DISORIENTATION
2014
SMASHING LIBERALISM
Liberation is not a game. It is not something you fight for in college after you have read some bell hooks, Marx, or Fanon. Liberation is a duty.

As students it is our job to seek complex truths, to be critical, to transform the world—not to just study it. This zine is a call to consciousness. It is a call to organize, to study, and to understand how institutions of “higher learning” teach us to perpetuate our own oppression and the oppression of others. It is an act of ideological warfare, however limited in scope and content, against the system that obscures its inherent violence with words like “liberty,” “diversity,” and “equality.”

But these aren’t just words—they’re representative of a liberal ideology that refuses to challenge the relations of exploitation central to capitalism’s core, that will be happy to engage in reforms as long as they don’t call the interests of the ruling class into question, and that—personified by our own school president—tells us that we can change the world, as long as we don’t get too angry or act in a way that challenges the actual structure in which we exist. Year after year during orientation, first-years are indoctrinated with the school’s false legacy of progressivism and convinced that they are buying into something worthwhile by committing to spend up to hundreds of thousands of dollars and their next four years of life at this institution. We refuse to submissively swallow the palatable yet corrosive liberalism that is forced down the throats of incoming student-consumers and their family members throughout this week.

One of the central themes this zine explores is the academic-industrial complex. Broadly, we understand the academic-industrial complex as a process encompassing three major elements:

- Corporate stratification of the university
  The university has become prime real estate for corporations to gain contracts and peddle goods to a perpetually self-renewing market of student-consumers. Often, members of universities’ boards of trustees hold positions at the same corporations in which the school is invested, including the private prison, military, and oil industries. Students are customers, administrators and board members are CEOs. The university itself has become a corporation, cutting costs wherever possible while pursuing an increasingly wealthy class of students. Those in positions of administrative power are removed from and unaccountable to the actual needs of students, faculty, and staff.

- Further stratification of social classes

The university contributes to rising inequality, facilitating the upward mobility of a small select population at the expense of those outside the ivory tower. College graduates partake in gentrification and the forced removal of inhabitants of lower-income neighborhoods. Research is not geared towards aiding populations deemed disposable under the social-economic doctrine of neoliberalism (and when it does it often smacks of paternalism and hypocrisy), but towards the continued domination of those in power. Resources are hoarded by universities, while the towns they occupy are as a threat to the safety of its students, as evidenced by heavy policing, racial profiling, and unfair double standards.

- Cultivation of liberal, capitalist rationality at the expense of structural analysis and social welfare

Students are encouraged to focus only on their own personal development while ignoring political, social, and economic struggles. Employability, professionalism, and indifference to human suffering take precedence over political consciousness. Everything is commodified—if exploitation and domination are the foundation on which our own self-interests and privileged trajectory rest, then so be it.

As you read through this zine, we hope the connections between the various pieces included will make themselves clear. While each piece deals with a specific theme—gentrification, liberal Zionism, administrative structure, and so on—they all relate to the academic-industrial complex. It is imperative that we develop a fuller understanding of these multiple facets that constitute Oberlin College and its position within the US nation-state.

We write to you as a broad coalition of students from various backgrounds and identities, all committed to anti-capitalist struggle and revolutionary transformation. While we take a militant stance against the core values of the institution in which we all find ourselves, we also recognize our own complicity within this system—none of us is infallible, none of us is free of reproducing oppression, either interpersonally or structurally. Yet our own failures and limitations even further necessitate the writing of this zine, and, more importantly, the call to action it embodies. We write to you not as know-it-alls, holier-than-thous, or reactionaries, but as peers inviting you to join in resisting that which so often goes unchallenged.

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While we’re at it, it might be helpful to develop a working understanding of what capitalism so we can actually explain why we’re up against and why we need to struggle against it. As you read on in this zine, the relations between capitalism and the academic-industrial complex should become more explicit. In the meantime, here’s a quick and dirty definition:

For our purposes here, capitalism is an economic system upheld by three central facets:

1. Wage Labor: working for a wage (i.e. money, the representation of social value)
2. Private Ownership of the Means of Production: juridical individuals own property (factories, machinery, offices, etc.) in which commodities are produced
3. Production for exchange and profit

Only a tiny group of individuals (the bourgeoisie) owns the means of production. Because of this, most people (generally, the proletariat) must sell their ability to work (“labor-power” in Marxist language) in return for a wage deemed reasonable by the employer.

In order for capitalism to continue, money needs to generate more of itself (this can be referred to as capital). For example, when a corporation uses its profits to open new branches, capital is being invested to create even more of itself (we can understand this as capital accumulation). It is easier for the bourgeoisie to accumulate capital when the smallest amount can be invested for maximum profit. Thus, many companies will cut costs by, for example, not observing environmental protections or paying paltry wages.

In order for capital to continue to reproduce itself, more and more things need to be able to be sold for money (to have an exchange value). As everything becomes commodified, it becomes necessary to sell something of ours in order to buy what we need to survive (again, we must sell our labor-power).

Now, if we are selling our ability to work, and if capital needs to reproduce itself in order for capitalism as a system to function, then it logically follows that there needs to be a difference between the wages we are paid (which are deemed by employers sufficient to keep us alive and able to continue working...if not, this relationship becomes one of super-exploitation) and the value we produce (value can be thought of here as the amount of labor necessary to produce a marketable commodity). This difference can be called surplus-value. This is important because it means that under capitalism people are exploited—surplus-value is extracted from them by employers. In order for capitalism to function, workers must only be paid a fraction of the value they produce. This dynamic operates consistently in both public and private sectors of the economy. The surplus-value extracted from workers is then reinvested by the exploiter (which can take the form of either a private boss or the state as a whole) in order to make more money.

The accumulation of capital also relies on unwaged work, such as housework or biological reproduction (an thus, the reproduction of the labor force). Often this kind of labor is executed by women (here we could begin to develop the notion of capitalist patriarchy). When unwaged work such as housework is conceived of as a natural part of womanhood, for example, then capital is benefitting from free labor. It should be clear at this point that labor is distributed according to the needs of capital in racist and sexist ways (this may be understood as the social division of labor).

In addition, capital requires competition in order to reproduce itself. If employers ignored the needs of capital, then they would lose money because their rivals would outpace them. So although we should frame class struggle as the antagonistic relationship between classes and thus realize the need for the proletariat to take power if we want to see actual structural transformation, we also must realize that capital has a life of its own—its need for perpetual self-reinvestment is what ultimately controls the system of capitalism. However, the pressure that bosses must face (competition) is ultimately the worst for the worker because the boss is not exploited and continues to control the means of production. At any rate, the bourgeoisie must act in its own self-interest because if it were not to do so it would sacrifice its ability to accumulate more capital.

Because of the fact that if businesses could actually do anything they wanted in the service of capital, then monopolies would develop and eventually petrify competition, the state must intervene on behalf of capital. The main role of the state is to maintain the capitalist system of exploitation, and thus the domination of one class over the others. In doing so, the state itself maintains regulatory power over institutions, as well as a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence (i.e. the police and repressive apparatuses), the law and legal apparatus, and the ability to tax and redistribute incomes (often upwards into the hands of the wealthy). Because it is an inherently territorial entity, the state also has the power to confer citizenship under the law. In so doing, it creates a population that may be exposed to incredible levels of exploitation (think of undocumented migrants today).

It is the continued, inherent exploitation at the hand of the state that necessitates revolution. Though capitalism is regularly presented as a natural, liberal system of democracy (...for the bourgeoisie), it owes its implementation everywhere to catastrophic and often genocidal violence. But this is not what we are taught. As you move on to “Notes from an RSCC Comrade,” we hope you will begin to see how capitalism reproduces itself both through repression and ideology. It is not just through repressive exploitation that capitalism is maintained, but through the very ideology of the state and the ruling class.
NOTES FROM A RSCC COMRADE
(REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE AT CUNY)

I) CAPITALISM AND THE STATE

In a capitalist system, the majority of the people are of the working class, which is exploited by a minority capitalist class that accumulates vast wealth and power on the backs of working people. The job of the state (the government, police, army, courts etc.) is to make sure that the conditions of exploitation continue day after day, as exploitation of the working class by the ruling class is the main contradiction driving the system along. However if the majority are exploited by the minority, why is there not a revolution of the working class?

The task of the state is to protect the property of the ruling class, and it does this in two ways:

A. The Repressive State Apparatuses: these are the instruments by which the state exercises a monopoly on force, such as the police and the courts. It is the repressive state apparatus that breaks strikes, pepper sprays protesters, stops and frisks people and throws the poor into prisons.

B. The Ideological State Apparatuses: these are the instruments through which ruling class ideology is reproduced, disarming the masses by making oppression and exploitation seem like normal facts of life. Contradictions such as gentrification become masked by ‘diversity’, exploitation in the workplace becomes masked by ‘the owner is working hard to make a profit’, imperialist wars become wars to protect ‘freedom and democracy’, racist policing becomes about protecting ‘law and order’. The ideological state apparatuses are both public and private, such as the family, schools, legal institutions, television, literature and art.

II) SCHOOLS AS IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES

When we are young, we are still learning about the world we live in and how to interact with it. Most of this time is spent with our families and in school. In a capitalist system, the family and the school are the two main ideological state apparatuses (ISA’s). They are where we learn gender roles, social norms, discipline, learn history from the perspective of the oppressors- where ruling class ideology is taught to us.

The educational ISA is of particular importance to us as student organ-izers. It is where class struggle happens at the level of ideology. The children of the proletariat and oppressed people are taught to be blind to the conditions of our existence, and the children of the ruling class are prepared to take charge of the imperialist system. This is where revolutionary students must insert ourselves, by waging war on the ideas of the ruling class with the ideology of the oppressed and exploited masses.

Oberlin’s job is not to create people who care about community. Who seek to uproot power systems and plant the seeds that communities have......................

The ideological struggle can take on many forms. It can look like arguing against reactionary ideas in classrooms, writing articles with revolutionary ideas for school newspapers, holding events with revolutionary themes, having protests on campus, fighting for ethnic and gender studies courses, etc. Ideology is an objective material force in society, and therefore we must respond to an ideology of oppression and exploitation by organizing ourselves into a material force of liberation.

III) EXCLUSION AND OPEN ADMISSIONS

Not only do schools reproduce ideology, but they also reproduce social classes. For example, schools such as CUNY prepare students for occupations such as managers and nurses, whereas Ivy League schools prepare the future ruling class. However, capitalism does not need everybody in society to be prepared with skills for labor; it needs people to do the hard and dirty jobs, too.

That is why secondary schools in poor, working class communities are so underfunded and under resourced; this makes it easier for proletarian youth who were not prepared for college to end up on the streets with low wage jobs, while some are able to make it into community colleges or senior colleges. Most often these youth are of oppressed nationalities whom the police prey on.

It is not only the secondary schools that are part of the process of exclusion but also higher education. Through admissions standards and testing policies as well as the rising cost of education, the universities also practice a structural exclusion of proletarians and oppressed nationalities.

This is why we not only call for open admissions, but also the transformation of the content of education. In this way, we turn the universities into factories that produce young revolutionaries who will go on to take up the struggles of the people.
DISSECTING COX
An introduction to Oberlin's administrative staff.

Hey! You're probably coming to Oberlin College with the impression that it has "long-standing commitments to access, diversity, & inclusion...the ideal laboratory in which to study and design the world we want," and that "Oberlin has long been associated with progressive causes." Perhaps the student-to-faculty ratio was appealing—how accessible! Even more impressive—Koffee with Krislov, where students can "enjoy free coffee and cookies while rubbing shoulders with Oberlin's prez." But who is Marv? Why is he running our oh-so-progressive college, and how did he get to the top? And what about the rest of the shadowy powers that be?

BIG MARV
Marvin Krislov (born August 24, 1960 in Lexington, Kentucky) is Oberlin College's 14th president and has been in office since 2007. Before coming to Oberlin, he graduated from Yale with a degree in political science, attended Oxford University for his master's degree in modern history as a Rhodes scholar, then attended Yale Law School. He eventually went on to serve as vice president at the University of Michigan. As the University of Michigan's general counsel—and here's the neato facto that you've probably already heard because it's a neato fact that the school wants you to know—Krislov devised the legal strategy to defend Michigan's affirmative action policies in front of the Supreme Court. Much progressive.

As president of our school and as chief executive of Oberlin the corporation, his job is to keep the college's sources of income—primarily the Board of Trustees, parents of students, alumni, and the public—happy. He is concerned with making sure the cash flow is flowing. His job is not about day-to-day policies and decisions or political statements.

Straight from the college's webpage on the Office of the President: "The president reports to the Board of Trustees, of which he or she is an ex officio member. The president's senior staff, made up of deans, vice presidents, and special assistants, manage specific branches of the college, so that the president is able to focus on broader issues concerning the college."  

Read: Marv reports to the Board of Trustees. Board of Trustees = $$$ . The Board of Trustees keep the school financially afloat, so Marv has to comply with their desires for the sake of longevity.

SENIOR STAFF

Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid - Debra Chermonte
Prospective students = $$$—"preserve the quality and diversity of the student body while also facilitating modest but essential increases in net tuition revenue per student" (Oberlin Strategic Plan, 2005)  

1999, The Oberlin Review: Chermonte said that when borderline cases come up, she might bring up the applicants’ ability to pay. "There is somewhat of an emphasis on ability to pay when it comes to marginally qualified students"  

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences - Tim Elgren
"Chief academic officer of Oberlin College, responsible for all faculty and curricular matters"
In charge of curriculum, educational policy, faculty hiring/promotion/development
Oversees the Allen Memorial Art Museum

Dean of the Conservatory - Andrea Kalyn
Manages all aspects of the Conservatory—oversees long-term development, including academic and artist programs, facilities, development, and outreach programs  

Note that Dean Andrea Kalyn is white—not an anomaly in the senior staff, but important to note as she was appointed as Dean in February 2014, one year after the March 4 events. (The phrase "March 4th events" will be used by students at Oberlin to refer to a months-long string of racist, anti-Semitic, and otherwise violent hate speech during Spring 2013 by a couple of white male students that were indicative of not only that interpersonal bigotry still exist but also that the college thrives under a number of structural oppressions. On March 4th, after hours of negotiating between primarily students of color and the administration, classes were cancelled to hold a "Day of Solidarity" during which students and administrators alike celebrated themselves for being "great allies" to those most affected by these hate incidents while ignoring their demands to make bigger changes that would be more likely to drastically change student life.)

- Former dean David Stull liked to cite the $24 million Kohl Building, opened in 2010, as progress and inclusion within the Conservatory
- Dean Kalyn may have had nine previous years working at Oberlin, but will she listen to students’ demands to address the conservatory’s incredibly eurocentric curricula and the fact that there are almost no black and brown professors?

Dean of Students - Eric Estes
Oversees most divisions relating to “student life,” from Concert Sound to the Counseling Center, the ID Card Office to the Edmonia Lewis Center for Women and Transgender People (ELC), the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) to Safety and Security (S&S), and everything in-between...

Estes came to Oberlin in 2004 as the associate dean and director of the

1 A Strategic Plan for Oberlin College, 2005 http://www.oberlin.edu/strategicplan/pdfs/strategicplan.pdf  
3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oberlin_College  
MRC; he's a nice guy with a nice house—attuned to student concerns and opinions, but will always answer to Marvin at the end of the day

Dean of Studies and Vice President for Strategic Initiatives - Kathryn Stuart

Dean of Studies: Coordinates academic advising in the College of Arts and Sciences, advises students, and helps faculty members with advising and academic policy concerns

Vice President for Strategic Initiatives: heads much of the planning process for planning the Strategic Plan (one of the institution’s most important pieces of policy that lays the ground for balancing the institution’s livelihood as a capitalist, corporate enterprise ["financial sustainability"] with its commitment to “ensure academic, artistic, and musical excellence”

Vice President for Communications - Ben Jones

Responsible for branding the college and public relations, controls college-mediated communication within campus. In short, makes the College look good.

Jones is a “nationally recognized expert on social media and online community-building” and created a “communications strategy focused on authenticity and transparency across all media”

He is also on the Core Planning Committee of The Oberlin Project, a greenwashing economic development plan that many feel has lacked community input and may lead to gentrification

Vice President for Development & Alumni Affairs - Bill Barlow

Responsible for fundraising and keeping alumni happy—the eternal question: how can the College milk the most money out of students long after they’ve graduated who have already paid their debt in attending the College in the first place?

Vice President for Finance and Administration - Michael L. Frandsen

Controls the money—is concerned with how to keep the College afloat with both short- and long-term planning, in charge of endowment, decides what is worthy of investment

Michael L. Frandsen is the new VP (replacing Ron Watts) who began his responsibilities July 1, 2014. He has had a career in corporate finance and holds a PhD in strategic management

General Counsel and Secretary - Sandhya Subramanian

The primary duty is to protect Oberlin College from legal claims made by students and community members and to advise the trustees and President’s Office about legal issues

Special Assistant for Community and Government Relations - Sandra Hodge

"Identifies strategic funding opportunities, important community issues, trends and joint ventures for the College, and enhances the College’s local, regional, and national outreach.” aka money + imperialism

Hodge is also the founding CEO of Hodge Enterprises Inc., which provides Fortune 500, small and medium businesses with training, consulting, and organizational interventions

Assistant to the President - Jennifer Bradfield

Literally an assistant—provides “support and guidance...briefs the president on upcoming conversations...and heads special projects as the president sees fit” 8

Within a capitalist society every institution must act as a corporation and to be a capitalist corporation, the college must have lots of money. (Money = prestige. Whichever university has the most money will undoubtedly be the best, and thus, have the capacity to be even better!) So then, the question is “Where does this money come from?” Larger universities, research, athletics, large grants, investments... For us, it comes down to student tuition. We make a little bit of money from all the things that larger universities generate income from (except athletics), but the college is largely dependent on student tuition and alumni donations to reproduce itself (and keep fueling its corporate machineeeeewwww)!

Given these conditions, what does this say about the (huge) influence of money on our community (in the classroom, office, cafeteria, dorm room, etc.)?

The College attempts to have its DiVeRsIty pie and eat our money, too.

As has already been pointed out, the college acts and even names itself as a “Corporation,” and President Krislov is its “chief executive officer” Just like every business, it needs to think about short- and long-term planning. While there are some administrators whose jobs can be specifically matched to jobs held by hot shots on Wall Street, every member of the senior staff has something written in their job description that acts to ensure the longevity of the college: most prominently, its financial stability. None of this should be a surprise, and it shouldn’t be a surprise that in the 2005 Strategic Plan for Oberlin College, a plan unanimously adopted by the Board of Trustees, it is written that, “to enhance the quality and value of the education it provides its students, Oberlin must attain financial sustainability. To remain a great institution of American higher education, Oberlin must enhance each of its revenue streams. Currently its most critical financial priority must be to realize more net tuition revenue per student and to do so in ways that honor Oberlin’s long traditions of racial and socioeconomic diversity.”

As Rhoades and Slaughter cite in “Academic Capitalism in the New Economy: Challenges and Choices”:

"[The] commercialization of the curriculum is moving institutions away from a commitment to providing access to underserved low-income and minority students and toward an investment in providing convenient accessibility and continuing education to student populations that are not only more advantaged but are already being served in our higher education system. In short, the emphasis is on students who cost less to serve and who can afford to pay more, at the expense of less privileged and historically underserved student populations. Institutions across the nation are strategically recruiting middle-upper class students of color in order to simultaneously up their liberal diversity rep and their revenue. It makes sense that this is a national trend because we’re all navigating the same capitalist, corporate nation (remember?)! For this reason, it should also make sense that Oberlin’s recruiting and branding scheme is not revolutionary in any way and does not increase (education) access to folks from “racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds” to any significant degree. Anything that feeds the system in this way can never dismantle it. If Oberlin really truly wanted to “shatter convention” and “[insert Oberlin as a beacon of liberal social justice quote],” then it would prioritize the ethics it advertises over the always-economically-profitable moves our administrators make for us (see Notes from a RSCC Comrade, pg 6)."

8 “How Oberlin Works” http://how.oberlin.edu/glossary/detail/2
9 Academic Capitalism, Rhoades and Slaughter
10 Ibid., 47–48
You’ve probably heard that Oberlin “regularly admitted African American students beginning in 1835,” making it “the first American institution of higher learning to regularly admit female and black students in addition to white males.” This 1835 decision “came about through a combination of financial need, chance opportunity, and the colonists’ religious sense of obligation.” Yes, being one of the first institutions of higher learning to regularly admit black students surely indicated progress towards racial equality in 1835. Nevertheless, it must be noted that even then, when the foundations of Oberlin College were being laid, students of color were seen as a source of income. The notion of seeing students as revenue is driven in when considered that:

Corporate long-term planning and enduring traditions, indeed.

...Oberlin College did not cultivate an environment that was intentionally of benefit to students of color, but because these students broadened the college’s financial source, they were admitted to the institution. This is still true today—no matter how diverse Oberlin pegs itself to be, it is still a white institution driven by corporate interests. The college creates a student body where white students hugely outnumber students of color, and instead of seeing how this practice creates a hostile environment for minority populations, it is supposed to lead to an idealistic, harmonious pluralistic society. Students of color exist in small numbers, but the resources for these students—faculty of color, for example—are disproportionately smaller when compared to the majority demographic on campus. And what does it mean that in 1835, black students represented only 3 to 5 percent of the student population, and a good many of them were born free (some of them were second or third-generation freemen) and came from a middle-class, urban background. Many of the students in this group were fairly-skinned, although the record does not indicate that Oberlin preferred mulattoes over darker-skinned individuals.

Black students may have been regularly admitted, but what did it take for these black students to be considered in the first place? These practices established in 1835 still persist today—Oberlin touts itself as a diverse and progressive institution, but this diversity and progressiveness is conditional on financial benefits.

How does this history affect YOU?

Today, Oberlin draws upon this history to brand the college as a beacon of diversity. It relies on programs like the Multicultural Visit Program (MVP, or now named “Access Oberlin”), which is geared towards first-generation, low-income, or multicultural students, to serve as proof of the school’s values. The promotional materials emphasize Oberlin’s dedication to diversity and social justice, its reputation as a super liberal institution (see: every college ranking list), which allures prospective students by painting a utopic of Oberlin.

We’re going to change the world, one student at a time. But in order to change the world, students need to have institutional support. How are the college’s resources actually allocated?

What does it mean that the Multicultural Resource Center (the MRC, check it out!) is still smaller than WOBC, the college and community radio station, even after its renovation? What does it mean that this campus is so hostile that there is a north vs. south campus divide? What does it mean that there is a need for students to carve out their own dining space (Third World Co-op)? What does it mean that on campus commemorates its history (the Memorial Arch on campus commemorates thirteen white missionaries who died on a Shansi trip to China during the Boxer Rebellion) whose “goal is to promote understanding and communication between Asians and Americans,” which often ignores Asian Americans and selects white students for its programs so they can feel “othered” for the first time? What does it mean that so many more students of color intend to major in a STEM field then actually end up graduating with that degree (hint: it’s not because these students are incapable, it’s because the college lacks resources to support these students, who are often not coming to this institution with the same preparation as others)? What does it mean that Latinx students don’t feel that La Casa Hispánica is a space for them? What does it mean that first-year students who didn’t apply are always placed in program houses like African Heritage House and Third World House—dorms that should be safe spaces? What does it mean that there is a north vs. south campus divide? What does it mean that the administration can cancel classes on March 4, 2013 and the Office of Communications labels it as a “Day of Solidarity,” when it took hours of debate at 3am before conceding to students’ demands to suspend classes?

While administrators (and trustees) will often claim that they, personally, did not make these decisions or do not have the power to undo them, that is a lie. Every single member of the administration has a large enough voice that their opinions would be taken seriously if they had the courage to speak out in favor of dismantling the branches of capitalism that line every branch of this institution. The examples cited are just a handful of the ways the administration’s decisions (or lack thereof) have disenfranchised the collaborators of this zine. With time, you will surely experience your own personal examples. With this in mind, we encourage you to hold both yourself and the administration (whose salaries we are in-debting ourselves for) accountable. When you feel the slap of institution’s oppressive hand, don’t ignore it—for the sake of yourself and the students who are sure to follow in your footsteps or take your place. Instead, acknowledge it and think about the people who have successfully climbed the corporate ladder to sit comfortably at the top of the institution and who profit off of the school’s liberal, capitalist, corporate structure and who have the power and responsibility to dismantle it if they truly want to serve the students (aka the administration).

13 http://new.oberlin.edu/about/history.dot
12 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oberlin_College
14 Ibid., 18.
15 Baumann, 19.
16 http://new.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/admissions/mvp/
17 http://new.oberlin.edu/about/history.dot
16 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oberlin_College
17 Scott Wargo, whose bio on Oberlin’s website says he is “a master of packaging stories correctly.”
18 For a complete timeline of March 4 events, visit http://obiemicroaggressions.tumblr.com/post/4469466981/to-the-oberlin-community (google “obiemicroaggressions timeline”)
Will You Survive in College?

Sexualized Violence in the Academic Industrial Complex

Trigger Warning (because all survivors of trauma and abuse deserve to have choice given back to them, and to exercise all possible authority over when they will be exposed to something that might cause them to relive their trauma in some way): Contains discussion of rape and assault, rape culture, and the mishandling of cases by college administrations. A particularly graphic depiction is prefaced by a brief warning within the article.

“Abrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.”
- Judith Herman

Treatment versus prevention is a common dichotomy used in addressing public health issues and understanding the cost-effectiveness of a given approach. Firstly, it is useful in dividing populations: the affected and the unaffected, the diseased and the healthy. Additionally, it is important in perceiving what solutions are worthwhile. Should we pour funds and resources into finding a cure for a disease that is very easily preventable but very fatal? And vice versa: should we focus efforts on preventing an illness that is largely unpredictable when we could instead allocate resources toward finding a cure or viable treatment? At heart, it is an issue of cost-effectiveness.

However, with strongly infectious diseases, treatment often equals prevention and vice versa; one cannot be fully healed without the other. Getting tested and treated for various sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) is crucial in preventing the transmission of those illnesses to intimate partners. However, within our cultural climate of bodily shame and poor sexual education, we aren’t very good at the treatment part. In even the most liberal of sex ed. curricula, teens merely learn to use condoms and other barrier methods in preventing STIs, and maybe if they’re lucky, are encouraged to get tested and address recognizable symptoms. Only if they’re lucky though, because with simply getting tested comes the very real possibility of belonging to a new sub-population: the affected, the diseased, and in the context of our stigmatic culture, the dirty, the shameful, and the irresponsible. In high school health class, this population is only addressed when showing fear-tactic-y slides of the most severe individual cases of STIs ever (Bet you never learned that the vast majority of gonorrhea and chlamydia cases can be cured with a simple dose of antibiotics before they disappear like a bad ear infection). The photographs subjects themselves are disemodied under a close-up genital shot, their humanity irrelevant and their reality a relic.

We currently fail to place an equal emphasis on treatment and prevention of STIs because, as a society, we are afraid of and would rather not acknowledge the former of the dichotomy and its associated subpopulation. Something similar happens when we attempt to address sexualized violence. No one would ever really use the word treatment to discuss the systemic problem of sexualized violence in this country today because it wouldn’t make sense. When we talk about this widespread violence, we talk about prevention. How can we prevent people from doing this? (or if you’re a rapeapist, “how can women prevent themselves from getting raped?”), how can we end this culture that equates sexual prowess with masculinity, that objectifies women to the point that violence against them is merely “natural” and “unavoidable”? If one were to say “How can we treat rape?” or “We need to find a treatment for sexualized violence,” it would certainly make no sense. One might respond, “Do you mean ‘how can we stop rape?’” or “How can we prevent it?” In this context, the dichotomy does not exist. It does not exist because once someone has become a victim or a survivor they are no longer part of the strategic conversation. They have become a psychological case, another lost cause of a perceivedly unsolvable problem.

In truth, however, the treatment vs. prevention model as applied to sexualized violence did exist at one point. It has existed behind closed doors and on top floors, where it became clear that treating and healing survivors as a part of preventing sexualized violence is not cost-effective enough for the purposes of those who are given the authority to handle the issues within their schools, their communities, and their corporations. It is much cheaper for these institutions to simply silence survivors when possible, and to provide them with settlements when not, than it is to actually structurally combat the endemic culture and prevalence of sexualized violence today. This is not a conspiracy, this is just the exploitation of people’s safety and rights in the name of profit; it’s simply a side effect of capitalism.

In understanding the very real connection between sexualized violence and the exploitation of individual safety in the name of financial concerns, consider the way that it has been addressed in prisons, one of the many institutions with incessantly high rates of rape and assault. The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was passed in 2003 with a goal of making information about prison sexual violence more comprehensive and public in order to better address the issue. In 2012, under PREA, the Obama Administration performed a cost-benefit analysis of rape in prisons, with the goal of placing a monetary value on ending prison rape, and to compare the financial cost of protecting incarcerated people from sexual violence versus the safety cost of not doing so. Essentially, they sought to decide “whether or not to protect citizens from rape... based on how much it costs.”

To decide whether or not to protect citizens from rape based on how much it costs...

Title IX and The Institutionalization of Violence

“I’ve never felt more shoved under the rug in my life... I don’t know. Has anything ever happened to you that was just so bad that you felt like you became a shell of a human being?” - a college rape survivor on attempting to report the attack to Columbia University administrators

Before we continue, there needs to be a brief discussion of some terms essential to this topic. Assuming you use the internet, you have probably heard of a persistent little thing called rape culture. Just so we’re on the same page, rape culture is, in short, a set of discourses and practices (including media, laws, personal beliefs, etc) that serve to normalize sexual violence, especially that towards women, to the point that it is perceived as inevitable. E.g. something that can be prevented sometimes, but is ultimately “just the way things are.” Every symptom and facet of rape culture, from victim-blaming, to rape-apologism, to the insidious little rape joke, points back toward this detached cultural understanding of sexualized violence. No one is exempt from rape culture: the perpetrator, the bystander, just like no one is exempt from misogyny, racism, classism or any type of oppression.

You are a victim of it, a perpetrator of it, or a complicit bystander (which is really not much different from being a perpetrator). And just to be clear, a perpetrator currently fails to place an equal emphasis on treatment and prevention of STIs because, as a society, we are afraid of and would rather not acknowledge the former of the dichotomy and its associated subpopulation. Something similar happens when we attempt to address sexualized violence...
of rape culture is not the same as a perpetrator of rape.

While such a brief summary is in no way comprehensive of the full effects and symptoms of rape culture, and we could indeed fill every page of this zine discussing just that, we won’t. The understanding of rape culture is merely a prerequisite to what I am truly here to discuss: not rape culture itself, but the everyday burden-bearers of it, whom institutions, especially those of higher learning, constantly seek to disenfranchise.

Why the treatment, the healing, and the survival of survivors is not the center of our discussion on ending sexualized violence should be a mystery to us. As notable writer and theorist on trauma and anti-oppression, Aurora Levins Morales has explained, in order for a community, no matter how large or small, to truly heal and rebuild from any number of violations and atrocities, that community must collectively relearn, retell, honor, and mourn the stories of the abused. And in turn, as psychological Trauma Theory states, for any individual survivor to heal, they must be fully received and acknowledged by their community. A process of “recognition and restitution...necessary to rebuild the survivor’s sense of order and justice,” as stated by psychologist and trauma specialist Judith Herman, in her book Trauma and Recovery. In this way, the treatment equals the prevention, and vice versa.

To illuminate the reasons for this detachment and neglect, we need look no further than the arena of sexualized violence with which our efforts are most concerned (and rightly so): college campuses. To say it in the way no one wants to: going to college is now a risk factor for being raped or assaulted. In 1998, the CDC concerned (and rightly so): college campuses. To say it in the way no one wants to: going to college is now a risk factor for being raped or assaulted. In 1998, the CDC concluded that 1 in 6 women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape or assault. In 2010, a similar study conducted by the CDC declared the ratio to be 1 in 5. And yet...

1 in 4 college women will experience sexual assault or rape during her or their academic career, as found in 1987, 2000, and 2006.

Violence is propelled not only through the belief that it is “normal” but that you can easily get away with it. Only 3% of rapists ever spend a day in jail—a fact that is not only indicative of rape culture, but of the true function of our criminal justice system: to punitively and conveniently disempower people of color, not to bring justice to victimized women and trans folks. In short, our police and our courts of law were not built to combat those with the setting of college, where violence is called “misconduct” (see Oberlin’s “Sexual Misconduct Policy,” formerly known as the “Sexual Offense Policy”) and policies tend to punish laptop thieves or Tour de Franzia participants more harshly anyway, and perpetrators seem to have found their safe haven.

College administrators (with exceptions, of course) have made it repeatedly clear (as it has become most newlywhor in the past year or so) that they could not give even a single fuck about survivors. Unless of course, they can’t get them to shut up about their abuse from both their perpetrator and the college itself, in which case it becomes a serious PR issue.

As of August 13th, 76 colleges and universities are under federal investigation by the US Department of Education for their mishandling of sexualized violence cases on campus. Such investigations are the result of Title IX complaints filed by both individuals and student groups on the basis of unjust case handlings and generally hostile environments toward survivors. Title IX is a law passed in 1972 that prohibits “sex discrimination” in any educational program that receives federal funding. It covers such areas as Athletics, support for pregnant and parenting students, and of course, sexualized violence. According to the organization Know Your IX, the law requires that

1) Schools must have an established procedure for handling complaints of sex discrimination, sexual harassment or sexual violence.
2) Schools must take immediate action to ensure a complaint-victim can continue his/her/their education free of ongoing sex discrimination, sexual harassment or sexual violence.
3) Schools may not retaliate against someone filing a complaint and must keep a complaint-victim safe from other retaliatory harassment or behavior.
4) Schools can issue a no contact directive under Title IX to prevent the accused student from approaching or interacting with you.
5) In cases of sexual violence, schools are prohibited from encouraging or allowing mediation (rather than a formal hearing) of the complaint.
6) Schools cannot discourage you from continuing your education as a result of experiencing any sexualized violence.

Basically every single one of these mandates within the law have been violated repeatedly by numerous schools across the country. In just a few of the most recent headlines:

A survey of 236 colleges and universities conducted by Sen. Clair McCaskill (D-MO) reveals that that over 40 percent had not conducted a single investigation of sexual assault in the last five years (Huffington Post, July 9), and Amherst College is refusing to release any campus sexual assault data since 2012 when students made the realization that the school has punished cases of laptop theft more severely than assault (AC Voice, August 13)

Administrators at Pace University forced the victim of a sexual assault into an investigation, found the alleged perpetrator not responsible without giving any explanation in their verdict, and then attempted to require both students to attend a program on alcohol and

Levins Morales, Medicine Stories, 1998
Herman, Trauma & Recovery, 1992
Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence against Women Survey, 1998
The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report
One in Four USA: Sexual Assault Statistics, www.oneinfourusa.org
"39 ofEvery 100 Rapists Receive No Punishment, RAINN Analysis Shows," www.RAINN.org, 2009
More than 50% of Rapists are White ("Meet the Offenders"), www.RAINN.org, 2009
"Amherst College Refuses to Release Sexual Assault Data," www.ACVoice.com, 2014
"Wesleyan Refuses to Release Sexual Assault Data," www.ACVoice.com, 2014
"Amherst College is refusing to release any campus sexual assault data since 2012 when students made the realization that the school has punished cases of laptop theft more severely than assault (AC Voice, August 13)"

"76 Colleges are Now Under Investigation for How They Handled Sexual Assault Cases," Huffington Post, 2014
"Title IX: The Basics," www.KnowYourIX.org
"Amherst College Refuses to Release Sexual Assault Data," www.ACVoice.com, 2014
"Amherst College Refuses to Release Sexual Assault Data," www.ACVoice.com, 2014

A college Dean’s advice to a campus assault survivor. Photo by Jisoo Lee, www.activism.thenation.com

Why don't you take a year off, get a job at Starbucks, and come back after he's graduated? —Dean
date rape (Huffington Post, August 18). Meanwhile, a student at Temple University has filed a Report with the Dept. of Education charging the school with fostering a hostile environment, failure to provide accommodations, discrimination against transgender individuals and not informing her of her own rights as a student, among other Title IX violations (Temple News, August 16)21.

These are literally just a handful of the more than 50 news articles released in the past few months shedding light on more and more schools’ dirty laundry. And many schools have done their part in assessing the damage—to their endowment, that is. Letters to parents, alumni, and major corporate funders are all part of the procedure. But little can be done to combat a very brilliant and thorough exposé, such as the one targeting Hobart and William Smith Colleges, printed in the New York Times on July 12th. As a warning, the following account is more graphic in its detail of the violence than I have been in this article so far.

This past year, a student at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York was gang raped by members of the football team in her first two weeks at the school. A friend reported to have found her being assaulted against a pool table with 6 or 7 other people watching and taking pictures and video. A sexual-assault nurse provided a recorded assessment of “blunt force trauma within the last 24 hours indicating intercourse with either multiple partners, multiple times or that the intercourse was very forceful.” The players denied not raping her, but having had “sex” with her in the first place. Even so, tests later found sperm or semen in her vagina, in her rectum and on her underwear. In just 12 days, the college investigated the report and cleared the players of all charges. The student received no protection or support from the college while she faced constant threats and harassment for accusing members of the revered football team immediately following the investigation. The college has since sent a letter to the college community, including alumni and notable donors declaring their policies and procedures to “reflect our commitment to creating and maintaining an academic environment that is free from sexual harassment and misconduct.”

No Justice for Survivors in the Academic-Industrial Complex

“It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of the pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering. . . . In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.” —Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery23

So now we find ourselves in the midst of a “national crisis” on sexual violence, both on and off campus. Let us return to the paradigm of treatment vs. prevention, the one that is most notably used to assess the cost-effectiveness of solutions to public health problems, and one that would probably be seen as distasteful at best if applied to an issue like sexualized violence. And yet, this is exactly what colleges have done, mostly because they’re not really the public beacons of knowledge that we have so often considered them. Since the late 90s and early 00s, there has been an ever increasing push for deregulation of colleges, especially at the management/administrative level.24 While this has occurred with the belief of making college more accessible and affordable,25 quite the opposite has unfolded. College presidents and senior administrators behave like CEOs, joining positions on the executive boards of major corporations, and colleges themselves behave like corporations26, investing in and receiving funding from large companies and wealthy alumni who are often associated with said corporations. Corporations ultimately have rising control over campus policies, administrative functions and school image; and thus, colleges are institutions of profit within a capitalist economy. Now, I know you may have already gotten that this is a major theme of the zine you are holding, but just let that sink in for a second, in the context of campus sexualized violence.

Colleges are institutions of profit within a capitalist economy.

And colleges are the institutions responsible for and authorized to serve justice for these crimes. Not the police, not a highly trained non-profit third party organization—colleges. Sure, you can report to the police. But besides the fact that students are vastly more likely to report to the college (an institution they assume will support them and function in their best interest), remember that only 3% of rapists spend a day in jail27, and furthermore, consider the nature of our justice system itself. Herman explains, If one set out by design to devise a system for provoking intrusive post-traumatic symptoms, one could not do better than a court of law.28

Additionally, it is worth noting that rape is a huge expense to institutions, carrying the highest annual victim cost of any crime.29 So with capitalist institutions in charge of bringing so many of these cases to justice, the solution becomes to actually just avoid justice altogether and settle. It is much much cheaper for colleges to settle these charges on campus, and even lawsuits, than it is to structurally combat the issue of violence within their community. And even more importantly this allows colleges to continue to pretend that sexualized violence is not a problem for them, by throwing some money at each little unfortunate rape charge as they arise. This is much much a better capitalist option than investing massively in structural change, and in turn admitting to their many corporate and individual investors that they have a violence problem.

As Lauren Chief Elk, founder of Save Wiyaabi, an advocacy group addressing violence toward Native American women explains, “College administrations already scramble to give corporate donors the impression their campuses are safe and free of rape to maintain their schools’ reputation. Corporate money—and the

20 “What Happened When a Student Told Her Campus Health Center She Was Sexually Assaulted,” www.huffingtonpost.com, 2014
22 “Reporting Rape and Wishing She Hadn’t,” www.NYTtimes.com, 2014
26 “97 of Every 100 Rapists Receive No Punishment, RAINN Analysis Shows,” www.RAINN.org, 2009
27 Herman, Trauma & Recovery, 1992
28 Herman, Trauma & Recovery, 1992
29 Krebs et. al & Department of Justice, “Campus Sexual Assault Study,” 2007
reputation of the corporation—makes the requirement to appear flawless even more imperative. In the context of sexual assault, victims become the problem, and so to make the issue of sexual assault disappear, victims are the ones who are made to disappear.”

So now, we return to our question: Why aren’t survivors, as well as the healing and uplifting of survivors, the center of our discussion on ending sexualized violence? Hopefully by now, this is more clear. Leivns Morales has also addressed this question, but beyond the scope of sexualized violence alone, and into the vast and intersecting view of all abuses that result from larger systems of inequality and oppression.

“When individual people are abused, the events themselves become a story of our worthlessness, of our deserving no better. We must struggle to recreate the shattered knowledge of our humanity. It is in retelling stories of victimization, recasting our roles from subhuman scapegoats to beings full of dignity and courage, that this becomes possible... The struggle we engage in is over whose story will triumph, the rapist’s story or the raped woman’s, the child abuser’s or the child’s, the stories of bigoted police officers or those of families of color whose children are being murdered. The stories of perpetrators are full of lies and justifications, full of that same projection that holds the abused responsible for her abuse. The stories of the abused are full of dangerous, subversive revelations that undermine the whole fabric of inequality.”

Within the framework of capitalism, victims of abuse are better if they remain that way: as victims, not survivors. In college, for example, their likelihood of graduating with better than a 2.0 GPA is quite low31, not to mention graduating at all, not to mention getting a sustainable job, not to mention functioning on a daily basis. It is better this way, because survivors who have healed and restored their strength and sense of humanity are dangerous, their insight sharp, and their hearts full and uncompromising.

And yet, treatment is prevention. When communities give survivors the freedom and ability to know and tell their stories, they in turn become enlightened to their own history as a community. They collectively face and grapple with the atrocities and abuses of their past and present, and only once doing so can they become aware to their own oppression, and oppression is the accumulation of millions of small systemic abuses.

Of course, it is imperative to understand that one cannot address only one type of violence while ignoring all others. Sexualized violence is inextricably linked to racism, classism, colonialism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, and transmisogyny among other abuses in the name of capitalism. And like the killing of black and brown folks by police, the incarceration of poor people of color, and the displacement of families so that young white people can move to a ‘hip place with good Mexican food,’ acts of sexualized violence are not isolated incidents. They are symptoms of our own oppression, and in the context of campus rape, they are symptoms of an already persistent rape culture combined with a privatized and profitable institution parading as a socially conscious arbiter of knowledge.

“Individual abuse and collective oppression are not different things, or even different orders of magnitude. They are different views of the same creature, varying only in how we accommodate to them... Abuse is the local eruption of systemic oppression, and oppression is the accumulation of millions of small systemic abuses.”

-Aurora Leivns Morales

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31 Leivns Morales, Medicine Stories, 1998
32 “After Sexual Assaults, Survivor’s GPAs plummet; This is a bigger problem that you think,” www.WashingtonPost.com, 2014

THE OBERLIN GENTRY
How Oberlin breeds our nation’s next gentrifiers

If you’ve ever lived in a large U.S. city or talked to an Oberlin student about their plans for after college, chances are you’ve heard about gentrification, even if not by name. All too often young people buy into the narrative of false independence that underlies the hipster (or young, appropriative, stylish, apathetic, ironic people) post-college lifestyle. This narrative fosters an entitlement to land and resources, which manifests in the form of displacement and erasure of residents who occupied a given neighborhood before the influx of hipsters.

GENTRIFICATION: WHAT IS IT?

Gentrification is the process by which middle or upper-class people, often white, move into areas where working class, usually brown and black people already live. In order to capitalize of this new market and to accommodate the ‘refined’ tastes of the middle class, developers and entrepreneurs start up organic grocery stores and cupcake shops in the given neighborhood, in addition to luxury condos to house even more gentrifier-consumers. The land, now sprinkled with nice things, accrues more value that it didn’t have before the invasion of the gentrity, and thus, the ones who own the land—which, sadly, is almost never the impoverished brown residents—are the ones who benefit. The grocery stores that the less fortunate original residents so urgently needed in their communities have now sprung up in order to keep fresh produce further out of their hands. As the previously cheap rent prices skyrocket, many small, family-owned businesses cease to exist and the neighborhood’s residents—faced with foreclosure, job loss, police violence, and other forms of communal disenfranchisement—are forced to move away to a new location, which is often an underserved suburb.

A ROOM WITH A VIEW AND MUCHO WINDOW SPACE

Liberal politicians and gentrifier apologists like to talk about gentrification as a renewal process, in which white trustfund hipsters save the day everyday by, for instance, prompting the construction of shiny new artist studios so they can erase the artists that already existed in the hood before they got there. Because of the erasure of the previous inhabitants that the culture of gentrification is grounded in, much of the discourse about gentrification in the media is posed as a positive dis-
play of economic growth and cultural fruition at the hands of the white gentrifiers. By extension, the gentrifiers become heroic testaments of generation y altruism and are then applauded and even glorified by the older generation of class-privileged people for roughing it out in a less than ideal backdrop for their glamorous young adult years in the name of economic independence.

The impression that college alumni are making real sacrifices after graduation so that they can support themselves financially by living in low-income neighborhoods—which by design often lack basic resources such as grocery stores and community centers—is unrealistic. Wherever white and/or upper-class people live, private and governmental bodies will rise to meet their needs, which means that if there isn’t a grocery store in a gentrifying area, it’s because not enough deserving people (read: white, class-privileged, college educated, etc.) are occupying the land yet.

With the entitlement to space comes the subconscious expectation of protection from the problems that afflict the underclass. It’s quite common for the gentry to complain about the violence or crime rate of a neighborhood once they move in. Given their status, law enforcement, especially the local police, are more than likely to respond to their concerns with the utmost urgency. This results in even more brutality and surveillance of the low-income people of color who are actually the ones who face the ugly realities that gentrifiers are quick to identify as threats to their own lives.

The neighborhood of Echo Park in Los Angeles serves as a tragic example of how the racist white newcomers in a predominantly Latinx neighborhood succeeded in expediting the process of displacement by appealing to the local government. The 2013 call for a permanent gang injunction in Echo Park by primarily white people who had moved to the neighborhood within the last 15 years was based on the myth that local gang violence put everyone who lived within the neighborhood in danger. Despite the fact that the rate of gang violence between Echo Park’s “most violent” gangs was at the lowest since the 1950s, the truth is that white people are already extremely safe in low-income neighborhoods where gang violence exists and their safety was never threatened in the first place because of their whiteness. It’s common knowledge to residents of neighborhoods like Echo Park that the police are no friend to black and brown youth. LAPD in particular (not to mention other paramilitary forces such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and the U.S. police apparatus in general exist to protect the white and wealthy. Regardless, the people of Echo Park, who knew that the gang injunction was definitely not the solution their community needed but rather another excuse for state-sanctioned abuse and criminalization, were not successful in stopping it from happening. After several court hearings, the injunction was put into place. The gang injunction not only increased police presence in Echo Park and suspended the rights of those who were accused of gang activity, but also currently serves as a tool to kick out many of the last remaining Latinx families from the neighborhood.

The bottom line is: Gentrifiers can live in these neighborhoods without having to worry about not having access to basic resources and without the risk of being exposed to police violence due to their perceived importance. Their position as privileged, voyeuristic settlers in low-income urban areas means that their presence is automatically valued more than the depressed communities that struggle to survive on the same turf. The problems that plagued the community before gentrification—poverty, violence, lack of city services—did not go away, but rather followed the community to a new area.

**THE OBERLIN GENTRY, OR “BUT WHERE ELSE AM I SUPPOSED TO LIVE?????”**

In Oberlin, the (lack of) relationship between college students and residents of the town permits similar dynamics that are present in the gentrification of urban spaces. The notorious No Trespass List is a file managed by Oberlin College Safety and Security that exists to keep certain people who supposedly pose a threat to the safety of college students away from campus. Rather than effectively addressing interpersonal violence, the No Trespass List upholds double standards and utilizes racial profiling to establish a false notion of safety within the college, while shifting the blame for this violence to the town.

Masking displacement as a renewal process is near and not so dear to Oberlin. Another concern is the Oberlin Project and the Green Arts District—an economic and community development project that many feel
has lacked open community input and may lead to gentrification—exacerbating many of the same root problems.

Oberlin alumni from a number of backgrounds are key players in the process of gentrifying some of the neighborhoods that other students call home. People who are college-educated, regardless of race/ethnicity or class, still have an advantage in certain job markets and therefore can also gentrify if they choose to move to another neighborhood to which they do not have any personal ties. I’ve seen my classmates move from their parents’ homes in glitzy, white areas of Los Angeles to neighborhoods right next to mine that only a few years ago, were very similar to my own, which is working class and Latinx. An area’s vulnerability to an influx of hipsters is correlated to its proximity to other hipster neighborhoods, as we have seen in several major cities in the U.S., so my stake in the anti-gentrification movement is huge.

The common defensive response to anti-gentrification arguments often come in the form of “But where else am I supposed to live?!?!?” What is key to understand here is that I’m not blaming only the gentrifier for the violence of displacement. Gentrification is structurally ingrained in urban spaces, but it’s important to recognize that gentrifiers do have the advantage of making a number of choices—some of those choices might include the choice to move out of one’s parents’ home with parents’ support, the choice to move back in with one’s parents and not pay any rent, and/or the choice to borrow money from parents to live in wealthier urban neighborhoods or suburbs where the chance of displacement is less.

The choices young Oberlin grads make, even if they are a self-proclaimed “radical” person of color or come from a low-income background, impact the livelihood of people in poor neighborhoods. However, while it’s important to ask Oberlin students to consider their agency in the process of gentrification, it’s also not enough to only target the actions of individual people. The practice of gaining control over land is central to capitalism, especially in the settler-colonialist USofA, so regardless of our choices, the problem of displacement will continue to persist until capitalism is destroyed.

LIBERAL ZIONISM, MILITARISM, AND NEOLIBERAL OBERLIN

Dear First-Year Students,

Though at this point you have likely been inundated with romantic lines about Oberlin’s “progressive” history, it is unlikely that you will have had much exposure to the college’s less glamorous track record with regard to its maltreatment of its workers, its heavy policing of and unwillingness to share resources with the town, and its longtime apathy and dismissal of its complicity in the Israeli occupation. Complicity in human rights abuses both domestic and abroad is hardly exclusive to Oberlin—such is the role of the university under neoliberal global capitalism, in which institutions of higher learning become increasingly self-serving private businesses operating in the service of their own financial interests. In this political-economic landscape, issues of moral and ethical obligations are posited as a cumbersome folly to fiscal responsibility. We frequently hear fellow students, Board of Trustees members, and administrators claim that they are critical of Israel, yet they refer to demands for divestment from corporations profiting from the Israeli occupation as a “divisive” and financially untenable issue that soils our campus climate. We hear that the history of Palestine/Israel is so complicated that no one could hope to understand it, and so we should really just stay out of it altogether. Rarely, however, do we witness a serious engagement with an issue that is difficult to talk about, but is not in fact as incomprehensible as Israel’s apologists make it out to be. As scholar-activist Henry Giroux explains, the neoliberal educational model in the United States “has abandoned the social contract and any viable notion of long-term investments in social goods. It is indifferent to human fragility and suffering, and remakes everything into commodified objects or reified financial transactions... Students are now taught to ignore human suffering and to focus mainly on their own self-interests and by doing so they are being educated to exist in a political and moral vacuum.” This is the reality we inhabit at Oberlin, an institution that has consistently marketed itself for “doing the right thing” even when this meant making unpopular or controversial decisions. In what follows we hope to provide a brief, albeit incomplete, overview of three central points:

1. First, we will expose the myth that one can simultaneously be truly committed to radical social transformation while also being a self-proclaimed liberal Zionist.
2. We will then discuss the immense military collusion between Israel and the United States, and show that in addition to a shared military-industrial complex, Israel is also complicit in the United States’ prison-industrial complex and mass surveillance of black and brown people.
3. Finally, we will assert the importance of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and debunk classically liberal conceptions of academic freedom that Oberlin has used to maintain its unspoken commitment to Israeli apartheid.
Identifying Liberal Zionism:

Though Zionism should and must be critiqued in its own right, we have elected to center this contribution on liberal Zionism because we believe it is especially inhibitive and ultimately destructive to fomenting critical consciousness with regard to Palestine/Israel. It is also pervasive at Oberlin. Whereas we broadly understand Zionism as a “settlement colonial political movement that seeks to ethnically cleanse historical Palestine of the indigenous population and populate it as a Jewish only state,” perhaps we would be best to understand liberal Zionism less as an ideology in its own right, and more as a discourse that attempts to justify Israel’s actions through the simultaneous promotion of ostensibly liberal social values. It adds up to a defense of the existence of the Israeli state and the occupation, coded through a rhetoric of universality. While most liberal Zionists may genuinely believe that human rights, anti-racism, democracy, and equality are reconcilable with settler colonialism, the effect is to neutralize debate on the occupation. Rather than centering the struggle of colonized and occupied Palestinians by “challenging Israel’s unjust and illegal policies and practices, ‘liberal’ Zionists end up defining the limitations to how Israel is challenged, if not themselves implementing policies that maintain the consistent repression of the Palestinian people.” Within these constricted parameters of critique, challenges to Zionism, the military-industrial complex, and Israel’s right to exist as an ethnocentric Jewish state may be lazily dismissed as anti-Semitism, obfuscating the reality of the occupation.

Liberal Zionists often claim that they are critical of Israel while simultaneously supporting its right to exist as an ethnocentric state, one in which the right to “defend” itself from racialized “terrorist” organizations like Hamas (democratically elected to head Gaza in 2006) through bombing innocent civilians. Even if we accept for the sake of argument the fallacy that an occupying colonial power may genuinely believe that human rights, anti-racism, democracy, and equality are reconcilable with settler colonialism, the effect is to neutralize debate on the occupation. Rather than centering the struggle of colonized and occupied Palestinians by “challenging Israel’s unjust and illegal policies and practices, ‘liberal’ Zionists end up defining the limitations to how Israel is challenged, if not themselves implementing policies that maintain the consistent repression of the Palestinian people.” Within these constricted parameters of critique, challenges to Zionism, the military-industrial complex, and Israel’s right to exist as an ethnocentric Jewish state may be lazily dismissed as anti-Semitism, obfuscating the reality of the occupation.

Liberal Zionists may occasionally voice distress over this kind of systematic abuse, yet when it comes to acting on it they will resort to dishonest apologist rhetoric. Though the very act of Palestinian reproduction is posited as a “demographic threat” to Israel’s so-called exclusively Jewish character (though nowhere is this recognized in international law [citation]), Israel promotes itself—and is in turn promoted by the United States—as a true beacon of equality.

Liberal Zionism and the Military-Industrial Complex:

Oberlin College is complicit in liberal Zionism. On its own website, the college writes, “Today, Oberlin’s faculty, staff, and student body reflect the college’s early dedication to diversity and social justice.” Yet its investments in corporations profiting from the occupation—specifically, G4S, SodaStream, Hewlett-Packard, Veolia, Elbit Systems, and Caterpillar—mean that any claims of solidarity with Palestinians are little more than lip service. What does it mean when claims to social justice are built on the rubble of Gaza? Corporations such as Elbit Systems and G4S are heavily subsidized by the United States. Elbit Systems, for example, was just awarded a massive contract by the Obama administration to continue the process of further militarizing the Mexico-US border wall, while G4S, a company known for its abuse of Palestinian prisoners, is a top security supplier of video surveillance and security officers at colleges and universities around the country. Caterpillar, the corporation that systematically bulldozes innocent Palestinians’ homes in the occupied territories, can be seen all around campus as gentrification schemes like the Oberlin Project will continue to drive out town residents in the name of eco-friendly public relations. This is not “Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace,” as organizations such as J-Street U would have it; it is imperialism by proxy. The longer Oberlin remains invested in these corporations, the longer it remains invested in neoliberal global capitalism and US imperialism, and the longer our academic education will be funded by the occupation.

To better understand the links between Oberlin and US imperialism vis-à-vis Israel, let’s turn to the military collusion between Israel and the United States.

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level.” In this sense we can begin to speak of the “Israelification” of security and policing within the United States, as a manifestation of the symbiotic relationship between the ways both countries exercise and collaborate in their executions of state violence.

“Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace” movements will not put an end to this kind of collusion; it will only strengthen it. Amidst the U.S.’s continued support for Israel’s assault on Gaza in the name of self-defense, is evident that only a mass-based grassroots movement will be able to challenge these systems. In this sense, Oberlin can play a significant role.

Oberlin’s Role in Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS):

In 2005, hundreds of organizations comprising Palestinian civil society (an amalgam of hundreds of trade unions, youth organizations, grassroots groups, women’s groups, religious and tribal associations, educational institutes and NGOs) called on the global community to participate in a grassroots-led boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement against Israel until it complies with international law. The BDS movement comprises of three central demands:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall.
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

In the words of the BDS movement, divestment “calls for the withdrawal of stocks and funds from corporations complicit in the violation of international law and Palestinian rights and ensures that investment portfolios and public funds are not used to finance or purchase products and services from such companies. These campaigns can take advantage of voluntary and mandatory corporate responsibility mechanisms.”

In 1987 Oberlin agreed to divest its funds from Apartheid South Africa after years of student protest and reluctance on behalf of the administration and Board of Trustees. As Palestinians in Israel are systematically denied equal rights, while those in the occupied territories are being bombed with Israeli missiles as this piece is being written, it is of utmost importance that we recognize this historical precedent and continue to demand action. In this sense, the BDS movement—and divestment more specifically—provides the most effective outlet for Oberlin as an institution to stand in solidarity with Palestine.

Rather than calling for a one- or two-state solution, the BDS movement works within a human rights-based framework. As Israel continues to violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, the official opinion of the International Court of Justice, and United Nations Resolution 194, and whereas the six corporations discussed above are guilty of committing human rights abuses as documented by organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Al-Haq, Addameer, B’tselem, Adalah, Badil, and Amnesty International, divestment in solidarity with the call of the Palestinian people is crucial. And the time to do so is now.

Resistance to Divestment in the Name of Academic Freedom?

Oberlin’s administration and Board of Trustees have been resistant to endorsing the BDS resolution proposed by the Student Senate in spring of 2013. Perhaps more importantly, these bodies have expressed disdain towards the BDS movement more generally, claiming that moves such as the American Studies Association’s 2013 decision to enact an academic boycott of Israel limits academic freedom. In a letter published online in response to the decision, Oberlin’s president Marvin Krislov wrote, “Even when academic freedom is imperfectly realized it must be protected for it is a fundamental condition that enables students, teachers, researchers and scholars to pursue ideas and inquiries beyond the confines of academic departments or disciplines, politics, national boundaries or social structures.”

Krislov’s response requires us to problematize our relationship to academic freedom. In essence, this is an inherently flawed conception of academic freedom because it is can easily be manipulated by those in positions of power whose sociopolitical interests are not served by transnational solidarity movements and boycotts. It is a definition that proffers equality, yet it is also ahistorical as it fails to take into account how not everyone has equal access to freedom of inquiry or expression, despite what we might want to believe. In this sense, calls for “open dialogue” and “academic freedom” reinforce and reproduce the status quo rather than challenge it. There is no reason to believe that Krislov’s logic would extend beyond academic freedom to basic human rights, given the administration’s and board of trustees’ dismissive attitudes towards calls for even the most modest calls for divestment from corporations that profit from the occupation. Meanwhile, schools in Gaza are decimated after the most recent slate of genocidal Israeli bombings in Operation Protective Edge. Why do we not express outrage at the continued repression of Palestinian freedom?

Given the reality of Krislov’s conception of equality and universality, and keeping in mind the occupation’s profitability to Oberlin College, it is here that we must cease to see the academy as an idealized democratic space dedicated to building individuals concerned with social justice, but rather as an instrument through which ruling class capitalist imperialist ideology is reproduced. Instead of clinging to the imagined inherent equality of academic institutions, we should be grappling with the political realities of the Israeli occupation. We must be constantly linking the struggle for academic freedom with the opposition to repressive state violence and ideological surveillance. We need to think about how freedom is being denied. The conflation of principles of absolute equality with the material reality of the occupation exists not solely in regard to abstract notions of academic freedom, but freedom in general. Though neither Marvin
Krislov nor the Board of Trustees has issued an official statement regarding the BDS movement, the idea that even when freedom is imperfectly realized we need to stick to our liberal conception of equality in which everyone must be treated the same does not bode well.

Even at Oberlin we can already see how these ideas are implemented to stunt student organizing. Students who expose institutional racism at Oberlin are often accused of ‘fascism,’ distribution of radical literature is often disallowed, and demands for structural transformation on campus go unheard. How is this academic freedom, an unfettered flow of ideas? Despite this, Oberlin maintains its clasp on its social justice public relations efforts, claiming in its mission statement to “offer dialogues on topical political and societal issues; events that honor culture and language...and classes on such subjects as peace and conflict, gender, feminist, and sexuality studies, colonialism, and much more.” But it is not just enough to offer classes on colonialism—we need to critically examine how our education is being funded by colonialism through Oberlin’s investment in the occupation. If we are to continue to struggle in solidarity for a free Palestine, we must continue to demand divestment, to see the connections between the oppression of Palestinians and the struggles of all oppressed peoples, and to combat the dominant liberal ideology central to this institution.

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Obviously this zine is packed with a ton of information—probably too much to fully process all at once. And of course there’s also lots of crucial analysis and issues that we weren’t able to touch on here: we wish we could have better situated the academic-industrial complex within the context of neoliberalism, given more personal accounts of our experiences at Oberlin, and provided more of the history behind March 4, 2013, to name only a few. But hopefully you will use this zine as a resource and a reference in order to better understand some aspects that often go unnoticed and unchallenged in the liberal whirlwind of college. If you’ve made it this far and are feeling inspired, overwhelmed, or any range of emotions, know that there is a community struggling for radical social transformation that would love to work with you. Come join us in educating, agitating, and organizing to smash liberalism. We look forward to meeting you.
RESOURCES

PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
Are Prisons Obsolete? by Angela Davis
Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, & Opposition in Globalizing California by Ruth Wilson Gilmore
Live From Death Row by Mumia Abu-Jamal
Blood in My Eye by George Jackson
Normal Life by Dean Spade
Visions of Abolition (2012) - film
The Last Graduation (1997) - film
Assata: An Autobiography by Assata Shakur

PALESTINE
The Battle for Justice in Palestine by Ali Abunimah
5 Broken Cameras (2012) - film
electronicintifada.net
mondoweiss.net
The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine by Ilan Pappe

GENTRIFICATION & POLICING
The Flatbush Rebellion - zine <http://eastcoastrenegades.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/the-flatbush-rebellion.pdf>
elbarriotours.tumblr.com (film & blog; resources on gentrification in NYC's El Barrio)
“The peril of hipster economics,” by Sarah Kendzior on Aljazeera.com
“Gentrification’s Racial Arbitrage,” by Peter Frase on Jacobinmag.com
“Gentrification’s insidious violence: The truth about American cities,” by Daniel José Older on Salon.com
Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected by Lisa Marie-Cacho
The Possessive Investment in Whiteness by George Lipsitz

ANTI-PATRIARCHY / FEMINISM
Bros Fall Back - zine <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Destroy_the_scene-BROS_FALL_BACK.pdf>
Conquest: Sexual Violence & American Indian Genocide by Andrea Smith
The Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde
Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation by Silvia Federici
Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins
Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldúa

HISTORIES
The Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein
A Brief History of Neoliberalism by David Harvey

THEORY
“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” by Louis Althusser
Selected Works by Mao Zedong
All About Love: New Visions, bell hooks
The State and Revolution by Vladimir Ilich Lenin
Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism by David Harvey
Medicine Stories by Aurora Levins Morales

THIRD WORLD DECOLONIZATION
The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon
Black Skin White Masks by Frantz Fanon
Our Sister Killjoy by Ama Ata Aidoo

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