

**Section Three:**

**A Radical Epiphany**

**Laura Diamond**

**5/05/2014**

**Dr. Lisbeth Gant-Britton**

**A Radical Epiphany**

*As isolated individuals  
we will always be powerless...*

*But as communities  
we can achieve anything—*

Angela Y. Davis

Black Rock City is the name of an ephemeral city built by participants of the Burning Man project every year in the Black Rock Desert, Nevada, that exists for eight days, and is then dismantled leaving no trace. While there, residents, many of whom call the city “home,” agree to live by certain principles as a form of self-governance. Black Rock City operates under a “Gifting” economy, with principles such as “Radical Inclusion” and “Radical Self-expression,” creating an open, inclusive environment that tends to follow people into their daily lives, and a strong culture and community has formed around it. Founder Larry Harvey called it “an international city in its own right” stating, “We want to change the world,”<sup>1</sup> and as a participant observer in the community, I believe in its power to do so. In reality however, statistics show that Black Rock City remains far less diverse than the community perceives itself, being primarily White and fairly wealthy. As an artistic social experiment with the goal of challenging the commodification of our culture and “changing the world,” I argue that the Burning Man community needs to start at “home” by facing and overcoming the obvious flaw in the plan for Radical Inclusion; the inadvertent exclusion of the poor from Black Rock City.

---

<sup>1</sup> Larry Harvey "Larry Harvey interviewed on Charlie Rose." Charlie Rose. PBS. New York. March 20, 2014.

It is the intention of this paper to challenge observed contradictions in the community's concepts of Radical Inclusion, Gifting, and Radical Self-reliance, with the eventual goal of gaining their support for a scholarship project aimed at greater inclusion for artists of color. Drawing from surveys and interviews conducted with prominent members of the Burning Man community, the Burning Man website, and the lectures and interviews of founder Larry Harvey, this paper will address the perceived contradiction. In referencing the work of social theorists, a case will be made for the importance of addressing this issue, concluding with a discussion about the project with a prominent community member that acted as a test case yielding an optimistic outcome.

It is not possible in the space of this paper to give an adequate description of the Burning Man culture, for which I refer the reader to the many books, writings on the Burning Man website, or even my own current ethnographic work on the culture. However, it is necessary to give a brief clarification of terms and cultural concepts of "Burning Man," which is a term used to indicate the annual festival held in the Black Rock desert, or the culture itself existing as a sub-culture in society outside of the yearly event. Black Rock City (BRC) is the name of the circular temporary city that is constructed by the participants; those who return yearly or subscribe to the culture year-round may refer to themselves as "Burners." The term "playa" or "The Playa" not only refers to the geography of the event – a large flat dry lakebed – but is used synonymously with "Burning Man," or can refer specifically to the portion of the expanse encircled by the city with the Man being at its center, or even to the white clay dust that makes up the surface and blows up off of the ground covering everything. The environment is harsh and dry, with extreme unpredictable temperatures that can range from 110 degrees during the day to the low 40s at night, sudden dust storms creating a "whiteout" affect, and absent of any life

forms aside from the residents. The conditions create a “survival” experience that affects the culture and draws the residents together.

It must be understood that Burning Man is not a festival, it is a community, as is stated by founder Larry Harvey in his lecture, *La Vie Bohème; A History of Burning Man* which can be found on the website.<sup>2</sup> This statement is echoed by Harvey and fellow board member Maid Marion in a documentary in which there is much discussion about the community as the Burning Man organization (BMorg) dealt with what Harvey called “the ticket ‘kerfluffle.’”<sup>3</sup> The documentary covered among other things the aftermath of a poor decision made by the organization in trying to handle ticket distribution to the growing population and provide equal access for those seeking tickets, in creation of a lottery type system for ticket purchase that succeeded in eliminating a large portion of the city’s infrastructure. The seriousness with which the founders and organizers treat their responsibility to the community was illustrated as they read the letters from angry community members— theme camps having lost many of their key people— faced the consequences of their actions and found an effective solution, thereby allowing the community to impact the decisions that govern it. According to the website, the organization of Burning Man grew out of the community, with many decisions made by consensus, stating that today, they “still operate in this fashion.”<sup>4</sup>

---

2 Larry Harvey "What is Burning Man: La Vie Bohème-A History of Burning Man." Burning Man Website .Black Rock City LLC. February 24, 2000. [http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/lectures/la\\_vie.html](http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/lectures/la_vie.html) (accessed 2014).

3 “Spark; A Burnin Man Story” Documentary. Directed by Jessie Deeter Steve Brown. Produced by Jessie Deeter, Alec Lorimore, Chris Weitz Steve Brown. 2013.

4 Website, *Organizational History*

According to the Black Rock City Census, the majority of participants agree that Burning Man is their community, many even calling it “Home.”<sup>5</sup> This year the Black Rock City Census, a voluntary survey and not a true census, randomly sampled members at the gate, using the data from the random sample to weight the data collected from the voluntary sample, in order to give a more accurate representation of the Burning Man population. On the 2013 census, the majority of participants surveyed indicated that they consider BRC to be their home to various degrees, and the Burning Man community to be family.<sup>6</sup> My own surveys yielded similar results among the twenty-six respondents, an equal mixture of friends, acquaintances and people I do not know, whose participation ranged in an even spread from two to nineteen years. Because of the many social networking sites available, and the participatory nature of the culture, I was able to reach people from Portland, Las Vegas, Reno, San Diego, San Francisco, one from Austin Texas, another on the East Coast, even one from outside the U.S. Seventeen out of twenty-six respondents agreed they call BRC “home,” almost all agreed that they identify as a “Burner,” sixteen of them “strongly,” twenty-one would call Burning Man their “culture,” similarly twenty-one would call themselves a resident of Black Rock City. Twenty-four out of twenty six respondents agree they call the people they know from Burning Man their “community,” twenty of them “strongly agree,” and twenty-two out of twenty six people agreed they go to Burning Man “for the community.” As Larry Harvey expressed to Charlie Rose, “People come for the art, but they stay for the community.”<sup>7</sup> Only one respondent indicated he “just goes there to party,” with 20 people disagreeing with that statement. It is the strength of this community and the ethos it subscribes to that caused me to focus my study on Burning Man.

---

5 Wendi Corbin Goulette, *Monthly Archives*: “Family.” Black Rock City Census Website. May 21, 2014. <http://blackrockcitycensus.wordpress.com/2014/05/> (accessed May 23, 2014).

6 Goulette, BRC Census

7 Harvey, Interview on Charlie Rose

The most striking characteristic about Black Rock City is that there is no buying and no selling, but operates as a gift economy of open reciprocity— giving without requiring a return, and related to this, the principle of “de-commodification” which bans advertising as well as vending. Harvey attributes the origin of this ethos to the underground Bohemian art community in San Francisco, describing Bohemia as “a world that artists create... made by people who live by their gifts and live for their gifts and live to give those gifts to others,” compared to the “economy of scarcity”<sup>8</sup> created by the mainstream, corporate sponsored art world. He describes the sharing, cooperation, and collaboration of the Bohemians, stating that what they learned is that “when you start giving gifts to one another it opens up this magnificent resource to people. Not only is it connective, not only does it generate cultural interaction, it is actually remarkably efficient.”<sup>9</sup> On Charlie Rose Harvey expressed, “we plucked that [attitude] out of Bohemia and built a city around it... devoted to the act of giving.”<sup>10</sup> The experience of spending a week without measuring our activity or the people around us by their monetary worth is unique, and often difficult for people to comprehend in a world that, as Harvey puts it, “is so permeated with commodity transactions.”<sup>11</sup> Freed from the need to extract money from people, activities at Burning Man tends to be more genuine, geared toward community engagement and interaction, and participants are free from having to measure their activity by what is worth spending their money on.

In 2004 Larry Harvey wrote the “Ten Principles” as a reflection of the community's ethos and culture, as it had organically developed since the event's inception. These Principles are posted on the website as follows: *Radical Inclusion, Gifting, De-commodification, Radical Self-*

---

8 Harvey, *La Vie Bohème*

9 Ibid

10 Harvey, Interview on Charlie Rose

11 Harvey, *La Vie Bohème*

*reliance, Radical Self-expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, Leave No Trace, Participation, and Immediacy.*<sup>12</sup> The community's adherence to these principles creates a unique, cooperative, self-governing environment that participants take with them when they leave, often drastically changing how they interact in their daily lives. Twenty-three out of twenty-six of my survey respondents say they adhere to the Ten Principles while at Burning Man, with twenty of those reporting they carry the philosophy of the principles into their daily lives. Harvey insists they had no ideology, but it all emerged from what they did, "The community isn't very tolerant of central authority, but they just inhaled these things, so...there must be a real resonance there."<sup>13</sup>

The principle of "Radical Inclusion" is written: *Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.*<sup>14</sup> Indeed people report a sense of belonging at Burning Man that they have never before experienced, including myself who as an artist has always felt a little out of sync with much of society's idea of "normative" in regards to behavior, hairstyle and clothing choices. When asked what the principle of "Radical Inclusion" means to them, participants gave a variety of responses, such as "Everyone is welcome," "Giving everyone the opportunity to participate," "opening your heart and hearth to strangers," and my favorite, "no one is other." One participant reported that he had grown up in a very judgmental and homophobic environment, but Burning Man changed his views. Another two-year participant who identified as both "African Diaspora/African American" and "White/Caucasian," and wrote "multiracial, neither one or the other," reported she experienced "community outside of racial identity on an authentic and

---

12 Larry Harvey, *The Ten Principles*. Burning Man Website. Black Rock City LLC. 2004. [http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about\\_burningman/principles.html](http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/principles.html) (accessed 2014)

13 Harvey, *Interview on Charlie Rose*

14 Harvey, *The Ten Principles*

meaningful level” and stopped seeing herself “as a token.” She was the only person who did not tell people in other parts of her life that she goes to Burning Man, and did not identify as “Burner,” yet she called it her community and her culture, and reported experiencing inner freedom to be herself, free from “social conditioning.” The inclusive environment dominates the Burning Man culture, and while in Black Rock City any judgment held by residents are laid bare and considered out of place. A prerequisite does exist for participation, however, that being the cost of ticket, supplies, and the time off to attend, which has a definite impact on the population of the city.

Before continuing, we must examine the reality of the demographics in Black Rock City. The Black Rock City Census for 2013 shows a median annual personal income of around \$51,000.00, with 51% reporting income over \$50,000, and 34% over \$100,000. One graph comparing “primary and non-primary household earners” shows that though non-primary earners are weighted towards the bottom, 10.7% reported personal incomes over \$35,000, with 3% of those over \$100,000. Furthermore, the census reports that the median income increased from 2012 to 2013 by “roughly \$7,000.”<sup>15</sup>

The census also reveals a lack of racial diversity at Burning Man, with 83% identifying as “White/Caucasian,” 11% identifying as a “person of color,” with less than 1% of these as “Black/non-Hispanic.” It is not the intention of this paper to discuss racial disparities at Burning Man, though this is of interest to me as one who intentionally seeks diversity in my life, and in discussing it with people of color there is every indication that there are cultural issues involved in the question of racial diversity at Burning Man. However, if one looks at national statistics, it cannot be ignored that economics is likely to be at least partially to blame for the racial

---

15 Black Rock City Census. *Monthly Archives*: “Sociodemographic: Income.” *Black Rock City Census*. April 26, 2014. <http://blackrockcitycensus.wordpress.com/2014/04/> (accessed 2014).

imbalance. Social Theorist Tim Wise discusses economic disparity between White families and families of color drawing from national statistics, stating that the median net worth among white families is twenty times that of black families and eighteen times greater than that of Latino families— a difference of over \$ 100,000.<sup>16</sup> Wise attributes this disparity in large part to the “historical residue of generations of unequal opportunity and access.”<sup>17</sup> Wise goes into detail discussing inequality in education, home-loans, and income, stating that according to data from 2009, even with a college degree a Black person is nearly twice as likely as a White person to be unemployed, and Latinos and Asian Americans with degrees are 40 percent more likely than Whites to be unemployed.<sup>18</sup> Wise asserts that “White America” must acknowledge the system of racial inequality that our nation was conceived in, the residue of which still plagues us.<sup>19</sup> Though this paper does not argue the case of racial diversity in BRC, one cannot ignore the part that economics likely plays in the community’s racial demographics.

Burning Man costs a considerable amount of money to attend, even beyond the cost of the ticket, currently about \$400; there is shelter, which must be appropriate for the particularly extreme weather conditions including protection from the scorching sun, supplies to last for the week that must contain a minimum 1 ½ gallons of water per day, dust protection such as goggles and dust masks, transportation for you and your belongings into the desert, a bicycle to get around, lights for safety, and the luxury of time to make the journey. Most of those I surveyed agreed they invest a lot of their money and resources in Burning Man. How can this community be “radically inclusive,” if there are those who can’t afford to even consider attending? As one of

---

16 Ben Rooney, “Recession Widens Racial Gap,” CNN Money (July 26, 2011), [http://money.cnn.com/2011/07/26/news/economy/wealth\\_gap\\_white\\_black\\_hispanic/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2011/07/26/news/economy/wealth_gap_white_black_hispanic/index.htm). From Wise, Tim. *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* (Kindle Locations 1563-1566). City Lights Publishers. (2012-01-10).

17 Tim Wise. *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* 2012. City Lights Open Media (Kindle Locations 193-196). City Lights Publishers. Kindle Edition.

18 Ibid (location 226) Wise cites: U.S. Department of Labor, 2009 Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, [www.bls.gov/cps/cpsrace2009.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsrace2009.pdf). Table 4.

my participants responded, “Radical Inclusion is simply not possible if the high cost of attendance becomes a barrier to entry.”

This is not to imply that there are not people of low economic means at Burning Man, or that there is no assistance, quite the contrary, as many of those surveyed were quick to point out. I consider myself among the Burning Man “poor,” having gotten low-income tickets twice, and made the journey with very little. This year the BMorg will provide 4,000 low-income tickets, (at \$190 each) to applicants who “are best able to demonstrate need,” as stated on the website. Several of my survey participants expressed that they or someone they know worked as a volunteer or helped with a Theme Camp, for a free ticket to Burning Man, however it must be pointed out that this is not an institutionalized process, but a potential case-by-case occurrence. One interviewee whom I call “Hannah,” reported that for her first Burn in 1999 she picked up a discounted \$80 ticket along the way, had “practically nothing,” and managed just fine, saying that while in Black Rock City she never felt poor nor any distinction between herself and her campmates who arrived in an R.V. Hannah has since risen to become a leader in a Burning Man sponsored project, and now funds a returning campmate every year whose own resources are spent making the trip from New York. Terry, a prominent community member and Theme camp leader, spoke of a community member who was on her own with little provision for her first Burn, stumbled into their camp one day and has been a part ever since, and earns her tickets each year with her high level of participation. Once in Black Rock City, participants discover what Larry Harvey calls “a hyper-connective environment” that generates new resources, “...wealth that you didn't have, things that you couldn't afford if you'd depended only on money and your own individual buying power.”<sup>20</sup> Harvey goes on to describe Burning Man as a “radically

---

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, *La Vie Bohème*

egalitarian society” stating, “We have .com millionaires. We have starving artists. We have .com millionaires meeting starving artists — and this really interests me.”<sup>21</sup> However, unless one can afford to get to Burning Man, which as mentioned requires considerable cost, one has no access to, nor even knowledge of these social resources.

A closer look as well must be taken at those whom the community considers “poor,” such as myself, or those mentioned by participants, who get low-income tickets or work for their ticket. Though I have at times considered myself “poor,” I have come to recognize my own privilege in life, including the material and social resources I had for making the trek to Burning Man, such as camping equipment, tools, and access to a Theme camp to join, which helped me through my first Burn. Likewise Hannah, who expressed she came with “practically nothing,” admitted she tagged along with an entire group of Bay area college friends with whom she camped, which I suggest was a “resource” that helped make her trip possible. Terry’s team member was already at Burning Man, however poorly equipped, giving her the opportunity to stumble into and become involved with his camp, and earning her way to a yearly ticket. As a stranger to the community, with no connections or previous experience of Burning Man, it is difficult to find a ticket in exchange for volunteer work, in a community where we are all volunteers. Many participants, myself included, work hard at Burning Man for Theme camps, but are still expected to pay for tickets. The census would indicate that only 38% of participants earn less than \$35,000, with about 18% under \$25,000, and 14% of them being “non-primary wage earners.”<sup>22</sup> So one must ask how effective these methods are in practice at including people of little economic means?

---

21 Ibid

22 Black Rock City Census

My surveys and observations of the community revealed a considerable amount of resistance to the idea of “more inclusion/assistance for people of little economic means at Burning Man,” despite the fact that the group overall agreed to certain inherent inequalities in our country’s socio-economic structures. To a series of strong statements concerning certain social issues, survey responses varied on topics such as immigration, equal access to education, Affirmative Action, and our prison system, however on questions regarding the economy a strong majority appeared. Twenty-three out of twenty-six participants agreed, “Inequality is inherent in our social/economic system (capitalism),” twenty-one participants agreed that “We are not all born with equal opportunities,” and that “institutional racism is still present in the U.S.,” and twenty-four agree there is “discrimination against the poor.” Eighteen participants agree there is a “caste system” in the U.S., with seven remaining neutral, likewise eighteen participants agreed there are not enough jobs for the unemployed in our country with six remaining neutral. Twenty-one agreed that opportunities and resources for artists are not “equally accessible to all,” and twenty agreed that the “poor and homeless are criminalized in the U.S.” with four remaining neutral. Only one participant agreed with the statement, “If a person is not earning a living, they should not waste their time on art,” with two remaining neutral, leaving twenty-three disagreeing, thirteen of them “strongly”; and most participants agreed that “art is an important cultural tool.” However, on the question of greater assistance “for people of little economic means at Burning Man,” only eight people said “yes,” twelve people said “it depends,” and five people said “no.”

The most common concerns stated were that people would take advantage of a free system, and that there is already ample help for those who need assistance. As previously noted, the BRC census reveals a high degree of wealth in the community, so one must ask what is an

acceptable level of inclusion for people who can not afford to consider attending Burning Man, or is this to be considered at all? Some offered up criteria such as “No freebies for folks who intentionally impoverish themselves, but still carry an iPhone,” “Its ok to give assistance to those who are trying their very best but not to those asking for a handout,” and “I have seen too much abuse of the low income ticket program. I have difficulty applying the tenet of radical inclusion to freeloaders.” This sudden need to judge a person’s value for inclusion by their potential lack of participation seems counter to the community’s ethos, and brings to mind the question of those who come with money but do not participate in the community, how does the community view these? Some felt the cost of getting to burning Man was not prohibitive, one saying “if saving \$50 a month is outside of ones means then they are not in a position to go to the burn” and “Life is an intelligence and effort test. You have to past the test to go to the party!” The implication that intelligence is equal to being able to save \$50 a month, or that you are not in a position to go if you cannot afford it, once again makes cost the deciding factor, the “test” for attendance, which seems counter to our efforts at “de-commodification.” Another pointed out that one doesn’t have to go to the yearly festival to be part of the community, and that several people she knows only attend regional events. It must be pointed out that these events also cost money, and I am still not convinced that money should be the ultimate deciding factor in this choice. Several participants pointed to the efforts of the organization or their own camp to indicate they felt that enough is done, so one must ask what is enough in this community of now 70,000 people?

Some participants indicated that if people want to go (to Burning Man) bad enough they will “make it happen,” using their “radical self-reliance,” a principle I often hear used in a manner that brings to mind the “rugged individualism” so pervasive in the American narrative.

Tim Wise speaks of it as the “myth of meritocracy,” whereby “hard work and initiative allow even the lowliest individual to rise in the ranks.”<sup>23</sup> The implication is that if people don’t succeed it must be their own fault, even though most know that our economy is not sustaining us all. Wise goes on to point out that the “notion that rugged individualism is all that is needed to ‘make it’ has little credence in a society where millions... find themselves struggling no matter their effort.”<sup>24</sup> Even though most of my respondents agreed to certain national systemic economic inequalities, many of these could not extend their principles of gifting and inclusion to the cost of attending, indicating it was part of a person’s “Radical self-reliance” to get there. When asked what the principle of “Radical Self-reliance” means to them, several responded with a version of, “Being completely self sufficient,” or “supplying for one’s needs,” one even stating “if you can't afford a ticket, you need to radically self reliance get a job (sic).” I suggest that this attitude of equating self-reliance with the monetary cost of getting to Burning Man, conflicts with the ethos of the culture, the goals of which are providing a counter-narrative by basing its economy on gifting, and “welcoming the stranger” with “radical inclusion.” It might surprise many Burners to learn that the principle of “Radical Self-reliance” as it is written does not mention material resources at all, only stating that Burning Man “encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.”<sup>25</sup>

I discussed these concepts with two of my interviewees, who I am calling Sunshine and Terry, both of whom I consider leaders in the community whose opinions I value, both illustrating the contradiction this paper seeks to address. Sunshine, a nineteen-year veteran Burner who says her life on and off the playa is now “seamless,” was one of the few to agree

---

23 Wise, *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* (736-737).

24 Wise, Tim *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* (City Lights Open Media) (Kindle Locations 734-739). City Lights Publishers. (2012-01-10). Kindle Edition.

25 Harvey, *The Ten Principles*

without reservation to greater assistance for lower income artists, exclaiming “Yes! The answer is 100% yes!” even saying we would see a lower rate in crime because, “When people have everything that they need, they don’t steal anything, especially shelter, food, water.”<sup>26</sup> This did not surprise me, as Sunshine is one of the most giving individuals I have encountered. Sunshine even expressed that she always brings ten times what she needs to give away to people who are not prepared. However, moments later when explaining the principle of self-reliance Sunshine went on to say that “If we brought low-income people... it’s not like they’re coming in, they don’t have any money, no” and explained that those coming in need to know the principles and “... still have to have their own water bottles and their own lights... so radical self-reliance is just that. Everything that you need, you need to bring.” When I pointed out the actual wording of the principle to Sunshine, she seemed to struggle with it, expressing “but it’s also nice to be radically self-reliant in the physical world as well as the spiritual world and emotional world” to which one must agree “yes it is nice,” but is it the reality for all in our society? And where or how does the principle of “gifting” play in this, not to mention “communal effort” and “civic responsibility” in ensuring we are not inadvertently excluding groups of people because of their economic status?

Terry’s survey responses showed a strong belief in inherent economic inequalities in our social structures, even agreeing that we have a “caste system” in our country, but Terry was one of those who answered “no” to greater assistance for low-income artists, upon the claim of “self-reliance.”<sup>27</sup> Terry is a nine-year Burner and a strong community leader, having run Theme camps and used his resources and professional skills in service to the community in numerous ways, and is now working as a documentarian on Burning Man outreach projects. In his interview,

---

26 “Sunshine,” Personal interview. Los Angeles. April 24, 2014

27 Terry, Personal interview. Los Angeles. May 15, 2014

Terry called the cost of attendance a good “benchmark” for attending, an “even playing field” and a “hardship for everyone.” Given that we acknowledge that not all have equal economic opportunity, why does that benchmark need to be monetary, especially considering we are a “gift economy?”

In discussing with Terry some of the previously mentioned flaws in the Burning Man “meritocracy,” and our view of the “poor,” I perceived a change in attitude as he got caught up in a plan for creating greater access, speaking in terms of opening up the Burning Man volunteer system for those who “really need it,” trading hours worked for a ticket, which is undoubtedly a good idea, but missing my point completely. Terry was turning my intended “gift,” into a “barter,” and he remained uncomfortable with the concept of a free ticket, without basing it on participation. I then pointed to the growing population of what BMorg has called “Turn-key” camps, in which “producers” run camps for use by wealthy clients, many of whom do not participate in the community, which has become a concern to the community. To this Terry responded “we can’t judge their participation” and I agreed, especially on hypothetical people, but my point was made, it was still about the money. My project, a way for those who have the resources to give the “gift” of Burning Man to artists who can’t afford to be there, in the form of a full-participation scholarship Theme camp appealed to Terry, though he was nervous about the selection process, which is certainly a negotiating element in the project. He began to see the purpose of my project, that of giving a gift to people to see what gifts came out of them, and compared it to the other Burning Man outreach programs “...teaching people to be leaders or whatever...they go back into the world [feeling] ‘Wow if I can do that I can do anything.’” Terry concluded that, “It’s a risk, and I think Burning Man likes risks, and that that’s a good risk to

take” and suggested I write it up in a proposal and submit it to the BMorg, which is encouraging as Terry is currently working closely with the BMorg on the documentary.

In the film *Vocabulary of Change*, “social theorist” Angela Davis, in conversation with Tim Wise, discusses the need for creating “new vocabularies” for thinking about “communities rather than individuals,” and a way to “imagine ourselves as connected to global communities.”<sup>28</sup> Wise speaks of the need to acknowledge the myth of “meritocracy” that he calls a “dagger pointed at the heart” of every working class person, saying we need “to talk about it more and ... to talk about it better.”<sup>29</sup> In speaking about the direction of future activism, Davis stressed the importance of preparing ourselves “for ideas that might be so radical today that we can’t begin to imagine what they might be,” and Wise says he finds hope in young people, “folks who are really quite hungry for a different way of understanding the world.”<sup>30</sup> The Burning Man community is such a “hungry” group seeking that counter narrative of global connection, opposing the commodification of our activity, and creating new ways of understanding the world. Harvey views the challenge of the community as it grows is to find ways it can “keep reinventing itself.”<sup>31</sup> This community is in the business of creating new vocabularies of community, and I am confident they will step up and embrace this opportunity to “reinvent” its views of poverty.

---

28 Angela Davis, *Vocabulary of Change; In Conversation With Angela Davis and Tim Wise*. DVD. Directed by Mohammed Soriano-Bilal. Produced by Institute for Democratic Education and Culture. Moderator Rose Aguilar Angela Davis. SpeakOut, 2012.

29 Tim Wise, *Vocabulary of Change*

30 Ibid

31 Larry Harvey interviewed on Charlie Rose

## Works Cited

*Vocabulary of Change; In Conversation With Angela Davis and Tim Wise*. DVD. Directed by Mohammed Soriano-Bilal. Produced by Institute for Democratic Education and Culture. Performed by Tim Wise, moderator Rose Aguilar Angela Davis. SpeakOut, 2012.

Black Rock City Census. "Monthly Archives: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC: INCOME." *Black Rock City Census*. April 26, 2014. <http://blackrockcitycensus.wordpress.com/2014/04/> (accessed 2014).

Goulette, Wendi Corbin. *Monthly Archives: Family*. Black Rock City Census. May 21, 2014. <http://blackrockcitycensus.wordpress.com/2014/05/> (accessed May 23, 2014).

Harvey, Larry, interview by Charlie Rose. "Larry Harvey interviewed on Charlie Rose." *Charlie Rose*. PBS. New York. March 20, 2014.

"The Ten Principles." *Burning Man*. Black Rock City LLC. 2004. [http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about\\_burningman/principles.html#.U3qjZl6WG1A](http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/principles.html#.U3qjZl6WG1A) (accessed 2014).

"What is Burning Man: La Vie Bohème-A History of Burning Man." *Burning Man*. February 24, 2000. [http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/lectures/la\\_vie.html](http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/lectures/la_vie.html) (accessed 2014).

*Spark; A Burnin Man Story*. Documentary. Directed by Jessie Deeter Steve Brown. Produced by Jessie Deeter, Alec Lorimore, Chris Weitz Steve Brown. 2013.

"Sunshine," Personal interview. Los Angeles. April 24, 2014

Terry, Personal interview. Los Angeles. May 15, 2014

Wise, Tim. *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2012.