“Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.” — Edward W. Said
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Assembly refused to hear a resolution to divest from Israeli occupation that was sponsored by Cornell Students for Justice in Palestine. A coalition of students took over the next Student Assembly meeting, changing the agenda to allow marginalized student voices to finally be heard and acknowledged by the Assembly. After a show of overwhelming opposition by students, University Assembly Resolution 14, which would have accepted the cutting of first-year bus passes, was rewritten to demand that the university increase TCAT funding. On May 1st — the international day of celebration of worker and immigrant rights — a huge procession of students marched and danced in the streets after engaging in a mock burial ceremony for the failed system of “shared governance” at Cornell, and proceeded to blockade the road outside Day Hall before delivering a letter to the President announcing a wide-ranging list of demands under threat of continued escalated action against the University.

Did you know: Cornell’s “property” was originally seized from the Cayuga Nation during a scorched earth campaign ordered by George Washington in 1779 (the goal of the campaign that Washington ordered was “the total destruction and devastation of their settlements, and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible”). Members of the Cayuga Nation (one of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, called the Iroquois by Europeans) are still looking to come back to their ancestral homelands. At Cornell, there is no formal acknowledgement of the colonial violence underlying the seizure of lands later granted to the university or of Cornell’s ongoing occupation of native territories.

Cornell has a problematic relationship to Ithaca too.

Cornell refuses to pay any more than $1.25 Million to the city of Ithaca (Mayor Svante Myrick has requested that the university pay $6 Million, which is 1/5 of what the actual tax bill would be for Cornell’s $2 Billion in tax-free, occupied, stolen lands). Meanwhile, Cornell brings an influx of temporary residents (students) who extract city services through the university while giving nothing back; pays Ithaca residents poverty wages to serve students drunk food at 1 am and clean their private mansions (aka frat houses), while these temporary residents drive up rents in the area and push the very same low-income Ithacans who clean up after their extravagant parties into the surrounding area.

Gooooooo Big Red!
Cornell heartily encourages the consolidation of patriarchal class power and homophobia through fraternity culture.

Social life at Cornell is largely organized through huge all-male clubs that each have their own fancy clubhouses and seem to be engaged in constant battle with each other that is publicly measured in part by which all-female clubs the men get to sleep with. The all-female clubs spend a lot of time evaluating their own self-worth through how attractive the men think they are and calculating how to ensure their future basic security and social recognition through dating and hooking up with the men.

Not everyone is actually in the clubs though! In fact, you could say that the clubs actively exclude many people. Every year there is at least one racist attack on people of color from fraternity members that becomes public and temporarily embarrassing for the fraternity in question, and several women report being date-raped, drugged and otherwise sexually assaulted at frat parties. (Most people don’t report instances of sexual assault because of the horrifying climate of victim-blaming that rape survivors have to face in addition to the psychological and physical trauma of rape itself.) However, President Skorton and frat brothers report that fraternities are not inherently racist, sexist or classist! They’re just a fun way of consolidating class power by getting drunk together, doing stuff to women without asking, ritualistically punishing one another, and harassing people who just happen to be on the other side of systemic social oppressions.

Don’t pledge frats! They’re fucked up and boring. Attack frats is on the rise!

It’s unrealistic to expect Cornell to reform itself.

Cornell isn’t a bad apple amongst other universities; it’s completely indicative of broader patterns in American education, government and economic institutions. It’s important to recognize that Cornell administrators really aren’t here for our interests, that student government isn’t in a position to actually represent students, that Cornell’s historical and ongoing purpose to educate some of the American population has always and can only proceed through the subjugation and immiseration of others.

Last semester, after an onslaught of incidents and relatively transparent attempts to consolidate administrative power at the expense of students (tuition was raised by $1,920, the administration announced discontinuation of free student bus passes, two women were raped at fraternities in one week, Haven’s [The LGBT Student Union] vice president who challenged its assimilationist agenda was ousted by university administrators, the ALANA intercultural board’s funding was cut by nearly $25,000), student resistance exploded in April when representatives on the Student
the victim, as in a friend or an acquaintance. This can happen at a party, in one’s own apartment, on campus, at the workplace, or almost literally anywhere. It is not always obvious, and it is not always possible to fight back.

In the way that universities have been handling cases of sexual violence in recent years, they have generally made a few points exceptionally clear:

1. They do not actually prioritize the experiences and recoveries of the survivors of sexual violence.

2. They are not seriously invested in actually punishing the perpetrators of sexual violence on their campuses.

3. They are even less interested in actually combatting the cultural problems at the root of the issue (which is, in fact, largely a combination of the first two points).

Creating a community in which survivors feel empowered to share their stories and fully heal and be accepted is a critical component in developing a community that resists perpetuating rape culture. The University has attempted (or at least claimed) to address this component, but it is evident that our current campus climate still is not one that inspires comfort for those looking to deal openly with their experiences of sexual violence.

This, arguably, is due in many ways to the second point: how can survivors feel comfortable confronting their experience openly in a society in which rape seems to not really deserve punishment? According to analysis of Justice Department data, fewer than 95% of rapists ever actually face prosecution. Only about 1 in 4 reports of rape actually leads to an arrest, and only about 1 in 4 arrests actually leads to a conviction. At Cornell, the story is no different. The University is apparently just as concerned with its own prestige as it is with the actual emotional well-being of its students, and it will likely not be in a hurry to convict a young man of rape if he comes from a wealthy and well-respected family that has the potential to give plenty of monetary donations to the University in the future.

However, the solution is not necessarily just for more perpetrators of

3 // Cornell doesn’t care about racism.

Of all student concerns, though, the Administration especially ignores the concerns of students of color. One of the more recent events that made this evident was in the fall when the administration failed to condemn university athletics for a clearly racist Cinco de Mayo-themed advertising campaign that took place in October. Despite continued pressure from MEChA de Cornell and specific suggestions for how to take proactive measures to discuss and deter similar incidences of open racism in the future, the University instead simply canceled the campaign without discussion. While “bias incidents” and racist microaggressions are a feature of daily life for students of color on Cornell’s campus, the administration treats the symptoms of this problem instead of actually intervening to change students’ or their own internalized oppressive worldviews.

4 // But that’s not all! Cornell is also enthusiastically collaborating with genocide and colonial occupation in Israel!

Since 2011, Cornell has been in the process of creating a massive applied sciences and technology campus on Roosevelt Island in collaboration with Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, a fun school that works with the Israeli Army and Israel’s largest weapons producers to develop military and arms technology that is employed by the Israeli military to maintain its occupation of Palestine! This is the same occupation that killed 2,000 Palestinians this past summer and maintains the world’s largest open-air prison (Gaza) in violation of international law.

The Caterpillar D9 Bulldozer was developed at Technion in Israel and is used to demolish homes and other buildings in Palestinian territory in order to pave the way for Israeli settlements. The destruction of private property in occupied territory as well as the resulting forcible transfer of residents are both in violation of the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This unmanned bulldozer was also used in the carrying-out of
such atrocities as Operation Cast Lead (2009) and Operation Protective Edge (2014) in which offensives the Israeli military killed over 1,400 and 2,000 Palestinians, respectively.

Technion also has strong partnerships with Israeli military technology companies Elbit Systems and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. Rafael Defense Systems is owned by the Israeli government, is the country’s largest manufacturer of military technology, and has historically maintained close ties to Technion through research and project-based partnerships. Elbit Systems is responsible for the production of the electronic detection fence, which is a crucial component of the separation wall that Israel has established in the West Bank, and which was deemed illegal under international law by the International Court of Justice in 2004. Their technology is also widely used in implementing Israeli “security” operations that restrict Palestinian freedom of movement and exchange of goods through the use of checkpoints and other forms of border control.

In October 2011, Cornell police chief Kathy Zoner attended an “Experience Israel Training Tour” in Tel Aviv, through which she was given a behind-the-scenes look at Israel’s “security operations” and “counterterrorism initiatives”. Cornell funded Zoner’s trip to Israel, and she became the first police chief of a university to take the tour. Zoner describes the tour as being “very neat...with lots of hands-on experience,” and claims that what she learned will be applicable to her job of “keeping the campus free from external threats”. Upon returning to the US, Zoner presented her new knowledge to members of the Department of Homeland Security and instructed the Executive Committee of the Nation Sheriffs’ Association on “high quality security.”

10 // Sexual violence and rape culture at Cornell

“Rape culture” is a set of widely adopted cultural practices that normalize sexual violence and make it seem like a simply inevitable and even somewhat acceptable component of society, particularly when directed towards women. It arises from problematic societal attitudes about gender, sex, and sexuality, and is evidenced by such practices as blaming victims of sexual violence and trivializing the issue of rape.

President Skorton has acknowledged the problem of sexual violence on university campuses (although not explicitly rape culture at Cornell), and his response is that “each of us and all of us is responsible for the change we want to see.” This is an incredibly meaningless statement that fails to acknowledge any of the actual causes of prevalent sexual violence.

We need to consider where we are placing the burden for the prevention of sexual assault as well as what factors are really responsible for the prevalence of rape culture on campus. Rape culture is perpetuated by organizations that champion male dominance and heterosexual male power. That is, it is not perpetuated by women who want to go out looking sexy (it is, however, perpetuated by the people who reinforce the idea that looking sexy is an unspoken invitation). It is also perpetuated by people who hear about rape and simply laugh it off, primarily blame alcohol, treat sexual violence as though it is simply inevitable, and jokingly tell women not to get raped on their way home but don’t seriously tell men not to rape anyone at the party tonight. Contrary to one brilliantly written piece in last year’s Daily Sun, one does not need to be an actual rapist in order to be complicit in the perpetuation of rape culture.

When Cornell offers self-defense classes or improves its blue-light policies, it addresses the problem of sexual assault only as one that occurs in dark, scary places, when you are walking home alone in the middle of the night and a creepy hooded figure jumps out of the bushes to attack you. That is not the reality of rape and of the majority of sexual assault on this campus. 70% of sexual assault is committed by attackers who know
corporate interests are fundamentally antagonistic to the desires and well-being of its students and the world.

While Cornell has spent $200 million on carbon neutrality, it has refused to divest from fossil fuel corporations. Although three out of the four Assemblies in the so-called “Shared Governance” system passed a hard-won resolution for divestment from fossil fuels, the University has refused to take action on the resolution due to its entanglement with corporate fossil fuel interests.

Meanwhile, Cornell has branded itself as a “sustainable campus,” which is sexy, popular, the kind of thing that will encourage students to come to this university (read: attract people’s money). Cornell is contributing to a more sustainable future for its happy, green, already largely privileged students! What it is failing to acknowledge is the way in which the actions of fossil fuel companies already disproportionately affect low-income and minority populations, and the ways in which climate change is already beginning to have a global, irreversible impact that disproportionately affects impoverished nations and groups of people who have the least complicity in the actual anthropogenic causes of climate change.

At Cornell, you will be encouraged to fill up your water bottle from the water fountain, so as to save plastic (which is good - you should do that). However, you will probably not be encouraged to have a conversation about the way in which bottled water corporations have worked to exploit lower-GDP nations by privatizing and commoditizing their water resources. You probably won’t be asked to consider the fact that (largely low-income, black) residents of Detroit have spent this past summer unable to “take back” their taps, because their government already did it for them, by shutting off their tap water.
5 // Cornell is a degree factory that is actively antagonistic to student interests.

While Cornell’s students have many concerns beyond how much money Cornell is making — ranging from the destruction of the environment to the racism occurring on campus — the university tends to do nothing about these concerns except rhetorically, because it primarily exists for its own profit. This means that student and even faculty interests are frequently almost entirely at odds with those of the Cornell administration, as the University increasingly adopts the degree factory model of education that is becoming widespread in the U.S. For example, despite student and faculty resistance, administrators pressure graduate students to speed through their research before throwing them out onto a collapsing academic job market. Moreover, according to data from The Adjunct Project, Cornell pays some adjunct faculty as little as $6,300 per course. With a heavy teaching load, most adjuncts cannot dedicate meaningful amounts of time to publishing research and advancing their careers. They have no job security because they have no possibility of being tenured. And neither Cornell nor universities at large are committed to creating new tenure-track positions. Meanwhile, at Cornell in 2009, the top 16 executives made more than $20,000,000, including a $300,000 pension for former president Hunter Rawlings III.

The problem is not just with Cornell, but with higher education in general. The crisis of higher education is a crisis of capitalism. In a system marked by overproduction, growing debt, and stagnant capital, universities function by charging students a fortune to prepare them for jobs that largely won’t exist for them, while corporations continue to operate by exploiting a working (and largely non-university educated) class that is increasingly paid unlivable wages.

As we consider the real value of a present-day university education, it is important to point out that you are still much more likely to be employed if you hold a university degree than if you don’t. However, this is not necessarily cause to rejoice. In today’s economy, degree-holders are increasingly being employed for jobs for which they are overqualified (and for which they seriously overpaid in college), thereby forcing those without cut the number of employees, and lose their medical benefits in order to deal with TCAT’s deficit. By failing to pay what it owes to TCAT, the University is expressing its open antagonism towards TCAT bus drivers and their livelihoods.

8 // Cornell, Counterinsurgency, Internet Privacy

Remember that Facebook “emotional contagion” study that manipulated thousands of people’s Newsfeeds and involved them in a study in which they didn’t consent to participating? That was a Cornell study. In addition to failing to meet Cornell’s own IRB requirements for ethical research, this study is part of a broader Pentagon-funded program called the “Minerva Research Initiative.” According to the Guardian, the Cornell study, which is happening from 2014-2017, “will determine ‘the critical mass (tipping point)’ of social contagions by studying their ‘digital traces’ in the cases of ‘the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the 2011 Russian Duma elections, the 2012 Nigerian fuel subsidy crisis and the 2013 Gezi park protests in Turkey.’” Cornell has been involved in counterinsurgency research at least since the Vietnam War. As we have recently seen with the protests following the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, counterinsurgency tactics, formed as a result of research like this study, are used in domestic unrest as well as unjust wars abroad.

9 // Championing “sustainability” over environmental justice

If you’ve chosen Cornell, there’s a decent chance that you’ve heard about its reputation as a champion of “sustainability.” Indeed, Cornell has gotten a lot of credit for its Climate Action Plan, which includes a proposal to have the university become carbon neutral by the year 2035. This, of course, is not necessarily a bad thing, but when taken in light of Cornell’s other environmental decisions, it further indicates that the University’s
degrees into lower-paying, less desirable jobs.

Of course, there are the few who are trained and encouraged to work their way to positions of power and privilege, at the heads of multinational corporations for example. Cornell will encourage you to fight for one of these positions, to follow the money, and to not consider how you might be doing so at the expense of your fellow students (or non-students).

6 // “Shared Governance” . . . and Actual Governance

“Shared Governance” is the system of advisory bodies that supposedly “represent” students, workers, and faculty. The early iterations of these bodies were formed as a way to placate student demands for the restructuring of the University following the Willard Straight Takeover in 1969 and the occupation of Barton Hall by 10,000 students. In 1970, the year of the largest student strike in Cornell History, the Trustees decided to create the “University Senate,” which had mandatory representation for students, workers, and faculty. It is worth noting that no campus body has ever given real power to stakeholders from the local community.

Over the years, the Trustees gradually reformed away student, faculty, and worker power to the point where, today, they only give advisory votes with no binding power. Historically, these legislative bodies have not served as a way to powerfully amplify community demands to the Administration (the way a Union would) but as a way of mediating “conflicts” among the student body and with the University (the way a police negotiator would). At best, the Assemblies are a way that the Administration pacifies and de-mobilizes the community, trying to convince us that everything is fine and we are being heard. At worst, the Assemblies are a divide-and-conquer tactic, pitting students against students, or workers against students, in the hopes of keeping the heat off of the Trustees’ and the Administration.

There are four main legislative bodies that operate with a combination of...
elected, appointed, and volunteer positions.

**The Student Assembly (SA):** Because the Student Assembly has only symbolic power to advocate for student interests, there is an extremely low turnout for elections. The races are decided primarily by the candidate with the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful social network. Consequently, a disproportionate number of seats are won by members of Frats and Sororities.

**The Faculty Senate:** A recent report shows that Faculty Governance has been cut back significantly in the past decade, with the University demarcating an increasingly large territory of “non-academic” policy that disempowers the faculty. This prerogative to “non-academic” matters lets the trustees unilaterally decide how best to squeeze even more money out of students, faculty, and workers, without even making a pretense of consulting the people who these decisions affect. For example, the President disbanded the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning without consulting anyone in the college on the matter. Another time, the administration decided to pave the historic and beloved Redbud Woods to build a parking lot (as part of their project to spend lots of money on “upgrading” student housing into the unaffordable administration money-maker it is today). Massive student, faculty, worker, and community opposition sparked heated protests that lasted for months. But the administration secured a court order against the town of Ithaca’s attempt to stop them, then ordered police to torture students standing in the way of construction equipment until they moved. Administration has done everything from blatantly ignoring the Faculty Senate’s passage of a resolution demanding improved adjunct working conditions, to creating a for-profit online learning site where those with enough cash can buy a “career-advancing” “Ivy-league” certificate without asking faculty if they wanted to create such a program (they didn’t, but google “eCornell” and see the results). Consequently, Faculty Senate can now do nothing but form committees to carefully research and consider different potential approaches to problems before being ignored.

**The Employee Assembly:** While many workers at Cornell are Unionized, and many Graduate Students are pushing to even be recognized as “employees” entitled to rights to unionize, the Employee Assembly holds only token powers in terms of University policy.

**The University Assembly (UA):** The University Assembly is supposed to be a body that represents the constituencies of the other three Assemblies, but it doesn’t always act that way. Late last Spring, the UA voted down a resolution to divest from top fossil fuel companies that had been passed by significant majorities of both the SA and the Faculty Senate.

**Actual Governance:**

Cornell is governed by a group of 64 trustees. Of those 64, one is President Skorton, one is elected by employees, and two are elected by students (one undergrad and one grad student). The rest are current and former CEO’s of international corporations, corporate consultants, corporate lawyers, bankers and finance executives, venture capitalists, and politicians. Many of them are profiting off of student loan financing.

In 2010, Cornell took out $285 million in bonds from the New York State Dormitory Authority for new “capital projects.” Goldman Sachs underwrote the loan, profiting off of it. The Senior Director of Goldman Sachs, Robert J. Katz, was the Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the time. Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%. Remember this when they tell you they “have no money.”

When not using their position to protect their own personal interests, the Board and their hired Administration have the main function of protecting Cornell’s wealth and prestige through fundraising and spreading Cornell’s brand. This means that now that you are a student, your concerns will be taken less seriously than at any time in your life: before you apply, you are a prospective student and Cornell wants your demand to make it appear more selective; after you graduate, you will be a potential donor (unless you never pay back those student loans!).