Beware the Funders of Immigrants’ Rights

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Beware the Funders of Immigrants’ Rights
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What would make a giant foundation headed by rich people be interested in donating money to so many groups promoting social justice? What’s Ford Foundation’s interest in all the immigrants’ rights non-profit organizations that are involved in Arizona (and beyond)? While a member of the Board of Trustees at Ford Foundation is simultaneously on the Board of Directors at none other than the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA)[1], Ford funds groups who have campaigns against CCA.[2] Other groups[3] also funded by Ford, are working on campaigns to counter the racist overpopulation myths that have been promoted by institutions like the Population Council who have received close to $100 million from Ford[4]. This speaks not so much of blatant hypocrisy, but that those in charge of the Ford Foundation have a completely different agenda than a lot of the groups they fund.

The publication in 2007 of the book The Revolution Will Not Be Funded put out by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence sparked discussions about the role of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC)[5] in movements. The book delves into “…the way in which capitalist interests and the state use non-profits to (1) monitor and control social justice movements; (2) divert public monies into private hands through foundations; (3) manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; (4) redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; (5) allow corporations to mask their exploitive and colonial work practices through ‘philanthropic’ work; (6) encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them.”[6]

This article will focus on points one and three, addressing not only Ford’s historical involvement with the CIA and violent coups, but also their tendency to channel resistance into “reasonable” and “responsible” activities like legal defense and reform, and how their hollow push for “equality” is part of “progress” on their terms. Although there is emphasis here on the Ford Foundation and how it may impact the immigrants’ rights movement, this article also addresses funding from other foundations[7], private donors and the government, which may have similar impacts on groups, as does the desire to win over politicians, mainstream media, etc. This is about whether the world we want to live in is compatible with that of any funder or anyone in positions of power whether they’re promoting social justice or not. This is about how people orient themselves in relation to the current power structure.

### Some groups linked to Ford Foundation:

- Alto Arizona via NDLON
- Brave New Foundation[102]
- Border Network for Human Rights[103]
- Center for New Community[104]
- Cuentame via Brave New Foundation
- Enlace Institute/Communities United for People[105]
- Grassroots Leadership[106]
- Interfaith Worker Justice[107]
- Institute for Transnational Social Change[108]
- National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)[109]
- National Immigration Law Center[110]
- National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild[111]
- Pan Left (“Under Arpaio”)[112]
- Puente Movement, via NDLON/Alto Arizona, Tonatierra
- Resource Generation[113]
- Salvador Reza[114]
- Seventh Generation Fund[115]
- Tonatierra via Seventh Generation Fund and NDLON

You can search the grant database for recent grants to groups on fordfoundation.org. Some groups don’t come up in a database search and can be found by searching for the group name in google, accompanied by “site:http://fordfoundation.org” in your search field.

Tides Center and Foundation, which receive millions of dollars from Ford also funds Brave New Foundation, Coalición de Derechos Humanos, NDLON, Resource Generation, Seventh Generation Fund, and Southern Poverty Law Center, Tonatierra Macehualli [116]
Ford and others may co-opt the language of these struggles, and put on a façade of concern about them, while avoiding getting at the root of the problems.

Some immigrant-haters seem to have decidedly taken their strategies to the extreme, perhaps hoping they will achieve something close to their objectives. Fanatical activities such as the Minuteman Project patrolling the borders, or Russell Pearce and others daring to change or reinterpret the constitution which they claim to revere, may not achieve their specific demands, but they succeed in shifting the debate. On the side of immigrants’ rights, very few people are even calling for an end to immigration laws, border controls, and the like, much less total freedom and no borders. But isn’t that what we should be fighting for?

History of Manipulation

Many of us are engaged in a battle against the deeply engrained myths about overpopulation which are part of the attack on the fourteenth amendment which gives citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil. The argument that immigration means overpopulation and destruction, reeking of racism, has infiltrated various sectors of politics and activism, including environmental groups. These myths can partly be traced back to the Population Council, which Ford Foundation has been funding since 1954. What does it mean for organizations working to fight these ideas about immigrants and overpopulation to accept Ford Foundation funding?

A little context: “The 1957 report of an ad hoc committee, consisting of representatives from the Population Council...outlined the emerging strategy of population control. Titled Population: An International Dilemma, the report depicted population growth as a major threat to political stability both at home and abroad.”[8] As I have written in “Invasion by Birth Canal?” “The efforts to supposedly end poverty through population control...is actually an attempt to decrease the threats that Black/Brown and poor people’s desires for freedom and equality (or even just survival) represent to these systems,” and to deflect responsibility for the poverty which is usually due to “resource/labor extraction as part of colonialism, capitalism, and neo-liberalism.”[9] Ford Foundation and others, making themselves out to be benevolent funders of the “empowerment” and “education” of poor (brown) women, are making deflecting responsibility for poverty and environmental problems onto these same women in the U.S. and abroad.

Ford Foundation, along with other institutions has sought stability across the world including within the US. In so doing, it has made itself a player in supporting the promotion of population control, as well as Capitalist-influenced economic change that has been accompanied by coups and horrendous human rights abuses, such as in Indonesia:

“Sukarno’s independent foreign policy greatly antagonized Western powers, and during his regime international agencies such as the Ford Foundation focused on sending the country’s intellectual elite [known later as the Berkeley Mafia] abroad for training, in the hope that one day they would inherit power. Their investment paid off in 1966, when a bloody military coup, which left a million dead, brought the country’s current ruler, General Suharto, to power. Under the influence of Western-trained technocrats, Suharto embraced the philosophy of population control. Today he has become one of its most prominent spokesmen in the Third World.” Naomi Klein describes Ford’s involvement a bit more in depth, “The Berkeley Mafia had studied in the U.S. as part of a program that
began in 1956... Ford-funded students became leaders of the campus groups that participated in overthrowing Sukarno, and the Berkeley Mafia worked closely with the military in the lead-up to the coup, developing ‘contingency plans’ should the government suddenly fall.”[10]

Extremely similar was Ford’s link to the 1973 coup in Chile, involving the Chicago Boys who were trained (funded by Ford) in Milton Freidman’s neo-liberal program at the University of Chicago.[11] The coup and the resulting detention, torture, and deaths are an indirect result of Ford’s vision for stability and development.

Of course Ford Foundation is a different entity now and has turned to superficially supporting human rights efforts in response to the torture, disappearances, and murders. Yet, maybe Ford is not all that different. Naomi Klein wrote, “Given its own highly compromised history, it is hardly surprising that when Ford dived into human rights, it defined the field as narrowly as possible. The foundation strongly favored groups that framed their work as legalistic struggles for the ‘rule of law,’ ‘transparency’ and ‘good governance,’”[12] which, as we’ll see, is part of a larger pattern.

In reading about Ford, one might get the sense that they didn’t fully comprehend the implications of that which was being taught to the Chicago Boys. Compared to many other institutions, Ford Foundation hasn’t pushed a neo-liberal agenda much. However, despite the fact that they have funded projects that are critical of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), they have also funded organizations with a more successful pro-NAFTA stance.[13] It is commonly acknowledged that NAFTA contributed to the loss of land and jobs in Mexico and so not only is Ford tied to the myths about overpopulation, they also share responsibility for the economic/political conditions that have led to mass immigration. It also appears that they are funding research that would help facilitate Homeland Security, as well as trade and growth in the border region, something that may cause more migrants and indigenous people to face displacement and dispossession.[14]

**Conclusion: Money is not neutral**

The Ford Foundation has its hands in all sorts of immigrants’ rights (and other progressive anti-racist) non-profit organizations. It could be seen as part of an organized effort to secure the status quo, or it may just be rich people trying to solve other people’s problems in their narrow way that obviously would not threaten their own position of wealth.

Hopefully it is clear that Ford Foundation funding is not the only problem being discussed here. It is the values and the objectives—not coming just from foundations—that influence the goals, messages, and activities of those who might otherwise push things to their limit. Even groups who forego funding may still live by the values held by their funders.[98] There may be various groups and individuals taking advantage of funding and not letting that funding dictate what they do.[99] You can argue that Ford is so large (especially if you include foundations it funds, like Tides), of course so many groups are going to receive funding from them. But we still must question what foundations are getting out of it. What would things look like if there were no groups whose dependency on funding required that they carry out “responsible” and “reasonable” activities and messages?

To break it down, the problem with anyone getting funding is the possible direct or indirect influence on organizations or individuals receiving funding, if energy is drawn away from more liberatory goals, if it means activities and messages get controlled or managed, if it causes leadership or spokespeople to speak for people they don’t represent, if it causes the leadership to police the group and/or outsiders or to sell others out. It is a problem if groups’ existing goals go unquestioned, or whether their ambiguity about long term goals can be co-opted into reinforcement of the status quo. There are so many people limiting their activities to safer (as in less threatening to those in power) activities like educational, legal, and charity “work” because that will get funded or will get more respect from politicians—when instead they could be doing something more effective with that time. Maybe no one has the answers right now about what will work, but if people stop limiting themselves to the accepted strategies, and to pragmatic visions, those answers are much more likely to come.

Dylan Rodriguez suggests, “Perhaps it is the fear of a radically transformed, feminist/queer/anti-racist liberation of Black, Brown, and Red bodies, no longer presumed to be permanently subordinated to the structures of criminalization, colonization, (state and state-ordained) bodily violence, and domestic warfare, that logically threatens the very existence of the still white-dominant US Left... that compels it to retain the staunchly anti-abolitionist
the World Bank[94] have gotten into the microfinance, creating an image of helping the poor while in fact putting even more people into debt and profiting from it. The purpose here may also be to prevent uprisings,[95] and to create more participants in capitalism, creating new “needs” for television sets and such things. And even when programs cut ties with foundation funding, they may still replicate the structure.[96]

Ford Foundation's false solutions to the problem of poverty are closely tied to its false solutions to immigration problems. So we can see how all this could be a conspiracy[97], but it doesn’t need to be a conspiracy to be counterproductive or worse.

We can’t separate the interests of Ford Foundation from the interests of the state and capitalism. Need more examples? “The Ford Foundation’s history of collaboration and interlock with the CIA in pursuit of U.S. world hegemony is now a well-documented fact...The Ford Foundation has in some ways refined their style of collaboration with Washington’s attempt to produce world cultural domination, but retained the substance of that policy...The ties between the top officials of the Ford Foundation and the U.S. government are explicit and continuing.”[15] As part of the Cold War and beyond, the CIA set up front-groups which would provide funding for hand-picked groups through foundations such as Ford.[16]

So while Ford has supported the police state’s standard avenues of repression,[17] its primary role has been more as “soft power.”[18] Joan Roelofs elaborates, “Coercive institutions also have their role, but attracting flies with honey can get them stuck good. Foundations induce consent by creating an ideology that appears to be common sense...”[19] (emphasis mine). Comparing the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) with the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC), Andrea Smith explains, “While the PIC overtly represses dissent the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus.”[20]

“While the PIC overtly represses dissent the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus.”

The intention of any passable reform is not to legalize all undocumented immigrants who are in the country, much less address the source of the problem that cause the necessity of migration...
The Civil Rights/Black Power movements are a good domestic example. "Philanthropy suggests yet another explanation for the decline of the 1960s' and 1970s' protest movements. Radical activism often was transformed by grants and technical assistance from liberal foundations into fragmented and local organizations subject to elite control. Energies were channeled into safe, legalistic, bureaucratic and, occasionally, profit-making activities." [21]

James Forman of SNCC wrote in a later version of his book[22] that the following had been censored from the original: “After the call for Black Power had become popular in the United States and other countries, McGeorge Bundy, former National Security Advisor under the late President John F. Kennedy, called a meeting at the Ford Foundation in New York City of twenty or more Black leaders. At that time McGeorge Bundy was the President of the Ford Foundation. Bundy announced to the assembled Black leaders that a decision had been made to destroy the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and to save the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). This decision was based on an assessment that it was possible to wean CORE away from the concept of Black Power through massive infusion of money for its operation. In the case of the SNCC, however, the assessment was that it was too late to save it; it had to be destroyed.” [23]

In 1969, Robert Allen wrote in Black Awakening in Capitalist America, “CORE’s militant rhetoric but ambiguous and reformist definition of black power as simply black control of black communities appealed to Foundation officials who were seeking just those qualities in a black organization which hopefully could tame the ghettos. From the Foundation’s point of view, old-style moderate leaders no longer exercised any real control, while genuine black radicals were too dangerous. CORE [fit] the bill because its talk about black revolution was believed to appeal to discontented blacks, while its program of achieving black power through massive injections of governmental, business, and Foundation aid seemingly opened the way for continued corporate domination of black communities by means of a new black elite.”[24] As another example, Roelofs adds, “Under the leadership of Ford and Rockefeller foundations, the National Urban Coalition was created in 1967 to transform ‘black power’ into black capitalism. Foundations donated $15.6 million in 1970 to moderate black organizations, mostly to the National Urban League, the NAACP, the NAACP-LDEF, and the Southern Regional Council.”[25]

You can see that foundation involvement in social justice groups undermined radical currents in the past, and while people more often talk about COINTELPRO,[26] Ford and others are still affecting groups today through the “state’s ongoing absorption of organized dissent through the non-profit structure.”[27] It is important to view this history in the context of current

**False Solutions**

One of the primary criticisms of philanthropy is that it simply alleviates some of the harm caused by capitalism without addressing the root of the problem. Maybe it makes rich people feel better, or maybe it just relaxes their worries about the likelihood that people will resist in a manner that the people in power cannot control. Either way, let’s have no illusions. Andrea Smith explains that foundations provide rich people with a way to “escape estate taxes, compensate relatives, and pay annuities to themselves.” With this tax shelter method, they only have to spend five percent of their net investment income on charitable expenses.[87] They are also very secretive about what they’re investing the rest of that money in.[88]

For them, instability is detrimental for so many reasons. While some further to the right might feel they can rely on the heavy hand of the state, others would prefer to avoid blatant state violence in solving these problems, especially when “soft power” might be even more effective. As the Secretary of the Ford Foundation in 1969 said, “We are in need of more—not fewer—instruments for necessary social change under law, for ready, informed response to deep-seated problems without chaos, for accommodation of a variety of views without deafening anarchy. Foundations have served as such an instrument.”[89]

Foundation funding for non-profits is similar to green capitalism in that it provides false solutions to real problems (“buy more stuff, as long as it’s green!” and “recycle and ride your bike more but don’t look at what the military and big corporations are doing”). In fact, often these solutions are directly or indirectly profitable to those promoting them (i.e. see Grameen Bank’s relationship with Monsanto).[90] “People of conscience” can get behind a campaign that feels good to them; meanwhile the problems remain because energies are being diverted to “solutions” that perpetuate the wider problems. They deflect responsibility away from economic inequality/capitalism and the state, allowing the rich to continue to profit.

Poverty is a problem for which people like to shift responsibility especially to the poor. They do not acknowledge that the rich benefit from the state-enforced theft of land and the limiting of freedoms that have impacted people all over the world in their ability to subsist more easily. Ford Foundation has been deeply involved[91] in the proposal of solutions like helping to provide microloans to impoverished (often landless) people (which by the way, is happening in Mexico[92]), without acknowledging the reasons and consequences of their circumstances in the first place.[93] Microcredit programs, while sometimes bringing a few people out of poverty, have also put many people into debt whereas before they were just poor. Additionally, more insidious entities such as
foundation involvement as well as the ways current activism often models itself on past activities.

Based on Foundation News articles, Roelofs determined that the attitude was the following: It was important that “the wildest appearing groups were essentially pragmatic. Ignore their rhetoric; all they want is to obtain benefits or their ‘rights’ from the system.”[28] She also wrote, “Those who see our travails arising from corporate power and wealth gradually are excluded from political discourse; they are labeled ‘irresponsible,’ ‘unrealistic,’ and ‘unfundable.’”[29] In this context, are the groups receiving foundation funding meeting these more conservative qualifications, and if so, is it to get/maintain funding?

Joaquin Cienfuegos, an anarchist organizer, wrote in 2009, “Non-profits... have hired many people of color who in other sectors of work would not have a job, but looking at the role that the Non-Profit Industrial Complex plays in guiding the struggle in a direction that is not a threat to the state because their funding in large comes from the state itself. We have many recent examples where these people have not been honest to the communities they ‘serve’ in terms of their real relationship they have to the state apparatus, and in many key times of repression they have sold out the more radical segments of the movement.”[30] It is important to see how funders can lead to divisions between people when “leadership” and non-profits find it more important to seem “responsible” and “realistic.”

White people have a specific problem when being “good allies” and “following the leadership of people of color” leads to uncritical acceptance of existing leadership and assumptions of unanimity, considering that people of color have divergent priorities, visions, and influences. It becomes essential to view leadership with a critical eye especially because, as Roelofs writes, “Leadership training” is another project of foundations that sought to tame radical protests. Here influence was exerted not on specific organizations but on activists and potential leaders. Domestic programs paralleled foundation and CIA cold war efforts to identify activists in the Third World, preferably at the high school level, and to capture them for our side, through conferences, scholarships, and extended stays in the United States.”[31] She adds that leadership programs “sought to identify militants from various ghettos and to persuade them that responsible leadership means giving up the idea that the power structure should be changed.”[32] Don’t think that Ford Foundation doesn’t still have leadership programs and that current local “leadership” hasn’t been courted, trained, and funded by them.

Undoubtedly there are individuals who, despite having gotten caught up in these types of programs, take advantage of them, and never have or no longer will let
foundations dictate their actions. However, there are likely many cases in which foundation-picked leaders use and maintain their imparted legitimacy and assume responsibilities for speaking for the community they claim to represent. They may try to influence this community on the issue of “responsible” and “reasonable” priorities, when in fact their interests may run counter to members of the community. They are also in a position to single out the “irresponsible” and “unreasonable” dissidents. (Ford Foundation has also promoted coalition building, which often comes with acquiescence to the lowest common denominator regarding demands). Certainly those of us who are white should be humble about our position in the power structure, but if we yield unquestioningly to the leadership or groups that have possibly been manipulated by foundations, we are contributing to the marginalization of voices that may be purposefully marginalized.

Really it’s hard to say how much influence funding has on any given organization or individual at any given time. We know from the past that various groups including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and Chicana Rights Project had to change their personnel and/or focus to maintain Ford funding.[33] INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence got their funding revoked by Ford Foundation because of their position on Palestinian Liberation.[34]

Ford Foundation’s conditions for grant money led the ACLU in 2004 to ultimately take a strong principled stance and reject $1.15 million in funding from Ford and Rockefeller foundations and return $68,000 previously received from Ford. This was in response to requirements (as of 2004) to sign a pledge to agree, “not to ‘promote or engage in violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state, nor... make subgrants to any entity that engages in these activities,’”[35] “not to ‘directly or indirectly engage in, promote or support other organizations or individuals who engage in or promote terrorist activities,’” and to “not ‘knowingly employ’ individuals found on a series of ‘watch lists’ of known or suspected terrorists.”[36] Based on this language, organizations would possibly be forbidden from supporting or promoting groups like the Zapatistas for example. Or considering the broad definition of terrorism, even promoting Food Not Bombs could perhaps get you into some trouble.[37]

This pledge was modeled after the Patriot Act in response to controversy over offensive language in some literature from a Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)—similar to non-profits, but non-profits specifically meet the requirements for tax status within the U.S.) that Ford Foundation previously funded. Although Ford Foundation is still accused of supporting Palestinian groups that are opposed to a two-state solution, Zeina Zaatari states, “Funders supported the Oslo agenda by rewarding projects concerned with mutual...

Pointedly speaking to the larger movement about CIR, the press release for the May 2010 lockdown at a Border Patrol Headquarters in Tucson stated, “Border militarization destroys Indigenous communities. The development of the border wall has lead to desecration of our ancestors graves, it has divided our communities and prevents us from accessing sacred places. Troops and paramilitary law enforcement, detention camps, check points, and citizenship verification are not a solution to migration. We have existed here long before these imposed borders, my elders inform us that we always honored freedom of movement.”[83] The action and the press release played a role in shifting the debate away from the settler-centered point of view which did not address the implications of border militarization as well as the larger economic and colonialist context.

As a participant in the action wrote, “[H]ow can reform for many, be at the expense of the original inhabitants of the land? We need to see it for what it is, and question neo-liberal projects, such as NAFTA, not just put a bandage on policies that affect everybody! We must challenge both the politicians and reformist activists that try to pit indigenous and migrant communities against each other in their ‘political’ solutions! We are in this together, and must start at the root of the problem, in this case from an O’odham perspective.”[84]

The problem for the immigrants’ rights movement is that if it calls into question the legitimacy of the U.S. in general, it loses all credibility in the eyes of the media and anyone in power, and reinforces the fears of nationalists (This means it’s all the more important for white people to join in the fight). For the most part, the more pragmatic strategy has been to win over enough people through ideologically non-threatening means, appealing to their morality instead of telling them to move out of the way if they’re going to impede liberation. Does this mean that at the risk of people not finding their personal interest or stake in allying with migrants, they should not be challenged on their racism and settler privilege? Winning people over would seem to require ignoring issues of colonization or state violence (historical and current).[85]

In this context, indirectly calling for the militarization of the border (via CIR) does not seem contradictory to the goals for “racial justice,” so how can anything fundamentally change? Ford sees “The Law-Related Work of Ford Foundation Grantees Around the World” as part of the “Many Roads to Justice.”[86] You can perhaps see the parallels between the emphasis on legal work around cases in which South African apartheid laws were unfairly applied and the focus on racial profiling by Arpaio. It is no wonder, when fights for justice are channeled into legal battles, that “justice” loses meaning.
reform is not to legalize all undocumented immigrants who are in the country, much less address the source of the problem that cause the necessity of migration (although I would also argue that people should be able to move from region to region even if they don’t need to). And as Raúl Al-qaraz Ochoa writes, “The concept of citizenship has helped capitalism by always providing a subclass of exploitable, disposable cheap labor at their convenience. Citizenship legitimizes the global capitalist order, as well as their borders and their nation states. So when we talk about citizenship today, we should ask who/what benefits from the exploitation of an ‘illegal class.’”[78]

Integration means not only participating in the reinforcement of black inferiority and the concept of rule of law, but also of colonization. For example, take Mary Rose Wilcox, who, fully integrated as a Latina citizen, has allied herself with, and seems to be embraced by, elements of the local immigrants’ rights movement. Yet she supports the Loop 202 freeway extension that would either cut through the Gila River Indian Community reservation or their sacred South Mountain, displacing and dividing people within their own community, desecrating sacred sites, increasing pollution, among other problems. She is and has been affiliated with various Ford Foundation-funded organizations[79] and currently sits on the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors where she has come into conflict with Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Yet while she opposes Arpaio’s immigration policies, she is also part of the Arizona-Mexico Commission which facilitates free trade, partly through building infrastructure like NAFTA highways by being “instrumental in the development of the Canamex Corridor,” which, guess what, includes the “Sun Corridor” of which the Loop 202 extension would be part. So not only is she part of an organization that seeks to facilitate NAFTA—one major cause of people (indigenous and mestizo) having to leave their homes south of the border—she also aligns herself with development that negatively affects indigenous people in this region. Yet local activists have also shared the stage with her and cheered on her calls for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.[80]

Ford seems to be trying to push a consensus about Comprehensive Immigration Reform[81] although if any Ford-funded non-profit opposed CIR or even has serious qualms about what it could entail, they do not seem to have voiced it. Some immigrants’ rights groups have concerned themselves with addressing the issue of border security/militarization and specifying “humane” reform (which is still ambiguous), but most have not. Every CIR proposal I’ve seen has catered to white supremacist/nationalist fears and included increased border security (along with other plans such as requiring a national ID card containing biometrics information, which would diminish civil liberties even further[82]). This is a problem not only for those who would be crossing the border in the future, but also for the indigenous communities along the border.

"The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job.”

INCITE!
Women of Color Against Violence

is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing.

www.incite-national.org
It is no coincidence that Ford Foundation’s involvement during the resistance to apartheid in South Africa was similar to the Civil Rights movement in the US and in with Palestinian groups. Roelofs writes, “Foundations had been working for some time creating NGOs as alternatives to the liberation movement approach. The Ford Foundation promoted public interest law firms concerned with civil rights, which helped people to whom the apartheid laws were unfairly applied, and assisted black trade unions, especially those developing power in the mining industry…. Ford also gave… scholarships to enable blacks to become lawyers, and generally helped to moderate reformers.”[39]

In 1988 and probably prior, Ford Foundation was invested in IBM,[40] a corporation which was actually sued for their involvement in apartheid. “The complaint states, ‘The South African security forces used computers supplied by … IBM and Fujitsu … to restrict Black people’s movements within the country, to track non-whites and political dissidents, and to target individuals for the purpose of repressing the Black population and perpetuating the apartheid system.’ Black South Africans were issued passbooks, which the apartheid regime used to restrict movement and track millions of people, and to enable politically motivated arrests and disappearances over decades.”[41] IBM divested from South Africa in 1987 and it is difficult to say what their relationship with Ford Foundation was prior to this. It is interesting to note that Ford Motor Company, along with IBM, was also involved in S.A. apartheid[42]—just as both were with Nazi Germany[43]—but this is pretty irrelevant since Ford Motor Company and the Foundation have been separate since 1976. Yet IBM’s involvement might be especially relevant considering they are one of Homeland Security’s top contractors,[44] so they are likely to be involved in any national ID containing biometric information that U.S. citizens may be required to carry, possibly as part of Comprehensive Immigration Reform.[45]

Very similar to concerns raised in the book The Revolution Will Not Be Funded are the experiences of Arundhati Roy about Non-Governmental Organizations in India. “Eventually—on a smaller scale, but more insidiously—the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda. It turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples’ movements that have traditionally been self-reliant. NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they’re at it). Real political resistance offers no such short cuts. The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary.”[46]

new caste system largely invisible; (b) it has helped to perpetuate the myth that anyone can make it if they try; (c) it has encouraged the embrace of a ‘trick down theory of racial justice’; (d) it has greatly facilitated the divide-and-conquer tactics that gave rise to mass incarceration; and (e) it has inspired such polarization and media attention.[74]

Have civil rights efforts been specifically steered (by forces like Ford) in the direction of legal defense and away from the grassroots fights in the streets? Is this an effort to channel energy into directions that would be largely ineffective? Clearly one does not need a nefarious conspiracy theory (though one could still be true) to explain the counter-revolutionary efforts of those such as Ford. It is important to consider the ways that legal defense strategies have relied on an assumption of innocence, which then requires that everyone be innocent or else they will not be defended. Do Mumia Abu Jamal or Leonard Peltier have to be innocent to be defended? If immigrants or their supporters decide to use unconventional tactics in protest, will they be on their own?

If advocacy for undocumented immigrants is limited to the current set of laws, one is more likely to focus on racial profiling,[75] and educating about their rights although rights-education groups have fewer and fewer rights to inform them of. This will be a perpetual dilemma until the idea is challenged that a migrant’s crossing of the border or staying in the country illegally is the problem. A good portion of the immigrants’ rights movement seems to wait, therefore, until some undocumented immigrants get legalized through Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR). This reform will still leave plenty of migrants criminalized, including the newer arrivals whose border crossing may be more dangerous with the increased border militarization that seems to be part of every plan for CIR. It also certainly doesn’t address the causes of migration or the legitimacy of the border. Fighting current policy with the law is limited as well, because, “...as Native scholar Luana Ross notes, genocide has never been against the law in the United States... On the contrary, Native genocide has been expressly sanctioned as the law.”[76] You can say the same about the border, which is intimately tied with genocide and dispossession. The circumstances surrounding immigrants’ plight are pretty much all legitimization within the law. Therefore the debates lie safely between whether the federal or local governments should be enforcing immigration law, and whether local police should avoid making immigrants afraid to call the police or not (as though the enforcement of immigration law is the only thing that makes people, citizen or not, avoid calling the cops).[77]

The fight for legalization does not question the notion that undocumented immigrants’ actions are wrong instead of the laws and the economic circumstances being wrong. As I’ve mentioned, the intention of any passable
The fight for legalization does not question the notion that undocumented immigrants’ actions are wrong instead of the laws and the economic circumstances being wrong.

Legal Routes

Although the Ford Foundation may not have any clearly defined agenda regarding whiteness, they put a large amount of their “Advancing Racial Justice And Minority Rights” funding towards legal defense (MALDEF, NAACP-LDF).[71] Even though there are some important victories that come out of these activities, it is clearly within the framework of the current oppressive legal system.[72] The funding hardly challenges the system that labels people criminals, nor does it challenge the laws that have led to mass incarceration of Black people and undocumented immigrants. Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow, explains that civil rights groups have not been fighting mass incarceration because they have been focusing mostly on litigation, which cannot solve this problem. They also tend to avoid advocating for people who have been labeled criminals.[73]

Although Alexander is speaking about affirmative action in the quote that follows, it could also apply to the types of reforms that Ford has promoted in the past and what it intends for its advocacy of immigrants’ rights: “We should ask ourselves whether efforts to achieve ‘cosmetic’ racial diversity—that is, reform efforts that make institutions look good on the surface without the needed structural changes—have actually helped to facilitate the emergence of mass incarceration and interfered with the development of a more compassionate race consciousness.” She continues, “Racial justice advocates should reconsider the traditional approach to affirmative action because (a) it has helped to render a

With the Civil Rights Movement, Palestine, South Africa, and India in mind, let’s consider an example of what’s going on right now in the U.S. Opposition to Corrections Corporation of America (CCA)—which runs private detention centers and has influenced legislation like SB1070 (through the American Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC) so they may continue to profit—is at odds with the interests of Thurgood Marshall Jr., a board member of both Ford Foundation and CCA. Whether or not there is some awareness of this seeming contradiction on the part of CCA or Marshall Jr., it may be more useful for Ford to fund legal, non-militant opposition in contrast to the much more militant targeting of businesses that invest in private prison companies (like Wells Fargo who invests in GEO Group, another large private prison company) such as the actions by anarchists that have been happening in various cities across the US.[47] In addition, it seems as though focusing on private prisons as an aberration of the criminal “justice” system, deflecting attention away from the state and towards private entities, would be more in the interest of the Ford Foundation since they seem to be more generally allied with the state than any one corporation. To them it would be more important to have activists worrying solely about the privatization of prisons while leaving mass incarceration intact.[48]
**“Equality” for Stability**

If you looked at the Ford Foundation’s literature today, you might think they’re a totally different organization than they were during the civil rights movement or apartheid in South Africa. But Ford Foundation primarily discusses immigrants’ rights on a very superficial level, as though immigrants didn’t have it bad other than the “roundups, the denial of due process in deportation proceedings, abusive detention conditions and increased hate crimes and bias attacks.”[49] Although Ford Foundation acknowledges that the reasons for migration need to be addressed,[50] they do not explain how. It is pretty clear what their idea of “justice” for migrants is, considering their language on immigration and influence with NAFTA. When they have rationalized their support for immigrants’ rights, they speak of “our Nation’s future,” progress, stability, development, advancement, and finding our “common goals” or “common ground.”[51] Ford is not interested in equality; they want stability. Keep in mind that those in charge of Ford are some of the richest people in the world. They want enough people, who might otherwise be threats to the status quo, to come to share the values of “mass consumption, economic abundance... individualism, and mobility.”[52]

That said, Ford is interested in some immigrants’ economic participation as part of the larger success of the economy of the US,[53] in addition to being interested in directing political participation in specific ways (i.e. into the democratic party). But whether or not you agree with the significance of the Ford Foundation’s involvement with the CIA, their interest in channeling activists’ energies in certain directions, or at least keeping tabs on them, there is one thing that is less deniable—either way, their strategy is about recuperation. Even a former Ford Foundation program officer in South Africa stated, “The agenda of grant-making organisations is the agenda of capital. It is an agenda that is designed to make negative effects of capital more bearable rather than to reform the system by which capital is created.”[54]

It is true that the various non-profits that are funded by Ford may have a diverse range of intentions regarding long term goals in relation to immigrants’ rights. While an end to raids, mass detention and hate crimes is obvious, these are shorter-term goals. This ambiguity about long term goals opens the movement up for co-optation or being channeled in a direction that benefits few, similar to the examples given above about the Civil Rights Movement. What are and have been the long term goals of proponents of immigrants’ rights beyond basic human rights, and how do they compare to what entities like the Ford Foundation want?[55]

Ford hyped integration,[56] but what does this mean, and is this goal shared by these ideas.[66] This speaks to why the dichotomies between “good” and “bad” (white/black, hard-workers/“real criminals”) are complex. Martha Escobar explains that if one suggests that “those targeted are upstanding members of society,” this rationalizes “the violence that occurs to those that do not fit this category.” She continues, “...the binary opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants necessarily naturalizes the exclusion of some, mostly immigrants labeled ‘criminal’ in order to defend the belonging of others. This naturalizes any negative effects on those that are deemed ‘criminal,’” which applies to immigrants labeled “criminal” as well as the huge number of black people labeled “criminal.”[67]

Speaking of certain European immigrants, Daniel A. Rochmes and G. A. Elmer Griffin wrote, “...in order to become white they had to join in Black subjugation, i.e., the construction of Blackness as inferiority. Agreeing to support the system of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow, immigrants attained upward social mobility and secured a privileged status in their new country. The social status and rights granted them were those accorded to all who chose whiteness in exchange for endorsing and enforcing the notion of Black inferiority.”[68] It is important for white people to challenge this trajectory.

Things are not just black and white, but in many ways, power is structured on this black and white binary and is enforced through the law. Rochmes and Griffin continue, “‘Brownness’ has no fixed place in the Black–white binary. Chicano identity strives to say I am not white, but to not be white means to be both Black and inferior. This equation has pressed many Chicanos into uncritically disassociating with Blackness as a way of affirming the value of a brown identity. However, Chicano identity constructed without a critical awareness of whiteness as ‘the maintaining force’ of a racial system that posits ‘some as superior and others as subordinate’ replicates its hierarchies. The disassembly of whiteness would appear to be the necessary predicate for the formation of an ethnic identity that does not require a corresponding inferior.”[69] Considering that undocumented immigrants from south of the border do not necessarily subscribe to this type of identity, and more of them are increasingly from indigenous communities that don’t even speak Spanish (and therefore are even less likely to be able to integrate), applying this analysis of Chicano identity to these immigrants is not particularly useful. The issue here is not so much about attainment of whiteness by immigrants, but participation in white supremacy by anyone in the immigrants’ rights movement. An important question is: who is speaking for the immigrants’ rights movement, and how often is the messaging of the movement geared towards appealing to whites or alleviating the fear of white (and rich) people?[70] What role do white people play, then, in fighting white supremacy?
Ford and sections of the immigrants’ rights movement replicate the “‘colonizing trick’—the liberal myth that the United States is founded on democratic principles rather than being built on the pillars of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy.”

The concept of citizenship has helped capitalism by always providing a subclass of exploitable, disposable cheap labor at their convenience. Citizenship legitimizes the global capitalist order, as well as their borders and their nation states. So when we talk about citizenship today, we should ask who/what benefits from the exploitation of an ‘illegal class.’”
While right-wing conservatives may want you to believe that liberal organizations such as the Ford Foundation are trying to undermine America’s values and facilitate the invasion of the country by Mexicans, the interests of the Ford Foundation might be more closely aligned with conservatives than with many immigrants and immigrants’ rights activists. Right-wingers tend to hate the promotion of multiculturalism while some on the left tend to embrace it without realizing the implications—that it “renders race marginal by heralding the primacy of culture.”[58] Ford and similar organizations have an interest in promoting multiculturalism at the expense of truly addressing the political implications of race and racism. In addition, multiculturalism is not necessarily incompatible with capitalism. It may be as Noam Chomsky describes, that capitalism would like us all to be interchangeable cogs as producers and consumers.[59] Of course in the U.S., capitalism functions and has functioned in part by dividing people along racial lines, and functions better with the illusion that we live in a post-racial society.

Multiculturalism fits Ford Foundation’s vision of democracy. Ford and sections of the immigrants’ rights movement replicate the “colonizing trick”—the liberal myth that the United States is founded on democratic principles rather than being built on the pillars of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy.”[60] Since integration entails participation in promoting the rule of law, we can see where some elements of the immigrants’ rights movement perpetuate the white/black color line and ally with whiteness. Examples include the lack of acknowledgement of the white supremacy-saturated “justice” system in activists’ calls for going after the “real criminals,” or demanding that Sheriff Arpaio serve Maricopa County’s unserved warrants instead of going after immigrants.[61] In “No One is Criminal,” Martha Escobar wrote, “[W]hen we claim that immigrants are not criminals, the fundamental message is that immigrants are not Black, or at least, that immigrants will not be ‘another Black problem’... [C]riminalizing immigrants serves to discipline them into whiteness.”[62]

I wrote in “No Borders or Prison Walls,” that “the war against ‘illegal’ immigration is just one part of institutional racism, except this is an example that makes it all the more clear that crimes have been made out of the actions of people because of who they are.”[63] Yet the above attitude has also contaminated the calls against racial profiling that targets immigrants from south of the border, these calls being primarily concerned with innocent people getting caught up in what’s portrayed as an otherwise legitimate law enforcement system.[64] Limited by their own desire for credibility, many spokespersons have been unwilling to oppose the border or immigration laws;[65] unwilling to call out these laws as unjust; and even Black folks who are aware of the racism of law enforcement, such as Al Sharpton, have perpetuated