

# **The Time is Now: Two Years Later**

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It has been almost two years since the Uprising for Racial Justice irrevocably changed our lives. In ways ordinary Americans can't even realize, the sacrifices made by our community of protesters and activists pushed us incredibly forward and fearlessly demonstrated a new way to live honestly with the ugliness of this nation. Since then, in Washington DC, an ecosystem of mutual aid collectives, political education groups, radical community-building organizations, and non-profits has grown and become more interconnected. Many who marched in 2020 might not have known exactly how our revolutionary energy would change the future. A lot of us may feel that we have impossibly long to go before we reach abolition, Black liberation, total liberation, or an end to the systemic suffering of marginalized people. But I actually disagree. I think it's closer than we think. This is where I think we go from here.

But first, what the hell happened in 2020?

Well, a worldwide pandemic shut down literally everything. We saw how fragile our institutions are in contrast to Mother Nature. A new kind of fascist demagogue intentionally fumbled America's handling of the crisis. An election happened which that demagogue lost but then convinced his supporters to violently reject by drowning them in delusions on social media. And, of course, the United States came as close as it possibly could have to seeing a real populist uprising lead by Black, Brown, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, and poor people from across the land. But let's face it, "as close as it possibly could have" was not that close at all. So what did the 2020 Uprising actually accomplish?

Liberals might argue that the Uprising led to more laws increasing police accountability, more public discourse about "systemic racism", and even some legislation downsizing a few police budgets. But what mattered most to me is a little different – We demanded financial redistribution. And we started to get some of it.

While the Uprising's dominant slogan (at least nationally), "Defund the Police", brought a ton of criticism from progressives and conservatives (and leftists) alike, what it successfully conveyed was that money and wealth were the real issues. It demanded that money be taken from ENORMOUSLY bloated police budgets to invest in underserved communities to build systems that eventually make violent crime obsolete. And/or invest it into community-led safety groups to make police unnecessary. Practically, rationally, materially, the "point" of the Uprising was to spur the redistribution of wealth from those who had it but didn't need it to the communities that were robbed of it for generations.

And that demand didn't just apply to police departments. It also applied to average-everyday white folks who should want to do the right thing, and from many who did, and perhaps should, feel guilty. And, let's be honest, they did a lot more than the vast majority of policy-makers who never took our demands seriously. When marches in DC chanted "White Silence is Violence" up and down 14th Street, through DuPont, or Downtown, it meant "join us or donate to mutual aid." And it worked. Throughout 2020, thousands of white folks, alongside Black and Brown agitators, activists, and marchers, bravely held signs, shouted at cops, and vented their frustration like the rest of us. Many showed solidarity by protecting Black and Brown protesters or bringing supplies to keep us safe. But, at the same time and after the protests were over, protest groups, mutual aid collectives, and well-known Black liberation organizations saw an immense influx of donations for almost that entire year. Many

who gave money were leftist, allies, and accomplices already. But many more were white liberals or moderates who didn't feel comfortable joining the Uprising on the ground, but could no longer live with blinders on to systemic injustice. Even if they didn't understand "Defund the Police", they at least understood that the issue came down to money, to wealth, and to making a lasting change in their disconnected lives to support communities that had so long been ignored. That is what the Uprising accomplished concretely.

However, the spiritual accomplishments of the 2020 Uprising are a whole different story. And these are my favorite to write about.

2020 was the first time Black, Brown, Indigenous folks, women and femme-identifying people, Queer and Trans folks, and people with disabilities were able to live in our anger without apology, without the hopeless fear of repression and silencing. And it was incredibly necessary. As marginalized people, we carry not only the trauma of our own lives, living in a world that constantly reminds and punishes us for our "otherness", but the trauma of those who have come before us. For Black, Brown, and Indigenous folk, that trauma is overtly contained by and passed down through our ancestry. The memory of the land our ancestors lost, the love and agency that was stolen from them, we carry it with us, even if we don't realize it. For Queer and Trans folks, women and femmes, and people with disabilities, that trauma comes from our own lives, and from the knowledge of and empathy with the suffering of those around and before us. And it makes us all angry. Yet our society teaches us that, at best, anger is an ugly emotion and will get us nowhere. And, at worst, that showing the world our rage will cost us dearly. But anger is necessary. Anger is vital. We, as people, feel it for a reason. We feel it when something in the world does harm to us and we don't want to let it harm us again. We feel it when we need to defend ourselves. We feel it when we need something to change.

Now, imagine how potent that anger would be if it's been repressed for 400 years for Black folks. 500 years for Indigenous folks. And literally since the dawn of time for women and femmes. It's been channeled here and there throughout history and resulted in undeniable progress. But we are all still being harmed. So, of course, we're still angry.

In 2020, we all got the chance to stop repressing our anger together. Of course, the police, the media, and politicians did what they've always done and tried to silence, demonize, or punish our anger, and many of us carry literal scars today from those attempts. But they could not stop it. And we used it, as best we could, with good intention. For a lot of us, I know it felt amazing to let our anger out for something purposeful without bending to the threats of repression. It was the most empowering thing many of us have done in our lifetime. And the universe knows, it made the ancestors fucking happy.

But now it's 2022 – So now what?

Over the last two years, I think we've found that anger can't cut it by itself. The ecosystem of radical political education groups, mutual aid collectives, and revolutionary community support organizations in DC is thriving. But to many who organize within it, it doesn't feel that way. Burnout, interpersonal drama, and difficulty finding a cohesive vision of abolition leave us feeling like the work we do amounts to little overall. The anger of 2020 convinced us that we have to fight to succeed, that we have to keep sacrificing to beat the obstacles ahead, and it's warped our relationships with our bodies, with self and communal care. This

has left many of us exhausted and discouraged by what feels like no progress. However, when we take the time to look at the big picture, I think it's actually a masterpiece in the making.

Here's a tiny snapshot of that picture: The DC Wards Mutual Aid Network has established a city-wide initiative to support each ward with free health supplies and groceries. They've kept a sizeable flow of donations afloat by toeing the line well between abolitionist values and appealing widely to DC residents. The Palm Collective has maintained an incredible repertoire of social media content giving exposure to abolitionists doing excellent work and supporting families surviving police violence. Harriet's Wildest Dreams has led successful grassroots campaigns for courtwatching and community safety, and successfully pressured the WMATA Board of Directors to throw out harmful policies. Good Trouble Cooperative has built a recognized and adored mutual aid presence on 14th and Columbia Rd NW, where working families come out every week to facilitate the exchange of free house and health supplies to each other with the Co-op's help. Total Liberation Collective and Remora House continue to support our unhoused communities by having cookouts, helping them through illegal evictions, and maintaining real friendships across the city. Meanwhile, non-profits like the Latino Economic Development Center are working with one-time George Floyd protesters to connect families at risk of eviction with free legal aid to stay in their homes. These are only a few examples of abolitionist work that I have been exposed to at the grassroots level. There is so much more happening in places I've yet to see and among non-profits who do community work with a lot more money and infrastructure. By organizing in our separate corners, mutual aid groups, liberation collectives, non-profits, and radical safety organizations are actively doing the work of abolition. But because we are so isolated from each other, it feels like we are each getting nowhere.

I think it's time to change that.

Speaking to a number of mutual aid organizers over the last several weeks, I've found we generally agree that organizing in silos hasn't helped us. We need to start helping each other. There are a lot of reasons we've become divided. For post-2020 groups, this began as a natural consequence of affinity groups exploring abolition independently. Interpersonal issues between leaders and community members cemented a few of those divisions. Some splits were due to cultural or ideological differences. For example, Good Trouble Cooperative, my organizing home, is committed to doing our work in Columbia Heights without 501c3 status to show that people power can happen independent of systemic incentives, like tax status. However, this leaves us feeling at odds at times with non-profits, like the Latino Economic Development Center or Collaborative Solutions for Communities, who operate in the same neighborhood but have a different culture of practice. Meanwhile, non-profit groups may not always know how to engage radical anti-establishment groups on common ground. So we each look the other way. Yet, without these divides, what we have overall is a dense network of people working for essentially the same thing, only with different angles, different backgrounds, different beliefs about the specifics of the path ahead, but ultimately the same intention – Total Liberation. All we're missing is unity and the consciousness of organizing as part of a collective.

In my view, the hard part – getting the work off the ground, making mistakes, having to adapt and keep going – has mostly been done. What stands between us and getting substantially closer to concrete abolition is bringing us all together, lifting one another up, then tearing the curtain back to say, “Tah Dah!” With that, I believe DC can become a beacon – an unprecedented example for the world of what a city can look like where we depend more on community than competition, more on love than capitalism, more on each other than systemic inequity. We just have to show them.

I don’t think this will be easy. But I think I know where to start. We need to let go of the anger of 2020 and let it evolve.

The anger and pain of 2020 forced our vision for the future and our responsibility to realize it to dramatically expand. But that anger also caused us to lose sight of a lot of things. Namely, how to take care of ourselves through the weight of this work and the powerful value of patience. Letting our anger go can give us the space to heal and determine what is the best path forward. Some groups and individuals fail to acknowledge that organizing through burnout, being driven by rage, or clinging to dogma like a security blanket puts out negative energy – we cannot win if we are more focused on where we should be than where we are. Putting out negative energy will only attract negative energy. But being patient enough to take care of ourselves, heal our divisions, and start connecting with each other as friends across spaces will help the finish line reveal itself.

There are many individuals in our community who have let their revolutionary anger turn into habits of demonizing others, organizing from a need for pride, or using the language of abolition to compensate for spiritual wounds they may not even be aware of. Often, comrades sharing space with these folks feel like they are walking on eggshells. Sometimes, the culture of the organizations they are in conforms to their negative or ego-driven attitude to the point that demonizing others through dogma or shared beliefs becomes normalized. I judge no comrade for the traumas they’ve yet to face, because I believe every person’s path is different and will lead them to their spiritual challenges in their own time. But I strongly encourage individuals in community with comrades who show these patterns of behavior to name the truth without malice and to call those people in. The divides in our community need to come down. We need to heal. We need to take care of one another. Even though we blame each other for why we can’t always get along or work together, it’s really ourselves who are unwilling to let go of our frustration to see the best path forward. Often, that path begins with a tough conversation, meditation, asking for help, or all of these together.

But what about our anger?

Anger is power, and power isn’t good or bad. It depends on how we use it, or if we let it control us. I feel anger everyday when I walk and see people hungry, suffering, or being unkind. I feel it when I sleep, and the ancestors whisper of all the traumas they suffered and prayed for me to overcome. I feel it when I think of all the harm I’ve endured, sacrifices I’ve made, wrongs I’ve committed, scars I carry, and where it’s all prepared me to go. I feel angry because I know how hard the future will be, and that we have no choice but to keep fighting.

But the fight will not be by blood, if I can help it. Yes, anger gives us power to defend ourselves and change things. But, more importantly, when wielded with experience and

discipline, anger gives us the clarity to tell the truth without compromise. Anger helps us learn from our mistakes and teaches us to do the right thing the next time. So, let's start helping each other. If you're an organizer in DC and you're feeling burnt out, reach out to another group doing similar work and start talking. Talk about what you've learned, what works and what doesn't, hurdles you've overcome, and what the future is supposed to look like. If you're unsure of how to start this process, wanna talk more, or you're not an organizer yet but want to be, send me an email – [abishakur427@gmail.com](mailto:abishakur427@gmail.com). Let's start preparing to pull the curtain back. To show the world what DC is and can be, what community is and can be, and, most, importantly, let's make the ancestors fucking happy.

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