

But Occupy was not able to translate its complaints into a policy agenda. It wasn't clear what the members of the movement wanted to have happen. The mere act of their camping out became problematic as winter set in and issues of sanitation and crowd control grew worse; in many cities, authorities ordered police to remove the protesters from public spaces.

As Rosemary Feurer, a historian at Northern Illinois University, has noted, protest movements typically don't start out with set lists of goals that they want politicians to achieve. The populist movements of the 19th century and early labor union activity began in ways similar to the beginnings of the Occupy movement: An encampment of people came together, found they shared a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, and worked to change it. As Feurer has observed, "What starts these movements is a list of grievances. You don't start with a list of goals, but with a sense of what's wrong."^e

Occupy gatherings sought to run by consensus, with those gathered expressing approval or disapproval of simple items, such as the order of speakers, through hand gestures. The movement, by its nature, was suspicious of leaders. "Don't lose sight of the bigger message of this movement being driven from the bottom up by consensus and not affiliation or deference to any group that's out there," said Ed Needham, a media spokesman for Occupy Wall Street.^f

As such, Occupy had a hard time finding allegiance even with politicians who might have been sympathetic.

This was exemplified when John Lewis, a Democratic congressman from Georgia and hero of the civil rights movement, showed up at the Occupy Atlanta site. Protesters there praised Lewis but refused to let him speak right away, as that would have disrupted the scheduled agenda.

Lewis, who had other obligations, decided to leave, although he said he took no offense. Recalling his own days as head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, he said civil rights groups sometimes reached consensus slowly and refused to be deferential to more established leaders. "It is growing, it is maturing, it will work out," Lewis told reporters, speaking about the Occupy movement at the Atlanta site. "It will come of age."

Just a few months after the protests began, however, it didn't appear that Occupy would have continuing relevance. What were highly visible encampments had already given way to sporadic, sparsely attended marches. Some of its rhetoric is still used by leftist protesters, but while the Tea Party thrives, Occupy is mostly a memory. "Occupy does not have a traditional leadership structure, making it difficult for the movement to engage in conventional political organizing in support of state legislators and members of Congress, like the Tea Party has," *The New York Times* reported in April 2012. "And some activists, angry at politicians across the board, do not see electoral politics as the best avenue for the movement, complicating efforts to chart its direction."^g

^a Michael Barone, "Tea Party Brings Energy, Change and Tumult to GOP," *Washington Examiner*, March 14, 2010, http://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbarone/2010/03/15/tea_party_brings_energy_change_and_tumult_to_gop/page/full.

^b Peter Katel, "Tea Party Movement," *CQ Researcher*, May 19, 2010.

^c Quoted in Matt Bai, "'You're Nuts!'" *New York Times Magazine*, October 16, 2001, 44.

^d Ed Kilgore, "The Tea Party Is Losing Battles but Winning the War," *Talking Points Memo*, August 6, 2014, <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/losing-battles-winning-wars>.

^e Quoted in Alan Greenblatt, "For Wall Street Protests, What Constitutes Success?" NPR, October 14, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/14/141347126/for-wall-street-protests-what-constitutes-success>.

^f Phone interview with Ed Needham, October 12, 2011.

^g Michael S. Schmidt, "For Occupy Movement, a Challenge to Recapture Momentum," *New York Times*, April 1, 2012, A21.