

A decade after the Occupy movement, a new digital archive chronicles its history—and continuing influence

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Launched at Case Western Reserve University this summer, the open-source Occupy Archive offers citizens and scholars a chance to revisit the multi-faceted movement—and recognize its roots in contemporary calls for reform and justice

The Occupy Movement was one of the first massive demonstrations to join online advocacy with in-person protests.

Culminating in hundreds of encampments and marches worldwide against income inequality, the [movement](#) also promoted causes for justice and reform that continue to influence present-day demonstrations for societal change.

Now, as the movement approaches its 10th anniversary, a home for its history—free-to-access open-source [digital archive](#)—has launched this summer at Case Western Reserve University.

Funded by the Freedman Center for Digital Scholarship in the Kelvin Smith Library at Case Western Reserve—and led by a scholar of the Occupy Movement—the [Occupy Archive](#) preserves more than 1,200 pages of documentation and offers access to more than 400 digitized materials that help bring to life the movement's massive scale, grassroots flavor and enduring impact.

"This archive is a resource that can help us all better understand and evaluate a period of activism that is both historic and contemporary—that was both ephemeral and transformative," said Heather McKee Hurwitz—a lecturer in the Department of Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Case Western Reserve—who has studied the movement since its earliest incarnations in 2010.

"Occupy is a major genesis of our current period of progressive activism—touching on issues that have influenced organizers responding to climate change and systemic racism," said Hurwitz, also a core research faculty member in the Women's and Gender Studies program at the university.

From social media, to the streets, to scholarship

First sprouting as a response to the 2009 [global financial crisis](#)—and measures taken to shore up large financial institutions in the downturn's wake—the movement eventually spread to more than 1,000 locations worldwide.

Hurwitz conducted on-site research at perhaps the movement's best-known U.S. incarnations—New York City's Occupy Wall Street, as well as California's Occupy Oakland. In the years after the protests, Hurwitz continued to collect interviews with Occupy organizers and participants, as well as literature, signs, art and ephemera—now preserved in the digital archive.

While Occupy started as a mass demonstration against financial institutions amid the Great Recession, the story of the movement is not so simple, Hurwitz argues in her book—"[Are We the 99%?: The Occupy Movement, Feminism, and Intersectionality](#)"—to be published this fall by Temple University Press.

"Mostly absent in the common narrative of Occupy was the sheer diversity of causes within the movement," said Hurwitz. "While this contributed to its vibrancy—and certainly lives on in advocacy on issues that have gained more mainstream support, such as universal health care—Occupy's many parts, locations and makeshift nature created issues that undermined its effectiveness."

In the book, Hurwitz documents internal conflicts about gender, race, class and sexuality within the movement.

"Today we see movements framing their issues with much more intersectionality—and building coalitions with other movements," said Hurwitz. "This is a lesson learned from Occupy's undoing."

Preserving the past for the future

As a Freedman Fellow at the Freedman Center for Digital Scholarship at Case Western Reserve, Hurwitz led a team of librarians and student researchers who scanned hundreds of items, created a searchable tagging system, and designed teaching tools and research guides to help students, teachers, and the public use the archive.

"Creating the resource has been a dream of mine for years," said Hurwitz. "The librarians and students at Case Western Reserve saw the potential and had vision and knowledge to bring it to life."

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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