

H-PAD Update

Occasional Newsletter #5, August 15, 2020



The Crisis and the Resistance Continue

On June 4, the Steering Committee of H-PAD issued “A Statement of the Historians for Peace and Democracy (H-PAD) on the Current Struggle” ([here](#)) calling for historians, and historically-minded intellectuals and activists to respond to the current crisis of racist repression, the Covid-19 pandemic, the destructive directions of the Trump regime. In this newsletter, we focus on the experiences, activities, and thinking of who are engaging this crisis.

Perspectives from Historians on the Reopening of Schools and Colleges

In the wake of a discussion of the Executive Committee (EC) of H-PAD, two EC members – **Marc Becker**, Truman State University, Missouri, and **Margaret Power**, Illinois Institute of Technology, volunteered to write brief statements to catalyze discussion, on the reopening of their universities schools this fall based on their experiences. In addition, we are including a portion of a Twitter and *Daily Kos* piece by H-PAD activist and Professor of History and Education, Hofstra, **Alan Singer** on reopening of K-12. The first and third pieces are excerpts, with a link at the end of each to the full article. Finally, we are publishing a related cartoon from long-time Historians Against the War and H-PAD supporter, historian **Joshua Brown**.



Marc Becker on Covid, Reopening, and Neoliberalism

On June 18, the provost at Truman State University sent a message to department chairs ordering that “Faculty are expected to physically be on campus this fall for the majority of their teaching, advising, research, service, office hours, etc.” That mandate caused an outcry among the faculty who rightfully believed that the administration was putting the interests of the institution above the lives and safety of the students, staff, and faculty. The administration feared that as a residential school if they did not force students on campus they would lose an important revenue stream. . . .

This is only one of many examples, as we are all aware, of how the Covid pandemic has exacerbated the neoliberal turn in education that harms all of us. Public appropriations for higher ed have plummeted to the point where some institutions can no longer hardly be called “state” institutions. . . . Meanwhile, the legislature and Republican Governor

Mike Parson engage in cut after draconian cut to the education budget even as they engaged in tax giveaways to corporations . . . that has resulted in an unprecedented upward redistribution of wealth. . . .

What we need is democratic control over our lives and our economies, not in the sense of electing Democrats whose policies, frankly, are hardly any better than their counterparts on the right side of the ally, but in terms of organizing so that policy decisions reflect the interests of the public at large. [*For the whole article, go [here](#)*]

Margaret Power on Necessary Tactical Alliances

The higher education system in the United States is in crisis. Neoliberalism, the current phase of capitalism, has led to privatization, the decrease and/or cutting of state funds, with the resulting skyrocketing costs of education and student debt. The pandemic has both exposed and intensified the weaknesses of the public as well as the private higher education systems.

Yes, university administrations are encouraging or forcing faculty to teach in person because they know that students and parents want to have in-class instruction and relationships with their teachers and other students that online classes simply do not deliver. This policy wrongly increases teachers, students, and staff's likelihood of contracting and spreading Covid 19. It must and has been resisted. But if faculty pose the conflict as being between themselves and the administration, I think we are missing the bigger picture. Certainly, given the current economic realities, university administrations are between a rock and a hard place. If students don't return to the campus, sign up for classes, live in dorms, and eat in the cafeteria, where will the money needed to sustain the university come from? Nowhere! It is highly possible that a number of universities and colleges will simply go under. That is why I think that posing the conflict as one between faculty and the administration is short sighted and will ultimately prove futile.

Instead, we need to work together with the administration, however challenging, even far-fetched that may seem to demand that the state, both local and national, fund higher education in the United States. We need to develop a clear statement that explains why a good higher education system is vital to this country, as is an educated population. We need to blame those who are not only responsible for the current debacle but have the power to change and improve it: our local and national governments.

Alan Singer on What Donald Doesn't Know

. . . Recently, Trump took time from his busy Presidential schedule to threaten to withhold federal funds from school districts that do not fully open this fall with face-to-face classes, whatever the health risk to students and staff. When asked whether he had qualms about Barron or his school-age grandchildren returning to class, he claimed "I am comfortable with that."

The White House also pressured the [Centers for Disease Control](#) to release a new statement on school reopening this fall written by a Trump compliant special working group in the Department of Health and Human Services. C.D.C. public health experts were permitted no direct communication with the working group, probably because a C.D.C. internal document labeled a full reopening of schools "highest risk"

An argument for reopening schools is that the overall infection rate for school age children remains low, about 2% of the cases in the United States, largely because schools closed in March. But in states experiencing [COVID-19 spikes](#), infection rates for children are much higher. In California and Mississippi, it is close to 10% of all diagnosed cases. In Florida, about one-third of all tested children are infected with the Coronavirus. . . .

What the Donald probably does not know or does not want to tell the American people is that because of the COVID-19, St. Andrew's is deciding whether it will continue to hold all classes online this fall as it did in the spring or adopt a hybrid model permitting limited in-person attendance. [Note: On August 6 it [decided](#): St. Andrews will open in the fall in distance learning mode] . . . Apparently, the risk of COVID-19 infection is too great for Presidential children and their families, but not for ordinary Americans.

[For the unedited article, "Does Donald Know Where Barron Goes to School?" (July 27, 2020, go [here](#) or [here](#)].

Faculty Network for Student Voting Rights Continues to Develop

FacNet emerged by stages starting at the end of March 2020, with the objective of gathering active faculty support for the right of college students to vote. Margaret Power (Illinois Institute of Technology) and Van Gosse (Franklin & Marshall College) conceived of the organization. After conference calls and brainstorming, a 10-person Steering Committee (SC) of faculty members and consultants has met weekly beginning May 19. Members of the SC include Sally Guttmacher, a teacher of public health (such a relevant issue!), Kathryn Quintin, a staffer for the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, and Mark Sanders, a philosophy faculty member.

By June 17, the FacNet website had been launched: faculty memberships and pledges rolled in, now totaling nearly 200 members in about half of the states. By July 8, Sabrina Medler, the newly hired staff intern, was at work in preparing biweekly newsletters and monitoring outreach to academic and voter-rights organizations. (The latest FacNet newsletter is [here](#).)

For myself, though retired, it's a chance to provide service and connect with colleagues. My FacNet colleagues at Pitt have contacted individuals in nearly 40 departments, receiving many commitments to put blurbs on course syllabi linking to the campus voting project, 'Pittvotes.' Voting information is to be central in fall orientations, and class visits of speakers are being scheduled.

FacNet needs to grow more (recruit your colleagues!), but it instantly became a significant player on the national scene for student voting rights. Its members are faculty from varied disciplines, colleges and universities. It has ties to major voting rights organizations, scholarly and academic organizations, student groups, state and county election offices, and college voting-rights offices.

This is an exciting venture, led by dedicated academics and activists. It builds to a peak with the national election on November 3. Whatever the results, voter rights will remain an issue, so that FacNet will snap back into action in years to come.

Patrick Manning, University of Pittsburgh

Some Recommended Videos

Webinar: "What Every Global Citizen Needs to Know About the Decision to A-Bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki." H-PAD publicized this discussion, originally broadcast online on July 25, to our members and supporters. For those who were unable to watch the original, it is now available in video. Four historians --**Gar Alperovitz, Martin Sherwin, Kai Bird, and Peter Kuznick** (a H-PAD activist)—discussed the current state of knowledge and political importance of the bombings. Poet **Carolyn Forché** moderated. Find the video [here](#).

Scholars for Social Justice Think and Action Tank on Racial Capitalism. SSJ, along with about sixty-five other left organizations that make up The Majority organized a two-day event—a think and action tank—on both general and practical issues concerning the increasingly important concept of racial capitalism. About twenty-five representatives of various activist organizations attended, including SSJ members Robin Kelley, Leith Mullings, Premilla Nadasen and Barbara Ransby. Two brief videos that were produced from those meetings are remarkable in the ways that they address and integrate theoretical and



historical questions on the one hand, and strategic and tactical questions on the other. The videos can be accessed [here](#).

Protest & Repression in Portland: A Historian's Experience



Statement by Maureen Healy, July 22, 2020
For Immediate Release

Since June, I have been attending peaceful protests in Portland neighborhoods in support of Black Lives Matter. I have gone with family and friends.

I am a 52-year-old mother. I am a history professor.

I went downtown yesterday to express my opinion as a citizen of the United States, and as a resident of Portland. Of Oregon. This is my home. I was protesting peacefully. So why did federal troops shoot me in the head Monday night?

I was in a large crowd of ordinary folks. Adults, teens, students. Moms and dads. It looked to me like a cross-section of the City. Black Lives Matter voices led the crowd on a peaceful march from the Justice Center past the murals at the Apple store. The marchers were singing songs. We were chanting. We were saying names of Black people that have been killed by police. We observed a moment of silence in front of the George Floyd mural.

I wanted to, and will continue to, exercise my First Amendment right to speak. Federal troops have been sent to my city to extinguish these peaceful protests. I was not damaging federal property. I was in a crowd with at least a thousand other ordinary people. I was standing in a public space.

In addition to being a Portland resident, I am also a historian. My field is Modern European History, with specialization in the history of Germany and Eastern Europe. I teach my students about the rise of fascism in Europe.

By professional training and long years of teaching, I am knowledgeable about the historical slide by which seemingly vibrant democracies succumbed to authoritarian rule. Militarized federal troops are shooting indiscriminately into crowds of ordinary people in our country. We are on that slide.

It dawned on me when I was in the ER, and had a chance to catch my breath (post tear gas): my government did this to me. **My own government.** I was not shot by a random person in the street. A federal law enforcement officer pulled a trigger that sent an impact munition into my head.

After being hit I was assisted greatly by several volunteer medics. At least one of them was with Rosehip Medic Collective. To take shelter from the teargas I was hustled into a nearby van. Inside they bandaged my head and drove me several blocks away. From there my family took me to the ER. I am grateful for the assistance, skill, and incredibly kind care of these volunteer medics.

We must take this back to Black Lives Matter. Police brutality against Black people is the real subject of these peaceful protests that have been happening in my city and across the country. What happened to me is nothing. It is nothing compared to what happens to Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement, mostly local police, every day. And that is why we have been marching. That is why I will continue to march.

Join H-PAD, Engage the Current Crisis!

Join us in our ongoing activities—see our newsletters and website for details. Launch your own project to fight the crisis. Contact us with your questions and with information on your involvements.

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H-PAD Website, <https://www.historiansforpeace.org/> Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/historiansforpeace/>