

Complacent Nation
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1) Project Summary: Complacent Nation

Over the last six months I've witnessed a transformation of the student movement. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) went from being a paper organization to a real one on the ground. Most having only met on listservs and conference calls, members were amazed upon meeting in person. In the halls of universities they gathered together, chapter by chapter and region by region, debating the true meaning of democracy.

SDS has grown not out of a present need to address an issue, not out of ideological affiliation, but out of a shared value system. Students from across the country, from varied backgrounds and traditions, came together to share in a true democratic process.

With my camera in hand, I traveled with the student movement, documenting the progression of events and the relationship of SDS to a broader Movement on the left. At the US Social Forum over 10,000 activists and organizers gathered to participate in workshops, panels, and meet-ups. Every cross-section of the left was present; environmental lobbies, councils on housing, labor constituencies, prisoner solidarity advocates, and anti-war organizers. The Left was united under a single slogan, "Another World is possible; Another US is necessary."

SDS members meeting at the forum were emboldened by the sense that they were part of something larger than themselves. One member in attendance, Beth Blume, remarked, "I couldn't help thinking throughout the forum of this mass organism of people meeting and talking. We're just one part of this enormous movement."

Students are always but a small part of a greater movement, but they can act as a spark to move it forward. In the 1960s the first SDS was a catalyst of change. Growing out of the civil rights movement and later galvanized by the War in Vietnam, the student movement grew to include tens of thousands of members. Today, SDS has emerged in the shadow of the past but looks toward the future.

The SDS Constitutional Convention was held this summer in Detroit, MI. Members from across the country converged on Wayne State University campus to determine the future vision and structure of the organization. Conversations ran into the late hours of the night as members came to compromise and change proposals. There was a sense that everyone in attendance genuinely cared; that they had the best of intentions. This assumption allowed for compromise to be

reached and debates to be won as a vision unfolded before them of a new and better society; one that is participatory and just.

I left Detroit in a state of disbelief. After months of following the stories of SDS members I was able to see their work unfold and meld into one creation. The production of the film had in many ways mimicked the trajectory of the organization. As the subjects grew and changed, so did I as a filmmaker.

2) Project Results:

Going into the project, I was perhaps, a bit naïve in thinking I could actually shoot and finish a feature documentary in a matter of a few months and on a limited budget. I was also working, primarily, alone, without a crew or advisers. This became stressful at times. However, the nature of the project was as such, that having a crew really wasn't possible. I wouldn't have been able to get the footage I needed or have the trust of my subjects if I were working with a crew. Much of the footage relies on my being able to move seamlessly in and out of small group dynamics and direct actions. I needed to be 'invisible' in a sense, and I was able to achieve this.

I have now completed all research and phase one of production for Complacent Nation. Given the time constraints I consider this to be a huge accomplishment. Continuing the project through the fall, I will complete the second phase of production and move into post by winter. Currently, I have a rough-cut completed, which will help me in securing more funding and distribution deals. In effect, 100 Projects for Peace allowed for the seed in an evolving project, without which the film would not be possible.

3) Implications:

While traveling on location for production I met a series of fellow filmmakers and alternative media advocates with whom I now collaborate. We're in the process of creating a national media collective that will, among other things, focus on the anti-war and student movements.