UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE STUDENT STATEMENT OF UNIVERSITY DEMANDS
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Abolition Geographies Collective
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The state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police, of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, among innumerable and unnamed others whose lives were taken by white supremacist violence, have sparked an international, popular rebellion against racism and systemic police brutality. Angela Davis has said in reference to these uprisings: "What we are seeing now are demands. Demands to demilitarize the police; demands to defund the police; demands to dismantle the police and envision different modes of public safety. We're asked now to consider how we might imagine justice in the future." As graduate students and workers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a land-grab university, we feel it is urgent and necessary to speak to the complicity of the university in anti-Black racism and the colonial theft and expropriation of Indigenous land. We demand an end to this complicity. We demand that the university take concrete steps toward defunding and disarming the UW–Madison Police Department (UWPD), redistributing these funds to community development, education, health and housing, reinvesting in reparations to Black and Indigeneous students and communities, and more.

We, the Abolition Geographies Collective, are a group of graduate workers in the Geography Department of the University of Wisconsin - Madison. The contemporary call for UW-Madison to divest from the UWPD is part of an existing and long-term struggle grounded in the work and ongoing commitment by police and prison Abolitionists. Here we acknowledge the work and knowledge of countless scholar-activists, that help us ground our perspective and understanding of this moment of struggle, including and not limited to Angela Davis, Barbara Ransby, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Robin D.G. Kelley, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Mike Davis. We strongly encourage all to read their work and learn from their praxis. Furthermore, we strive to meet the immense challenges in line with the organizing that is already occurring around and beside us, by The Movement For Black Lives (M4BL), which has been on the ground building and working as a coalition with countless organizations such as: Black Lives Matter, the Black Youth Project 100, Million Hoodies, Black Alliance for Just

Immigration, Dream Defenders, the Organization for Black Struggle, and Southerners on New Ground (SONG) to demand policies for [Black Power, Freedom, and Justice](). We are emboldened, encouraged, and continue to learn from this reality of crisis and the movement, a movement for abolishing the use of prisons, policing, surveillance, and criminalization as solutions to crises of racial capitalism.[1] Drawing from the work of these scholars and organizations, we reject the state as the "primary protector" of our communities. Within our immediate community of Wisconsin, we look to engage, support, and uplift the work that is already being done by Freedom Inc, Urban Triage Inc, Urban Underground of Milwaukee, The Milwaukee Freedom Fund, and Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (Milwaukee).

While various administrators of the UW-Madison as well as the [Chief of UWPD]() have released statements condemning the racist murder of George Floyd, their claims to effect institutional change remain inadequate. Expressions of grief or solidarity are effectively void without action taken towards police and prison abolition. As Dean Wilcots stated in his most recent statement to the UW-Madison community, "let us not fall into thinking that systemic racism and injustice are problems too large and too pervasive for us to solve. Let us not fall into thinking that finding solutions is someone else's responsibility. This is not work that can or should be only borne by a few." Accordingly, it is imperative UW-Madison address its own responsibility to work against the state and its sanctioned violences against people of color, of which the institution is presently guilty of upholding.

[Policing is rooted in anti-Black racism, slavery, lynchings, and "protecting and serving" a system of racial dominance and exploitation.]() In Madison, and in Wisconsin, we remember and honor Tony Robinson, Derek Williams, Dontre Hamilton, and Sylville Smith, all victims of police murder. These shootings are part of a long history as Madison and Wisconsin have grappled with white supremacy, as Nick Lally, Elsa Noterman, and Keith Woodward have written. North and South Madison, where most communities of color are located, have been subject to surveillance, neglect, and the worst effects of urban renewal. In the 1920s the Madison Police Department would give UW student members of the KKK the green light to terrorize the Greenbush neighborhood, where many of the city's minoritized communities lived. In the midcentury this same area was completely redone through eminent domain, leaving minority owned businesses and homes razed to the ground. North and South Madison continue to be heavily patrolled by police, while residents endure unchecked eviction and landlord neglect. Given in brief, this history, of which policing is a part, helps

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[1] Loyd, "Abolitionist Perspectives on No Borders," 92.

explain why Madison, despite its progressive pretensions, is home to some of the most stark racial disparities in the nation.

The United States is [one of the few places in the world](#) where armed police forces are a normalized presence on college campuses. "Policing the campus" became increasingly common during the 1960s and 1970s as campus police presence expanded in scope and function in order to control student protests and movements. During this period, campus police became full-service professional law enforcement agencies. It was only during the 1980s and 1990s that campus police increasingly developed ties to municipal police departments and became autonomous from universities. The UWPD is currently [the third largest police force in Dane County](#); UW-Madison spent [$12.8 million on the police in 2018-2019](#),[2] which is [5x more than the national average](#) for University police; recently the UWPD received [$4.2 million to fund the expansion and remodeling of the UWPD station](#). Currently, policy allows for police officers to use Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray (commonly referred to as pepper spray) as a non-lethal Use of Force ([see UWPD policy 1.3.4.1.B](#)). Choke holds and neck restraints are currently allowed for sworn officers of UWPD if "[the officer is justified in using deadly force and no other alternative is available, likely to be effective, or tactically optimal](#)." The UWPD has [consistently touted](#) its progressive reforms and trainings and alignment with Campaign Zero.

Yet, it is clear that their reformist model is woefully insufficient. The elimination of the use of these "nonlethal" weapons and disarmament, while important for immediate harm reduction, is also not enough. In 2019, [39% of UWPD use of force was weaponless](#). The police often use their own bodies, vehicles, and the concrete as weapons as we've seen time and again with the murders of George Floyd, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and others. Accordingly, the only real way to remove the threat of police violence and brutality is to get them off of our campus and out of our streets.

At UW-Madison, there have been previous attempts by students to address racist and discriminatory policing by the UWPD and [the militarization of the UWPD](#) in line with the Black Lives Matter policy platform. In 2017, when the Associated Students of Madison (ASM) voted unanimously to approve a resolution for the UW Police Department to create a community accountability board to review policies that discriminate against people of color, the UWPD rejected these student-led efforts of reform. Instead, the UWPD issued a statement, which victimized itself by expressing disappointment with this resolution and emphasizing that the UWPD prides itself on [its "open door policy" and "willingness to listen to feedback and make change."](#) Some of

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[2]2018-2019 Budget in Brief, p. 10

this transparency has included [publicly listing the weapons that the UWPD uses](#) and informing the student body [if the UWPD uses university funds to purchase military equipment in the future](#). We stand steadfast when we say that transparency by the police to address systemic racism–whether in the form of [body cameras](#), [disclosures about its weapons arsenal](#) or [police dialogue with communities of color](#)–does not work to end police brutality. We anticipate that the university will respond to these uprisings with a series of proposed reforms; however, drawing from the insights of abolitionists, we know that reform only expands, normalizes, and further entrenches the police.

We recognize that there was never a time in which the production of knowledge and the university were ever outside of processes of policing, incarceration, war-making, colonization and genocide in the name of 'progress'. To address the issue of police on our campus and explicit military ties is just one step in the process of abolition. It is also necessary for the university to accept its culpability in these interconnected processes. This means reparations to both Black and Indigenous communities and divestment from corporations that profit from carceral and colonial violence domestically and internationally. The university has circulated statements denouncing racist police violence and recognizing that ["words are not enough;"](#) if the administration wants these statements to move beyond shallow gestures, they must materially divest from carceral violence. In 2017, the ASM approved a divestment proposal [calling for UW-Madison's divestment from private prisons, fossil fuel corporations, border walls and arms manufacturers,](#) yet the resolution was [ultimately rejected and denounced by the campus administration](#). How can the university say "together…we can move toward a more just future," when the administration has crushed student dissent by continuing to invest in private prisons and border walls?

We need to imagine alternatives to the police on university campuses, and work towards different practices of public safety. We demand that the University of Wisconsin-Madison divest from the UWPD police and invest in public community modes of accountability and safety. To be clear, these calls for divestment coexist with a refusal to accept simply replacing the police with another armed security force. The university must change the system at its core and not simply exchange the current mode of policing the campus, one that currently depends on federal funding and student tuition dollars, with a privatized police force that directly profits from white supremacy and systemic police brutality.

In the context of COVID-19 austerity measures and budget cuts, we demand that the university defund the campus police and commit to restorative and reparative practices. Police abolition is ["a gradual process of strategically reallocating resources, funding, and](#)

responsibility away from police and toward community-based models of safety, support, and prevention." Fulfillment of these demands as well those from black-led organizations, other departments' graduate students, and social justice organizations across campus ensure the body of University of Wisconsin-Madison actively works to confront the root of harm and to end the punishment of harm itself. Our demands are as follows:

DIVEST

1. We demand that UW-Madison abolish the UWPD. This involves the defunding and divestment from the UW Police Department and investment of these funds from policing toward racial and gender justice teaching, research, and community initiatives as well as increased material support for Black faculty, staff, students, and workers on campus. The plan for the redirection of both immediate and ongoing resources should be developed by faculty experts in the field of Black and Ethnic Studies on campus as well as student, staff, worker, and community stakeholders.

2. We demand an inquiry into and divestment from all educational programs and partnerships with ties to the police and military. Specifically, we demand that the UW end any collaboration with the Madison Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Future Law Enforcement Youth Academy, and the Department of Homeland Security.

3. We demand that the UW-Madison address and halt investments in companies that profit from the violation of human rights in the United States and internationally—including those with ties to the state of Israel, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and private prisons—as well as advocating for UW-Madison faculty and students whose work challenges these brutalizing and genodical systems.

INVEST & REINVEST

1. We demand the financial support of Black students, faculty, and staff through direct funding, student organization funding, and funding for departments geared toward the support of Black communities.

2. We demand the university to recognize the singular importance of Black and Ethnic Studies, not only in its work towards racial justice, but also in reimagining the university

itself. This includes the financial compensation of Black employees with tenure considerations for their unrecognized labor in mentoring, counseling, and engaging with students, in addition to their participation in multiple diversity efforts and committees.

3. We demand that non-Black staff, faculty, and administration take responsibility to proactively engage in anti-racist initiatives backed by self and institutionally led education to shift labor off of Black individuals.

4. We demand the creation of a policy that protects students that protest in the course of community-based activism on campus and disavows forms of intimidation including but not limited to, police brutality, threats of expulsion or suspension by the university.

5. We demand the formation of a committee to investigate avenues for reparations and demand that the university make sustained reparations to both Black and Indigenous communities, including but not limited to Freedom, Inc. and Urban Triage.

6. When university hires are being considered, one's record with racial justice and injustices must be a major consideration. When Jim Johnson was put forward as the only candidate for the UW-System President, it was revealed that he had received multiple no confidence votes from faculty at different branch campuses and students in no small part because his graduation rates for black students were below 15%. While we recognize this position is filled by the Regents, we expect that any worker of the UW system (administrator, faculty, graduates, staff) should be subject to scrutiny of their history of racial justice and injustices. And when said expectation does not occur, we demand that allies stand in solidarity to not let racist leaders dictate our institution.

7. We demand a campus-wide centralized approach to addressing these systemic issues, identifying the decentralized campus as negligent and oppressive. This very structure in 2018, was identified as a barrier to addressing sexual misconduct on campus, "We have a huge and very decentralized campus. As I've noted before, this university – students, staff and faculty – is about the size of Janesville. Because of this size, it is inevitable that some bad things will happen here, despite all of our efforts." Current efforts are inadequate. "Bad things," such as anti-black racism, racial violence, and gendered-violence are not inevitable. They are products of the current institutional structures of the university. By not changing these structures, UW-Madison is complicit and responsible for these violences. The decentralized campus is dangerous and limits the opportunities for groups–administration, employees, faculty, staff, and students–across campus to build coalitions and operationalize real institutional change.

We condemn the university's complicity in a system that uses policing, surveillance, and imprisonment as solutions to economic and social problems.[3] If the university does not critically address its complicity within these systems and varying scales, we will continue to see anti-Black racism, gendered-violence, and racialized violence, across the university. We insist that action bucks rhetoric. Police are better funded and militarized by the year. Reverse this trend and put a halt to all violence, state-sanctioned or otherwise. It is time to construct a campus and community that eschews aggression, fear, violence, and inaction for care, compassion, creativity and community healing.

Signed,

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We invite all those in solidarity to sign through this link.

IN SOLIDARITY
(**updated: 9.02.2020**)

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[3] Burridge, "No Borders' as a Critical Politics," 466.

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