

OTHERING & BELONGING CONFERENCE

O&B24 post-
conference
report



Superpowers, Activated

from john a. powell
Director, Othering & Belonging Institute



john powell at the 2024 O&B
Conference in Oakland, California

“Othering is the problem of the twenty-first century. It’s not just a problem in the United States, it’s a problem all over the world. And what’s our response to that? How do we produce, offer, and narrate an alternative vision, all across the world? **So that’s what the conference is about. This is a conference about belonging, and about drawing that as broadly as possible.**” - john a. powell

IT ALREADY SEEMS like both a long time ago and just yesterday that over 2,000 of us came together at the 2024 [Othering & Belonging Conference in Oakland](#), joining thousands more who tuned in online.

Belonging is foundational and something that all people desire. Yet the reality is that we live in a world where many advocate a kind of belonging available to only a select group, where an “other” must be created and maintained in order to define who belongs, and who doesn’t.

Belonging **without** othering, then, becomes our challenge and our aspiration.

I know that building a world where **everyone belongs** and **no one is othered** seems like an ambitious effort, and some would even say impossible. If I did not know many of the people supporting this movement, including you, I might agree. Instead, what I see, and what I think the conference in April illustrated, is that belonging is a global movement, with people doing work based on their belief that this new world is at least a **possibility**, and that possibility is one that we can organize around. This conference is a space where we try to give life to that possibility, and to each other.

I do not subscribe to a superpower but if I did, it would be us.

Belonging is more than just a hashtag, it’s more than just a dream— we are part of a movement, so let’s keep moving. And we are also part of a family, so let’s keep practicing care and love.

On the cover: Indigenous scholar Dr. Yuria Celidwen opened the conference with an invitation to build an ethics of belonging

Unless noted, all photos are by Nicholas Bruno of Lea Bruno Productions

Right: O&B24 attendee co-creating the live, community mural-making workshop led by Oakland artist/activist Marty Aranaydo and TDK Crew



What we built, together.

Learnings from O&B 2024

from **Rachelle Galloway-Popotas**,
O&B24 Conference Director

I'M SO PLEASED to share this report with you that takes a look back at our [2024 Othering & Belonging Conference](#), held April 25-27 in Oakland, California.

First I want to **thank you** for being part of co-creating this powerful gathering. If you attended in April, or are finding this report because you are curious about the conference or the Othering & Belonging Institute, I hope this report captures some of the essence of both the unique experience we shared at the conference over three days as well as about the work of building belonging that continues.

I've been fortunate to take part in planning all of our conferences since our first one in 2015, so I can say with experience that we definitely "leveled up" this year. We moved and activated a fully integrated conference campus spread across two historic Oakland institutions—the Henry J. Kaiser Center for the Arts and the Oakland Museum of California—where we sought to bring an interactive program of connection and engagement rooted in belonging to every single person whether attendee, speaker, artist, or volunteer.

Every O&B conference has been special, but this one had many "firsts," and we highlight several of those in this report.

My colleague Ivan Natividad gives a detailed **report from the ground**. From his perspective attending an O&B conference for the first time, Ivan shares his takeaways from the curation of the sessions and speakers to the vibrant space called The Commons to the fusion of arts and scholarship. I believe he accurately captures the immersive experience that was O&B 24, illustrating how this special gathering was both rich in details **and** a whole that was bigger than the sum of its parts.

Along with our successes, we also want to know with specificity what we can improve upon. In our "Lessons Learned" section **Lisa Nguyen**, an OBI Summer Fellow, offers some actionable ideas, based on her summer researching OBI conferences and their impact, on how we can improve our events, in order to more fully live up to designing spaces as co-creative, participatory, and radically inclusive.

It's not only that we want to make future conferences more meaningful, but we also aim to situate these gatherings as a part of OBI's **moonshot**. On the first day of the conference OBI Deputy Director Ashlin Malouf-Gashaw elevated this goal when she laid out the following charge to the crowd: "How can we use our time over these next three days to talk about and think about **truly making belonging a global norm?**"

Judging from the hundreds of evaluations we read, and the many stories and messages that participants shared with us, our 2024 conference was one vibrant expression of the **possibility and the promise** of that moonshot.

Thank you for helping make belonging a reality now and toward the future. I can't wait to gather with you again in the future.

from left: O&B24 stage manager Chi Chi Okonmah, conference director Rachelle Galloway-Popotas, and assistant stage manager Kimi Okada backstage at O&B24.



THANK YOU!

We are so grateful to the organizations below who provided sponsorship for O&B24. In addition to their generous financial support, many foundation staff took leadership roles in conference sessions and conversations. If you would like to continue to support our ongoing work, or join this global movement of belonging, please contact Erika Prasad at eaprasad@berkeley.edu.

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Welcome to a world where we all belong

Report Back from Othering & Belonging 2024

by Ivan Natividad
OBI Assistant Communications Director

THIS YEAR WAS my first time attending an Othering & Belonging Conference, and I was intrigued to see how the framework of belonging would come to life in such a large-scale gathering. Held at Oakland's historic and newly-renovated Kaiser Center I shared space for three days with over 2,000 people—fellow OBI staff, dozens of volunteers, and over a hundred speakers and artists—all of us gathered together to explore ideas and work based on belonging, without othering. Here are some of my takeaways from those vibrant three days.

Making Sense of Our World

One clear insight is that the conference program spoke to the most prominent dynamics in the world today. From the opening to closing mainstage talks, to the myriad arts and cultural offerings, to the cutting-edge breakout sessions, conference conversations were designed to respond to the question of how to build a world of belonging—one that doesn't require othering. Conversation topics included ongoing wars in Gaza and Ukraine and the role of collective memory, trauma, and narrative in addressing those, among other areas; ideas for structuring an economy based on care and belonging rather than profit and extraction; how disability and restorative justice can be interdependent with a belonging movement; and conversation among leaders from many different communities and geographies discussing and modeling work in peacebuilding in a time of war, and building long bridges to shore up democratic norms in a time of increasing fragmentation.

One attendee evaluation shared, "I love it when people talk about these huge and (so far) intractable

problems in ways that help them to take clearer shape and feel less amorphous."

In the mainstage sessions, a multitude of speakers and artists helped define key ideas, which attendees were then able to unpack in a set of sixteen breakout sessions, and through interactive exhibits and cultural offerings. Concurrent workshops were offered to strategize on how to apply the concept of "targeted universalism," the vital role of public infrastructure in a democratic society; xenophobia and the future of the immigrant rights movements; food sovereignty; and how to use data to advance belonging, among many other rich sessions.

Beyond strategy and analysis, **how** we relate to each other was also a primary theme. One program track that highlighted how to build a "greater we" highlighted conversations on building and sustaining relationships that truly support a more inclusive field of change. Debt activist and author **Astra Taylor** shared about the power of solidarity, while a long

**"The sense of possibility
in so many people
recognizing and
listening to the suffering
and humanity of others."**

Attendee response to "what did you find
most valuable about O&B24?"



From left: Kaitlin McGaw
and Samara Atkins of
Grammy-award winning
band Alphabet Rockers,
took over the public deck
with a highly-interactive set



Long Bridging and Democracy mainstage conversation, from left: Moderator Yuna Blajer de la Garza, Pastor Bob Roberts, Myriam Méndez Montalvo, Omar Salha, and DeAngelo Bester.

bridging conversation offered practical applications for working across social and institutional differences. OBI director **john powell** and acclaimed journalist **Maria Hinojosa** discussed the need for bridging and belonging in a time of increasing distrust, loneliness, and fracturing, and ways to get there, insisting on holding onto our shared humanity and orienting our work from there.

The diversity and breadth of the conversations stood out to many attendees, who mentioned the depth of the speakers and the curation of the agenda in their evaluations following the conference.

As my colleague Lisa Nguyen found when analyzing the evaluations, “Attendees found the talks most memorable when speakers provided concrete examples of othering and belonging and worked through the framework during panels.”

The Commons: Connection and Co-Creation

This year’s conference venue included a massive auditorium that OBI re-imagined and built as a space dubbed “**The Commons.**” As the name alluded, this was a public space that belonged to all. The Commons—a vibrant hub for attendees with space to connect and relax, participate in interactive exhibits, meet OBI staff, and buy books or merchandise—became the heartbeat of the conference.

Fanning out from a central lounge, where attendees could find tables to work at and comfortable furniture to rest or meet with others, were a series of activities and exhibits. The **Belonging Design Principles** exhibit, artist Christine Wong Yap’s “**How I Keep Looking Up**” installation of banners and

“This was one of the best panels I have ever witnessed in my life. The stories the panelists told were moving and the way that they demonstrated the sort of thoughtful bridging to create belonging that we all try to do was a powerful example.”

Attendee Testimonial on the Long Bridging for Democracy panel

stories created as a participatory project with Yap and women from three immigrant communities, and a public altar-making, inviting in space for grief and joy, led by artist Veronica Ramirez were all open for exploration and engagement. A popular social justice poster-making area, led by **Favianna Rodriguez** and the **Center for Cultural Power**, and live screenprinting by local screenprinter **Franklin Cartagena** from Oakland's Revolt Silkscreen, were also on hand for tactile engagement.

In addition The Commons was also the place to learn from OBI's first crowd-sourced exhibit, the [Belonging in Action Poster Gallery](#), which gave attendees an opportunity to explore dozens of posters submitted by creators all over the world, while the **Belonging Booktable** was always packed with both those looking to buy books and waiting in line to meet and greet authors or have them sign copies of their books.

The Commons was also the location of the popular Community Stage. Adorned with a commissioned banner handpainted with the word "Belonging," created by local artist **Marty Aranydo** and members of Oakland's **TDK Crew**, the Community Stage became both a backdrop for selfies and group photos as well as a space for joy and movement that showcased local talent. A session of **salsa rueda**, led by OBI's **Jose Richard Aviles**, spoken word by **YouthSpeaks poets** and **Michelle "Mush" Lee**, and drumming and movement call and response to Guinea and West African sounds of the **Duniya Dance & Drum** duo were all offerings led from the dynamic Community Stage.

Throughout The Commons and other public spaces, interactive meaning-making came alive, inviting participants to take part in shaping their own conference experience as well as that of the whole. As one attendee put

"... the growth of the integration of the arts—more music, more movement, more art on display—is what is really special about Othering & Belonging. I go to a variety of other interesting conferences around the world and this one does things that nobody else does at that level with the arts." —Attendee Testimonial

it: "The diverse offerings made The Commons a place where anyone can find belonging."

The Power of Arts and Culture

The O&B Conferences have built a reputation for blurring the lines that too often separate "scholarship" from the arts in . What OBI calls "experiential belonging" came to life with a truly vibrant arts program in the 2024 conference. Led by celebrated Bay Area dance educator, and this year's emcee, **Sarah Crowell**, an arts subcommittee consisting of a cross-section of OBI staff and local arts leaders, curated a highly diverse array of music and movement offerings that showcased artists as culture-shifters, spiritual leaders, and intellectuals, and in conversation with community leaders and researchers.

Each day started with an invitation to join a Sufi meditation session led by local teacher **Michelle Ayazi**, while the Grammy award-winning **Alphabet Rockers** band





Top, from left: Speakers and session designers of the “Global South Feminist Visions Toward Belonging” workshop, from left: Elsadig Elsheikh, Basima Sisemore, Maud Jean-Michel, Dina Omar; Refilwe Gqajela, Samantha Sipin, Zarqa Parvez Abdullah; Bottom: Attendees in a packed breakout session held in the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)



and **Play Marimba & Neblinas del Pacifico** delivered rousing music sets outdoors on the public deck of the HJK Center. Local artist **Brett Cook** presented a version of **The Black (W)hole**, a community-based installation featuring photography and short films promoting the work of public healing and ritual. Other arts included a mainstage performance by the award-winning Navajo hoop dancer **Patrick Willie**, an opening night set from Oakland-based ensemble and rising musical stars **Orchestra Gold**, music from **Mbira dzaSoko** celebrating Zimbabwean culture, collective audience singing led by Grammy-award winning musician **Melanie DeMore**, a powerful Taiko drumming opening with **Dance Brigade**, and a dynamic martial arts demo team from local **Destiny Arts** youth. On the last day even the outside of the historic HJK building came alive with an awe-inspiring set from aerial artistic group **BANDALOOP**, who use dance and climbing technology to expand and challenge what is possible.

“The cultural aspects of this conference really opened my eyes to different ways of thinking about belonging,” one attendee shared. “It has changed my whole perspective.”

Belonging On A Global Scale

OBI used the platform of this year’s conference to make clear connections between global models, struggles, and strategies for expanding belonging, with a thematic

throughline on prioritizing and tending to local concerns while connecting work to global dynamics.

The goal, as OBI director John Powell shared, was to grapple with how the “radical new proposition” of how belonging without othering can help us create **a shared future for all**, which includes people, places, and concerns of all nations, identities, and cultures.

Specific global perspectives included talks on the current state of Global South feminism, seeding a global network for migration and belonging, and a mainstage discussion on bending the global arc of change toward belonging through peacebuilding from leaders who worked in South Africa, Ireland, Iran, among many other countries.

Attendees in-person and online hailed from over 85 countries, including over a dozen speakers from OBI’s Democracy and Belonging Forum in Europe who led and facilitated several conference sessions. OBI also invited a small cohort of emergent partners where the Institute is deepening its relationships, including from India and Colombia, to take part in the conference.

The closing conversation of the conference, featuring four leaders whose work spans the globe, grappled in real time on the idea of belonging without othering as a global frame and a collective aspiration. Speakers highlighted ideas on might be required to build a shared future together, which would need to include new norms, both symbolic and institutional. As one attendee evaluation shared, the most valuable thing about the panel was “... the ability to see presenters from around the world like Ireland, Britain, Africa hold space and bring forward the realization that othering and belonging work is global.”

The 2024 Othering & Belonging Conference was an energetic space full of amazing moments, both big and small, reflecting a truly global movement brought together to collectively build a world based on belonging.

Reach and Audience

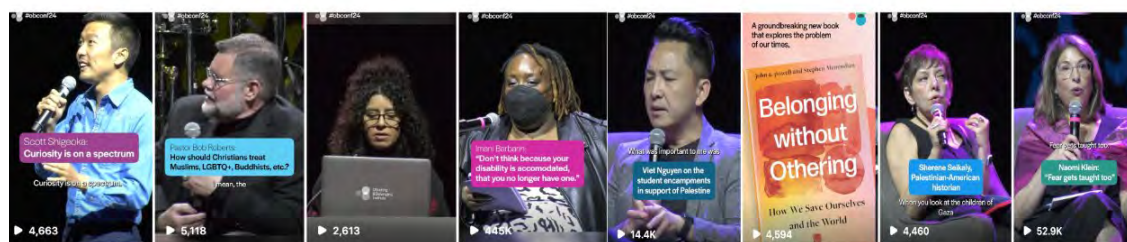
Innovative, wide-reaching communications channels greatly expand conference reach

O&B24 WELCOMED
2147
IN-PERSON
PARTICIPANTS,
our highest
attendance at an in-
person conference.

MORE THAN
7K
people tuned into
the conference
livestream at OBI
University over the
three-day event.

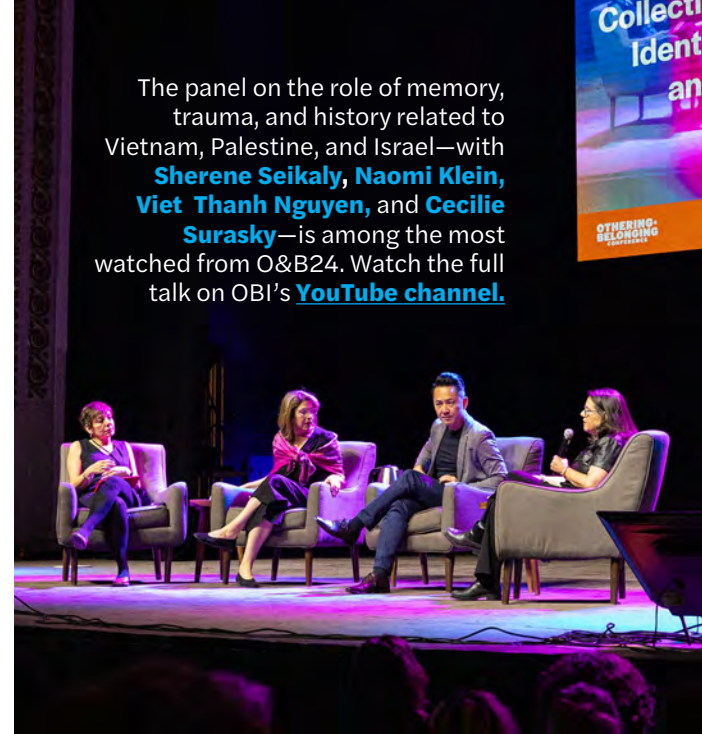
PEOPLE FROM
85
COUNTRIES
took part in
O&B 24 online
and in person.

The OBI conference was attended in person or via livestream by reporters and editors from 10 major news outlets including *The New York Times*, *LA Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and KQED.



Reels and video excerpts on OBI's popular social media accounts from speakers such as author Scott Shigeoka, Pastor Bob Roberts, author Viet Thanh Nguyen, and others, have been viewed over a half million times since the conference. [Visit OBI's Instagram page](#) to watch these and more.

The panel on the role of memory, trauma, and history related to Vietnam, Palestine, and Israel—with **Sherene Seikaly**, **Naomi Klein**, **Viet Thanh Nguyen**, and **Cecilie Surasky**—is among the most watched from O&B24. Watch the full talk on OBI's [YouTube channel](#).



300K+

A keynote talk from disability activist **Imani Barbarin** was our most viewed on social media—over 300K views and counting. Watch her speech on OBI's [YouTube channel](#).





Members of the Belonging Resident Company take the stage at O&B 24 / photo by Nicholas Bruno

2024 HIGHLIGHT

The Belonging Resident Company Debut

A prevalent force at O&B24 was the **Belonging Resident Company (BRC)**, who premiered by opening the first two days of the conference. The BRC's dynamic performances set the conference tone by inviting in collaboration and the power of movement.

The BRC is a dance and theater troupe whose purpose is to amplify bridging and belonging through movement, poetry, spoken word, and playback theater. BRC was conceived and directed by long-time Bay Area dancer and educator Sarah Crowell (also the O&B24 emcee), who worked to develop the company with educator and facilitator Sangita Kumar and OBI staff member Julia McKeown.

The 2024 inaugural group is, as Crowell describes them, "a colorful garden of folks" who range in age from 19 to 60 years old. The Company, who were selected after a public audition process held in January, is comprised of UC Berkeley students, folks who thought they were retired dancers, filmmakers, theater directors, professors, nonprofit leaders, writers, somatic healers, therapists, authors, musicians, poets, among other titles. What they all have in common, says Crowell, is that they are "dreamers and weavers of belonging in all aspects of their lives."

The BRC co-directors led the company through an intensive bonding process, building a community over the five months leading up to the conference through group sessions, virtual calls, and rehearsals. BRC members also led movement sessions in conference breakout sessions, bringing in the power of somatic experience for participants.

"Movement is our superpower," said Crowell, "connecting us with each other across movements, through our movement."



From top: Roberto Bedoya of the City of Oakland; Maurice Mitchell of Working Families Party; and Ashley Gallegos of Othering & Belonging Institute.

2024 HIGHLIGHT

Program Tracks

Three tracks at O&B24 identified clustered sessions for those wanting to follow a thematic experience

Places of Belonging

This program track was designed to highlight what it takes to **build belonging**. As introduced by OBI's Belonging Coordinator **Ashley Gallegos**, the track offered a shared learning space for attendees and an opportunity for connection, networking, and movement-building. Speakers in these sessions highlighted work already taking place, sharing about ongoing research, collaboration with practitioners, and real-world applications of belonging-building. The emphasis on **place** was intentional as well as open for interpretation, since a place, Ashley shared, "can be a community group, school, government, business entity, a city, a state, a nation and even trans-national."

Places of Belonging featured talks with belonging doers and thinkers such as **Roberto Bedoya**, cultural affairs manager of the City of Oakland, disability activist **Imani Barbarin**, and acclaimed abolitionist geographer and scholar **Ruth Wilson Gilmore**. The track theme was also woven through many interactive components such as the Belonging Design Principles Exhibit in The Common and several breakout sessions.

Building Belonging Economies

In introducing this track, OBI senior researcher **Hossein Ayazi** first invited attendees to help co-create and define what practices of belonging economies

may include. He shared that for OBI practices are defined as being grounded in principles of inclusion, connection, recognition, and agency. Sessions in this track elevated efforts where economies are being built around collective needs and access to a good life, rather than systems based on accumulation, extraction, and exclusion. Speakers and conversations were aimed to share "longstanding efforts that are at once local and global and interconnected, that grapple with the history and present nature of injustice, and that are attuned to the circumstances and possibilities of the moment."

Democratizing economic decision-making, expanding all peoples' capacity for self-determination, work in regenerative and restorative economics, and climate justice were all themes picked up by speakers such as **Astra Taylor** on solidarity, democracy, and debt; a panel with geographer **Jovan Scott Lewis** and Katalay Foundation president **Nwamaka Agbo** on repair and reparations; and breakout sessions on community-governance and resilience, among other sessions.

A Greater Story of "We"

Introduced by OBI Senior Researcher **Basima Sisemore**, the third program track was one that was woven through-

out all sessions of the conference, designed as an umbrella category of sessions that speak to the power of narratives, the illusion of the "other," and work toward creating a bigger "we"—themes that underpin OBI's vision and ongoing work.

Speakers discussed some of the major stories circulating about our present, past, and future, ones that have for too long solidified and perpetuate the illusion of the *other*, and fomented continued fragmentation. Speakers and session topics elevated ideas for new, and renewed, narratives that build bridges and solidarity, ones that insist on the inherent humanity in everyone, and embrace the reality that we all have multifaceted, dynamic identities.

Touchstone sessions included talks from curiosity champion and bridger **Scott Shigeoka**; panels on collective memory, identity, and trauma and long bridging for democracy; a fireside chat with **Maria Hinojosa** and **John Powell** on belonging without othering; a talk from **Maurice Mitchell** on building more inclusive, resilient, and loving movements; and, a closing panel on situating belonging as part of a global arc toward change.

Pictured, in circles from left: OBI's Hossein Ayazi and Basima Sisemore

Films: An Immersive Medium for Exploring Belonging

Film screenings and talkbacks came for the first time to O&B 24! Films offer a storytelling medium for sparking vibrant conversations through a directly-experiential format. O&B 24 featured two short documentaries followed by talk-backs with acclaimed filmmakers of each piece.

From Here, winner of Best Documentary at the New York Human Rights Film Festival, follows four artists and activists in Berlin and New York whose lives hang in the balance of immigration and integration debates and policies.

Among wide-ranging public discourse in the US and Germany tackling racism, nationalism, and conversations about national identity, the four protagonists spend their 20s and early 30s facing major turning points in their lives: fighting for citizenship, starting families, and finding room for creative expression.



In a conversation following, filmmaker **Christina Antonakos-Wallace** shared that she felt the film elevated many themes of belonging, and that showing it at the conference represented a chance to ask questions such as, “How can we start talking about migration in a different way?” **From Here** captures these peoples’ journeys to redefine what it means to “belong” in societies that are increasingly hostile to their existence.

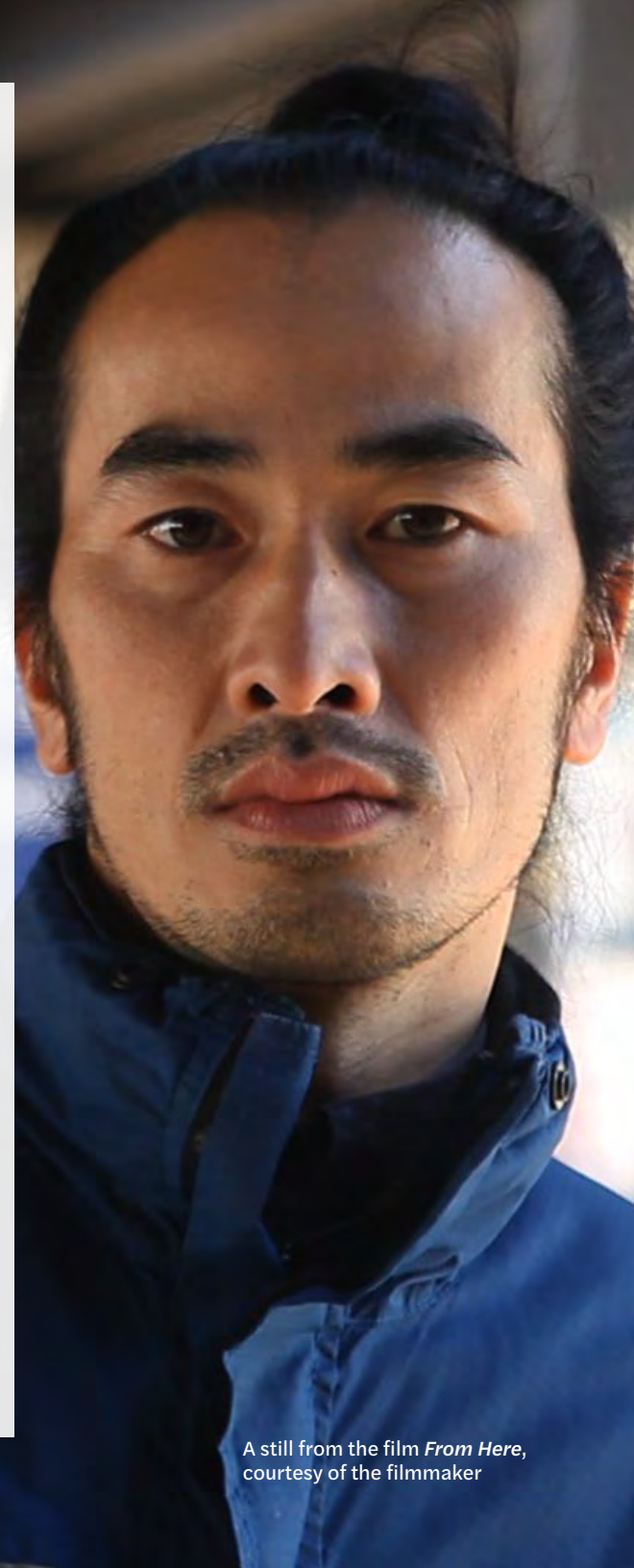
O&B 24 also featured a session that showed the short documentary **Black Girls Play: The Story of Hand Games**, and a talkback from award-winning director **Michèle Delgado Stephenson**.

Similar to her critically acclaimed *Going To Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project* (Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner), *Black Girls Play* highlights the influence that Black women and girls have had on music, dance, and arts all across the American creative landscape.

Stephenson’s film traces the rhythmic hand games that have been played by Black girls for generations, as well as conversations with musicians, music educators, and ethnomusicologists who offer powerful accounts of the cultural history that traces the significance of hand games, particularly in the evolution of music from jazz to hip hop, from the playground to TikTok videos, and gives due to the young girls who were its original creators and vectors of culture.

In her talk following the screening, Stephenson related to Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s keynote speech from the previous day. “She said, ‘to live and think in the future requires us not only to change present practices, but also to shift how we understand the past,’” Stephenson recalled.

“And this film is an attempt in shifting not only how we understand the past but what do we reclaim when we do that, and how we celebrate it and acknowledge it.”



A still from the film *From Here*, courtesy of the filmmaker

2024 HIGHLIGHT

Belonging In Action Poster Gallery

A brand new feature to this year's conference was a vibrant poster gallery showcasing case studies of belonging-building from around the world.

The best part? All the posters were **crowd-sourced**—the result of a public call from OBI for anyone to submit their ideas on initiatives that were advancing belonging and bridging work in different communities around the world.

Out of an initial 83 ideas submitted, an internal judging committee chose 25 to be printed and displayed in large poster format in The Commons. Several poster creators who were in attendance at the conference were available to talk about their work to those stopping by. The walkthrough gallery was a highly popular feature of O&B24 and lives on in [a digital gallery on the OBI website](#).



One of the posters from the Belonging In Action Poster Gallery displayed around the circumference of The Commons area.

2024 HIGHLIGHT

Belonging Bibliophiles

Since the first Othering & Belonging Conference in 2015, when hundreds got in line to have books signed by keynote speaker bell hooks, the O&B booktable has been one of the conference's most consistently popular spaces.

For O&B24, OBI partnered with local, independent bookseller **Pegasus Books** to curate a diverse selection of books to sell at the "Belonging Booktable," including books authored by this year's conference speakers. Book signings were offered that allowed attendees to connect with speakers on a more personal level, including signings with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Scott Shigeoka, Maria Hinojosa, and Astra Taylor.

What better place, then, to host the official launch of a new book from OBI's john a. powell and Stephen Menendian? The first day of the conference was designed as the official release date of their new work, ***Belonging without Othering: How we save ourselves and the world***, as well as becoming the theme that underpinned the entire conference. OBI gave away a copy of the new book to the first 800 people who claimed a ticket, and an additional 250 copies of *Belonging Without Othering* were sold at the booktable.



john a. powell (left) and Stephen Menendian of the Othering & Belonging Institute meet attendees and sign copies of their new book

Acclaimed journalist and author Maria Hinojosa signed books and met attendees at the Belonging Booktable



Attendee Testimonials

What Did You Find Most Valuable?

“Overlaying histories and taking the time to connect them so that **attendees had the language** to draw those parallels to our respective networks.”

“The concept of Belonging without Othering and **how revolutionary** that idea is.”

“As a teacher it’s priceless to hear the same, or similar, topics discussed in different ways because the **more angle of approaches I have** the more I can meet my students’ needs, and the better I can understand their perspectives.”

“The thematic thread of othering and belonging was everywhere. It felt wonderful to be told, ‘**You belong here.**’ It gave me, an introvert, permission to sit and have lunch with new people, knowing they’d be receptive. Mostly my takeaway is how applicable the othering belonging framework is to all aspects of life. **It’s given me a fresh lens.**”

“I’m very taken by how often **the word love** comes into the conversation. It’s not an idea that finds its way into government or NGO or even social justice spaces very often. Here it seems **integral and fundamental**; it’s included easily and naturally without qualifications or buffers.”

“Gosh, I thought I came for the sessions but the **conversations with attendees** ended up being just as amazing. The power of you creating a space of belonging will inform my work. I came to the conference alone and **never felt alone once.**”

“The slightly different title of the conference—Belonging without Othering — gave me a **fundamental and radical shift** in how I thought about the Israel/Palestine work we were doing at our high school.”



O&B24 emcee Sarah Crowell (right) and musician Amikaeyla Gaston delivered a set of announcements combined with improvised music and rhythms.

Lessons Learned

By Lisa Nguyen
2024 Othering & Belonging Summer Fellow



Lisa Nguyen, 2024 OBI
Summer Conference
Archival Research Fellow

THIS SUMMER I was an OBI Summer Fellow (a program that provides emerging researchers with skills, mentorship, and training), where I focused on researching the role and significance of conferences and convenings in achieving social change. My project was to study both the historical role of convenings in shifting norms and policy, as well as analyzed the particular impact of the O&B conferences.

I was excited to learn more about the O&B conferences, and try to capture their contribution to the larger field of social change.

With insights from interviews with OBI staff and partners helping guide my research, I focused primarily on attendee reflections and evaluations from 2015 to 2024. Some of the questions my research attempted to answer included: What were the elements that made the O&B conferences unique? How did the conferences provide a space for participants to grapple with and respond to socio-political challenges? In what ways might the O&B conferences evolve, especially toward the Institute's goal of norming belonging on a global scale?

I found that the O&B conferences have emerged reputationally as significant spaces of learning, strategizing, and network-building.

One of the most powerful impacts was that the conferences have given people a way to **directly experience** OBI frameworks, in real time, and in a shared space with others. In particular, bridging and co-creation were cited as having left lasting impressions as concepts for change because they were both modeled directly through sessions and speakers, and there was an opportunity to directly engage and grapple with them.

Feedback for the 2024 conference was extremely positive, with many attendees describing it as transformative, moving, and unlike anything they've attended before. Attendees left with significantly increased interest to continue sharing knowledge, tools, and strategies they learned at O&B 24. For this report I grouped some key areas of feedback on ways to improve the conference experience taken from my research. I think these ideas can situate the O&B conferences of the future even more powerfully as a channel for norming belonging.

More Connection

The most persistent feedback was the desire for the conference to offer more intentional networking opportunities. Many attendees suggested creating structured ways to bring people together, such as through learning cohorts, affinity groups, communities of practice, and existing or emerging networks. Dedicating space within the conference to build and strengthen relationships, especially as the field of belonging continues to grow, is crucial.

More Operationalizing and Applicability

Attendees want more concrete examples, tools, and real-world application of how the OBI frameworks can be utilized to build for social change. One successful example mentioned was the talk from Roberto Bedoya from the City of Oakland, who shared his work building measurable, concrete, policy change at the municipal level bridging across cultural, public, and private sectors.

More Youth Voices

Many talented youth artists took the stage at O&B24, but youth leadership participating as speakers and leaders was notably absent. Attendees expressed desire to hear more about youth-led work and emphasized the necessity of acknowledging youth leadership in social change.

Bridging Across More Contexts

Attendees would like to be convinced by OBI's bridging framework, but some expressed apprehension due to its perceived lack of consideration to how bridging can be adapted into spaces that are not explicitly progressive, such as Southern and Midwestern states. Pastor Bob Roberts, leader of a Christian church in Texas who spoke about challenges bridging across faith spaces, received a notably warm reception, underscoring the need for more diverse voices.

More Processing Time for Deeper Meaning-Making

Feedback was shared of overload from long and content-dense sessions, with some attendees struggling to absorb all the rich information presented without time to process. As OBI's Ashley Gallegos shared "...without time to unpack, our saturation point is met." A more spacious conference program and facilitated processing exercises and prompts would build in time to synthesize and process reactions to sessions.

What's Next? Stay Involved!

Conference Webpage

Archive of agendas,
speakers, reports, and
more

obiu.org

Free classes on structural
racism, bridging, and
more

Belonging Design Principles

A resource guide for
building belonging

Belonging Merch

T-shirts, hoodies, and
limited O&B24 merch

YouTube Channel

Conference sessions,
animated explainers, OBI
talks, and more

Learn how to support
OBI's moonshot for
belonging! Contact
[Erika Prasad](#).



Acknowledgments

Hundreds of people worked together to bring the 2024 O&B Conference to life. Thank you to all the OBI staff, volunteers, sponsors, and partners; thank you to the construction crews, custodial workers, technical teams, and caterers at HJK and OMCA. Most of all thank you to every attendee, speaker, and artist whose generous participation made this gathering so special.

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The 2024 Othering & Belonging Conference was organized by the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley



Above: Staff of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the Henry J. Kaiser Center in Oakland on April 25, 2024

OTHERING & BELONGING CONFERENCE

“This conference has really pushed me to think about what loving your neighbor really means. What does it mean to see the humanity in those who don't see your humanity? How do we move from just gathering and being upset and resisting, to really creating the kind of change that we want?”

-O&B CONFERENCE ATTENDEE

belonging.
berkeley.edu

photo: Mariam Diakite of the band
Orchestra Gold performing at O&B24

