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The University Is Trying to Kill You. Do Not Let It.

Irruptions

2021

We at Irruptions are excited to feature a submission from an anonymous group of students from the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. With a biting analytical style, their piece pulls back the veil of today's activism to reveal the murder plot against possibility. Their unsparing critique leaves us all with some reflection to do. We encourage readers of this piece to consider their own reactions and give the arguments a fair assessment. We also encourage everyone to read the referenced essay, "On the Poverty of Student Life" by the Situationists International, which is available on the Anarchist Library. Lastly, we hope for the opportunity to feature local analysis from this group and other likeminded people in the future.

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—Irruptions

The university is a deathtrap.

Around us lurk festering aristocrats called “fraternity brothers” who exercise “the right of the first night” on whomever they please, regardless of age. Above us loom the greedy casino bosses called “administrators,” who collect our last pennies and lie that they’ll “boost our chances” in a hollowed-out job market. And before us grandstand the influencer-activists who order us to sit down in front of the student union so that the police can better surveil our movements among the crowd. Does anyone here have our “best interest at heart?”

No.

No one but us.

That is, if we have the courage to learn to stand up for ourselves.

To this end, we think it wise for us students to perform a little self-criticism by looking at a parallel moment in history. The work of the Situationist International—a 60s French revolutionary group who many of today’s so-called leftists could stand to read up on—offers us a lens through which to understand our present wretched state. In their (literal) riot-inducing essay, “On the Poverty of Student Life,” the Situationists and members of Strasbourg University write the following: “[T]he reasons for which [the student] is despised are often false reasons ... whereas the reasons for which he is justifiably despised from a revolutionary standpoint remain repressed and unavowed.” It is these revolutionary grounds on which we call ourselves out.

We will settle, instead, for this—a plea to anyone who will listen: Go offline, and go underground. Talk quietly among yourselves about what can be done and do it. Find the others who are doing the same, within the university and without; make common cause and spread resistance. Spread subversive materials in your classrooms and meeting rooms. Become the Situationists’ model student and “calmly carry the germs of sedition to the highest level.” And, most of all, start living. We hope that, like us, you have had enough of dying.

periodic outbreaks of yellow fever in Haiti” discovering the “hidden partisan knowledge” surrounding those epidemics, as Idris Robinson writes in “How It Might Should Be Done.” It was the long history of coal miners and other workers waging war on bosses who would send them to die in factories and mines. Standing Bear (whose monuments are defaced by virtue of being so close to our campus) marching back to his homeland against Army orders. Omaha-born Malcolm X facing off against the FBI.

So, we ask: Will we students and other assorted “radicals” of Lincoln ever get over ourselves and make common cause with true revolutionaries, such as those who shut down the Havelock Burger King with their resignations? (These “lowly burger-flippers,” as some would have it, showed twice the intelligence and ten times the courage of the “politicized” university student.) Or the members of the August 19th anti-FIJI protest in which the crowd (a mixture of college students and working-class passersby) momentarily escaped the activists’ clutches and brought the fight directly to the pigs?

Perhaps, it is too hopeful to imagine nothing short of the immediate seizure of every fraternity in the country, in the world. Perhaps, it is unrealistic to propose that such reclaimed spaces could become spheres in which we organize new forms of life. Forms of life that challenge rape culture far more than following each other on social media ever will. Rebel-students in Iowa City showed little hesitancy in terms of taking drastic action against the property of FIJI rapists, but it seems we have work to do before we can measure up to our friends to the east.

It is, of course, easy to criticize some portion of the student population on the basis of their erotic fixation with “the college experience,” as portrayed in so many filmic monuments to date rape; and, in truth, such students ought to be pitied, for they are embarking on a miserable, alcohol-fueled “last hurrah” before they affix the noose of work, family, and vacation around their necks. But let’s look, as well, at the graduate student and their young activist counterparts: See them taking principled stands for their Instagrams and resumés; see how the tall and gilded halls of power are framed neatly in the background; see how these students do not realize that they are standing before the mausoleums wherein rests all the power they will never wield, for they have buried it beneath Snapchat filters and applications to well-intentioned nonprofits (as if intentions were anything more than toilet paper for landlords, developers, and cops in Lincoln and around the world—but we digress).

To be fair, these student-activist may have been under the delusion that anything was actually accomplished by those climate “strikes,” where no one skipped anything without written permission and wrote their so-called leaders for permission to add their public comment to the dustbin (an antithetical waste of paper for those supposedly concerned about the climate). It is these modern “revolutionaries” who now demand we stand around and faint from dehydration while they tell us about all the big meetings with big people that they have on their calendars “thanks to you,” their supporters. And though they tell us how much they care about us and the movement, they are slow to use their positions of power to, for example, call on someone to go buy more water. But we expect nothing less. Despite their

professed concern with the climate, these good citizens of social media have built little of note to help those presently dying in 110° humidity and -50° windchill.

Sooner or later, the professional activists among us will have to realize that the dooms of climate, police, and now sexual violence—about which they so vociferously prophesied through their PA systems—were more than matters of policy to be settled with political campaigns and vote tallies. There will be no running from this knowledge once the power grid fails (again and worse than last winter) and the Ogallala Aquifer finally dries to dust.

So, what is it that we students think we're doing? There is no and never was any "accountability;" our "voices" were never heard as anything more than the impotent yapping of bourgeois lapdogs.

Once again, the Situationists already revealed that "all these struggles take place over the head of the student, in the heavenly realm of his masters. His own life is totally out of his control—life itself is totally beyond him," which is why we presently order our Grubhub and say nothing in our own defense. Because what is there to live for in this world? Our careers in a terminal economy? Our elders' ossified approval? Our budding substance abuse problems? And as we ponder these eternal conundrums, we leave no room in our well-educated brains to think of the workers who folded our Chipotle burritos at risk of their lives in this endless pandemic. We have no concept at all of the suffering we have in common with every restaurant and retail worker, every worker, every unemployed and houseless person, in every city, in every

country—because we are "moving on up," we are "getting out of this garbage-dump town," and meanwhile the chancellor shits in our faces and calls it a diploma.

To the student activists and the broader Lincoln "left," we pose this question: How have COVID-19, the George Floyd Rebellion, and now a rape on our campus passed us by as nothing more than a little hiccup in consumer culture, a little fuel for our performances of wokeness? How did the activists among us, who said all the right things and held all the right kinds of space, spend this entire year of upheaval building nothing in common with the communities most at risk from the capitalist diseases of poverty, rape, murder, and—well—literal disease?

Have we misunderstood our task? Have we closed our ears to what is demanded of us by the dead? Let us listen to their words now.

The late philosopher Walter Benjamin writes in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that:

Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.

Every so-called leftist in Lincoln has utterly failed to "seize hold of [the] memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger." What flashed up was the memory of "rebel-slaves" during "the