

For a life worth living

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*In 1971, nearly two years after his assassination at the hands of law enforcement, the New York Times published a speech given by Fred Hampton, a leader in the Black Panther Party. That speech is reprinted below.*

“I was born in a so-called bourgeois community and had some of the better things you could say of life. And I found that even some of the better things of life for black people wasn't too cool. And I found that there was more people starvin' than there was people eatin'. And I found there was more people didn't have clothes than did have. clothes. And I found that I just happened to be one of the few. And I made a commitment to myself that I wouldn't stop doin' what I'm doin' until all those people were free.

We talkin' about we goin' to make some changes in this system. We know they have our pictures. We know they lookin' for us. We know they want us. But we're still sayin' that even though we could be, in a sense, as far as this system goes, “on the mountaintop,” we in the Black Panther Party, because of our dedication and understanding of what's in the valley, knowing that the people are in the valley, knowing that we originally came from the valley, knowing that our plight is the same plight as the people in the valley, knowing that our enemy is on the mountaintop, our freedoms in the valley ... We say even though it's nice to be on the mountaintop, we're goin' back to the valley!

I want you to know that I want you to think. If you ever think about me and if you think about me and if you ain't gonna do

no revolutionary act, forget about me. I don't want myself on your mind if you're not going to work for the people. Like we always said, if you're asked to make a commitment at the age of 20 and you say, I don't want to make a commitment only because of the simple reason that I'm too young to die, I want to live a little bit longer. What you did is, you're dead already.

You have to understand that people have to pay the price for peace. If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you dare not struggle then damnit, you don't deserve to win. Let me say peace to you if you're willing to fight for it.

I've been gone for a little while. At least my body's been gone for a little while. But I'm back now and I believe that I'm back to stay. I believe that I'm going to do my job and I believe that I was born not to die in a car wreck; I don't believe that I'm going to die in a car wreck. I don't believe I'm going to die slipping on a piece of ice; I don't believe I'm going to die because I got a bad heart; I don't believe I'm going to die because of lung cancer. I believe that I'm going to be able to die doing the things I was born for. I believe that I'm going to be able to die high off the people. I believe that I will be able to die as a revolutionary in the international revolutionary proletarian struggle. And I hope that each one of you will be able to die in the international proletarian revolutionary struggle or you'll be able to live in it. And I think that struggle's going to come. Why don't you live for the people? Why don't you struggle for the people? Why don't you die for the people?”

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# Of Pandemics and Academics: How the University of Michigan Robbed 30,000 Students

By Trenten Ingell and Joshua Sodicoff

You — and thirty thousand of your peers — are getting shafted by the University of Michigan, the leaders and best ... Go blue! Our fair-enough university boasted on the flyers you read as a prospective student, the banners that line campus, and many other methods of communication we receive about its immense power. It holds an endowment equivalent to the yearly expenditures of the government of Jordan, the largest stadium in the United States, and many of the top academic departments in the world. If it's so great, and surely any representative of the University would agree, then why have they failed in supporting students beyond their most basic responsibility during the COVID-19 crisis? From the few weeks preceding spring break through now, the University dealt with the needs of undergraduates strictly on the basis of necessity and not of humanity. In the process, they failed to account for the nuances of these issues and have created new, unforeseen problems. From the very beginning of this crisis, these systemic failures have stood out to us. That is why we're trying to organize students and other stakeholders in our community to speak out against our administration and the lack of accountability that led us to our current situation.

We want to acknowledge that we understand and accept that many of the actions the University has taken during the current pandemic were necessary from a public health perspective. Do we miss our friends, having places to be, and Ann Arbor? Of course. But we're realistic, and we know that an open campus during a global pandemic would only lead to disaster. That being said, at almost every point the University made one of these critical COVID-19 decisions, they botched it. Because of their inability to

act, they cost students their time, money, mental health, and for some, their ability to return home.

Do you remember how the University chose to cancel classes three days after the end of spring break? Other universities, also on break, gave students fair warning so that they didn't have to engage in unnecessary, costly and potentially hazardous travel. But ours cancelled after we came back, some of us traveling across or even out of the country. It was only predictable that some of us would return to Ann Arbor with COVID-19. In addition to their delay in cancelling classes, the University gave no other information on how operations would proceed. Students were kept in the dark about important decisions and left to react to them day-by-day. Surely, managing a crisis is difficult. But how did administrators not give credence to the impact of leaving a student body the size of a city in the dark? In travel alone, the University cost its student body hundreds of thousands dollars. This number is especially large when you consider that a strong majority of University of Michigan students come from in-state.

Far more grievous was university housing's actions to reduce the population density of on-campus living. What started with a series of emails pleading for students to move escalated to a notice that all students without a sufficient reason for staying on-campus would have to leave as early as March 17th. This was just three days before Governor Whitmer signed a statewide moratorium on evictions. The language in this email suggested students would lose keycard access the following morning if action was not taken. Only after the deadline set out in the email was any clarification given on the policy. Clarification that did nothing to

mitigate fears that the University continued to hold the power to forcibly remove students from their rooms. The power structure in tenantry at the University implied that resistance was futile, and so the University conducted mass evictions.

Meanwhile, as universities across the country announced housing refund policies as part of a coherent COVID-19 response plan, the University remained silent on this issue until March 20th. Administration wondered why students remained in their prepaid housing when no guarantee of compensation for leaving was made. Housing's decision to offer a measly \$1,200 refund for half a semester of rent, utilities, and dining was a slap in the face to students who pay astronomical costs for these services. Room and board is, on average, \$12,000 per year. We were told to leave campus right after spring break, halfway through the semester, equating to three thousand dollars in lost costs. Meanwhile, \$1,200 is what we would have received if we were eligible for federal relief checks (another topic we could wax poetic on). Americans agree that this check wasn't enough to make up for lost wages, and for University students who did not budget for the costs associated with providing for themselves, it goes much less far. Furthermore, upon cursory research, we found that the University's disruption of services clause in the Community Living at Michigan document calls for a proportional refund in the event that Housing is unable to fulfill its obligations, like providing food or rent. In every sense, residents of university housing were shortchanged, and the continued lack of proportional reimbursement remains a gross violation of the University's own policy.

The University's best claim to an adequate response — its rapid transition

to online coursework — also failed large swaths of students. Yes, some professors developed a strategy for continuing to provide coursework. Between us, we had great-to-fair experiences with the transition online but this is not the overwhelming response. Some courses that could have moved lectures and discussions online with enough thought simply reduced their requirements to short weekly assignments. Labs and other hands-on courses lost most, if not all, of their value. There was never any sign that departments were monitoring the continuity of coursework. When professors knew no one was watching, many chose to do the bare minimum. But still, with access to our course evaluations and Canvas pages, the University will pretend it did enough because we have the credits from this semester on our transcript. We know that this accomplishment is incomparable to the same of any other semester. When we come back, students will pay for the gap between expectations of their online learning experience and the reality of severely diminished outcomes from the change in environment and learning style. Whether this includes students being unprepared for further coursework from less attentive prerequisites or students abandoning tracts of coursework entirely from a department's response to online classes, we will figure out soon enough.

Of course, as we navigate through the pandemic, we will share our personal journey to fight against the University. From the very beginning of the crisis, when the University refused to publicly announce if a proportional refund would be offered as it pressured students to leave university housing, we thought it was important to rally student voices against the failures of the administration. We started with a petition to request the University follow the stated policy of prorating services not rendered with respect to housing and dining — a fight that has since evolved into collaboration on research and representation for a class action lawsuit against the University. During this endeavor, we learned more about the scale and variety of problems that our peers were facing, from unresponsiveness of departments beyond

housing to dissatisfaction with online coursework. We felt uncomfortable stopping our efforts at an issue that was close to us as former university housing residents when we saw that all of our peers were, in some way or another, receiving unjust treatment.

In the process of developing our requested response, we attempted to reach out to diverse voices in our community. The first step of this was the creation and distribution of a Google Form with questions about student priorities. It also provided space to describe what elements of crisis response students found most important. We saw that students overwhelmingly supported a proportional refund for aspects of the winter term, a reduction in tuition for the spring, summer, and fall terms, and greater transparency in decision-making. With data and additional suggestions from this form, we reached out to a GroupMe we had made for students interested in supporting a fuller response from the University for help in writing a document detailing our rationale and our finalized list of demands. We also reached out to the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), a union representing graduate student instructors and student staff assistants at the University. Recently, GEO successfully negotiated a new contract despite the pandemic. We sought their input on issues of strategy and for feedback on our draft demands. Ultimately, we settled on the following:

- 1) A 50% discount for tuition and fees for the Spring, Spring/Summer, and Summer 2020 terms, a 25% tuition discount for the Fall 2020 terms, with an additional 25% discount in the event that classes continue in an online format.
- 2) A pro-rata refund, retroactively effective March 12th for room and board, tuition, and fees for the Winter 2020 term.
- 3) Subsidies for rent payments for students living off campus, and university assistance in terminating leases in the event that classes continue in an online format in the Fall.
- 4) Additional academic resources, in-

cluding additional tutoring and make-ups for lab courses, meant to compensate for the decrease in quality of the second half of the Winter 2020 term.

5) A 50% reduction in expenditures toward executive officers and service units as well as a half reduction in utility costs passed on to students as a means of partially offsetting these demands.

Instead of helping students negotiate with landlords, the University ardently pressured students to leave. Instead of providing further financial assistance to its students during a turbulent economic period, the University and its administration ranted about its own supposed financial struggles in an attempt to explain why it was unable to address even the most basic of student concerns. The dust has settled now, and we want to address the glaring flaws in the University of Michigan's response to COVID-19 through these demands.

The primary criticism of these demands has been the associated numbers. Originally, we tried to conduct research into university finances to develop a full picture of where tuition goes and what costs might be lower under the current circumstances. We quickly found a bit of opacity with cash flows beyond the department level, making it difficult to back up any decisions we made. Instead, we decided to err on the side of requesting more than we expected to receive. In the event that we negotiate with the University, compromise is to be expected. So why start with a weak position?

Our current issues now revolve around tackling the repressive set of policies and bureaucracy that the current university administration has established. The existing structure of our university does not allow the students to have any voice in discretionary spending or crisis-related decisions, and because of that the University has been unable to understand or react to student needs as they come. If the University wants to exert its institutional authority over us as students, so be it. But this should at least be done with some effort to buttress the social safety net of the student body at large. They have these investments and

liquid assets to use. They are, as an institution of learning, tasked with promoting a quality education and charming college atmosphere which we have all likely come to appreciate in our academic careers. Not only has the University failed to provide the basic service of a safe and secure environment for its students, it has robbed many of those students the financial safety net that has yet to be provided by any state or federal institution.

We have to be clear about what the consequences of a poor long-term response from the University may be. Already, the University is counting on a net outflow of students due to an unwillingness to pay full price for an inferior semester. In response, they admitted 500 more freshmen than originally intended. Students will transfer out, take gap years, or in some cases end their college careers entirely. As the economic outcome of the pandemic becomes more clear, we think that a higher proportion of students than originally accounted for will take one of these paths. Students already taking off and unable to pay tuition are unlikely to return. For the University, this will mean lower revenue far beyond just the Fall semester. Some students will likely attempt to bridge this difference with loans, a risky choice to make in the midst of a growing national college debt crisis and in one of the worst economies of the last hundred years. For many, this choice will surmount to indentured servitude to lenders for years. Because students will return, whenever that may be, with a shallow understanding of content they were supposed to have learned this semester, they are more likely to perform below standards that have yet to be addressed by anyone at the University. This is a perfect storm of negative factors, leading to a student body depressed in all senses of the word at the most crucial time in their development. We will have the burden of a crisis completely outside of our control on our backs for the rest of our lives. From an organizational standpoint, this is also very bad for a university that prides itself on its alumni network and extensively solicits donations from its graduates. If it means anything to you, reader, we promise to complain about the response to anyone who asks about our

thoughts on the University after we graduate.

We have been led to believe as students that the University has an abundance of resources available to students on and off campus. The list goes on of the great facilities, departments, and amenities of living. It leaves a bitter and unsavory taste in our mouths as we are told by this same university that it is now unable to provide the necessary financial support to its students through this crisis, and that it has somehow lost all ability to forgive tuition and housing payments, or spare even a single cent on lowering tuition for the upcoming term. They have led us to believe that the University will hemorrhage from the effects of COVID-19 and they will need to make cuts in how much they are able to provide to students during this time. This is one of the greatest fabrications the University has engineered. We understand that it is not as simple as breaking open the piggy bank of a multibillion dollar endowment; it is a reallocation of assets and a change in policy that accommodates the circumstances of the current pandemic. What would you estimate the University's current assets sum to, in total? I guarantee you, you will underestimate the bloated behemoth that is the account book of any institution of higher education. As we begin to imagine this staggering amount of accumulated assets, we must consider what is necessary for an institution of learning to guarantee for its students. The choices administrators have made so far have had severe material consequences for their students. The inaction of our University has set a precedent for institutions of learning to pass on their financial liabilities to their student body. As we aim to unionize and negotiate a fair deal for students, we ask you, the reader, to consider for yourself the consequences of a silent and apathetic student body during this crisis.

We have reached out to dozens of organizations other than YDSA at the University of Michigan, our sole organizational sponsor, and we have yet to receive a single response. We assume that organization leadership naturally doesn't want to invoke the wrath of the University on their funding and relationships

to the wider community. But because we now have a system where students are being seriously harmed, we must act. If we as a student body do not voice our dissent of current university policy, we will be robbed once again and will have no one but ourselves to blame. Ignoring this opportunity to engage with the system endangers both your own and your fellow classmates' financial security. You have nothing but the time and ability to spread this discourse of a fair deal for students, but we perhaps naively have expected this out of the student body, the supposed leaders and best that Michigan has to offer.

We implore you to consider once again what your interests are as a student. As someone who is currently paying for housing and tuition, ask yourself some questions. Do I think the Board of Regents has my best interest at heart? How can I expect a fair deal from the University's administration who continue to act in the self-interest of the University's capital interests, and have been nothing but antagonistic to the housing and academic needs of its students? If I can't expect any form of refund or financial aid during this time, what is it that I can do to help myself and my fellow Wolverines?

Well, we are here to answer that last question. As representatives of Students for a Fair and Transparent COVID-19 Response, we demand the University answers the needs of its students before the Board of Regents make budgetary decisions for this upcoming Fall term. It is imperative that we are proactive during this crisis, and that we can unify as a student body to pressure the University to listen. We have many avenues through which we intend to organize, such as tuition strikes, threats of mass-disenrollment, and media outreach. Feel free to ask us questions or give us feedback at either of our emails, [ingellt@umich.edu](mailto:ingellt@umich.edu) and [sodicoff@umich.edu](mailto:sodicoff@umich.edu). If you have a problem that you have faced because of the University's response to COVID-19, we want to know and we want to help. This struggle is ours to solve in concert, to understand our rights as students during this time, and to set precedent for the University to respond fairly to our needs during times of crisis. 🌟

# Our loss, Thanks to Betsy DeVos

By Joseph Lobodzinski

In the fall of 2017, I had graduated high school and started my first semester of college at Ferris State University where I was studying to become a tool designer and machinist. Several months earlier, Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th President of the United States, ushering in a new era of political ignorance, ineptitude, and corruption within the executive branch of the United States federal government.

One of the first individuals Donald Trump nominated for his incoming presidential administration was former Chair of the Michigan Republican Party and billionaire baroness, Betsy DeVos. On Nov. 23, 2016, Trump selected DeVos to be his Secretary of Education, most likely as a token of appreciation toward the DeVos family for fundraising and donating millions of dollars to the Republican Party since the early 1990s. Despite being chosen because of her family's peddling financial influence over the Republican Party rather than actual credibility and competence, DeVos was confirmed by the U.S. after a 50-50 Senate vote broken by none other than Vice President Mike Pence.

While I was finishing high school and starting college, DeVos and the new ultra-conservative Department of Education was hard at work undermining and erasing almost anything that had to do with the previous Obama administration. By September 2017, now-Secretary DeVos announced her biggest and most controversial objective to that date, distorting Title IX by eliminating the Dear Colleague Letter: a set of guidelines created in 2011 in order to create a more fair trial for both parties involved in an instance of sexual violence on a college campus. The Department of Education's decision to end the Dear Colleague Letter was met with condemnation by college campuses across the nation, many

of whom, such as my alma mater, Ferris State University, announced they would continue to adhere to the established guidelines.

Secretary DeVos' intentions behind revoking the guidelines within the Dear Colleague Letter were nothing short of insidious. In an interview with Lesley Stahl of 60 Minutes, DeVos stated her reasoning behind the decision was her concern for men falsely accused of sexual assault. "Survivors, victims of a lack of due process, and campus administrators have all told me that the current approach does a disservice to everyone involved," DeVos said.

It has been nearly three years since she carried out this evil act with an ignorant assumption as justification, as sexual assault allegations made to police or campus authorities are only proven false approximately two to ten percent of the time. The only result of this change has been the increased difficulty for survivors of sexual assault on campus to come forward and pursue justice against their aggressors. But, now, DeVos is back at it.

On May 6, 2020, DeVos announced new rules on campus sexual assault — rules that give more advantages to the accused. The new rules bar universities and colleges from using a single official to investigate and judge complaints, instead establishing a judicial process in which the accused has a right to a live hearing and the ability to cross-examine their own accusers. This new set of guidelines, first introduced in late 2018, has been rightfully met with extreme criticism from women's rights and sexual assault survivor groups.

"We will fight this rule in court, and we intend to win," Emily Martin, vice president of the National Women's Law Center, declared. She said the core of the challenge would be that the Department

of Education was "arbitrary and capricious" and in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, which governs how agencies write regulations. She also stated that the department blatantly disregarded evidence and studies that proved the rule would harm survivors of sexual violence.

Despite the fallacies that DeVos and her cronies in Trump's Department of Education believe, sexual assault survivors should not be subjected to cross-examination by their assailants. The implementation of these new rules will only allow perpetrators to escape justice for their reprehensible actions, as individuals who have been targeted will now decline to come forward for fear of being confronted by their attacker in person, which could ignite trauma and PTSD. It should go without saying that victims of sexual crimes on campus should not have to interact with their perpetrators in order to prove their accountability. There should also be no live hearing that may publicly expose aspects of a victim's life that they wish to keep private. We all should whole-heartedly agree that the three University of Michigan campuses should disregard these new guidelines. The victims of sexual crimes enacted on campus should not feel discouraged in any way for them to pursue justice through their institution.

DeVos, the spoiled daughter of, and wife to, billionaire ultra-conservative moguls who literally bought her way to an executive cabinet position by donating millions to the Republican Party, should be held in no acclaim whatsoever. Her views and actions should be scorned. Since DeVos ascended to secretary of education, she spent her time trying to revert college sexual assault guidelines and justice proceedings into something similar to that of 17th-century public witch trials. We will not stand for it. 🌟

# Abolition on the Horizon

By Mahnoor Imran

For many Americans, prison is entrenched in their minds as an indispensable and indissoluble institution necessary to preserve public safety. Police are viewed as honorable authority figures who maintain law and order by rightfully locking away harmful individuals that pose a threat to our communities. Decades of propaganda have injected these fallacious perceptions into our society, dismissing alternatives to these institutions as unnecessary, impractical, and even dangerous. In reality, policing and incarceration are deeply pernicious to public safety and public health and should be strategically dismantled.

All too often, police violence results in trauma, injury, and death that disproportionately affects marginalized populations including people of color, immigrants, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. In jails and prisons, incarcerated people suffer from mental health issues, substance abuse issues, and chronic health conditions that are frequently left unaddressed and untreated.

Recently, jails, prisons, and detention centers have also witnessed the devastating impact of COVID-19. At least 43,967 people in prison have tested positive for the illness, and there have been at least 522 reported deaths from coronavirus. Michigan in particular has the third highest number of cases in prisons and the second highest number of deaths in prisons.

Dr. Nora Krinitsky, a historian of the carceral system and the interim director for the University of Michigan Prison Creative Arts Project, noted that the built environment of prisons makes isolation and social distancing almost impossible. Due to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions that predated the pandemic, Michigan prisons have become incuba-

tors for the virus. Those who show and report any symptoms are immediately segregated in solitary confinement cells. Krinitsky contends that “the prison system [is] using a traumatizing, violent punitive measure as a public health tool” and that this pandemic has “exacerbated all the things that were already incredibly huge disasters and human rights violations” inside of prisons.

Given the rampant injustices and indignities within the carceral system, the idea of abolition is gaining relevance. The movement comprises a vast network of activists, community organizers, writers, and thinkers who seek to address the root problems that lead to policing and mass incarceration. Through the reimagining and reorganization of society, abolitionists believe in gradually shifting from a system of punitive mechanisms to rehabilitative, restorative, victim-centered practices that provide opportunities for redemption and growth.

Abolition cannot be understood without analyzing the insidious rubric of the prison-industrial complex. Critical Resistance, one of the organizations that brought the abolition movement to prominence, defines the prison-industrial complex as the “overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.” Most abolitionists are not only critics of the carceral system, but also critics of the capitalist system that has allowed corporations to pounce on any opportunity to privatize prison services and financially exploit the poor.

From food to communication to healthcare services, more than half of the \$80 billion spent annually on incarceration is used to pay the vendors that operate within prisons. These companies consistently prioritize their own econom-

ic gains at the expense of incarcerated people’s livelihoods and health.

Michigan is no stranger to this phenomenon. In 2014, 30 people were treated for food poisoning days after maggots were found in the food service lines at Parnall Correctional Facility in Jackson. Aramark, the company involved, has even served literal garbage to people at the Saginaw Correctional Facility. In 2017, a man complained about having chest pain and difficulty breathing at the Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson. Corizon Health, the company hired to handle healthcare inside prisons, sent him back to his cell where he collapsed and died. In 2019, phone calls through ICSolutions at Mecosta County Jail in 2019 cost incarcerated people and their families nearly \$173,000. These incidents are not isolated and unrelated; they are reflective of how companies are less concerned with the wellbeing of incarcerated people and more concerned with making as much money as possible.

Abolitionists recognize that prisons are fraught with cruel, inhumane, and degrading conditions that are no places for any human being to live. These are not places where people have access to nutritious food, clean water, sanitary washrooms, proper ventilation, natural daylight, free communication, and robust healthcare. These are places of ubiquitous brutality, sexual abuse, and exploitative penal labor in which people are mentally ill, overcoming substance abuse, and struggling to recover from trauma. These are neither places that address criminogenic circumstances nor places that promulgate justice. These are places of suffocation that effectively reproduce the conditions that lead people to prison in the first place. In fact, a study conducted in Michigan concluded that imprisonment is an ineffective intervention in

preventing post-release violence and may actually lead to an increase in post-release violence.

Krinitsky points out that from an ideological perspective, abolition is about “abolishing the very logics that tell us that punishment is the best way to govern.” Perhaps one of the most profound misconceptions regarding the abolition movement is that abolitionists seek to bulldoze over every carceral structure with the snap of their fingers. This conjecture fails to realize that abolition actually advocates for taking steps toward programs that help people struggling with issues such as homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, and employment instead of criminalizing and alienating them from society. The long-term goal is to render facilities of incarceration obsolete and replace them with lasting alternatives.

Instead of using prisons as de facto psychiatric hospitals, homeless shelters, and detox centers, abolitionists seek to create life-sustaining facilities and programs for those who desperately need them. Instead of responding to mental health emergencies with police officers who throw people in jail, abolitionists are interested in building response programs that dispatch behavioral specialists and health professionals to provide assistance. Instead of fortifying the school-to-prison pipeline, abolitionists support funding for schools to have diverse counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses without relying on police officers to handle the manifold problems that students face. Instead of punishing people for struggling with the disease of addiction and homeless people for sleeping on park benches, abolitionists would rather construct accessible treatment centers and safe housing options. Instead of subjecting people to an adversarial court system and locking them in cages for committing transgressions, abolitionists work on developing restorative justice models that involve the person who committed the harm, person impacted by the harm, and community impacted by the harm in the decision-making process of how to handle redress. Clearly, abolition is capacious.

One of the most common questions about abolition asks how it treats

those who perpetrate sexual violence. This question suggests that our current system is effectively dealing with those individuals. Rapists, for example, roam everywhere from our workplaces to our campus fraternities to our own government. Only 5.7% of rapes end in arrest, tens of thousands of rape kits have gone untested, and less than 1% of reported rapes actually lead to convictions. Furthermore, this is a movement that is heavily led by Black women, a demographic that experiences high rates of sexualized and gendered violence. It is deeply contemptuous to suggest that they would develop a framework that excludes this lived experience.

Recently, the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd have prompted protesters all over the world to take to the streets in their condemnation of systemic racism and police brutality. In response, police departments are tactically weaponizing mace, flash bangs, and teargas to quell the protests. Given the growing consciousness of police violence, some reformists argue that it is better to invest in police departments and provide them with extensive training and body cameras in order to prevent harm and increase responsibility for their actions. However, these measures have not been enough. The Minneapolis Police Department spent millions of dollars on implicit bias training, established dialogues to foster ties between the police and community, and created an intervention program to detect problematic officers. Yet, George Floyd was still killed.

Moreover, body cameras and dashboard cameras do not protect people from being harmed by the police because increased technology bolsters the powerful complex of community surveillance without producing any accountability. One study examined Washington DC’s comprehensive body camera program and concluded that there was no statistically significant effect on use of force by police officers. Researchers at George Mason University’s Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy looked at 70 other studies and similarly found that cameras do not have statistically significant effects on most measures of officer behavior. In some cases, officers refuse to turn the cameras on when they are plan-

ning on using force. Frustratingly, even when they do, obtaining and releasing footage from these cameras can be an immense, bureaucratic process. Video footage cannot save lives if it cannot substantially change police practices.

The abolitionist response to policing seeks to demilitarize and defund police departments by strategically real-locating funding towards emergency response programs that disconnect health crises from police response, design community-based sexual assault centers, develop publicly financed housing, promote anti-violence and peacebuilding programs, and create multitudinous employment opportunities. These are not new ideas. Through the tireless advocacy of people like Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Mariame Kaba, we have been able to open up discussions about what a better society could look like. There are myriad models, toolkits, and resources that exist to help people navigate nonviolent community safety. For example, the model created by Creative Interventions lays out strategies for how to intervene in situations of interpersonal harm. The Young Women’s Empowerment Project examined ways in which sex workers can take care of themselves while working in the street economy. The Oakland Power Projects developed the Anti-Policing Health Toolkit to provide health workers with the tools to respond to health emergencies without a police response. The New York Harm Free Zone Collective outlined practices used to build community-based harm-free zones in New York City.

At its core, abolition seeks to strengthen the social fabric of a community and uphold models of safety, support, and prevention. Yet, abolitionists are incessantly ridiculed for being idealists. The accepted notions of feasibility confine us to a bleak reality in which violent, anti-black, white supremacist institutions that traumatize, cage, and kill people are continually funded and sustained. When we hide behind the veneer of pragmatism, we acquiesce to the ills that our injustice system creates. Abolition is about redefining the parameters of our imagination. Only in doing so can we achieve liberation. 🌱

# POLICE VS. PEOPLE

By Cal Abbo

*“The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love ... We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.” -Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara*

## **SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR**

After the execution of George Floyd, a national movement of solidarity with black lives grew from a few small cracks in the sprawling pavement of our neoliberal sidewalk. Demonstrations connected by nothing more than a hashtag spread across all six populated continents. Hopping from one demonstration to the next, I can't help feeling extraordinarily safe, more than I have in any crowd before. I understand exactly why people march for miles, every single day, after grueling eight-hour shifts: Our guiding ethos tells us not only to avoid harming anyone, but to do the most good we can.

Living for others is no simple task. Once we learn about police violence, about children who die in cobalt mines, about millions of climate refugees

forced to abandon their way of life, about America's global war machine, about thousands of other daily atrocities and the deep systemic connections between them, we have no choice but to dedicate our lives to fighting for the oppressed. A conviction like this disturbs our souls at every thinking moment, and it isn't easily broken. But the concrete reality of capitalism blunts this conviction and forces us to choose. Role-playing good samaritan and being kind to everyone can only go so far. At some point, we confront our unchangeable reality, with all the systems it contains, and we're forced to choose not if, but how we contribute to the exploitation of the very people we have consciously dedicated our lives to saving. The only answer is to reject the options and demand a different system.

This is where our complex task lies. We must understand how our actions contribute to exploitative systems and work to figure out the best way to

dismantle them and construct meaningful, dignifying alternatives in their place. All while ensuring our own survival and well-being. The job looms large, but there's never any debating if it has to be done. To try and justify living this way of life leaves us with confusing circular logic. How do I answer when someone asks why I care about black lives in America, impoverished workers in Asia, and starving children in Africa? I couldn't imagine not caring.

## **ROTTEN SOULS**

It might perplex us, then, to see so many who act with impunity and without understanding the harm they cause. Asking why Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd is hopeless until we understand the systems that shaped Chauvin, Floyd, and their relationship to one another. We know exactly why Chau-



Photo: Albert Cesare/The Enquirer

vin knelt on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. The institutions that made Chauvin who he is, including capitalism, policing, and systemic racism, told Chauvin that Floyd's life, in all its beauty and grandeur, did not matter. Instead, Floyd only mattered insofar as Chauvin can take advantage of him economically or enforce his policing duties. This is how our depraved systems taught Chauvin to think of Floyd: not as a person with family, friends, and just as much depth and complexity as himself, but as someone he could abuse, disrespect, and even murder without recourse.

While we celebrate the life of George Floyd, we also mourn the soul of Derek Chauvin and his colleagues. Given every opportunity to do good, Chauvin and the officers at the scene did not, instead choosing to end Floyd's life once and for all. Their souls are thoroughly corrupted, ravaged and ruined by years of harassing people of color and treating them as objects of their will. Thousands more officers joined the ranks of Chauvin and his colleagues when interacting with protesters. Those demanding justice masked up and fled to the streets, amid a global pandemic, to declare that these precious black lives matter, daring to dream that someone important might hear them, or one black life might be spared as a result. As expected, police

met them with all they know: control and domination, disregarding the stunning acts of love kneeling just a few feet away, begging for mercy. Instead choosing to degrade them into objects of their violence, mediated through tear gas and rubber bullets.

We all have to work on the systems we contribute to — always emphasizing its victims — in our quest for a dignified and just world. But it's impossible to fight exclusively for the liberation of the oppressed. We are also fighting for the soul of the oppressor, whether we'd like to or not, asking that they might come and exist with the people, the objects of their oppression, and understand that the dignity and well-being of their victims is as valuable as their own. And while we fight for our poor brothers and sisters in the valley who are not yet fully free, the oppressor will never be free while their soul suffers from treating people as they do. Smashing our institutions serves to save everyone.

## **SOMETHING TO DIE FOR**

I can't help but see demonstrators kneeling in front of police as courageous martyrs. They kneel, day after day, begging a hostile force to put down their weapons and join the streets, only to get maced and beaten by the very people who

swore an oath to protect and serve. This way of life, living for others, declaring they are people who deserve to be treated as such, is something to die for. Recognizing that anyone else's life matters as much as mine can be strange at first, but it soon becomes the only way to act. It's so clear that a demonstrator might risk their own life to expose the morbid brutality of an unjust policing system with the hope that they might actually save another — the ultimate act of love. It takes a special kind of bravery and self-assuredness to do such a thing. Demonstrators possess a moral righteousness so clear and absolute that they would rather be shot with tear gas, running away coughing and sputtering, than see another person of color begging for the right to breathe from someone who won't give it to them.

We are tired of funding a hostile police force that treats black lives as targets to be suppressed rather than people to be helped. We are tired of participating in a system that distills individuals into what they can produce for profit rather than the fullness of their being. We long for a world where people see the full complexity of others. Neoliberalism, in its total and complete domination, skipped over the cracks in the sidewalk: our own human spirit and its capacity for radical love are the fertilizer. Let that solidarity bloom. 🌱

# Taking the Climate Black Pill

By Elias Khoury

It took late nights of scrolling through the depths of Reddit to eventually figure out what the hell a “black pill” is. The term was popularized by the incel (a portmanteau of “involuntary” and “celibate”) online subculture. This community of sexually-frustrated young men uses “black pill” to describe the belief that they are doomed to a life devoid of romantic partnership. The use of the term has broadened, though, with “taking the black pill” now just coming to mean accepting any bleak prospect for the future.

This sort of doom and gloom is increasingly starting to characterize my feelings toward climate change. This attitude has only further solidified as I continue to work my way through *Common Sense for the 21st Century* by Roger Hallam. Hallam is the co-founder of Extinction Rebellion — a coalition of activists based in the United Kingdom who use civil disobedience to push for action on climate change. A representative of the book’s publisher, Chelsea Green Publishing (which is a worker co-op!), was nice enough to offer a free copy to the Young Democratic Socialists of America at the University of Michigan. We simply could not refuse.

Now, before I proceed, I just want to say that, naturally, I do not endorse everything Extinction Rebellion (XR) has ever done. Indeed, their meth-

ods can be quite uncouth. In the past, members have taken to public nudity and drenching public places, such as Downing Street and the British Treasury, in fake blood. These sorts of strange tactics strike me as counterproductive. They alienate the average person, only further pushing XR toward the fringes. It is therefore no surprise that XR has become something of a pariah.

But this article is not intended to be a discussion about strategy; it is intended to be a discussion about empirical reality. In the words of NBC News contributor Sarah Kendzior, “We are all entitled to our own opinions, but we are not really entitled to our own facts.” And the facts presented in *Common Sense for the 21st Century* are nothing short of chilling.

Early on in the text, Hallam points out that “Carbon dioxide levels went up by 3.5 parts per million (ppm) in [2018] to reach 415 ppm.” If all we do is continue this rate of increase, we will likely reach 5 degrees warming within the space of just a few generations. And this is where Hallam drops the proverbial hammer.

*“One recent scientific opinion stated that at 5 degrees Celsius... above the pre-industrial mean temperature, we are looking at an ecological system*

*capable of sustaining just one billion people. That means 6-7 billion people will have died within the next generation or two. Even if this figure is wrong by 90%, 600 million people will face starvation and death in the next 40 years. This is 12 times worse than the death toll (civilians and soldiers) of World War II and many times the death toll of every genocide known to history. It is 12 times worse than the horrors of Nazism and Fascism in the 20th century.”*

Now, take a second. Allow the magnitude of that statement to truly sink in. This feels like alarmism until you thumb through the carefully-sourced footnotes and quickly realize that these statements are all based on high-quality research and data.

The question then becomes, How do we avoid such catastrophe? Of course, we cannot afford to just lie down and accept humanity’s defeat like that. To that end, economic anthropologist Jason Hickel offers some relevant wisdom.

In a back-and-forth with economist Branko Milanovic, citing climate scientists Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows, Hickel noted that “If we want to stay under [2 degrees Celsius warming], rich nations will have to reduce emissions by 8-10% per year.” It is worth adding

that keeping global warming to less than 2° above pre-industrial levels does not mean we are safe. According to climate scientist Andrew King, “If we exceed 1.5 degrees [Celsius] global warming” there will be “more heatwaves and hot summers, greater sea level rise, and ... worse droughts and rainfall extremes.”

But here is the real kicker. In the very next sentence, Hickel wrote, “Reductions greater than 3-4% per year are incompatible with a growing economy.” Therefore, to meaningfully combat climate change requires that we make a conscious effort to contract economies

positive. Indeed, juicing the economy has become a competition that politicians often cannot afford to lose.

We are in the middle of a presidential election right now. And not only are both major party candidates promising economic growth, but neither come close to taking the issue of climate change even somewhat seriously. This has come to be expected of Republicans. For them, outright denial is the party line. It is for this reason that Noam Chomsky — often regarded as the world’s top public intellectual — calls the GOP “the most dangerous organization in human history.”

**“There seems to be a gap between what is necessary and what is feasible that, barring the unthinkable, is going to be all but impossible to bridge.”**

— or, as Hickel puts it, we must pursue “degrowth” (since “Green growth is not a thing”).

Effectively conceding the validity of Hickel’s argument, Branko Milanovic nonetheless responds by identifying degrowth as “not ... even vaguely likely to find any political support anywhere.” Milanovic contends that people have simply internalized this culture of competitive consumerism to such an extent that they would not dare abandon it. In his own words, “The ideology of commercialization and commodification has never been stronger.”

As much as it pains me to say it, Branko Milanovic is right. For the life of me, I just cannot imagine, say, a viable presidential candidate on the stump being met with rousing applause as they lay out their plan to shrink GDP. And how could I? They only ever promise the op-

But it is also true that the presumptive Democratic nominee does not treat the issue with requisite seriousness either.

Joe Biden’s climate plan scored a paltry 75/200 on the Sunrise Movement’s 2020 Presidential Candidate Scorecard. As a point of comparison, Bernie Sanders — their endorsed candidate and mine — came in at 183/200. On the other side, we have the incumbent. And, in fashion symbolic of a rotting civilization, the so-called “Leader of the Free World” insists that climate change is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese. So, substantive executive action on climate change in the near future is probably unlikely regardless of who wins in November.

To be absolutely clear, I am not suggesting we stop fighting. Particularly in an American context, a Green New Deal — I am particularly fond of Bernie Sanders’ specific plan — is certainly

something we should continue to strive for. I cannot thank folks like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez enough for pushing this proposal into the national discourse. A radical restructuring of the entire economy along green energy lines as a subject of mainstream debate was unthinkable just a few short years ago. The amount of ground we have gained on this issue in a relatively short period of time is considerable, and ought not to be downplayed. So, yes, we should continue to push for a Green New Deal — but with no illusions.

Is a Green New Deal necessary? Yes. Is it some sort of magic bullet? The perfect fix-all to the preeminent struggle of our time? No, I am afraid not.

Building a nationwide green energy infrastructure is no small feat. For one, almost all renewable energy sources rely on mineral stores that can be quite difficult to obtain. Jasper Bernes, Managing Editor of *Commune*, describes how this can play out in practice. “To make a high-capacity solar panel, one might need copper (atomic number 29) from Chile, indium (49) from Australia, gallium (31) from China, and selenium (34) from Germany,” he wrote.

Acquiring these materials is not a carbon-neutral process. Digging earth elements out of the ground never is. Also, mining just takes a while. A Green New Deal is therefore a very time- and labor-intensive project. It is worth it, but the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that we need to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 to avert climate catastrophe. It is not even totally clear that we will be able to gather all of the materials necessary to do so in this time frame.

In short, the situation is dire — and we are already playing with borrowed time. So, as it pertains to confronting the preeminent struggle of our time, for the sake of our collective mental health, we must properly manage expectations. There seems to be a gap between what is necessary and what is feasible that, barring the unthinkable, is going to be all but impossible to bridge.

In other words, the climate black pill is very much on the table. Feel free to take it if you wish. I promise I will not judge you... 🌱