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Abolition

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During the first wave of the Black Lives Matter age, I got involved in activism as a Black nationalist. I believed in our right to self determination and capacity to change things for our communities by us, for us. I led political education projects, partook in phone zaps and calling campaigns to get cops fired who committed brutal acts, helping coordinate fundraisers and teach ins and more. I was doing advocacy through theatre/acting around issues in public education and one of my budding concerns at the time was the “school to prison pipeline” especially since I went to school with metal detectors and had to deal with police harassment in school constantly. I was involved in environmental research and ambassadorship during that time as well, and really started to think about the ways climate risks (like Hurricane Sandy) and air pollution along with policing could seriously imperil my neighborhood all at once in the Bronx.

So because of all this, I did decide at some point to get involved in a program where we would sit down with cops and try to talk things out. I truly had hoped it would help bring about change. I was not an abolitionist. And while I considered myself a radical I

did believe reform was possible. I had family members who were cops or COs.

In all of these sessions, the cops made it seem like our fears of them as Black youth was on the same plane as their concerns that we would get aggressive with them.

The program I went to even went so far as to say that our anger at being profiled was equivalent to cops being assumed as racist.

Black cops always tried to appeal to us in this program, talking about they know what it's like when they take their uniforms off to suffer racism.

They would compare their personal life struggles with ours. The whole program was about us seeing our 'shared humanity.'

I did this program for a while, truly hoping I could get cops to see us. You know what I learned? None of them, not one of them, questioned why it was that in order to keep our lives we as youth, as disempowered Black kids, had to make sure we just 'did not' see them as enemies. None of them, furthermore, questioned the histories that went into why we saw them that way – ongoing histories. None of them questioned the fact that they were dispatched to and patrolling our communities way more than in white ones. None of them questioned the structures that went into why our communities were poor and destitute, assuming it was all just because our people dont 'try' hard enough.

And finally, the cops who DID understand this – because they do exist – still sat back silent while the other cops basically would nod at what we were saying but still assert the rightness of their penchant to kill us. These 'good ones' as you would probably say it would never work to curtail the firepower and necropower of their chosen profession, or actively call out their fellows in blue. Because it would risk their job.

After years of dealing with that program, I left them alone, convinced that police themselves were fundamentally insistent on keeping this the way they are, not even tryna lessen the risk of brutality in any meaningful way.

A lot of other people during this time made similar discoveries as organizers. Whether it was demanding body cameras or some other reform measure, we realized the cops would just twist it and still find a way to fund their violence, and undermine or invalidate attempts at change.

Then I found out why that was. I found out that the prison and police system was slavery just in new form. I found out that the thing called “capitalism” and “colonialism” I heard about growing up was connected to the whole police brutality issue. It was the basis. I learned later that policing was formed not to protect human beings, but keep property interests intact – and that part of those property interests was the bodies of enslaved people, including folk in the jails currently. Suddenly, my parents telling me that prisons served to keep the poor in place when I was a kid made more sense.

I learned first hand but also from study and with other organizers that reform is a dead end. It is impossible. It is also counterintuitive, and actually has helped the system get smarter and smarter with each reform.

And so, I became an abolitionist. Not because I don't care about Black safety. Not because I'm a Black identity extremist. But because I understand and learned, as have others, as Black Radical Traditions have attested, that only we can show up for ourselves. None of the masses' institutions serve or were built for the people. It all must go. And we must create a new world that has no need of them. That means abolishing the system of haves and have-nots. That means ensuring structural control over the means by which we provide for ourselves materially. That means we take back the fruits of our labor, our labor power, and our relationships with land and the rest of nature from the colonizer. We cannot do any of this with police/prisons existing. They uphold what keeps us poor and exploited.

This moment is showing us that. Literally the world was hit with a pandemic, fell into a standstill. Many of us lost our lives or loved ones, forced into jails or on the streets. The government

bailed out corporations meanwhile they told us 'stay home' and let us get killed in the hospitals. And they put extra cops in our communities to enforce 'social distancing' while denying so many of us unemployment and stimulus money. And so some of us autonomously decided to use illegal methods to loot food and clothes for their kids – like any struggling person would, which we understand as a people because we talk about this in the hood all the time. That's where the riots came from. To challenge a rigged set up where properties and politicians and celebrities and companies are more important than us. And the cops... they brutalize us still. Even when they and the businesses they serve to protect claim to kneel or stand with us, when cameras are off they brutalize us. They barely targeted the Europeans who violated social distancing the whole pandemic and did not target all white people even though many of them stormed government buildings to demand that coronavirus restrictions get lifted. And that's because they all work together to keep working class Black people down. All of them. Just like the KKK and fascists. There's no reforming this.

Please learn from Angela Davis' work. Learn from Mariame Kaba's work. Learn from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work. Learn from CeCe McDonald's work. Learn from Miss Major's work. Learn from Marsha P Johnson's work. Learn from the modern abolitionist movement. Learn from Anarkatas. Learn from Black Radical Traditions. And understand that racism will not end unless we abolish police, prisons, and the capitalist/colonial society which requires their maintenance in order to sustain its exploitative arrangement. The way out of these structures and institutions, and the alternatives, have been experimented with and scientifically developed over the course of a rich and beautiful and cumulative legacy of Black Radical Traditions.