’ actions as opposed to green (safe) or yellow (non-violent) ones are entirely to blame for the police attack. In Seattle it was effective non-violent civil disobedience which brought on the police attack — the broken windows were blocks away and hours later. In New York for World Economic Forum there was an increased awareness of the relationships between areas and actions. We used the phrases ‘yellowish-green’ and ‘greenish-yellow’, and talked at length about how to effect a transition from a ‘green day’ to a ‘yellow night’ while making sure to inform people fully. At the last minute, a spontaneous spokescouncil halted this transition entirely due to the presence of children and other ‘unarrestables’ who were trapped in the area that was supposed to ‘turn yellow’.

Awareness and responsiveness to protesters’ needs for safety must continue to develop. The Zapatistas provided the theory of ‘one no, many yeses’. Recently, other Southern Cone activists have developed the concept of ‘specifismo’ to encourage fluid shifting of tactics appropriate to the situation. Let’s work to collaborate respectfully in our diversity of approaches to anti-globalization and anti-oppression.

NOTES

This essay depends heavily on two years of dialogue with Brian Cairns. It is written with great trepidation.

1 In 1967, Stokely Carmichael & Charles V. Hamilton argued that if liberation was to go beyond integration, Black Power needed to be developed entirely independent of even the most sympathetic White Power. Whites could contribute to building Black Power in three ways: 1) ‘go into their own communities – which is where racism exists – and work to get rid of it’; 2) use their access to poor white communities to ‘creat[e] a poor-white power block dedicated to the goals of a free, open society’; 3) when called upon for support, follow Black leadership and respect Black wisdom, skills, and self-determination (Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America, New York: Random House, 1967).

As part of the development of the Power perspective, 1960s movements rejected assimilation and positioned culture as an important part of empowerment. ‘Multiculturalism’ has come to signify a variety of at times acrimoniously competing activities in cultural curation, education, anti-racist activism, and government policy. Its most radical interpretations of self-determination have proposed anarchist-type theories of decentralized control and mutual aid between communities in order to enable ‘all
cultures to survive and thrive’ (Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development*, Boston: South End Press, 1981). At its most common, white progressive activists and organizations now are judged (and shape their identity) in part by the diversity visible in their political and social lives.

In 1978, responding to a US military crisis involving interracial tension among enlisted men, Judith Katz developed ‘Racism Awareness Training’ (RAT). This program aimed to train whites to be better community members by helping them to ‘take responsibility’ for their power, privilege, and unconscious racism (*White awareness: Handbook for anti-racism training*, Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). More radical subsequent versions have used this awareness as the starting point for eliciting commitments to anti-racist political practices. Amalavander Sivanandan critiques the RAT approach for separating race from class and is concerned that the emphasis on personalistic relationships to oppression permits capitalism to carry on its racist projects (‘RAT and the Degradation of Black Struggle’, *Race & Class*, 25(4), 1985, reprinted in *Communities of Resistance*, London: Verso, 1990).

2 The Canadian and US anti-globalization movements share practices but are distinct, as are the two nations’ histories of and discourses on racism. Specific forms of ‘anti-racism’ have traveled between the US, Britain, and Canada.

3 Elizabeth Martinez, ‘Where was the Color in Seattle?: ‘Looking for reasons why the Great Battle was so white’, circulated on the Internet shortly after N30 and eventually published in *Colorlines*, 3.1, Spring 2000.


9 Sivesind does not specify when, where, or by which group this street theatre was proposed and/or performed.


11 Colours’ website does not provide a founding date. Infoshop.org, a
reputable source for such information, lists the Colours website as ‘new on the web’ in November 2000. Colours is housed in Montréal.

12 Yutaka Dirks, ‘Doing things differently this time: Kananaskis G8 meeting and movement building’, posted on Colours of Resistance website http://www.tao.ca/~colours, n.d..


15 Hahnle, ‘Speaking truth to power’.


http://www.thepeoplesinstitute.org. Interestingly, the Institute ran a workshop in Seattle during N30 and took no interest in the WTO protests.


21 Martinez, ‘Where was the Color?’

22 Sayegh, ‘Redefining’.

23 Sage Wilson, letter to the editor, Colorlines 3.2, Summer 2000.


25 Crass, ‘Thoughts and reflections’.

26 Sayegh, ‘Redefining’.


29 ‘Green’ means ‘safe’ activities which are supposed to run no risk of arrest or police attack either because they are strictly legal or because they have state permits. ‘Yellow’ is classic civil disobedience and non-violent direct action which, depending on the situation, could result in arrest or police attack, but which also could end up being safe. ‘Red’ are tactics expected to attract police aggression (this could include property crime, trying to cross police
lines, or non-violent direct actions such as a lock-down in a particularly sensitive area). Since planned ‘red’ actions are more secretive and might be organized with a small affinity group, participants might also be more vulnerable simply because fewer people will be around.