

We, the membership of Sociologists Without Borders write in solidarity with and in support of the Occupy Wall Street movement now underway in cities all over the US and the world. Many observers have insisted that the movement has no focus, no specific goals or clear agenda, but we do not share this assessment. The movement very clearly has united around a common criticism of increasing and deepening inequality in all its forms; its goal is to bring unflinching attention to that inequality and its consequences of blocked opportunities and destruction of hopes for better futures for the vast majority while generating unprecedented and ever-growing profits for a very few. The demonstrators are demanding real and lasting changes in policy and practice that redress the many inequitable features of our society, which have been made far worse by the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent protracted recession. Among these are: the lack of accountability on the part of the bankers and Wall Street firms that drove the economy to disaster, and the federal government's failure to not only control these but to in fact reward and help them in their predatory banking practices; deepening economic inequality in the United States to levels unseen since the Great Depression; the intimate relationship between corporate power and government at all levels, which has regularly interfered with the advancement of significant changes in the practices and policies that brought us to this point of severe inequality; the need for proactive and dramatic action to provide employment that provides a living wage for the jobless, and to protect much-needed programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, in part by requiring the wealthy to pay their fair share of taxes; the disastrous economic and political effects of the costly wars that the United States has been conducting overseas since 2001, wars that have redirected substantial and vital economic resources to fund them at the direct expense of the most vulnerable among us. The demonstrators clearly recognize that it is only by identifying the interconnections between repressive economic, social and political regimes and the obvious decline of the life chances of the majority of us can social and economic justice prevail, locally, nationally, and globally. We must be united in this struggle or we will all suffer together.

Furthermore, we decry the deplorable, heavy-handed tactics of social control agents in using force and violence to remove and silence demonstrators in the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City, Oakland, Portland, and elsewhere. Demonstrators are not trespassing on private property; they are exercising their political and civil rights to free speech and dissent; and they are doing so peacefully. Although these agents may be able to remove the physical tents and the demonstrators from these locations, they cannot silence the demonstrators' voices or the ideas they are raising, all of which are spreading and growing. We applaud the courage, the commitment, and the vision of the demonstrators, and we call on all members of the profession to lend their support to this peaceful and potentially transformative movement.

As teachers and academics, we stand in support and solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street protests. Unjust and unsustainable wars, an economic crisis induced by the predatory practices of the financial industry aided and abetted by federal policy and practice, and an unfair tax structure are all placing overwhelming burdens on those who have the least, among them a sizable majority of children and young people. Corporate influence in politics and the media has warped public political discourse into personalities and misrepresentations of the most vulnerable among us and of those who seek to call attention to that misrepresentation. That discourse has distracted vital and substantive attention from the real and growing attacks on the life chances and the futures of the many as these improve substantially for the few.

The situation plays out in the streets and in the hallowed halls of educational institutions. Tuition hikes have made higher education an unattainable goal for many whose numbers grow every day, and have saddled yet others with ever-higher crushing levels of student debt as they attempt to enter a job

market with little to offer them. Colleges and Universities have responded to their own budgetary crises by resorting to increasing reliance and exploitation of contingent faculty who struggle to make ends meet; the job insecurity of contingent faculty has a real potential to chill their voices of protest and causes them to hesitate to teach challenging or controversial topics for fear of losing their jobs. That hesitance undermines the goal of higher education to foster critical thinking in the interest of producing an informed and independent civic population. The current housing and jobs crises, and cuts to public services and education, combine with the student debt crisis to create an unsustainable situation for a whole generation of young people, our students and recent graduates; it bodes poorly for the future of the nation and the world as we squander their talents, their intellect, and their passion. We all stand to lose if we continue to look the other way and allow that squandering to continue.