

Mutual Aid

in the Midwest

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New Year's Revolution

When I started this blog exactly six years ago, I didn't know why the Spirit led me to name it *Quakers, social justice and revolution*. It was the *revolution* part I've been patiently waiting to understand. I wondered if that related to my quixotic quest to get people to stop using cars. But I don't think you can call one person's actions a revolution, can you?

Anyway, now I know.

As each new year begins, many reflect on the past year. Some make resolutions to do something different, something better, in the new year. A fresh start.

But now, rather than making simple resolutions that are rarely kept, we are at a time to commit to joining a revolution this new year. The revolution I've been learning and writing about, and have joined, is Mutual Aid.

What do you see when you look back over the year 2020? When you step out of the daily struggles just to survive, literally in this time of COVID? And figuratively? What I see is:

- The failure of an economic system built on capitalism
- Suddenly millions of people have lost access to food, water, healthcare, education and shelter
- Collapse of our healthcare system
- The success of a political establishment designed to transfer massive amounts of wealth to those who are already wealthy
- The destruction of a social contract that used to allow us to operate from norms of truth, logic, science and care for one another
- The many consequences of rapidly evolving environmental disasters
- The ongoing destruction of infrastructure from neglect and environmental destruction
- Out of control spending for and utilization of the military and police
- The rise of a militarized police state that instills fear, suppresses dissent, and incarcerates those who do dissent
- The continuation of white supremacy and systemic racism
- The rise of authoritarianism
- Spiritual poverty

The capitalist economic system once worked fairly well for white people when there was nearly full employment. This transactional system required money to obtain all goods and services. Over the past several decades unemployment increased. Social safety nets helped somewhat. Then this year millions have lost their income, or their businesses forced to close. We've watched the political establishment totally disregard these crises.

For many years charities offered help. They would have rules about who qualified for help. Those needing help were stigmatized. At times the help offered wasn't what was really needed. And the help was rarely sustained.

We are in crisis and need fundamental change right now. My whole life I've said we have to stop using fossil fuels now. And that, of course, didn't happen. Now we wish we had done that. The consequences were a long time coming, but are here now.

But the crises we face now don't have a long timeline until their consequences materialize. Every minute millions of men, women and children are hungry, many with no shelter.

The revolution we need is Mutual Aid. Mutual Aid projects work to meet **survival needs**. Mutual Aid is built on the idea of us all working together on problems that affect us all. This is radically different from "us" helping "them", which is the view of charities and social safety nets.

To illustrate how Mutual Aid works, this is an example based upon some of my experiences. I'm fortunate to have met and become friends with Ronnie James, an indigenous organizer with over twenty years of experience. He has been mentoring me regarding Mutual Aid. For the past three months I've been participating in one of the projects he is involved with. Which is the weekly food giveaway of Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA). This is a continuation of the Black Panthers' free school breakfast program from the 1960's.

My first time at the food giveaway, Patrick told me this was a Mutual Aid project, which meant any of us helping out were welcome to take food. A very diverse group of my new friends distribute food (often past freshness date food from local grocery stores) among fifty or so boxes. The food is then taken to tables set up outside the church. Then one of us directs traffic, and the boxes of food are put into each car. Every one of us is very friendly toward those in each car. No one tells us to be polite. It's just naturally how we feel

Several times I've heard people say these Saturday mornings are the highlight of their week. And of mine, too. As Ronnie explained before I got started, you work frantically for an hour and a half, after which you are sweaty, tired, and feeling good. This good feeling is why Mutual Aid projects mobilize people and expand solidarity.

From this example, you can see what Dean Spade is talking about in his book, **Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)**. There are three key elements of mutual aid.

1. Mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.
2. Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements.
3. Mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

A Mutual Aid project must be participatory. You have to be physically present in the community you are working with. That is necessary in order for you to really understand the situation and the people you are working with. It is necessary so those you work with can get to know and trust you.

And an important part of the Mutual Aid experience is how you are changed as you learn how to be with people in new ways. Much of that is related to learning how to leave vertical hierarchies behind. Basic to Mutual Aid is the idea there are no vertical hierarchies, no superiors. We are all in this together.

Seriously, this is the time for all of us to join the Mutual Aid revolution.

If there isn't a Mutual Aid group near you, start one of your own. There are many resources on the Internet to help you do that.

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

Some friends have asked for concrete examples of Mutual Aid. Can't see how to escape the capitalist system. I'll try to explain as I tell you the story of how I first got involved in Mutual Aid and what has happened since.

I've learned that mutual aid has been practiced globally for centuries. But I was unaware of what mutual aid meant until a fortunate meeting with Ronnie James last February. Several of us were holding a vigil in support of the Wet'suwet'en peoples who were trying to stop the construction of a natural gas pipeline through their territory in British Columbia. We posted the event on Facebook. Fortunately Ronnie saw that and joined us. I learned Ronnie is an Indigenous organizer with many years of experience. And that he works with the [Great Plains Action Society](#), along with other friends of mine, including Sikowis (Christine Nobiss), Trisha Cax-Sep-Gu-Wiga Etringer, and Alton and Foxy One Feather.

Ronnie and I didn't get a chance to visit much at the vigil, but he accepted my Facebook friend request. And that was the beginning of our friendship, and his patient mentoring me about Mutual Aid. One of the first things he shared with me follows.

[NOTE: unless otherwise noted, all the quotes here are from Ronnie James]

I'm of the firm opinion that a system that was built by stolen bodies on stolen land for the benefit of a few is a system that is not repairable. It is operating as designed, and small changes (which are the result of huge efforts) to lessen the blow on those it was not designed for are merely half measures that can't ever fully succeed.

So the question is now, where do we go from here? Do we continue to make incremental changes while the wealthy hoard more wealth and the climate crisis deepens, or do we do something drastic that has never been done before? Can we envision and create a world where a class war from above isn't a reality anymore?

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

I was really impressed with how he expressed that. Poetic. That distilled so much of what I believe about capitalism, white supremacy and racial injustice. Capitalism is the system that can't be repaired.

So I work with a dope crew called Des Moines Mutual Aid, and on Saturday mornings we do a food giveaway program that was started by the Panthers as their free breakfast program and has carried on to this day. Anyways, brag, brag, blah, blah.

So I get to work and I need to call my boss, who is also a very good old friend, because there is network issues. He remembers and asks about the food giveaway which is cool and I tell him blah blah it went really well. And then he's like, "hey, if no one tells you, I'm very proud of what you do for the community" and I'm like "hold on hold on. Just realize that everything I do is to further the replacing of the state and destroying western civilization and any remnants of it for future generations." He says "I know and love that. Carry on."

This was how I first heard the term Mutual Aid. I also like "anyways, brag, brag, blah, blah" because I also feel a bit awkward talking about work I've done.

This is where you begin to see how Mutual Aid moves away from capitalism. "Just realize that everything I do is to further the replacing of the state and destroying western civilization and any remnants of it for future generations." Seriously. But this is a nonviolent, peaceful revolution. I mean besides the state sanctioned violence against us. The more we take care of each other, the less power they have.

What we have is each other. We can and need to take care of each other. We may have limited power on the political stage, a stage they built, but we have the power of numbers.

Those numbers represent unlimited amounts of talents and skills each community can utilize to replace the systems that fail us. The recent past shows us that mutual aid is not only a tool of survival, but also a tool of revolution. The more we take care of each other, the less they can fracture a community with their ways of war.

I began to learn what was going on in Des Moines by following the Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA) Facebook page. I was intrigued by the follow Ronnie wrote, impressed that DMMA was continuing the food giveaway program started by the Black Panthers so long ago.

[My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far](#)

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

Happy 54th Birthday to the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The Panthers have been a lifelong inspiration and one of the major influences on how I act in this world. The Free Food Store that Des Moines Mutual Aid helps coordinate was founded by the Des Moines chapter of the Panthers and has continued to this day. I deeply value that we get to carry on that legacy. All Power To The People.

I asked Ronnie to tell me more about Des Moines Mutual Aid.

It started as group of my friends working with the houseless camps some years back. It has now grown into a solid crew that runs a free food store started by the Black Panthers, still work with the camps, we organized a bail fund that has gotten every protester out of jail the last few months, and we just started an eviction relief fund to try to get a head of the coming crisis, in cooperation with Des Moines BLM. We have raised \$13,000 since Wednesday and the application to apply for the grants goes live this week.

Besides the food giveaway program, Des Moines Mutual Aid has built a network to respond to those who are being evicted, or forced to leave the houseless camps. There is also the bail fund to support those who are arrested advocating for change. When Des Moines Black Liberation declared a black state of emergency in Iowa, Patrick spoke at the press conference, and said Des Moines Mutual Aid fully supported that. Another project involves Des Moines Valley Friends (Quaker) meeting which allows the use of their kitchen to cook food to take to the houseless camps. In Sioux City, my friend Trisha Etringer takes personal protective equipment to those in need there.

As I began writing about Mutual Aid, the Black Panthers and Black Lives Matter, Ronnie told me **“connecting these dots of history to present will lay out your plan for the future.”** One way Ronnie mentors me is to read some of what I write, and make comments like that, for which I am very grateful.

I’m hearing about all these things that are answers to so many of my questions and prayers. This sounds like the way to build the Beloved communities that I’ve longed for. At this point my question was, what am I going to do now? I both want to learn more, and offer my help. I’ve since learned one of the keys of mutual aid is this power to draw people in.

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

I'm sensitive to the need to be careful about inviting myself into new things. I could tell trust is very important in what Ronnie was sharing with me. In part because law enforcement surveilles and abuses its power against those who are agitating for change in various ways.

But as we exchanged messages we began to get to know each other better. When I felt the time was right, I asked if it would be OK for me to join in, he said "def". He warned me things things moved pretty fast, but at the end of an hour and a half you're tired, sweaty and feeling good. **And so it was.**

He told me to come to a church in downtown Des Moines at 9:00 Saturday morning. I'm not great at meeting new people, so was a little apprehensive that morning. But I also have a long history of engaging with groups working for justice, and you can always count on them being wonderful people. **And so it was (again).**

When I got there Ronnie greeted me and we went into the church basement where around a dozen mostly young, but very diverse people were beginning to distribute the food. Everyone is very careful about COVID precautions.

The basement was full of tables. And large quantities of various kinds of food in boxes and bags. The food that was past its freshness date came from local grocery stores. Sometimes vegetables were donated by farmers or gardens. And since schools were closed because of the COVID pandemic, arrangements were made with food banks to distribute that food.

Patrick introduced himself, and told me this really was about mutual aid, and we are all encouraged to take food ourselves. And I have seen some of us taking some food. He also said we don't do a lot of telling anyone what to do. It would be some time before I appreciated this was an example of how mutual aid resists vertical hierarchies.

Forty or fifty empty boxes were set out, and we would grab food and deposit it in each of the boxes. The amount of food in each box increased steadily. I noticed that bread was put in last so it wasn't squashed. When there were pork products, those were kept separate so that wouldn't be given to families who didn't eat pork.

We started this at 9:00 and were done around 10:00. Tables were set up near the street outside the church. Once the boxes were full, we took them out to the tables.

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

In the meantime those who came for the food were parking in line in the school parking lot across the street. People find out about this by word of mouth. We had to be somewhat flexible as the numbers fluctuated from time to time.

One of us went to the cars, and controlled the flow to our food tables. We sorted out who was going to open the door as the cars pulled up in front of the tables. Someone else would put a food box in the car. When we had boxes of food from the government (school lunch) someone else would one of those boxes in the car. Often there are gallons of milk, which another person put in the car.

Sometimes Patrick will call for a team huddle, and we'd all circle around and divided up the tasks by volunteering.

Everyone of us is polite and friendly toward those picking up the food, as were the people in the cars toward us. I like the cars with kids in the back seat where we put the food. They always had smiles. This is a very important part of mutual aid. Recognizing it was the failure of the capitalist system that people needed help. Not their fault.

Another important part of mutual aid is the knowledge we are in this together. At another time we might be in need of help with food. Mutual aid is not "us" helping "them". It is definitely not charity. It is all of us being in these things together, and working to make things better for all of us.

After the last car has been loaded with food, we sanitize and take down the tables. While most of us had been loading cars, others had been cleaning the church basement. Now was the time we got to relax together. Sharing news of what others are doing. Almost everyone is involved in multiple other justice work. Someone mentions another possible source of food.

By participating in groups in new ways and practicing new ways of being together, we are both building the world we want and becoming the kind of people who could live in such a world together.

"Mutual Aid is essential to our survival" by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

Several times different accomplices (a term Ronnie uses that I love) have told me these Saturday mornings are the highlight of their week, as it has become for me. For the past three months I've only missed one Saturday morning.

Randomly passing an accomplice on the street and throwing up a fist at each other as we go our separate ways to destroy all that is rotten in this world will never fail to give me extra energy and a single tear of gratitude for what this city is creating.

Ronnie James

In his book, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* Dean Spade says there are three key elements of mutual aid.

1. Mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.
2. Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements.
3. Mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

Working to change the world is extremely hard because the conditions we are up against are severe. We cannot blame ourselves for having a difficult relationship to our work, even though we understand that learning to work differently is vital for our movements and for our own well-being and survival. We must be compassionate to ourselves and each other as we practice transforming our ways of working together.

We need each other badly to share what is hard about the overwhelming suffering in the world and the challenge of doing work for change in dangerous conditions. Even in the face of the pain that being awakened to contemporary conditions causes, all of our work for change can be rooted in the comfort and joy of being connected to one another, accompanying one another, and sometimes being inspired by each other. Reflecting deeply about our own orientations toward work—what it feels like to participate in groups, what ideas we are carrying around about leadership and productivity—is crucial to building a practice of working from a place of connection, inspiration, and joy. This means intentionally creating ways to practice a new relationship to work, and diving into the psychic structures underlying our wounds from living and working in brutal, coercive hierarchies.

Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 1469-1481). Verso.

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

It is really significant that Mutual Aid is how justice groups are beginning to organize our work and invite others to work with us.

mutual aid is the new economy. mutual aid is community. it is making sure your elderly neighbor down the street has a ride to their doctor's appointment. mutual aid is making sure the children in your neighborhood have dinner, or a warm coat for the upcoming winter. mutual aid is planting community gardens.

capitalism has violated the communities of marginalized folks. capitalism is about the value of people, property and the people who own property. those who have wealth and property control the decisions that are made. the government comes second to capitalism when it comes to power.

in the name of liberation, capitalism must be reversed and dismantled. meaning that capitalistic practices must be reprogrammed with mutual aid practices.

Des Moines Black Liberation

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

Returning to the questions Ronnie posed at the beginning of this:

So the question is now, where do we go from here? Do we continue to make incremental changes while the wealthy hoard more wealth and the climate crisis deepens, or do we do something drastic that has never been done before? Can we envision and create a world where a class war from above isn't a reality anymore?

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

I've been asked how we can engage huge numbers of people to affect change. First, I believe the Margaret Mead quote, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I believe, and have experienced that.

And I have witnessed what Dean Spade called one of the key elements of mutual aid, "Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements."

A Google document was recently created for people to sign up for roles needed for the food giveaway each Saturday morning. That was partly done for social distancing related to the virus, and because the number of people coming to help was rapidly growing. Mutual aid projects do mobilize people. I think an analogy is going to be how the civil rights struggles of the 60's exploded with national participation.

And as noted previously, frontline justice movements are calling for creation and participation in mutual aid groups.

The greatest driver to build networks of mutual aid groups is we have no choice. It is increasingly clear our political system has failed us. Capitalism has failed us. And most of all, environmental chaos will rapidly worsen. So many tipping points have been triggered. Air temperatures will increase rapidly, resulting in severe drought, crop failures, more ferocious wildfires, stronger storms and rising sea levels.

[My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far](#)

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

For those friends I mentioned at the beginning who are wondering how to become involved in mutual aid, I hope this has been helpful. I think the most important thing know is to you have to be present with those you are working with. Participatory. Mutual aid can't be done from a distance. This is necessary because you have to learn new ways of being with others. You have to learn to abandon vertical hierarchies. You have to show your commitment that we are all in this together.

*"Quakers will only be truly prophetic when they risk a great deal of their accumulated privilege and access to wealth. Prophets cannot have a stake in maintaining the status quo. **Any attempt to change a system while benefiting and protecting the benefits received from the system reinforces the system.** Quakers as much as anyone not only refuse to reject their white privilege, they fail to reject the benefits they receive from institutionalized racism, trying to make an unjust economy and institutionalized racism and patriarchy more fair and equitable in its ability to exploit. One can not simultaneously attack racist and patriarchal institutions and benefit from them at the same time without becoming more reliant upon the benefits and further entrenching the system. Liberalism at its laziest."*

Scott Miller

<https://friendlyfirecollective.wordpress.com/2018/06/05/scott-miller-on-why-quakerism-is-not-prophetic/>

My Mutual Aid Journey Thus Far

The next American Revolution, at this stage in our history, is not principally about jobs or health insurance or making it possible for more people to realize the American Dream of upward mobility. It is about acknowledging that we Americans have enjoyed middle-class comforts at the expense of other peoples all over the world. It is about living the kind of lives that will not only slow down global warming but also end the galloping inequality both inside this country and between the Global North and the Global South. It is about creating a new American Dream whose goal is a higher Humanity instead of the higher standard of living dependent on Empire. It is about practicing a new, more active, global, and participatory concept of citizenship. It is about becoming the change we wish to see in the world.

The courage, commitment, and strategies required for this kind of revolution are very different from those required to storm the Winter Palace or the White House. Instead of viewing the U.S. people as masses to be mobilized in increasingly aggressive struggles for higher wages, better jobs, or guaranteed health care, we must have the courage to challenge ourselves to engage in activities that build a new and better world by improving the physical, psychological, political, and spiritual health of ourselves, our families, our communities, our cities, our world, and our planet.

The Next American Revolution, Grace Lee Boggs

Mutual Aid Discourages Colonized Ideas

In the following I try to express why I believe Friends should do our justice work using the Mutual Aid concept. Mutual Aid is far from a new idea, having been practiced globally for centuries. Christine Nobiss recently wrote truth telling and mutual aid discourage colonized ideas.

Quakers are known for our long deliberation. But we are rapidly moving deeper into environmental, political and social collapse.

There are two fundamental concepts we need to understand, for our own sake and so we can convince others to join in this emergency work.

The first is that capitalism is a system only of the rich, and oppresses the other 99% of us in so many ways. We have to understand so we don't waste our time working within this system.

Secondly, the alternative to capitalism and structural racism is Mutual Aid. We can and should begin our own work with Mutual Aid now.

We can't look away from the millions who have just been added to the numbers of those who are food, health and housing insecure.

As capitalism continues to "fray around the edges" as Ronnie James puts it, we will continue to see greatly accelerating social collapse. I am convinced Mutual Aid is the way to respond.

I've been researching the concept of Mutual Aid for most of this year, beginning in February when Ronnie James came to Friends House to join Peter Clay, Linda Lemons and I for a vigil for the Wet'suwet'en peoples. Since then, Ronnie, of Des Moines Mutual Aid and the Great Plains Action Society has moved his office to Friends House. Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting, under the care of Peter Clay and Deborah Fisch, has graciously allowed Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA) to use their kitchen to prepare food that is then distributed to the houseless community.

Since that time Ronnie has graciously taken a lot of time to mentor me about Mutual Aid. This education has been augmented by my participation in DMMA's food giveaway program.

Mutual Aid Discourages Colonized Ideas

At the end of this is the biography about Ronnie that was used in advertising for yesterday's #TRUTHSGIVING online meeting. This shows Ronnie is an Indigenous Organizer, and his main work is DMMA. It is also significant that Ronnie and Mutual Aid are fully supported by Christine Nobiss and Great Plains Action Society.

"Truthsgiving is an ideology that must be enacted through truth telling and **mutual aid to discourage colonized ideas** about the thanksgiving mythology".

<https://www.truthsgiving.org/about>

You can view a video of yesterday's TRUTHSGIVING event here, where Ronnie, Christine and Trisha Etringer discuss their decolonizing work.

<https://fb.watch/2669vqdfRg/>

It is also significant that Des Moines Black Lives Matter/Liberation embraces the concept of Mutual Aid. Which means there has been and will continue to be significant interaction between DMMA and Des Moines BLM.

From the Des Moines Black Lives Matter Facebook page:

mutual aid is the new economy. mutual aid is community. it is making sure your elderly neighbor down the street has a ride to their doctor's appointment. mutual aid is making sure the children in your neighborhood have dinner, or a warm coat for the upcoming winter. mutual aid is planting community gardens.

capitalism has violated the communities of marginalized folks. capitalism is about the value of people, property and the people who own property. those who have wealth and property control the decisions that are made. the government comes second to capitalism when it comes to power.

in the name of liberation, capitalism must be reversed and dismantled. meaning that capitalistic practices must be reprogrammed with mutual aid practices.

Mutual Aid has become the focus of what I've been praying and writing about for some time now. I believe Friends should embrace the concept of Mutual Aid and that should be the focus of the work of our peace and social concerns committees.

[Prophetic Vision | Quakers, social justice and revolution](#)

Mutual Aid Discourages Colonized Ideas

In justice work it is essential to be responsive to what oppressed communities are asking of us. Midwest Indigenous organizers and Des Moines BLM are embracing Mutual Aid. By inference, they are asking us to do so, also. One of the concepts of Mutual Aid is Mutual Aid communities will crop up all over.

Some of the more relevant articles are:

<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/10/20/quakers-and-mutual-aid/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/10/22/out-of-the-meetinghouse/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/10/24/mutual-aid-for-social-concerns/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/10/29/a-radical-act/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/11/02/working-with-joy/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/11/06/mutual-aid-101-wegotourblock/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/11/07/rural-mutual-aid/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/11/13/flat-or-hierarchical-world-view/>
<https://jeffkisling.com/2020/11/22/truthsgiving-3/>

Ronnie James, Indigenous Organizer

Law Student @Great Plains Action Society and Des Moines Mutual Aid

Ronnie James is an Indigenous activist and organizer in Des Moines, Iowa. He currently organizes with The Great Plains Action Society and Des Moines Mutual Aid, in addition to being a father and a pre-law student. He is involved in many Mutual Aid projects centered around food insecurity, racial and economic justice, and our houseless relatives. He has many years of boots on the ground grassroots organizing experience, all informed from an Indigenous and anti-capitalist perspective. Ronnie is pursuing a law degree to further these goals and believes that by having a law license he will be able to effectively protect the vulnerable and support the courageous.

Prophetic Vision

Friends in my Quaker meeting in rural Iowa have been praying and discussing what we are being led to do at this time, when there is so much suffering in the world. “Being led” means discerning what the inner light, or spirit, or God is saying to us.

During these discussions the concept of prophetic vision came up when we considered whether we had a shared vision. It seemed we didn’t have much of an understanding of what prophetic vision meant.

Quakers have always identified themselves as being a prophetic community, asserting that their faith is ‘not a notion, but a way’. Typically, Friends see action as being the primary response to their deepest spiritual experiences. In this blog post, Martin Layton explores the significance of this aspect of Quaker witness.

Truth is our guide

Prophets are sometimes misrepresented as fortune-tellers, but it is more accurate to think of them as truth-tellers. As Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann explains,

*The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and **express hope** in a society that lives in despair.*

In the seventeenth century, Friends proclaimed themselves as the ‘Publishers of the Truth’. ‘The Lord opened my mouth,’ wrote George Fox, ‘and the everlasting truth was declared amongst them, and the power of the Lord was over them all.’

As [Robert Lawrence Smith](#) reminds us, from their beginnings Quakers have held that truth ‘restores our souls and empowers our actions. Truth is our guide and truth is our liberator.’

Quaker Testimony

This links back to the idea of 'testimony', the name we give to Friends' shared behaviours, located in the sphere of everyday life, which are usually seen to be a challenge to conventional ways of behaving or are reflective of their experience of personal transformation. Individually and collectively, Friends' testimony asks them to seek out the truth in their lives and to uncover destructive falsehoods. Crucially, they have always recognised that although this can be a cause of discomfort, it often leads to a more meaningful life or deeper sense of inner peace.

George Fox understood how the Spirit, in whose presence Quakers wait in worship, can empower people to work for this more just and compassionate world. In his Journal, he wrote:

The Lord had said unto me that if but one man or woman were raised by His power to stand and live in the same Spirit that the prophets and apostles were in who gave forth the scriptures, that man or woman should shake all the country in their profession for ten miles around.

THE PUBLISHERS OF TRUTH, Woodbrooke, 24 January 2019

*"Quakers will only be truly prophetic when they risk a great deal of their accumulated privilege and access to wealth. Prophets cannot have a stake in maintaining the status quo. **Any attempt to change a system while benefiting and protecting the benefits received from the system reinforces the system.** Quakers as much as anyone not only refuse to reject their white privilege, they fail to reject the benefits they receive from institutionalized racism, trying to make an unjust economy and institutionalized racism and patriarch more fair and equitable in its ability to exploit. One can not simultaneously attack racist and patriarchal institutions and benefit from them at the same time without becoming more reliant upon the benefits and further entrenching the system. Liberalism at its laziest."*

Scott Miller <https://friendlyfirecollective.wordpress.com/2018/06/05/scott-miller-on-why-quakerism-is-not-prophetic/>

The Police State and Why We Must Resist

That is another way of expressing what I've been trying to say lately. For example in [A Radical Turning](#), that our capitalist economy and the political and policing/military systems that enforce it are inherently unjust. Placing little value on resources, including human labor, and siphoning vast wealth to those already rich, leaving millions impoverished. Consuming resources at rates many times greater than they can be replenished. Polluting our land, air and water. Built on white supremacy, militarism, and systemic racism. The triple threats that Martin Luther King, Jr, warned against; racism, militarism and **materialism**.

As [Albert Einstein](#) stated, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." Think about how profoundly true that is. That is why incremental changes have not worked. We MUST "think outside the box."

An example is the failure of Quakers to address environmental chaos because most continue to drive cars, fly in airplanes, have homes with air conditioning, and include red meat in their diet. My decision forty years ago to give up having a personal automobile was my attempt to be more true to my environmental concerns. To obey what the Inner Light clearly said to me. Time and time again when I got into discussions about our environment, the first thing someone would say would be along the lines of "well you drive a car, don't you?" If you can't say "no I don't", you have lost any authority to try to get others to care about our environment. As Scott Miller puts it in the quote above, "Any attempt to change a system while benefiting and protecting the benefits received from the system reinforces the system. "

My vision of creating diverse, self-sufficient communities with simple living structures, communal kitchens, growing food in surrounding fields is a way to escape the capitalist system. And if everyone is truly welcome to live and work in these communities, which will require much physical labor and energy to create and maintain, that has the potential to avoid systemic racism. A commitment to nonviolence could create more just and peaceful communities without police abuse.

In years past it was easy for people to dismiss these ideas, and believe they would never come about. They would point to the eventual failure of the vast majority of intentional communities. The difference at this point in time is that climate chaos is beginning to overwhelm our economic and political systems. And will increasingly do so in more ways. Many thresholds are being crossed, which trigger [destructive feedback mechanisms](#), that even more severely stress and break these systems.

The Police State and Why We Must Resist

We will soon be forced to find alternatives to our existing social and political systems. Now is the time to figure out the best alternatives, before environmental and social chaos catches us unprepared. We can also be addressing systemic racism, militarism and materialism in the process. This article discusses ideas for designing and building such communities. <https://jeffkisling.com/2018/02/22/design-and-build-beloved-community-models/>

As Scott Miller says above, “Quakers will only be truly prophetic when they risk a great deal of their accumulated privilege and access to wealth. Prophets cannot have a stake in maintaining the status quo.”

I would contend the reason our Quaker meetings are getting smaller is because most of us are too entrenched in the current, unjust economic and political systems. But I also believe we could speak to these times if we build alternative, Beloved communities. This year I’ve been learning about and involved in the concept of Mutual Aid. This is how I believe we can build such communities today.

[“mutual aid” | Search Results | Quakers, social justice and revolution \(jeffkisling.com\)](#)

[Practicing hope.](#)

The Police State and Why We Must Resist

Teach In 8/22

Hello all, my name is Ronnie James, and I am here representing Des Moines Mutual Aid.

I am descended from numerous peoples of so-called north america.

At this point I am supposed to do a land acknowledgment, but I don't like what those have been distorted into.

Instead I will say you are standing on and directly benefiting from stolen land, within a nation built by stolen bodies, which is the foundation of the police state that occupies these sacred grounds of the original peoples.

If you would like to know more of who's land you are on, there are numerous resources. We are still here, and numerous, just ask us.

Historically, the police and other law enforcement were formed to protect the interests and property of the moneyed classes from the rest of the People. This "property" included the bodies of the enslaved, and was the justification for brutally repressing the righteous and inevitable revolts born from the atrocity of slavery. This same philosophy of endless possession was the bloodlust that fueled the "Indian Wars" and the theft of Indigenous land and bodies that continues to this day.

(Wampanoag, 2020)

Today, this same war of conquest, the repression of the many for the benefit of the few, continues.

Currently, Des Moines Mutual Aid and it's many accomplices have been fighting a battle with the city of des moines and it's foot soldiers trying to repress our houseless population from utilizing unused "property". The basic universal need of a place to rest and be safe is trumped by the need of the wealthy, and the wannabe wealthy, to control every inch they can possess. It is a war for control, and the pigs have enlisted willingly.

The Police State and Why We Must Resist

This same war of conquest is currently using the mass incarceration machine to instill fear in the populace, warehouse cheap labor, and destabilize communities that dare to defy a system that would rather see you dead than noncompliant. This is the same war where it's soldiers will kill a black or brown body, basically instinctively, because our very existence reminds them of all that they have stolen and the possibility of a revolution that can create a new world where conquest is a shameful memory.

The first, and possibly the most important, is that it was not always this way, which proves it does not have to stay this way.

As bleak as this is, there is a significant amount of resistance and hope to turn the tide we currently suffer under. We stand on the shoulders of giants that have been doing this work for centuries, and there are many lessons we can learn from.

What we have is each other. We can and need to take care of each other. We may have limited power on the political stage, a stage they built, but we have the power of numbers.

Those numbers represent unlimited amounts of talents and skills each community can utilize to replace the systems that fail us. The recent past shows us that mutual aid is not only a tool of survival, but also a tool of revolution. The more we take care of each other, the less they can fracture a community with their ways of war. Organized groups like The American Indian Movement and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense showed that we can build not only aggressive security forces for our communities, but they also built many programs that directly responded to the general wellbeing of their communities. This tradition began long before them and continues to this day. Look into the Zapatistas in Southern so-called Mexico for a current and effective example.

These people's security forces, or the "policing of the police" not only helps to minimize the abuse and trauma they can inflict on us, but it begins to shift the power balance from them to us.

Mutual Aid programs that help our most marginalized or other events that work to maintain our spirits result in stronger communities. A strong community is less vulnerable to police intrusion. 99% of our conflicts can be solved by those affected by them, but only with the support of those around them. Anytime we call on the police to mediate our problems, we are risking ourselves or a loved one from being hurt or worse.

Black State of Emergency in Iowa

The more we replace the police with organized community response to conflict, the safer we will be. Another powerful benefit is the removal of power from those that take their orders from those that have no interest in your well being, at least past it being useful to amass and increase wealth.

Of course, part of this fight of police abolition will be fought on the political stage, but let's not fool ourselves that the state and the wealthy will ever give up tight control on all resources. We can lobby and vote to have police resources diverted to less dangerous organizations, but they will still be working for the same state and same class that have dispossessed and repressed us for centuries. Every election has the possibility of reversing any policy gain we may won.

Some of the fight will be in the government offices, but the majority of it will be us, in the street.

Many communities work to train amongst themselves mental and physical health workers, conflict mediators, and anything else we need, despite the state and it's soldiers insistence that they are the sole "authority" of these skills, and always with the implied threat of violence.

As we work toward this, and this summer has proven des moines has the heart, desire, and skills to do so, we still have to deal with what's in front of us.

Black State of Emergency in Iowa

We each have skills and resources we can utilize towards the abolition project. Some of us can use the halls of the system to make short term change there, others have skills that produce food, provide medical care, or care for our precious youth, some are skilled in the more confrontational tactics needed. Once we envision that world our ancestors want for us, finding our role is natural.

If we are to survive, and more importantly, thrive, we know what we will have to do.

All Power To The People.

Ronnie James

Black state of emergency in Iowa

Des Moines Black Lives Matter

October 13 at 11:20 AM

Black Iowans are not safe. We're joining with a number of other community organizations to implement strategies and policies to protect one another.

#BlackEmergencyIA

The Press Release can be found at the end of this post.

Key Points:

- Learn more about the coalition's efforts by following the social media hashtag **#BlackEmergencyIA**.
- <https://www.facebook.com/desmoinesblm> Des Moines Black Lives Matter clarified why it's now known as the Des Moines Black Liberation Movement. **Matthew Bruce**, an organizer with BLM, said the group wanted to make sure that "we reflected that not only are we valuing our lives, but we are dismantling the systems that keep us oppressed."

Black Iowans exist in a "state of emergency" and need resources to fight longstanding racial disparities and violence, said a coalition of 10 community organizations from across central and eastern Iowa.

"With this declaration of a state of emergency for Black Iowans, we are also calling on all local elected officials — from city elected officials to state representatives — to Governor Reynolds to our federal elected officials in the congress and the senate — to join with us in recognizing the state of emergency for Black Iowans and reacting with the resources that are necessary to help combat this," said **Jaylen Cavil**, an organizer with the [Des Moines Black Liberation Movement](#) (BLM).

The coalition of groups include:

Black State of Emergency in Iowa

- [Des Moines Black Liberation Movement](#)
- [Des Moines Mutual Aid](#)
- [Iowa Coalition for Collective Change](#)
- [Iowa Freedom Riders](#)
- [Mothers Against Violence](#)
- [The Union of Black America](#)
- [Central Iowa Center for Independent Living](#)
- [Central Iowa Democratic Socialists of America](#)
- [Iowa Queer Communities of Color Coalition](#)
- [Shop Black Des Moines](#)

Black Iowa in 'State of Emergency'. Activists sound the alarm about the dire longstanding racial disparities harming Black lives by Dana James, Black Iowa News, October 14, 2020

Des Moines Mutual Aid

DSM BLM Rent Relief

August 23, 2020 ***** Stunning***** The fund is up to \$12,806 so far. Thank you everyone for participating! If you haven't already, please share this page with as many people in your friend groups as possible! We need to get word out!! Remember – stable housing = health and well being! Every community needs this to thrive!! Venmo @DSMBLMRentRelief Cash app \$DSMBLMRentRelief Paypal: <https://paypal.me/DSMBLMRentRelief>

Evictions by the numbers in Polk County y'all- 305 – Completed evictions in August (more still coming) 70 – Scheduled for September (this number will grow) \$13,149 – Rent Relief Fund 453 – Rent Relief Page Followers Our fund needs more page followers and money to make a difference in this unfolding tragedy! Venmo @DSMBLMRentRelief Cash app \$DSMBLMRentRelief Paypal: <https://paypal.me/DSMBLMRentRelief>

DSM BLM Rent Relief , “a collectivist response to the existing housing crisis that was exacerbated by COVID-19 and a paralyzed government. This fund was formed in the relationship between Black Liberation Movements and mutual aid actions in Des Moines.” <https://www.facebook.com/DSMBLMRentRelief/>



Des Moines Mutual Aid Bail Fund

US Political Meltdown and Mutual Aid

Community Service The Des Moines Mutual Aid Bail Fund provides bail for protesters arrested in Central Iowa. Call us or leave a voicemail to request aid! Organized by Des Moines Mutual Aid, a group of street medics, social service providers, and community members.

<https://communitybondproject.networkforgood.com/projects/101939-free-our-protesters> (515) 218-1994

Cop Myths – Cops work for the public good and support public safety Truth – Cops protect wealthy interests. This isn't a new problem. We have a some present examples. Barrata's owner called in the cops to stop protesters from exercising their constitutionally protected right to free speech. Please support the bail fund! **The ability to speak about the problems around us is worth fighting for!** Venmo: @DesMoinesMutualAid-

BailFund <https://communitybondproject.networkforgood.com/projects/103795-protester-support>

US Political Meltdown and Mutual Aid

Much has been written about the collapse of our political systems and the capitalist economy. This past year has seen the utter inability of Federal and state governments to even begin to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the consequences of which are 18,973,520 confirmed cases and 333,957 deaths as of today in the US.

The capitalist system that requires money for every transaction leaves behind all who don't have access to money. Millions of people who once had jobs no longer do, through no fault of their own. Suddenly millions of people are hungry and find themselves dependent on food banks. Millions face the threat of eviction when they can no longer afford the rent, or to pay their mortgage.

And yet, knowing all this, the US Congress and administration refuse to provide even a modicum of financial relief. At the same time the military is given billions of dollars.

Des Moines Mutual Aid

Mutual Aid has become ever more important as a way to address these survival needs. I don't know why I only discovered the concept of Mutual Aid about a year ago. Fortunately there is a well organized group nearby, Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA) that has been active for years. Providing food, help for the houseless or those facing evictions, and providing bail for those arrested for agitating for change.

US Congress and administration refuse to provide even a modicum of financial relief

I went to Des Moines again yesterday to help with the DMMA food giveaway. Where I see first hand what food insecurity and hunger look like. Where I am with my friends joyfully doing this work together. Those are the two reasons I hope more people become involved with Mutual Aid in their communities. Fulfilling survival needs, and experiencing working with, belonging to a community working on helping us all, together.

I came across this article recently, "COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid. Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism", by Tina Gerhardt. I've had a great deal of trouble convincing white friends that capitalism is the root of much that is wrong today. In this country colonialism has been based upon capitalism.

Climate Parade, Des Moines, Iowa

Des Moines Mutual Aid

"Mutual aid," a concept coined by the Russian naturalist and anarchist Peter Kropotkin in his 1902 Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, refers to the principles of cooperation, and of people joining together to help each other. It ran counter to the then-hegemonic Darwinian theories emphasizing competition and survival of the fittest. Kropotkin did not deny the role of competition, but he argued that the cooperative spirit has gone under-examined.

Kropotkin traced the role of mutual aid in various communities over stretches of history and geography, including among Indigenous communities, so-called free cities in Europe, guilds, labor unions and poor people, and he flagged one key factor that undermined these relationships: privatization.

*Reciprocity forms the bedrock of Indigenous worldviews. Robin Wall Kimmerer, in Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants, writes of the "web of reciprocity, of giving and taking. . . . **Through unity, survival. All flourishing is mutual.**"*

COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid. Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism, by Tina Gerhardt. Progressive, December 19, 2020

*Mutual aid manifests itself most intensely during crises. **“This is when the structures of the state and of capitalist markets not only fail to address the emergency situation but they often show their complicity in making it worse,”** writes Massimo de Angelis, in the introduction to *Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid during the COVID-19 Crisis*. He says it amounts to a collective cry from society that “I want to evolve but my evolution depends on you.”*

Amid the pandemic, communities have sprung into action. With the economic fallout and lack of federal “survival checks” (as U.S. Representative-Elect Cori Bush, Democrat of Missouri, [refers](#) to them instead of “stimulus checks”), people are not only calling for an extension to the federal eviction moratorium, which expires at the end of 2020, but also taking action to keep people housed. In NYC, [Mutual Aid NYC](#) sprung into action. A multi-racial network of people and groups, it aims to share food, material and other resources “to support each other interdependently.”

*COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid. Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism, by Tina Gerhardt. *Progressive*, December 19, 2020*

I’m of the firm opinion that a system that was built by stolen bodies on stolen land for the benefit of a few is a system that is not repairable. It is operating as designed, and small changes (which are the result of huge efforts) to lessen the blow on those it was not designed for are merely half measures that can’t ever fully succeed.

So the question is now, where do we go from here? Do we continue to make incremental changes while the wealthy hoard more wealth and the climate crisis deepens, or do we do something drastic that has never been done before? Can we envision and create a world where a class war from above isn’t a reality anymore?”

Ronnie James

45 percent uptick in hunger from 2019 to 2020

Given the 45 percent uptick in hunger from 2019 to 2020, people are also working to self-organize food distribution. Together with other organizations, *Fire Igniting the Spirit* works to ensure food security for Indigenous communities, distributing food and supplies among five tribes in Oregon and Washington. Just last weekend, the effort *reached* more than one thousand families. The fact that COVID-19 relief funds from the Department of Treasury to tribes *expire at the end of the year* has intensified mutual aid.

During emergencies, disaster capitalism, whereby neoliberalism swoops in to privatize and profit precisely at moments of crisis, well-delineated in Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine (2007), is the flip side of the coin to mutual aid, well-argued in Solnit's A Paradise Built in Hell or Hope in the Dark (2004).

In light of COVID-19, we are all facing unique challenges, but each one of us has different resources and skills we can contribute. What this moment offers, as any crisis does, is an opportunity to engage the needs of our neighbors and communities.

After all, a society will be measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members.

COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid. Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism, by Tina Gerhardt. Progressive, December 19, 2020

Bobby Seale

October 10 at 5:56 PM · The first Survival Programs Survival Programs was the Free Breakfast for Children Program, which began in January 1969 at one small Catholic church in the Fillmore district of San Francisco, and spread to many cities in America where there were Party chapters. Thousands of poor and hungry children were fed free breakfasts every day by the Party under this program. The Program became so popular that by the end of the year, the original Black Panther Party set up kitchens in cities across the nation, feeding over 10,000 children every day before they went to school.

The original Black Panther Party believed that "Children cannot reach their full academic potential if they have empty stomachs."

United Front Against Fascism

The Free Breakfast for Children Program became so effective, it drew the ire of the director of the FBI, J Edgar Hoover who has been quoted as saying that it was not the guns that were the greatest threat but the Party's Free Children's Breakfast Program that was the "...greatest threat to the internal security of the United States of America."

On May 15, 1969, in an internal memo, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wrote: "The Breakfast for Children Program represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for."

The FBI's director J. Edgar Hoover became involved in stopping the Black Panther Party as the party began to gain prominence because of Survival Programs such as the Free Breakfast for Children Program. As COINTELPRO had been established in 1956 to police "political radicals" within the United States, focus and pressure now came onto the Black Panther Party. On December 15, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover pledged that 1969 would be the last year of the Party's existence. Under J Edgar Hoover's reign, the Black Panther Party may have suffered immensely, which resulted in many of its members being assassinated or imprisoned, but the Black Panther Party survived the FBI's COINTELPRO operations that attempted to disrupt and destroy it. (A lot of people are not aware that the Black Panthers won 95% of their courtroom cases.)

The original Black Panther Party developed a series of social programs to provide needed services to the people. Their intent was to promote "a model for an alternative, more humane social scheme." These programs, of which there came to be more than 60, were eventually referred to as Survival Programs, and were operated by Black Panther Party members under the slogan "survival pending revolution."

Many social programs today go back to the Survival Programs of the Black Panther Party. And the struggle for justice for African American and minority youth in the face of police oppression is unfortunately as relevant today as it was when the original Black Panthers Party was established.

Bobby Seale All Power To All The People! <http://bobbyseale.com/>
[#blackpantherparty](#) [#blackpanthers](#) [#bobbyseale](#) [#blackhistory](#)

Popular Resistance School

1. **Recognize this is a class war.** As we enter an [economic depression](#) with millions more people becoming poor and losing their homes and a worsening pandemic, recognize that a government that cannot protect and provide for the basic needs of its people is a failed state. The wealthy class doesn't care about the welfare of the majority. They feel secure knowing they will have the best health care if they become sick and they have the resources to move anywhere in the world.
2. **Build solidarity on the left.** There is no organized left in the US at present. In [this Chris Hedges interview](#) with Slavenka Drakulić, they discuss that what happened in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s mirrors what is happening here. One of the factors that allowed war to break out was the failure to build an organized left to counter the right wing nationalists. All efforts should be made to build alliances between leftist organizations and find ways to work together. Don't allow small differences to divide us.
3. **Build international solidarity.** Many peoples around the world have been struggling against US imperialism for decades and building successful alternatives to capitalism. People in the United States have much to learn from them. The same tactics the US has employed against people in other countries – dismantling and privatizing essential services, economic warfare and violence – are being used against people in the US. We also share a common vision for a better world.
4. **Promote a common vision.** In a time of multiple life-threatening crises, people can unite around a bold vision for that better world. If we look at the platforms of various social movements and left political parties, we find many commonalities such as respecting rights to health care, housing, education and jobs with a living wage, protecting the planet, putting people over profit, supporting self-determination and people's right to have a say over what happens in their communities and opposing a foreign policy of death and destruction. This is not the time for weak demands. It is a bold agenda that will rally people to the cause. Here is a [Peoples Agenda](#) that came out of the Occupy Movement and has been honed since then. People are also designing new systems that value people and the planet such as [this ecological economy](#) starting to take hold in the Pacific Islands.

A radical act

5. **Mobilize in ways that weaken the elites.** Sometimes we need to march in the streets to show what we represent and that we have wide support. Sometimes we need to take actions that challenge and interfere with what the power structure is doing. There are many examples of this from individuals to groups of people exposing and blocking injustices. Our greatest power lies in collective actions such as boycotts, strikes and building alternatives that function outside the systems we are working to change. When enough of us take collective action, we have a power that is unstoppable.
6. **Support each other.** We are facing difficult times. We need to support and protect each other to get through it. Build networks of [mutual aid](#) in your community and start creating what we need now such as solidarity gardens, housing takeovers, health care provision, including emotional care, support for working parents and more.
7. **Stay human.** All people have the capacity to do good and to do harm. As we struggle and are faced with hateful, violent people, ground yourself in the values that you want to see in the world we are building. Don't engage them. Don't behave like them. Remain nonviolent, which includes your right to protect yourself, and steadfast in your convictions. Treat others with love and respect. This doesn't mean giving opponents power over you, just recognizing we are all human and that hate and violence are a slippery slope.
8. **Don't give up.** We never know how close we are to victory. Our opponents will seem the most vicious the closer we get as they recognize they are losing power. Find ways to continue to struggle no matter what happens.

Queries about Mutual Aid

Quakers like to ask ourselves questions we refer to as queries. Rather than being 'told' to do something, the questions invite us to focus on what we are or are not doing. I would ask these questions. You might have more.

- What Mutual Aid groups are in your area?
- What relationships do you see between your peace and justice work, and the concept of Mutual Aid?
- What would your justice work look like if you adapted it to the Mutual Aid model?
- How might faith integrate with Mutual Aid?
- How could Mutual Aid expand who you do your justice work with? Bring in more Friends in your meeting, youth in your meeting, and other people in your wider community?
- How can we create ways of meeting our needs, making decisions, and organizing ourselves and solving problems outside of the State structure and the capitalist system?

Connections between different communities

Following is a list of things I have discovered over the years as I've made connections with different communities and cultures.

How to create connections between different communities or cultures?

- ⓘ Do NOT ask or expect to be taught
- 💬 Don't be a burden
- 👂 Listen deeply—this is how you learn
- 👥 Do NOT offer suggestions/leadership until invited to do so
- 👍 When invited to do so, speak from your own experience
- 👤 Focus on building friendships
- 🕒 Be honest
- ✓ Accept being vulnerable

Principles of Peace and justice work

- Focus on building friendships. This is the most important thing.
- Find appropriate ways to be present out in the community.
- When first beginning to work with a new community, listen deeply and don't offer thoughts or ideas until you are invited to do so.
- When you are asked something, speak only from your own experiences. Share even when it is difficult.
- Be honest.
- Recognize opportunities in what others say, which is often very subtle. Communities appreciate it when you show up at events they hold, assuming it is appropriate for you to be there.
- Social media platforms provide multiple ways to share of yourself, and connect with others. But be very careful not to be too intrusive
- Look at what your new friends post on Facebook or Instagram or twitter.
- When you find things you appreciate on people's social media, briefly let them know. A simple "like" can be good.
- When appropriate, share things that aren't directly related to what you are working on with others. Sharing photography has been helpful in many different ways.

By 1969, the Panthers began to use fascism as a theoretical framework to critique US political economy. They defined fascism as “the power of finance capital” which “manifests itself not only as banks, trusts and monopolies but also as the human property of FINANCE CAPITAL – the avaricious businessman, the demagogic politician, and the racist pig cop.” The *Black Panther* newspaper began to feature excerpts from Dimitroff's writings and articles with titles such as “Fascist Pigs must withdraw their troops from our communities or face the wrath of the armed people,” “Students Struggle Against Fascism,” and “Medicine and Fascism.” The Panthers advertised local showings of films like *Z* about fascism in Greece and used their iconic artwork as a cultural tool to [visually](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com...) demonstrate anti-fascist resistance.

Failed Systems

In July 1969 close to 5,000 activists from organizations like the Black Students Union, Communist Party USA, Los Siete de la Raza, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Students for a Democratic Society, Third World Liberation Front, Young Lords, Young Patriots, Youth Against War and Fascism, and the Progressive Labor Party flocked to Oakland, California's Municipal auditorium in response to the Black Panther Party's call for allies to gather and strategize against fascist conditions in the United States.

This [United Front Against Fascism](#) (UFAF) conference was an important moment in the history of the Black Freedom movement and the New Left. The Panthers hoped to create a "national force" with a "common revolutionary ideology and political program which answers the basic desires and needs of all people in fascist, capitalist, racist America." At the opening session, Seale called for unity of action arguing that "we will not be free until Brown, Red, Yellow, Black, and all other peoples of color are unchained."

The Black Panther Party, the International Liberation School, and the National Committees to Combat Fascism, "Poster for the National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism," Student Digital Gallery, accessed January 23, 2017

<https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/items/show/6582>

PEOPLE! ORGANIZATIONS! GROUPS! YIPPIES!
POLITICAL PARTIES! WORKERS! STUDENTS!
PEASANT-FARMERS! YOU THE LUMPEN! POOR
PEOPLE. BLACK PEOPLE. MEXICAN AMERICANS.
PUERTO RICANS. CHINESE. ETC. ETC.

WE MUST DEVELOP A
**UNITED FRONT
AGAINST
FASCISM**

**WHYS!!!
FOR NAT'L CONFERENCE**

■ CONNECTICUT PANTHER LEADERSHIP BUSTED

"On May 22, 1936, the lifeless body of Charles Poole employee of the Work Progressive Administration was found lying in a ditch. He was laying on the outskirts of Detroit. It seemed like another murder story". On May 22, 1969, Alex Rackley's body was found in a river outside New Haven Conn. One need only recall the "Thrill" murder of George Baskett in San Francisco, which was described by witnesses from the community in court that FASCIST PIG MICHEAL O'BRIEN, AFTER A DRINKING PARTY, stated that he just "wanted to know what it felt like to kill a nigger".

The situation of the Negro in the United States is in many respects startlingly analogous to that of the Jew in Nazi Germany. There are in fact, sections of the South where without doubt the Negroes are even worse off than were the Jews under the Hitler Dictatorship.

- WORKERS REMEMBER BLOODY THURSDAY
- HUEY P. NEWTON INCARCERATED WITHOUT BAIL BECAUSE OF HIS LEADERSHIP TO ESTABLISH THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION
- BERKELEY JAMES RECTOR MURDERED BY FASCIST ALAMEDA COUNTY SHERIFF WHO PLACED PRIVATE "PROPERTY" OF FINANCE CAPITAL ABOVE HUMAN LIFE - SO-CALLED "TRESPASSING" WITH RESPECT TO PEOPLE'S PARK.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM (BACK PAGE)
U.F.A.F. CONFERENCE HEADQUARTERS B.P.P.
(PH 845 0104)
3106 SHATTUCK AVE. BERK. CALIF. 94705

NATIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR A

**UNITED FRONT
AGAINST FASCISM
IN AMERICA**

FASCISM: THE POWER OF FINANCE CAPITAL

OAKLAND CALIFORNIA
JULY 18, 19, AND 20,

THIS CONFERENCE IS CALLED BY THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, THE INT'L LIBERATION SCHOOL AND ORGANIZED BY THE NAT'L COMMITTEES TO COMBAT FASCISM

SOME OBJECTIVES TO DEVELOP A UNITED FRONT AGAINST FASCISM IN AMERICA

- PRIMARY: COMMUNITY CONTROL OF POLICE ON A NATIONAL SCALE
- FREEDOM OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND POLITICAL FREEDOM FOR ALL
- BLACK AND WHITE WORKERS AGAINST FASCISM
- THE CHURCH VERSUS FASCISM IN AMERICA
- STUDENTS VERSUS FASCISM
- HOW TO DEAL WITH 'LAW AND ORDER' POLITICIANS
- THE RIGHT TO SELF DEFENSE AGAINST FASCIST TACTICS

The Black Panther Party, the International Liberation School, and the National Committees to Combat Fascism

A Radical Act

[“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival”](#) by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020, is a primer about the concept of Mutual Aid. I recommend reading the entire article. I’ll be quoting it more extensively than I usually like to do but it is not hyperbole to say Mutual Aid is essential to our survival, and this article explains this well.

A radical act

For good reason, many people feel scared right now. We face terrifying unknowns about the [worsening economic crisis](#), climate change-induced disasters, [rising COVID-19 infections](#) and [long-term health problems](#) facing people who survive being infected, ongoing [racism](#) and [violence](#) at the hands of law [enforcement](#) of [all kinds](#), and increasing [mobilization](#) of armed white supremacist right-wing people and organizations. It is difficult to have any faith that, no matter who is in the White House, we will see a massive redistribution of wealth, immediate action to stop climate change, an end to policing, borders and war, and universal housing, health care or child care. Under these conditions, we need mutual aid to survive and to build resistance movements of hundreds of millions of people who can fight to stop the systems of extraction that govern our lives and build a world we can survive.

There is nothing new about mutual aid — people have worked together to survive for all of human history. But **capitalism and colonialism** created structures that have disrupted how people have historically connected with each other and shared everything they needed to survive. As people were forced into systems of wage labor and private property, and wealth became [increasingly concentrated](#), our ways of caring for each other have become more and more tenuous.

“Mutual aid” is one term used to describe collective coordination to meet each other’s needs, usually stemming from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them. Those systems, in fact, have often [created the crisis](#), or are [making things worse](#). We see examples of mutual aid in every single social movement, whether it’s people [raising money](#) for [workers on strike](#), setting up a car pooling system during the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#), putting [drinking water](#) in the desert for migrants crossing the border, training each other in [emergency medicine](#) because ambulance response time in poor neighborhoods is too slow, raising money to [pay for abortions](#) for those who can’t afford them, or coordinating [letter-writing to prisoners](#). These are mutual aid projects. They directly meet people’s survival needs, and are based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust.

In this context of social isolation and forced dependency on hostile systems, mutual aid — where we choose to help each other out, share things, and put time and resources into caring for the most vulnerable — **is a radical act.**

“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival” by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

A radical act

As I highlighted above, “capitalism and colonialism created structures that have disrupted how people have historically connected with each other and shared every everything they needed to survive.”

I’ve been working on the following diagram to illustrate these ideas. In this most recent version I added MUTUAL AID.

Mutual Aid has been around since the beginning of human communities. I wasn’t aware of using the idea of Mutual Aid as an organizing concept until I met Ronnie James. As I think about how to characterize his role, I remember one of the important aspects of Mutual Aid is there isn’t a hierarchy with some people in leadership positions. In Mutual Aid, we all take care of each other, and all have an equal say in what we do.

You might notice I say “we” because I have been blessed to join in some of the work of Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA). Saturday mornings I look forward to gathering with my new friends to make boxes of food to distribute at the Free Food Store.

Three Key Elements Of Mutual Aid

One: Mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.

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Mutual aid projects expose the reality that people do not have what they need and propose that we can address this injustice together. The most famous example in the United States is the Black Panther Party's [survival programs](#), which ran throughout the 1960s and 1970s, including a [free breakfast program](#), [free ambulance program](#), [free medical clinics](#), a service offering [rides](#) to elderly people doing errands, and a [school](#) aimed at providing a rigorous liberation curriculum to children. The Black Panther programs welcomed people into the liberation struggle by creating spaces where they could meet basic needs and build a shared analysis about the conditions they were facing. Instead of feeling ashamed about not being able to feed their kids in a culture that blames poor people (especially poor Black people) for their poverty, people attending the Panthers' free breakfast program got food and a chance to build shared analysis about Black poverty. It broke stigma and isolation, met material needs and got people fired up to work together for change.

[“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival”](#) by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

As I began to get to know Ronnie James, I first learned about the Black Panther connection to Des Moines Mutual Aid when he told me how DMMA started:

It started as group of my friends working with the houseless camps some years back. It has now grown into a solid crew that runs a free food store started by the Black Panthers, still work with the camps, we organized a bail fund that has gotten every protester out of jail the last few months, and we just started an eviction relief fund to try to get a head of the coming crisis, in cooperation with Des Moines BLM. We have raised \$13,000 since Wednesday and the application to apply for the grants goes live this week.

Ronnie James

Just a few days ago he wrote:

*Happy 54th Birthday to the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The Panthers have been a lifelong inspiration and one of the major influences on how I act in this world. **The Free Food Store that Des Moines Mutual Aid helps coordinate was founded by the Des Moines chapter of the Panthers and has continued to this day.** I deeply value that we get to carry on that legacy. All Power To The People.*

Ronnie James

A radical act

As a result, I've been studying about the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

Two. Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity and build movements.

Mutual aid is essential to building social movements. People often come to social movement groups because they need something: eviction defense, child care, social connection, health care, or help in a fight with the government about something like welfare benefits, disability services, immigration status or custody of their children. Being able to get help in a crisis is often a condition for being politically active, because it's very difficult to organize when you are also struggling to survive. Getting support through a mutual aid project that has a political analysis of the conditions that produced your crisis also helps to break stigma, shame and isolation. Under capitalism, social problems resulting from exploitation and the maldistribution of resources are understood as individual moral failings, not systemic problems. Getting support at a place that sees the systems, not the people suffering in them, as the problem can help people move from shame to anger and defiance. Mutual aid exposes the failures of the current system and shows an alternative. This work is based in a belief that those on the front lines of a crisis have the best wisdom to solve the problems, and that collective action is the way forward.

Mutual aid projects also build solidarity. By working together, members of mutual aid projects learn about experiences different from theirs and build solidarity across those differences. Solidarity is what builds and connects large-scale movements. In the context of [professionalized nonprofit organizations](#), groups are urged to be single-issue oriented, framing their message around “deserving” people within the population they serve, and using tactics [palatable to elites](#).

[“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival”](#) by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

A radical act

Three. Mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

Mutual aid projects help people develop skills for collaboration, participation and decision-making. For example, people engaged in a project to help deliver prescriptions to vulnerable people in their neighborhoods who can risk COVID exposure going to the pharmacy will learn about [COVID delivery safety protocols](#), but they will also learn about meeting facilitation, working across differences, retaining volunteers, addressing conflict, giving and receiving feedback, following through, and coordinating schedules and transportation. They may also learn that it is not nonprofits or social service agencies who can directly support people, and that many people — including themselves! — have something to offer. This departs from expertise-based social services that tell us we need to have a social worker, licensed therapist, lawyer or some other person with an advanced degree to get things done.

Mutual aid is inherently anti-authoritarian, demonstrating how we can do things together in ways we were told not to imagine, and that we can organize human activity without coercion. Most people have never been to a [meeting](#) where there was not a boss or authority figure with decision-making power. Most people work or go to school inside hierarchies where disobedience leads to punishment or exclusion. We bring our learned practices of hierarchy with us even when no paycheck or punishment enforces our participation, so even in volunteer groups we often find ourselves in conflicts stemming from learned dominance behaviors. But collective spaces, like mutual aid organizing, can give us opportunities to unlearn conditioning and build new skills and capacities.

By participating in groups in new ways and practicing new ways of being together, we are both building the world we want and becoming the kind of people who could live in such a world together.

[“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival”](#) by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

That describes my experiences with the Free Food Store. I wanted to help with the effort, but also knew this was something I would like to do in my own community. So I saw joining the Free Food Store would teach me how to organize Free Food Stores elsewhere.

From my experiences I have concluded that the way for people of different communities or cultures to understand and trust each other is to spend significant time together. Times where ideas are shared during book discussions, or when working on physical projects, building things together. I often share this quote that expresses this idea:

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ALL THAT WE ARE IS STORY

From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we're here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship — we change the world one story at a time.

Richard Wagamese (October 14, 1955-March 10, 2017)

Ojibwe from Wabeseemoong Independent Nations, Canada

Before I knew about Mutual Aid, I wrote I was truly blessed to have become involved with the Kheprw Institute (KI) in Indianapolis. Monthly, mainly white Quakers from the meeting I attended would participate in book discussions at KI. Once Imhotep Adisa, one of the leaders of KI, said, **“these conversations are revolutionary.”** I was surprised, but saw that was true. People of color and White people sharing their stories with each other, getting to know each other. Becoming friends.

Working with Joy

Working with Joy

It is not surprising that most of us have distorted relationships to work, including work in mutual aid groups. The conditions and systems we live under make work coercive, create severe imbalances in who does which kind of work and for what kind of compensation and recognition, and make it hard to feel like we have choices when it comes to work. Working to change the world is extremely hard because the conditions we are up against are severe. We cannot blame ourselves for having a difficult relationship to our work, even though we understand that **learning to work differently is vital for our movements and for our own well-being and survival. We must be compassionate to ourselves and each other as we practice transforming our ways of working together.**

We need each other badly to share what is hard about the overwhelming suffering in the world and the challenge of doing work for change in dangerous conditions. **Even in the face of the pain that being awakened to contemporary conditions causes, all of our work for change can be rooted in the comfort and joy of being connected to one another, accompanying one another, and sometimes being inspired by each other.** Reflecting deeply about our own orientations toward work— what it feels like to participate in groups, what ideas we are carrying around about leadership and productivity— is crucial to building a practice of working from a place of connection, inspiration, and joy. This means intentionally creating ways to practice a new relationship to work, and diving into the psychic structures underlying our wounds from living and working in brutal, coercive hierarchies. The following chart may be a useful reflection tool for individuals and groups trying to change harmful cultures and practices of work.

Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 1469-1481). Verso.

Failed Systems

Failed Systems

The contemporary political moment is defined by emergency. Acute crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change– induced fires, floods, and storms, as well as the ongoing crises of racist criminalization, brutal immigration enforcement, endemic gender violence, and severe wealth inequality, threaten the survival of people around the globe. Government policies actively produce and exacerbate the harm, inadequately respond to crises, and ensure that certain populations bear the brunt of pollution, poverty, disease, and violence. In the face of this, more and more ordinary people are feeling called to respond in their communities, creating bold and innovative ways to share resources and support vulnerable neighbors.

This **survival work, when done in conjunction with social movements demanding transformative change, is called mutual aid.**

Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 53-59). Verso.

The Audacity to Believe

The Audacity to Believe

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.

I still believe that we shall overcome.

Martin Luther King, Jr



#WeGotOurBlock

#WeGotOurBlock



This toolkit includes step by step instructions for how you can build your own mutual aid network while staying safe from the spread of COVID-19. You can start by posting on social media: “I’m going to support my neighbors through COVID-19. Ocasiocortez.com/we-got-our-block #WeGotOurBlock” and keep us updated on your mutual aid work through #WeGotOurBlock.

On Wednesday, March 18, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and organizer Mariame Kaba discussed a response to COVID-19 based in community building and resource sharing — **“Mutual Aid.”**

Mutual aid is **“cooperation for the sake of the common good.”** It’s getting people to come together to meet each other’s needs, recognizing that as humans, our survival is dependent on one another. If you’re interested in learning more about the long history, politics and practice of mutual aid, we encourage you to read the links we’re including at the end of this toolkit.

Download a printable copy of this toolkit [here](#).
Download printable #WeGotOurBlock signs for your windows/door [here](#).

Defending Protestors

Mutual Aid is...

- *Getting people together in your community to provide material support to each other*
- *Building relationships with your neighbors based on trust and common interest*
- *Making decisions by consensus rather than relying on authority or hierarchy*
- *Sharing things rather than hoarding things*
- *Treating no one as disposable*
- *Providing all kinds of support, ranging from food prep to childcare to translation to emotional support, and recognizing the value of all of them*
- *A political education opportunity, where we build the relationships and analysis to understand why we are in the conditions that we're in*
- *Preparation for the next disaster (natural or economic). Next time around we'll already have relationships with each other and know who is vulnerable and needs support*
- *A great jumping off point for other kinds of organizing and movement work*

Mutual Aid Is Not...

- *Quid pro quo transactions*
- *Only for disasters or crises*
- *Charity or a way to "save" people*
- *A reason for a social safety net not to exist*

How can we create some processes and procedures to mitigate inequity in our social, legal and economic structures? How can we begin some conversations about creating a system that is equitable? What can each of us do in the present to advance equity in our society? And how do we continue to fight for equity during these difficult times?

Is Equity Possible in a World Post-COVID19?

Is Equity Possible in a World Post-COVID19?

First and foremost, all of us, every last one of us, must engage others in our work, home and play spaces to have honest, open and authentic conversations around the issue of inequity. Some of us, particularly those in positions of power, must have the courage and strength to look more deeply at the inequitable structures that exist within their own organizations and institutions.

The real courageous ones must begin to look at and change policies, processes and cultures that prevent creating more equitable institutions. For example, we need to begin to internally reward staff and departments that take tangible action to address the equity question and create consequences for those that don't. We must engage in these difficult conversations which can help us have a better understanding of ourselves, others and our history as we seek to build structures with the possibility for equity.

Imhotep Adisa is the executive director and co-founder of the Kheprw Institute, a nonprofit organization focused on empowering youth and building community wealth in Indianapolis.

Is Equity Possible in a World Post-COVID19? Indianapolis Recorder

The Root of White Supremacy

The Root of White Supremacy

Back in the 1970s I attended the annual retreat of Pittsburgh Friends Meeting. I was in a small group discussion of about ten people and somehow we got on to the topic of how people see the world organized. Only one other person, Margaret McCoy, and I saw the world as a flat, non-hierarchical construct. All the others saw the structure of the world as hierarchical. Everyone is enmeshed in a large number of hierarchical rankings. God is on top. Under him (the use of the pronoun is intentional) is the government – national, state, and then local. Men are over women, parents over children, capitalist over laborers, teachers over students, the educated over the poorly educated, the wealthy over the common people, the famous over others, certain racial groups over other racial groups, American born versus foreign born, the privileged on top, and the rugged individual over the community, and so on and on and on.

I suggest to readers that at this point they should reflect on how they see the world organized, flat or hierarchical.

Reflect back on the founding of the United States. It is well known that those founding fathers considered slaves to be only 3/5 of a person. In addition, though, all women were excluded. Likewise only those few white males with a considerable amount of property were considered eligible to vote. In summary the United States was based on the myth that there were only certain people who were destined to rule the rest of the people in the world. When I arrived at Harvard College in 1961, I was informed, perhaps fifty times in the first few weeks, that as a Harvard man (no women in Harvard in those days), I was one of the elect few that were destined to rule. Even then at eighteen years old, I considered this nonsense as I found that my fellow Harvard students were not a whole lot different than my classmates from my public high school.

Even though at the time of independence in 1776 the United States got rid of the monarchy, American society lauds its elite – the rich, the famous, movie and athletic stars, politicians, and so on. This is a result of the acceptance of the **hierarchical zeitgeist** of the US. Many who voted for Trump were convinced to vote for him because he was a TV star and a rich man who represented the elite. For a person meshed in a **hierarchical** mindset, approval of, envy for, and support for an elite person is perfectly normal. This is how the elite continue to rule.

To return to white supremacy, it includes much more than racist classification. As such it can include others who are not “white”. White supremacists are quite willing to include blacks and others if they conform to the white supremacy world view – for example, Supreme Court justice, Clarence Thomas, among many others, comes to mind. This then allows someone like Donald Trump to proclaim that he is not a racist at all.

The implications of this analysis are profound. In order to make American society equal and just, the hierarchical zeitgeist has to be replaced with a flattened view of society. This is a million times more difficult than removing Trump from the presidency.

David Zarembka, [The Root of White Supremacy](#). Report from Kenya #630 – November 13 2020

Last night Drake University’s National Lawyers Guild held a Zoom panel discussion about Defending Protestors. The panel explored the role the legal community plays in defending activists and their rights to protest and organize.

Defending Protestors Panel

I found out about the event from an announcement on the Facebook page of my friend Ronnie James, who was on the panel. I was really impressed that there was such an event. I've been involved in many vigils and protests and don't remember there being lawyers present at any of them. Although none of them had any real police presence, or need for there to be any.

One of the roles we did fill when we were organizing our local direct action in Indianapolis related to the Keystone Pledge of Resistance was legal observer. That action wasn't triggered because President Obama denied the permit to build the pipeline.

There were several legal observers on the panel last night. Legal observers are really helpful resources to have during demonstrations. They can answer protester's questions, and monitor the legality of what police are doing.

One of the most powerful experiences of the Keystone Resistance was when we took a statement of what we intended to do, to law enforcement officers at the Federal building where our direct action was planned to occur, should the actions nationwide be triggered. We actually had an interesting discussion. Not surprisingly, we learned law enforcement in Federal buildings all over the country already knew about these potential actions.

I was especially interested in this panel discussion because I know one of the projects of Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA) is a bail fund. The other two DMMA projects are the free food store, and work to help those who are houseless or facing eviction. So DMMA works on providing basic necessities of food and shelter, and supporting those who are arrested for agitating for change.

During the panel discussion Ronnie spoke about Mutual Aid as a framework for multiple, diverse organizations and people to come together to help the most marginalized people in our communities.

The panel discussion began with the question "why now"? related to the escalation of police brutality in the country in general, and in Des Moines specifically, this year.

Defending Protestors Panel

The discussion was about how the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis triggered protests, and police responses all over the country, and in Des Moines. It was about the extreme grotesqueness and length of time it took to kill him, all transmitted all over the world via social media.

And social unrest was triggered in relation to the crash of the economy, with millions more becoming unemployed, and struggling to find basic necessities.

It was also the prolonged and varied response of those in Minneapolis, transmitted in real time, that influenced the prolonged protests in Des Moines, which triggered the police response here.

The Des Moines police, showing up in riot gear and aggressively responding escalated tensions. Tear gas and pepper spray were used when they weren't called for. It was also the false depictions, by the police, of what was going on that was reported in the media.

Police body cam videos were so chaotic that charges against many individual protesters had to be dropped.

Warnings, that I had heard from Ronnie, were made about the dangers of people supporting the protestors, live streaming what was going on. Because the police can use those videos to bring charges. Police were actually scanning the crowd to grab individuals from prior videos from the local news media. **Days after protests police went to people's homes to arrest those they had identified from videos.**

State Police also banned individuals who were protest leaders, from the grounds of the State Capitol, in clear violations of constitutional rights.

Some people on the panel felt that police were intentionally bringing multiple, and more severe charges against protestors, in order to try to deplete Des Moines Mutual Aid's Bail Fund. Ronnie has told me the bail fund has paid the bail for every protestor in central Iowa.

Someone said police actions were the best fundraisers for the bail fund. Another person mentioned that was especially true when police turned their guns on white youth.

Defending Protestors Panel

There was a heartfelt statement about the difficulty of white people, who grew up believing police are the good guys, finding out they are not always. Most Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) never had those delusions.

The discussion ended by expressing this was all about community, and supporting those who are most marginalized.

Urgency for Mutual Aid

My experience has always been how slowly justice related things change, even then the changes are incremental, often don't persist. A lot of that is the disconnect between a committee (slowly) making decisions, which too often don't have practical steps to implement the change. And often are really disconnected from those who the change was intended to benefit.

Even though the concept of Mutual Aid couldn't be clearer, it marks a radical departure from the above. Getting away from the vertical hierarchy (above) has all kinds of benefits. Those interested in helping and those needing help are no longer separate, as in "us" versus "them". Mutual means everyone involved working together to help solve a problem that is affecting everyone.

Mutual Aid always involves action. The Black Panther's free breakfast program drew in large numbers of people to help and fed thousands of children. The photographs of this are remarkable, showing everyone clearly enjoying what they were doing. FBI Director J Edgar Hoover recognized how effective the Breakfast for Children Program was.

Urgency for Mutual Aid

HOOVER MEMO ON BLACK PANTHERS' BREAKFAST FOR CHILDREN PROGRAM LYRICS

SAC, May 15, 1969

PERSONAL ATTENTION TO ALL OFFICES

Director, FBI

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM
BLACK NATIONALIST - HATE GROUPS

The Breakfast for Children Program (BCP) has been instituted by the BPP in several cities to provide a stable breakfast for ghetto children. ... The program has met with some success and has resulted in considerable favorable publicity for the BPP. ... The resulting publicity tends to portray the BPP in a favorable light and clouds the violent nature of the group and its ultimate aim of insurrection. The BCP promotes at least tacit support for the BPP among naive individuals ... and, what is more distressing, provides the BPP with a ready audience composed of highly impressionable youths. ... Consequently, the BCP represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities ... to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.

<https://genius.com/Federal-bureau-of-investigation-hoover-memo-on-black-panthers-breakfast-for-children-program-annotated>

Blame private capitalism for social problems

*In the span of just a few weeks, the coronavirus has completely changed life as we know it, while also exposing the vast array of contradictions firmly entrenched within capitalist society. America has been laid bare as to what it always has been, a **settler-colonial project** that is the sole property of those who own it, as [John Jay](#), one of the 'Founding Fathers' once argued.*

In this moment, everyday people have to seize the initiative and get organized; before a new normal takes hold and the State can re-solidify its authority. The Trump administration will try and do this through blunt violence and police orders, as already the [national guard is streaming into various cities](#). Democrats and the neoliberal media on the other hand will push for the country to "come together" behind Joe Biden – assuming that the November 2020 elections even are held.

If poor and working people see within the coronavirus not only a pandemic that will possibly leave in its wake a massive death count, but also the very real crisis that is modern industrial capitalism, then we must mobilize for our own interests, push back, and actually fight. This means demanding not only bread and butter: free housing, access to food, an end to evictions, and clean water: but also building new human relationships, new forms of actual life. This means creating ways of meeting our needs, making decisions, and organizing ourselves and solving problems outside of the State structure and the capitalist system.

Towards this end, we are encouraged by the explosion of grassroots and autonomous mutual aid projects that are springing up across the US. Not since the early stages of the Occupy Movement have we seen this growth of spontaneous mobilization in the face of a crisis. These efforts must continue to organize themselves, grow, network, and deepen their connections within working-class and poor neighborhoods.

[Autonomous Groups Are Mobilizing Mutual Aid Initiatives to Combat the Coronavirus – It's Going Down](#)

As it says above, "**In this moment, everyday people have to seize the initiative and get organized; before a new normal** takes hold."

Des Moines Mutual Aid (DMMA) is seizing the initiative now, providing food for those in need, and supporting those who are houseless. DMMA is working with Des Moines Black Lives Matter to collect winter clothing.

Blame Private Capitalism for Social Problems

[Blame private capitalism for social problems](#)

Blame private capitalism for social problems

Mutual Aid is getting a lot of attention because numerous Mutual Aid efforts have been successful in responding to survival needs, when the political system failed spectacularly.

As Richard Wolff writes below, “***neither (political party) dares blame private capitalism for social problems like unemployment and pandemic casualties***. A solution would be a genuinely level political playing field. It would include a new political party that criticizes and opposes the capitalist system because of its responsibility for critical social problems.”

Locally, Des Moines Mutual Aid works in the areas mentioned below—free food distribution, shelter, bail and support for those arrested advocating for change, and providing personal protective equipment.

Popular anger finally exploded in 2020 in the form of widespread and sustained protests for racial justice, forcing white Americans to reckon with their privilege and the face of stark inequality.

*Indeed, 2020 must be remembered for Black Lives Matter: for the neighbors who put on their masks and showed up for one another, for the revolts against state violence, and the **mutual aid that blossomed even in an era of social distancing**. We will soon put 2020 behind us, but the power built by our movements this year will continue to grow. There was far too much organizing in 2020 to fit into one article, but here's a snapshot of activism that defined a year when everything changed.*

Mutual Aid

*While the mainstream media focused much of its attention on property destruction and clashes with police during the revolts of 2020, activists everywhere harnessed the collective power of the protest movement to better their communities. **Mutual aid flourished during the uprising in Minneapolis**, for example, where Truthout reported on street corners and empty shops that transformed into free markets, and a hotel taken over by houseless activists and their allies.*

*Rooted in anarchist thinking and a **longtime practice among leftists of all stripes**, mutual aid became a household term in 2020 as the capitalist system proved incapable of responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Across the country, people organized **mutual aid groups to deliver food and supplies to people** who could not leave their homes during the pandemic. As historic wildfires threatened communities across the U.S. West, Black Lives Matter activists in Portland shifted gears, **temporarily halting protests to focus on mutual aid**. As the pandemic hit new peaks this month, Brant Rosen explored **mutual aid within the Hannukah tradition**, urging readers to resist COVID by caring for each other. As **Noam Chomsky pointed out in an interview** with Chris Steele, **there is a long history of mutual aid in the U.S. and across the world — and it is key to our survival**.*

***Politicians Failed Us in 2020. Our Movements Built Lasting Power**, by Mike Ludwig, Truthout, December 26, 2020*

A basic social reality of the United States is its capitalist economic system that organizes enterprises internally into a small minority (employers) dominating the majority (employees), with markets to distribute resources and products. Like capitalisms everywhere, the U.S. version crashes recurringly. Various called crises, recessions, or depressions, they have happened, on average, every four to seven years throughout capitalism's history. The 2020 crash is second only to the Great Depression of the 1930s in its social impact. That fact alone demands major policy interventions on the scale, at least, of what was done then (including the creation of Social Security, federal unemployment insurance, the first minimum wage, and the creation of millions of federal jobs). Moreover, the 1930s were not simultaneously a time of deadly viral pandemic. Given the uniquely immense challenge of 2020's two crises, no remotely adequate policies were undertaken nor even contemplated by Trump, Biden, Republican or Democratic establishments. They just don't get it.

For both Republican and Democratic establishments, political strategies are similar. Each endorses, privileges, and supports private capitalism. **Each blames the other party for negative results that flow from the social dominance of private capitalism. Neither dares blame private capitalism for social problems like unemployment and pandemic casualties.** Instead, each has its preferred set of scapegoats to blame. Republicans blame immigrants, foreign trading partners (especially China), non-whites, pro-abortion rights activists, mainstream media, liberals, and socialists. Democrats blame Russia and Russians, China, gun enthusiasts, white supremacists and racists, Fox News, and Trump and his supporters.

A solution would be a genuinely level political playing field. It would include a new political party that criticizes and opposes the capitalist system because of its responsibility for critical social problems. It would break the political monopoly run by Republicans and Democrats just as many economic monopolies have ended in the nation's past. Today's crises, inequalities, divisions, and the sufferings of so many deserve no less. Yet the political monopolists want to keep their control.

THE DC POLITICAL MONOPOLY JUST DOESN'T GET IT By Richard D. Wolff,
Counterpunch, December 26, 2020

Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism and, using an intersectional framework, working to ensure racial, gender, economic, health, and environmental justice.

After Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, while federal, state, and local agencies [left people stranded](#) without shelter or food, groups including the [Common Ground Collective](#) worked to provide housing, clothing, health care, and legal services to those in need. The organization was cofounded by former Black Panther Malik Rahim, drawing in part on the Black Panthers [ten-point program](#), which offered free breakfast programs and free health care and legal clinics, and advocated principles of mutual aid.

Amid the pandemic, communities have sprung into action. With the economic fallout and lack of federal “survival checks” (as U.S. Representative-Elect Cori Bush, Democrat of Missouri, [refers](#) to them instead of “stimulus checks”), people are not only calling for an extension to the federal eviction moratorium, which expires at the end of 2020, but also taking action to keep people housed. In NYC, [Mutual Aid NYC](#) sprung into action. A multi-racial network of people and groups, it aims to share food, material and other resources “to support each other interdependently.”

[COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid](#). Mutual aid is not only about addressing the crisis at hand but also about undoing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism, by Tina Gerhardt. *Progressive*, December 19, 2020

