

Grassroots activism is hard. Can open source help?

Open Source Bridge 2017

thenexusofprivacy.net/data/osb17-activism-slides.pdf

Jon Pincus @jdp23

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About me: Software engineer, entrepreneur, strategist

- Background: software tools, social networks
- Current focus: diversity-friendly software



... and grassroots activist!



*Grassroots activism =
people taking action*



RESIST sign at SFO #noban Protest, [Kenneth Lu](#), via [Wikipedia](#) and [Flickr](#)



Women's March, Washington DC, Brian Allen, via [Wikipedia](#) and [Voice of America](#)



Indivisible Meeting, Grand Rapids MI, Nina DeSarro, WZZM

Grassroots activism

- “Bottom-up”
- Often involving people new to activism
- National movements are usually decentralized

Today's focus: *progressive* and *transpartisan* groups

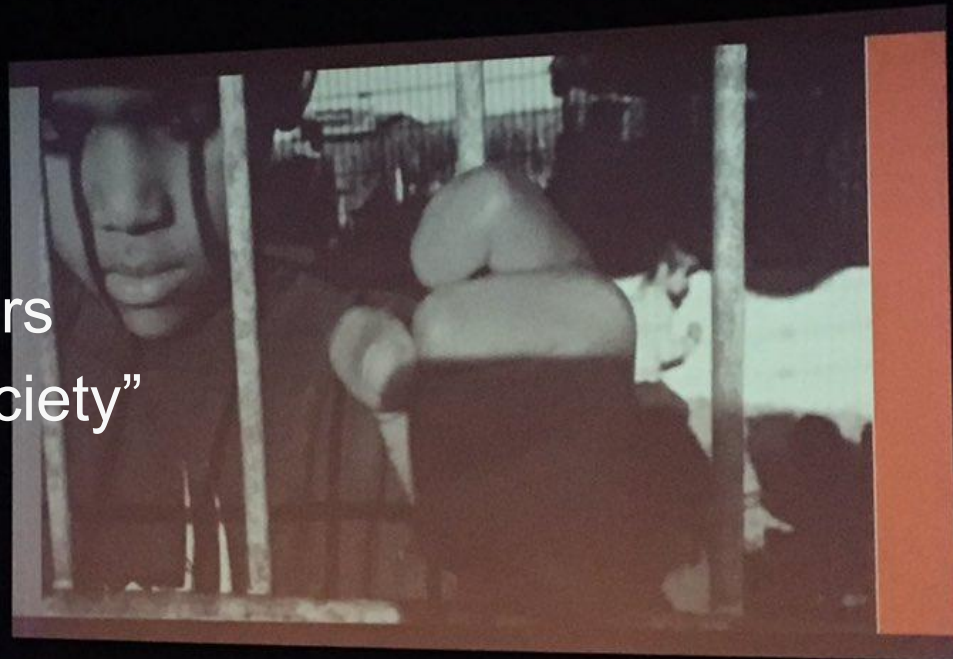
Grassroots activism

is primarily about people ...

... but technology matters too

“Technologies reflect
the biases of the makers
and implicit rules of society”

- Malkia Cyril, at PDF



As tweeted by @anxiaostudio (an xiao mina)

Outline

- Today's landscape
 - Needs
 - Tools
 - Techniques
- Opportunities
 - Incremental
 - Transformational

What do grassroots activism groups do?

- Mobilize
- Organize
- Communicate with their members
- Work with other groups

For example

- Events
 - Marches, town halls, protests, ...
 - Often co-promoted with other groups
- Send out daily and weekly actions
 - Call your congressperson about X, here's the talking points!
- Doorbelling, canvassing, house parties
- Discussions
- Meetings
- Workshops and trainings

What tools are most common?

Facebook groups, pages, events

Email

Web sites

Google Docs

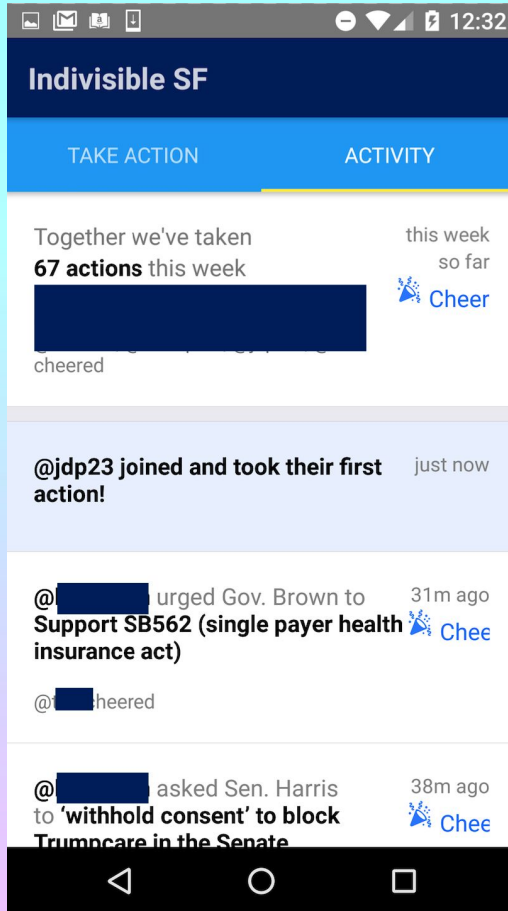
Meetup

Slack

Twitter and Instagram

For example: Daily/Weekly Actions

- Collect ideas and decide priority
 - Email, Facebook group, Slack
- Draft, edit, discuss
 - Google Docs, Slack, Facebook, email, teleconference, ...
- Distribute
 - Facebook, email, Twitter, web site, Instagram, app ...
- Promote
 - Like, retweet, share, forward, ...
- Track
 - Google Form, Facebook thread, app, ...



Amplify: an “actions” app from Indivisible SF

- “Cheering” for positive reinforcement
- One-click tracking

*People are not satisfied
with the tools they're using*

Challenges with today's tools

- Organizing
 - "Tool overload"
- Discussion
 - Facebook and email aren't very good for conversations
 - Slack's useful, but limited
 - Forums might be better but how to get people to use them?
- Broadcasting and recruiting - "where people are"
 - How to integrate Facebook, email, other social networks, mobile apps, the web, ...?

The Facebook dilemma

It's easy!

“Everybody” is on Facebook!

But ...

The Facebook dilemma

Most people typically don't see most Facebook posts

Facebook's tools suck for activism

Many people *aren't* on Facebook

Many people don't feel safe doing activism on Facebook

Facebook is a panoptic "real names" environment

Facebook is an especially hostile environment for activists



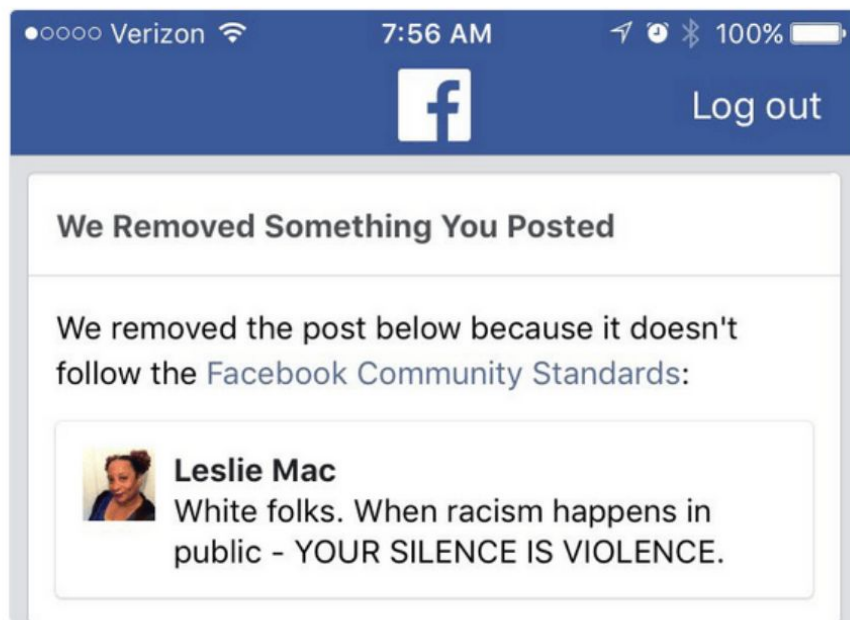
Leslie Mac ✓

@LeslieMac



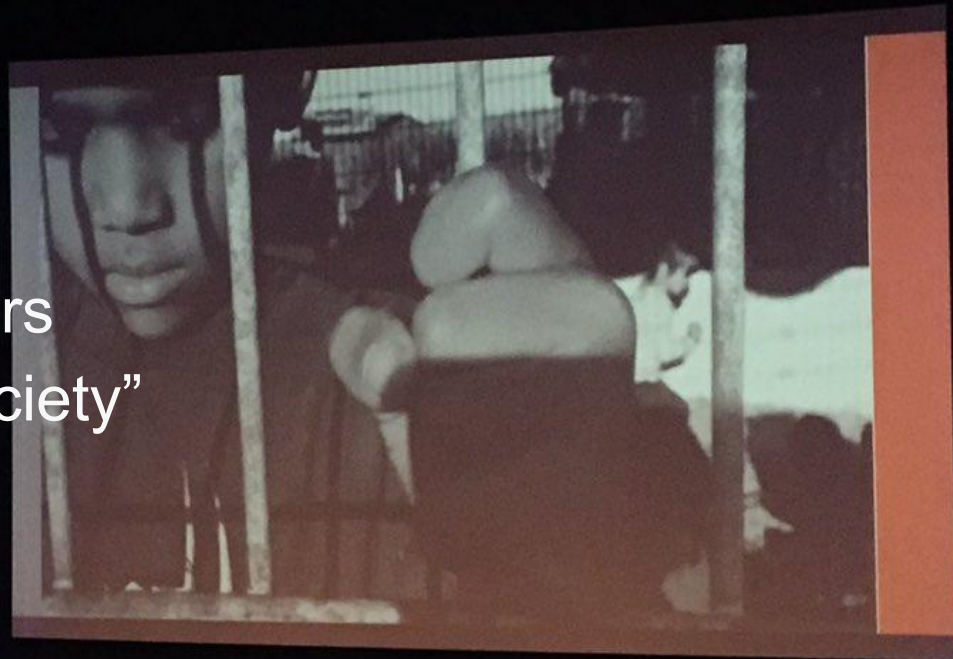
Follow

So @facebook put in 24 jail for this post.
Apparently plainly expecting white folks to
speak up against racism is against their
standards...



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- Today's landscape
 - Needs
 - Tools
 - **Techniques for intersectional inclusion**
- Opportunities
 - Incremental
 - Transformational

Progressive and transpartisan groups

have an additional challenge:

*building broad **and diverse** coalitions*



“Our agenda of equity and justice is not in power in government. What we have is people, so we can’t afford to exclude. That’s our strength, and we can’t treat it cavalierly.”

-- *Aditi Juneja, in How to Make Inclusion and Intersectionality Real*

Intersectionality

Overlapping or intersecting
social identities
and related systems of
oppression,
domination,
or discrimination



Kimberlé Crenshaw

more at <http://bit.ly/osb17-inter>

*Intersectionally-focused groups use
similar tools ...*

but approach things differently

For example: reducing barriers to access

- Provide information in multiple forms
- Onboarding and training
- Accessibility -- online and for physical spaces
- Accommodate people with different time availability and skill sets
- Use easy-to-understand language

For example

Moderator Training



<https://SeattleIndivisible.com>

Training by Rev. Azure Lunatic - video coming soon!

Intersectional techniques

- Reduce barriers to access
- A code of conduct
- Help people learn - and take on larger roles if they want
- Institutionalize intersectionality in the group's organization and processes

details at <http://bit.ly/osb17-techniques>

Outline

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 - Needs
 - Tools
 - Intersectional techniques
- **Opportunities**
 - Incremental
 - Transformational

Incremental opportunities

- More use of already-usable tools
- Improve and evolve tools
- Tools tying together multiple channels
- Creating an anti-oppressive network for activists

There are some good tools out there!

- Web site: Wordpress, Drupal
- Blogging: Wordpress, Ghost, Jekyll, Known, ...
- Forums: Discourse, ...
- Secure messaging: Whisper, Wire, Matrix/Riot
- Decision-making: Loomio
- Community: Mastodon? Known?
- Platform: Action Network, Affinity (in progress)
- ...

How could tools evolve?

- Easier setup
- Better onboarding
- Improved accessibility
- “How-tos” for key activism use cases
- New functionality not provided by commercial alternatives

For example: Slack alternatives

Slack's not designed for grassroots activism

- No moderation
- Hard to recover context
 - Slack's "threads" aren't very good; room to do better
- No two-way email connection
- Slack's free version has limits on searching old messages
 - Easy to lose history

Zulip, Mattermost, Rocket.Chat, Matrix/Riot have Slack-like functionality, decent usability ...

How a Slack alternative could evolve for activists

- Defaults that work for activist use cases
- Improved onboarding
- Better two-way email integration
- Facebook integration
- One-click installs on ISPs, hosting available
- “How-tos” for activism
 - Recommended channels, welcome bot, techniques for using with GoogleDocs/Etherpad, how to use polls for daily/weekly actions, ...

Some specific opportunities for open source tools

- Look internationally
 - US-based companies are increasingly hard to trust
- Discussions could be better
 - Chat/thread hybrid
 - Improved moderation
 - Dealing with microaggressions
- Fragmented conversations
 - Leverage Indieweb syndication technology
- “The Facebook dilemma”
 - Build a Mastodon-based activism network

A functionality gap: microaggressions

Microaggression: casual degradation of any marginalized group

“You’re so articulate for somebody with a rainbow earring!”

Most microaggressions are unintentional, but ...

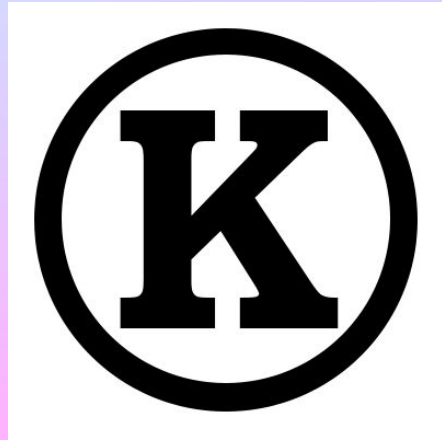
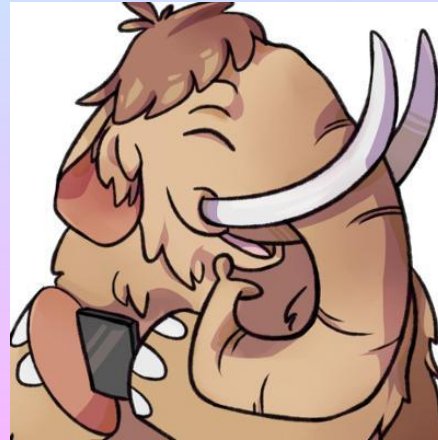
- They make a group less inclusive to marginalized people
- Call-outs, defensiveness, and white/male fragility can lead to angry discussions - and people leaving the group

Tools could help!

- Preventing microaggressions
 - Warning *before* people post
- Reducing the effects
 - Encourage “call-in” approaches when appropriate
 - Make it a learning opportunity
 - Hide posts from people who don’t want to deal with it

Creating an anti-oppressive network for activists

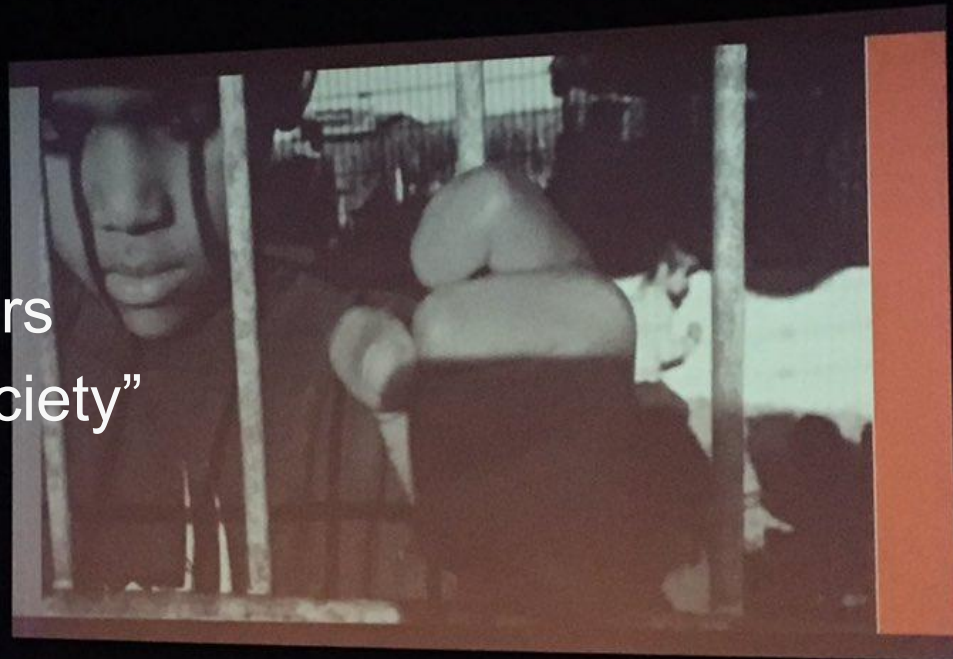
- Decentralized social networks could be a good match for (decentralized) grassroots organization
- Mastodon or Known, plus ...
 - Groups
 - Events
 - Multiple levels of federation
 - Stronger security



Transformational opportunities

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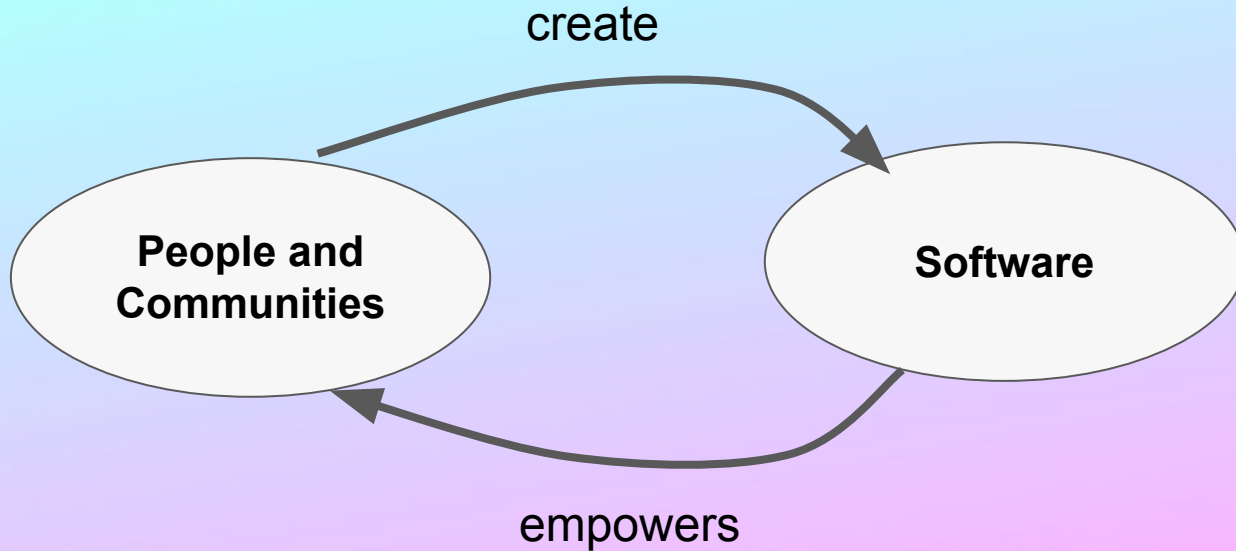


As tweeted by @anxiaostudio (an xiao mina)

*The software industry's lack of diversity
is embedded in the processes we use
and the software itself*

*Software today works best for
people like its creators*

Software reinforces power dynamics



From [Supporting Diversity with A New Approach to Software](#), with Tammarrian Rogers, OSBridge 2016

It doesn't have to be that way

Techniques for diversity-friendly software ...

- [Diversity-friendly software](#), with Shireen Mitchell, SXSW 2017
- [Supporting Diversity with A New Approach to Software](#), with Tammarran Rogers, Open Source Bridge 2016
- [Transforming Tech with Diversity-friendly software](#), TRANSform Tech 2017
- [Gender HCI, Feminist HCI, and Post-Colonial Computing](#)

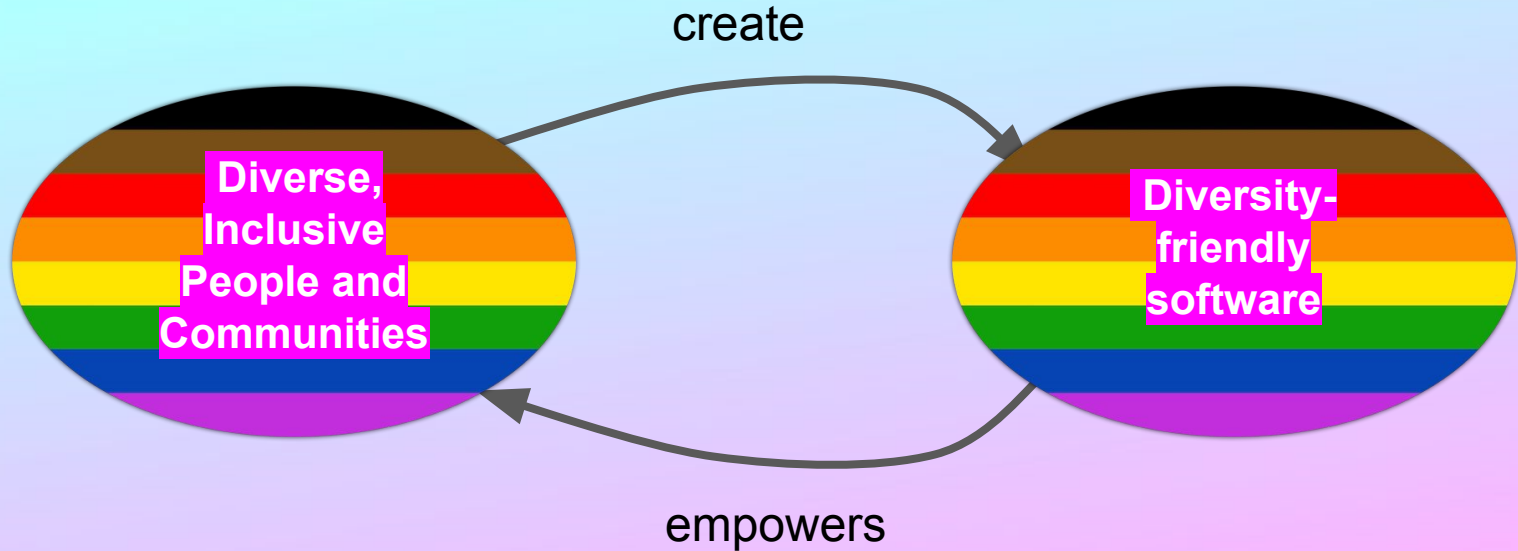


<http://bit.ly/div5y-strategy>

Imagine a new platform for activism ...

Created by diverse teams
working with a diverse community
in a design-led process
using methodologies like design justice
and design from the margins

Let's create a virtuous cycle!



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