

Narratives From The Day of Action

[The Walkout]

Meeting with Janet on February 13th presented the opportunity for her to really get to know what Berkeley's about. I was definitely nervous as one of the first speakers in the meeting, but my anxiety was overcome with the adrenaline of being able to face Janet and speak my truth. I walked out of the meeting with Janet fueled by my utter anger at the significance of such an individual taking space as the president of the UC, an institution that prides itself on its diversity and progressiveness. Witnessing the blank expression on Janet's face as each and every one of us shared our experiences and stories further reinforced her complete lack of ability to relate to students. My decision to walk out was meant as message to Janet that we're not interested in conversating. We never were, we want her out. — C.

[The Rally]

Restored with a sense of hope, I saw a vibrant manifestation of discontent and unified will to commit to the struggle for transformation. The organizing, the lack of sleep, the fear of dreaming too big but allowing the dream to persist. As numbers dwindled and the rawness of occupying under late night early morning drizzle kept me from sleeping and warding off the unresting questions, "What's next? How big is this monster? It must be possible. But how?" — P.

I participated in the rally on February 13 because I believe that Janet Napolitano embodies a threat to what I value the most in life, the right to an education.

I firmly believe Janet Napolitano represents a confluence of privatization, militarization, and a co-optation of the right to public education. Therefore, I have chosen to be a part of the movement, to not only oppose Napolitano's UC Regent Presidency but to protect the UC system from a leader I see as incompetent and dangerous. — G.H.

As a grandchild, child of migrants and a migrant student-worker at UC Berkeley I protested in solidarity with my peoples against the presidency of Janet Napolitano. As the former head of Homeland Security and governor of Arizona, Napolitano served as an instigator for the spread of racial profiling laws and injustice against migrant families. With around 2 million people displaced during her presidency, how can I as a migrant student-teacher trust that she will not continue her tradition as a human rights violator? As a student I want to vote for my University's president. I say, NO NO NO NAPOLITANO. We want a re-election. — V.

And there we were, concentrated under the sun. People's colors were radiantly standing out with their signs, faces, clothes, and eyes set on the speakers and the students holding it down. The rally, and all the action throughout, was making me have a range of emotions and giving me teaching moments that any schooling couldn't give you. I could see how our plans unfolded into practice, all of our work, our thoughts, materialized into action... in a way, it was like building a tangible path. Weaving the

flow of the march towards the building where Napolitano was hiding and speaking our truth standing by, and with, the student-occupied Blum Center was an empowering moment that reflected what we could achieve together. Later, when I had to be outside the Blum Center for 26 hours –without sleeping and under the rain, the support of so many people told me that we were doing something right: our message and our will has hit home for them. This is only the beginning. Our strength and our hearts have grown and we are ready to keep on fighting. – F.

I remember drawing ideas of how the rally would look visually with all the signs and art pieces, but even then, I was not prepared to see the immense support from students and community members. I remember what I dreamt the night before the rally: I was painting yellow signs. And when I woke up and gathered the things I needed for the day, I remember freaking out because I couldn't find the signs I had dreamt about. That's how important this was to me. I also remember thinking of taking a blanket because I knew of the civil disobedience, but I talked myself out of it. I baked cookies for the folks taking over the building. I was nervous about the rally, but I had to show my appreciation for the people putting their bodies on the line. Nothing could prepare me for the emotions I felt then. I just remember being at the rally and marching to University Library, seeing the mass of red and black, and then to Blum. I saw the banner drop at Blum as we walked, and I got a lump in my throat and with a cracked voice I whispered, "they did it. they are in." It was at that moment I realized we had started something big. Something we had wanted, but something that was going to take a lot of organizing, a lot of energy and a lot of love. I don't hate Napolitano. I could care less about her as a person. But I care that she is held responsible for all the lives she has hurt. Still, I don't feed off of that. I feed off of the love from & for my community. The fuel that kept me going in the days of action and what keeps me doing the work I do is through the power of standing up and speaking up. And when the people no longer live in fear and speak up, no Regent, President or mainstream media outlet can shut you up. I believe this is what SCSC is all about. – A.S.V.

[The Takeover]

I participated in the February 13-14 occupation of the Blum Center in opposition to Janet Napolitano's hire as the President of the UC system. But more than a site of rejection, this occupation--fittingly leading into Valentine's Day--created a space of love and commitment by students from across the university to a school free of state violence and the racisms and oppressions that mark it. Over the course of 24 hours, the eleven of us inside the Blum Center transformed it from a bureaucratic campus building into a livable space that deeply engaged with students' and workers' actual political concerns. In addition to sharing kindnesses, insights, and laughter with those inside, I remember being deeply moved by the many who remained outside of the building through the night. Exposed to the cold and rain and subjected to hourly amplified warnings by police, these people created a space of safety and solidarity for all of us. It is this incredible gesture of care that I remember most of all. – B.

As one of the folks who helped do outreach before the three actions on February 13th & 14th, and as someone who was part of the occupation, what I can say for sure is that the whole experience of planning and experiencing those two days showed me the sheer power of folks here at Berkeley and around us. It showed me how much passion students of color have here, and how much support and care there is from folks in communities from all over. My running thought throughout the occupation was that none of it would

be possible without everyone who came to be with us, those who posted about it or even just started a conversation. Afterward, I am still struck by how much support I saw in terms of healing and destressing. Essentially, I think a great part of what I saw during that seemingly scary and tense time was actually fueled by love -- love for each other and our different communities. — P.O.

The experience of the Takeover was itself a very powerful one but also intensely emotionally overwhelming. I think it is important to recognize the heavy emotions that ran through all of us simultaneously. One of the difficult moments of the takeover was how this thick glass wall somehow divided us from the inside of the building with the student community outside. Regardless of this challenge that made it harder to communicate with people from the outside, seeing them sitting down and planting themselves on the ground, I felt like we weren't the only ones doing the takeover of the building. Every time I would look outside and I would see everyone, I feel like that's where I would gather most of the strength from to be able to continue with the action. I feel like the people outside were the backbone of the action because they were protecting us, they were taking care of us for twenty six hours and as I began to grow aware that we were losing capacity, the not knowing what to do from the inside was driving me crazy. — S.R.

Before going into the building, I thought the take-over would probably be interrupted and thwarted by the police. As we were approaching, I took a glimpse through the blurred glass of the building and mistook some of the staff members inside for cops. But, having entered the building, my anxiety about police aggression finally dissolved a bit after a hectic half hour or so of locking the doors, posting signs on the windows, and rummaging through kitchen cabinets for materials for a makeshift toilet, when I could sit down together with those inside and we could all check in. Going around the circle, it felt like those present were listening and trying to open space for each other. I had a feeling of groundedness. But attentions were also being drawn elsewhere: to critical phone calls with organizers, to the upstairs door and the cops in the adjacent room, to those speaking at the outside assembly, to videos and screens. This splitting and movement of attention seemed to define the takeover: those inside the building were there, physically, with each other — sharing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, tea, some music, fancy furniture and iffy bathroom facilities — but we were also oriented, in different ways, to those across the glass and elsewhere, and to hoped for or feared future events: the raids, arrests, marches, or solidarity actions that might have occurred. The action was in a few places at once. The glass wall of the building was maddening, but it also gave view to this dislocatedness: looking at those out on the deck, it was possible to see at the same time reflections of those inside the Blum center: it was as if our second selves were sitting amongst friends and strangers on the deck. As midnight passed, some of those inside lined up in front of the glass for an impromptu zumba class; before this, some of us recorded 'Real World'-esque confessional videos, having fun inventing and distorting dramas between us. As night wore on, I found it hard to know what was actually happening: were the cops issuing dispersal orders or some other warning to those outside; were the cops about to come at the doors; were they going to break in before the working day? I was woken up by anxious voices, responding to enigmatic sounds and police movements. From this first moment on, the second day in the Blum center felt more strained. The phone calls were more often taken up with arguments. Four of those from the takeover decided to leave the building; their moment of leaving seemed overwhelming, with insistent voices and confusions across the door. I started to feel less present in my body, but was hoping that an afternoon housewarming gathering would bring needed materials — a curtain for some privacy, toiletries, new clothes — but also in some more general way, a new sense of comfort and wellness. As it was, the afternoon gathering was the moment when some of those who, after weeks of

intensive organizing, had slept a night on the deck, in the rain, exposed to the police, dealing with media and sometimes volatile dynamics, could convey to those of us still inside that the action should end, for now, to give time for mending, reflection, and the making of something else in the weeks to come. — A.