

NO UNIVERSITY AT THE END OF THE WORLD

On the Anti-Blackness of the
University and the Union



by mack

Typeset in **AKIRA EXPANDED**, Epilogue, and Adobe Caslon Pro

Cover: Drawing of a broken down cop car, overgrown with plants and a large tree through the center of the vehicle body. Art by Em Varian.

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You know this already, but it still must be said aloud: **Student Researchers United (SRU) and United Auto Workers — which are the unions representing TAs, Student Researchers, and Postdoc students throughout the University of California system — are anti-black.** These unions are anti-black for many reasons; but for now, we'll be focusing on the lack of urgency with which they've treated the demand for Cops Off Campus and the necessity of continuing to articulate this demand despite the pessimism we may feel about its viability at the bargaining table. SRU and UAW proposed a "Community Safety" article as part of the current negotiations over a new contract for academic workers, which ostensibly addresses defunding/abolishing UCPD. However, its extremely vague language about defunding and lack of concrete data, timelines, or accountability measures to ensure a meaningful downsizing/defunding of UCPD may take place makes it extremely lackluster and unserious.

The unseriousness, disregard, and even disdain with which UAW/SRU leadership have treated the Cops Off Campus demand has trickled down to union leaders at individual campuses who have policed Black student workers that have screamed it on the picket lines. Despite this ostensibly being one of the Union's demands, Black students calling for the defunding and abolition of UCPD were silenced and told that they would no longer be allowed to lead that chant because it was "divisive and made people feel uncomfortable". This instance is but one of many throughout my time on the virtual and in-person picket line where I've observed the anti-black discomfort, disdain, and disregard that union leaders and members have expressed with regard to the Cops Off Campus demand. For example, according to UC Davis Cops Off Campus organizers, picket-line leaders have policed and been antagonistic towards Cops Off Campus organizers and even gone so far as redirecting marches and moving the sites of picket lines to avoid them. These events are symptomatic of a larger disdain and disregard by union leadership for its Black members and its lack of desire to meaningfully bargain with the UC over defunding UCPD. These events also represent the union's unwillingness to hear the demands of its Black workers and fight for them in earnest.

The disdain and disregard with which Union leadership has treated the Cops Off Campus demand at the bargaining table clearly demonstrates the antagonism that exists between the Union and its Black workers/members. Whereas an antagonism exists between Union members/workers and our University bosses, there also exists an antagonism between the Union and the Black worker. Inasmuch as the UAW/SRU leadership fails to treat the demands for Cops Off Campus with urgency at the bargaining table, they collude with the anti-black University in ensuring the continuity of anti-black, carceral policies and practices at the University that harm and enact violence upon Black students such as campus policing. As Black workers,

it is important that we don't lose sight of this and that we understand the necessity of positioning ourselves both *in* and *against* the Unions as long as it colludes with the University to ensure that anti-blackcampus policing continues to exist at the UC...

To be clear, this is not a stance of anti-unionism. But inasmuch as SRU and UAW directly or indirectly collude with the University in upholding anti-black violence, in this current moment Black workers must strategically position ourselves — both *in* and *against* — in such a way as to win our demands. This means positioning ourselves as antagonists to the University by withholding our labor and shutting down business as usual, and seeking to bring the University to its knees, while also positioning ourselves as antagonists to University *and* Union leadership by using our collective power to **DEMAND** that the union leadership take seriously the call for Cops Off Campus and an end to anti-black campus policing practices. To be clear, given the intransigence of anti-blackness in the modern world, we do not have much, if any, hope that the UAW, the UC, or any other academic institutions will meaningfully consider taking steps to mitigate anti-black violence by defunding and/or abolishing their UCPD without something that amounts to a total revolution and transformation of civil society. Yet, despite the pessimism that we have about this demand being met, it is imperative that we continue to articulate it and scream it at the top of our lungs, for it is the doorway through which we may pass that can lead us toward the creation of another kind of university.

FUCK UCPD

For the safety and well-being of all campus community members, and Black campus community members especially, the SRU and UAW bargaining teams must be more emphatic about the demand for Cops Off Campus and the necessity of disarming, demilitarizing, defunding, and abolishing UCPD and related forms of carceral control at the university. Frequently administrators claim that UCPD is necessary for ensuring campus safety. This invocation of police as necessary for ensuring public safety illustrates the antagonism that exists between the UCPD and Black student workers and should push us to ask a set of questions: Who do police keep safe? Who do police surveil, profile, harass, and brutalize to guarantee “public safety”? How do we change this dynamic?

Insights offered to us by the Afropessimist school of thought help us answer these questions. Afropessimism's central claim is that as a consequence of the totalizing nature of chattel slavery and the centrality of anti-blackness in shaping the modern world, Blackness has come to embody and be associated with Slaveness. In the U.S., following the legal emancipation of slaves in 1865, the modernization of the conflation of Blackness and slaveness has manifested as a conflation of Blackness and criminality, enabling the contin-

uation of slavery and its carceral logic that continues to shape the contours of Black life. Because of how anti-black Negrophobia shapes how Black people and Blackness has come to be imagined in the collective (un)conscious, Black people are understood to be always already criminal, and thus the natural result is that Black people experience the brunt of the violence doled out by the carceral state and its agents.

This means that when we talk about who's worthy of protection and what they need to be protected from, this language is cloaked in anti-black euphemisms that appeal to colorblind sentiments of fairness and justice. But no matter how it is phrased, folks are seeking protection from the imagined Black boogeyman criminal who supposedly threatens public safety. Inasmuch as this relationship between Blackness and criminality creates the conditions for the over-policing of Black students, there is what kihana ross calls an "impossibility of a protective relationship between police as a structure and Black students as people".¹ As long as Blackness is paradigmatically associated with slaveness, criminality, and deviance in the collective (un)conscious, Black people will continue to be the disproportionate recipients of police violence and this is particularly true on college campuses.

There has **NEVER** been a point in the history of this country where Black people's relationship to the policing institution has been one **NOT** constituted by violence. Policing is an institution that has antiblack roots traceable to chattel slavery and the larger colonialist project on continental Africa. As a modern instance of this legacy, campus policing grew as a response to the desegregation of college campuses and the growth of student activism that led to the creation of ethnic studies departments and other programs meant to support students of color. As soon as Black students appeared on the scene at Historically White Institutions, police have been used to profile, criminalize, surveil, and harm Black students whose beingness challenges and/or contradicts the Eurocentric hegemonic social and academic norms prevalent at Historically White institutions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint when, where, and how there has been a protective relationship between Black people and the police, especially on college campuses. The conflation of Blackness and Slaveness, or Blackness and criminality and deviance, creates the onto-epistemological conditions for the bodies of Black students on college campuses to always already be read as dishonored, disruptive, deviant, thus requiring formal and informal methods of surveillance and policing in order to ensure maximum control.

During the 2020-2021 school year, a group of undergraduates at UCLA formed the NOUCPD coalition to work towards the disarming, defunding, dismantling, and the abolition of the campus' UCPD. An analysis of UCPD's crime data done by NOUCPD and Million Dollar Hoods found

1 kihana miraya ross, "Funneling Our Children From Classrooms to Cages Ends Now": <https://level.medium.com/funneling-our-children-from-classrooms-to-cages-ends-now-1b22669c9dd7>

that Black residents of Westwood are 19x² more likely than white residents to be stopped by UCPD for so-called “suspicious activity”³. This analysis also found that while Black people in Westwood make up 2% of the population, we account for 29% of stops for “suspicious activity” and 31% of all arrests.⁴ In 2022, Black Westwood residents make up for 37% of all arrests, despite being only 2% of the population.⁵ Beyond the quantitative data, there are countless anecdotal stories about anti-black profiling, harassment, and use of force by UCPD targeted at Black campus community members, many of which are not reported and logged into police logs and reports which results in a misrepresentation of the extent of police violence on campus.

UCPD’s own crime data betrays the justification for its existence. UCPD does little to protect the campus community from violence and much more to proliferate violence and harm on Black students and other campus community members. The data shows that we do not need such a large police force, that we do not need armed goons patrolling the streets, and ultimately, the data suggests that we need to abolish campus policing in totality. 88% of all UCPD arrests in 2022 were for individuals who were not affiliated with UCLA, meaning that they were likely Black folks who lived in the area or visited the so-called public university and were racially profiled. A 2018 analysis conducted by UCLA’s Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies and Luskin’s Inequality and Democracy Institute found that 85% of UCPD stops don’t result in “Criminal Law Follow Up” and that only 9% of stops result in arrests.⁶ They also found that only 9% of stops were in response to what they labeled as Force/Threat, while 31% were in response to property-related matters and 26% to disturbance/trespassing. This means that over 90% of stops were related to nonviolent events! The UC Office of the President also has data that shows that in 2022, only 4% of UCPD’s statewide calls for service were for reported crimes. The top reported crimes were Petty Theft, Intrusion Alarm, “Malicious Mischief”, “Annoying Phone Calls”, and “Unauthorized Subjects”. Only 2% of its statewide calls for service pertained to crimes involving violence, while 10% of its recorded crimes were for violent offenses such as Assault or Sex Offenses.

The first and most obvious takeaway from this data is that Westwood is effectively a modern-day sundown town where being Black makes you nearly 20x more likely to be stopped by UCPD. The UCPD engages in blatant

2 Instagram post, “Abolishing the UCPD”. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEvQm-saACQV/?igshid=ZDFmNTE4Nzc%3D>

3 Daily Bruin, “Demographics of UCPD stops and arrests”. <https://stack.dailybruin.com/2018/01/29/demographics-of-ucpd-stops-and-arrests/>

4 NOUCPD, Policing UCLA: UCLA PD Arrests (2013-2018) <https://www.dropbox.com/s/2ruvr7al62eyksa/Policing%20UCLA%20-%20No%20UCPD%20Coalition%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

5 UCOP, “Community Safety: Crimes”. <https://universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/ucpd-crimes>

6 Alejandra A Martinez, Paavo Monkkonen, Noah D. Zatz, Jennifer M. Chacón, “-Mapping Yesterday’s Police Activity at UCLA”: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt4jm4t63k/qt4jm4t63k.pdf?t=qls61f&cv=lg>

racial profiling and quite literally works to police the border of who does and does not belong at the university. The fact that 88% of UCPD arrests at UCLA are for individuals who are not affiliated with the university suggests racial profiling efforts to “protect” the campus community from imagined or real outsiders. This undermines the so-called mission of the public university to be open to the public. Furthermore, the so-called crimes that UCPD responds to and supposedly protects us from are problems that can be addressed by individuals who are not armed and have the license to kill. The imagined threats to public safety that supposedly justify the existence of UCPD simply do not exist. There is no justification for spending \$150M statewide to address problems such as these on our campuses. UCPD is ineffectual in preventing these so-called crimes and can only respond to them. Given the prevalence of racial disproportionality in UCPD’s stops and arrests data, it is clear that one primary purpose of UCPD is to keep the university safe from its Black inhabitants. Black students’ need for safety was and always is overshadowed by the UC’s hunger for engaging in anti-black, counterinsurgent carceral state violence to reproduce the university and its borders of who does and doesn’t belong in so-called “elite” institutions.

When administrators suggest that we simply need to reform police or reexamine their role, what they’re really saying is “let’s reexamine how much anti-blackness is permissible on this campus”. According to these administrators, UCPD functions to “promote public safety”, which is administrator-speak for protecting the interests of capital at and near the university as well as policing the border of who does and who does not belong on campus and in the surrounding community. Inasmuch as data continues to show the gross overrepresentation of Black students in UCPD stops and arrest data, the University communicates to Black students what we already know: that its policing practices are anti-black and that Black students and that other Black campus community members do not belong in the campus community. We are imagined and policed as a community of not-quite-students, as not-quite-faculty, as not-quite-staff.

Whether it be through the disdain and disregard for Black students exhibited through the lack of institutional support we receive or through the incessant micro and macro aggressions we face daily as we navigate these campuses, nonblack students, faculty, and staff police Black campus community members’ way of thinking, speaking, and moving about the University through overt and tacit messages that communicate to us that we are perpetual outsiders at the University. UCPD polices the borders of belonging and campus community by constantly surveilling, harassing, and profiling us. The informal policing at the hands of our so-called peers and advisors and the formal policing at the hands of UCPD work to perpetually position Black folks in, around, and against the university as outsiders who are unworthy of belonging at so-called world-class institutions such as UCLA or UC Berkeley.

Toward an Abolitionist University and the End of the World

The University as it exists will always be anti-black. If we don't simply want *less* anti-blackness or *fewer* Black campus community members being harassed by police, and we want a **total** end to it, then we must build an abolitionist university. Our demand for #CopsOffCampus and the abolition of the UCPD does not exist in a vacuum and is intertwined with the larger struggle of abolishing the University of California and our marching toward the "end of the world". If we desire to build a new world grounded in an anarchistic, abolitionist ethic, we can start by abolishing the UC and creating space for a new kind of university, if we can even call it that anymore; one with no cops, no chancellors, no hierarchy, no gatekeeping of knowledge, no hoarding of resources, no exclusions.

The demand for Cops Off Campus can be the first step towards abolishing the "University" and reimagining how schools function and serve their students, faculty, staff, and other community members. UCPD budgets could be reallocated towards improving mental health services, creating partnerships with community abolitionist drug and alcohol addiction treatment programs and organizations, free food programs and subsidized housing for food and housing insecure students, and scholarship programs for Black students and funding for resource centers so that they may be fully staffed and have actual resources to support Black students. Cops Off Campus isn't just about getting Cops Off Campus, but it's also Cops Off Campus and COLA4ALL (including undergraduates and all university staff), Cops Off Campus and free public education, including colleges and universities, Cops Off Campus and Disability Justice, Cops Off Campus and Open Admissions, Cops Off Campus and Free Meal Plans for all students and free food for all community members, Cops Off Campus and No Prisons and No Chancellors and No Bosses and No Borders and and and and. Cops Off Campus isn't just about getting Cops Off Campus but it is also a demand that bespeaks a desire to work towards building an abolitionist university and ultimately, the end of the world.

To be clear, a "better University" should not be our final goal. As stated before, the "University" will always be anti-black and exist to legitimize and reproduce the anti-black, imperialist, racial capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal civil society. We must pursue an abolitionist university. However, it won't be possible or even permissible to achieve a truly abolitionist university until we end the world created by imperialism, colonialism, racial capitalism, anti-blackness, and cisheteropatriarchy. Thus, the struggle to build an abolitionist university is part of our larger struggle to achieve, in the words of Fred Moten, the "absolute turning of this motherfucker out"⁷: the overthrow of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, imperialism, cisheteropatriarchy, and all forms of oppression that restrict and are antagonistic to one's humanity

and autonomy. In calling for an abolitionist university, the term “university” is only used as a placeholder for whatever kind of educational institution(s) we collectively decide to build once we reach the other side of the end of the world. To create a truly abolitionist university, this current world must end, and so must the University.

My understanding of an abolitionist university is not that of a final goal or destination, but rather an orientation to the university as it exists and to whatever form of education comes after its demise. That is, the abolitionist university is not simply about the redistribution of university resources in a more equitable or non-carceral way, but rather an ongoing commitment to and process of transforming the social, economic, and political functions of the university in such a way that it is no longer the “University” and so that we may create educational spaces that allow room for the cultivation of Black freedom dreams and Black liberation. This understanding of an abolitionist university is grounded in education scholar David Stovall takes its call from David Stovall’s call for school abolition, which “seeks to eliminate the order, compliance and dehumanization that happens in [school] buildings while allowing for the capacity to imagine and enact a radical imaginary”.⁸

An abolitionist university would abolish all forms of carcerality that exist within contemporary educational institutions, especially those that exist to achieve hierarchization and perpetuate exclusion; affirm and center our ancestral ways of knowing and being that precede this world created by colonialism and imperialism; equip us with the tools and training necessary to pursue our dream vocations and desired life paths; empower us by providing us with the language and tools to develop a critical consciousness about the world we inhabit; prepare us for the oncoming inevitable ecological apocalypse; give us the tools we need to collectively and individually address and reduce harm without reproducing it; equip us with the socioemotional skills to lead happy, healthy, fulling lives; and so, so much more. Ultimately, an abolitionist university would abide by abolitionist principles that seek to meaningfully address and reduce harm, eradicate all forms of carcerality, and that ensure that everyone — students, faculty, staff, and other community members — has their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs nourished.

In calling for the abolition of UCPD and for an abolitionist university, it is imperative that we follow Dr. David Stovall’s charge to demand the impossible. In other words, we must demand programs, policies, and practices that are inconceivable to exist in the world *as we know it* in order to meet our collective needs and create the conditions for the masses of Black folks to go beyond surviving and begin thriving. It is only by doing this that we will be able to reach the “end of the world” and achieve the goal of abolition

8 David Stovall, “Are We Ready for ‘School’ Abolition?: Thoughts and Practices of Radical Imaginary in Education”, 51: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1130&context=taboo>

outlined by organizers such as Mariame Kaba, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Joy James, Derricka Purnell, Dylan Rodriguez, and so many more. Just because we aren't entirely sure of what lies on the other side of the horizon does not mean that abolition is not a goal worth working towards. By demanding the impossible, we acknowledge that another world and another university are possible.

FUCK UCPD.
COPS OFF CAMPUS.
ABOLISH UCPD.
ABOLISH PRISONS.

