



Mutual Aid

A tool of survival

A tool of revolution

Jeff Kisling

Mutual Aid



- Capitalism is unjust, failing and can't be repaired
- Chaotic times – environment, economic, political, social
- Mutual aid
 - Tool of survival
 - Tool of revolution



Problems with capitalism

- Early in our lifetimes, nearly full employment
- Nearly every household had income
- Commerce was based on capitalism
- Money was the only way to obtain goods and services



Problems with capitalism

- Increasing unemployment
 - Automation
 - Jobs moved overseas
 - Economic impact of COVID
- Millions no longer had income to pay for goods and services
- Increasing reliance on social safety nets
- Poverty



Problems with capitalism

As a society we failed to address the loss of wages for millions of people who no longer had money, in a system that requires money for everything—food, shelter, healthcare, etc.



Problems with capitalism

It is clear to me that capitalism is an unjust, untenable system, when there is plenty of food in the grocery stores, but men, women and children are going hungry, living on the streets outside the store.

Capitalism and colonialism

As people were forced into systems of wage labor and private property, and wealth became increasingly concentrated, our ways of caring for each other have become more and more tenuous.



Capitalism and colonialism

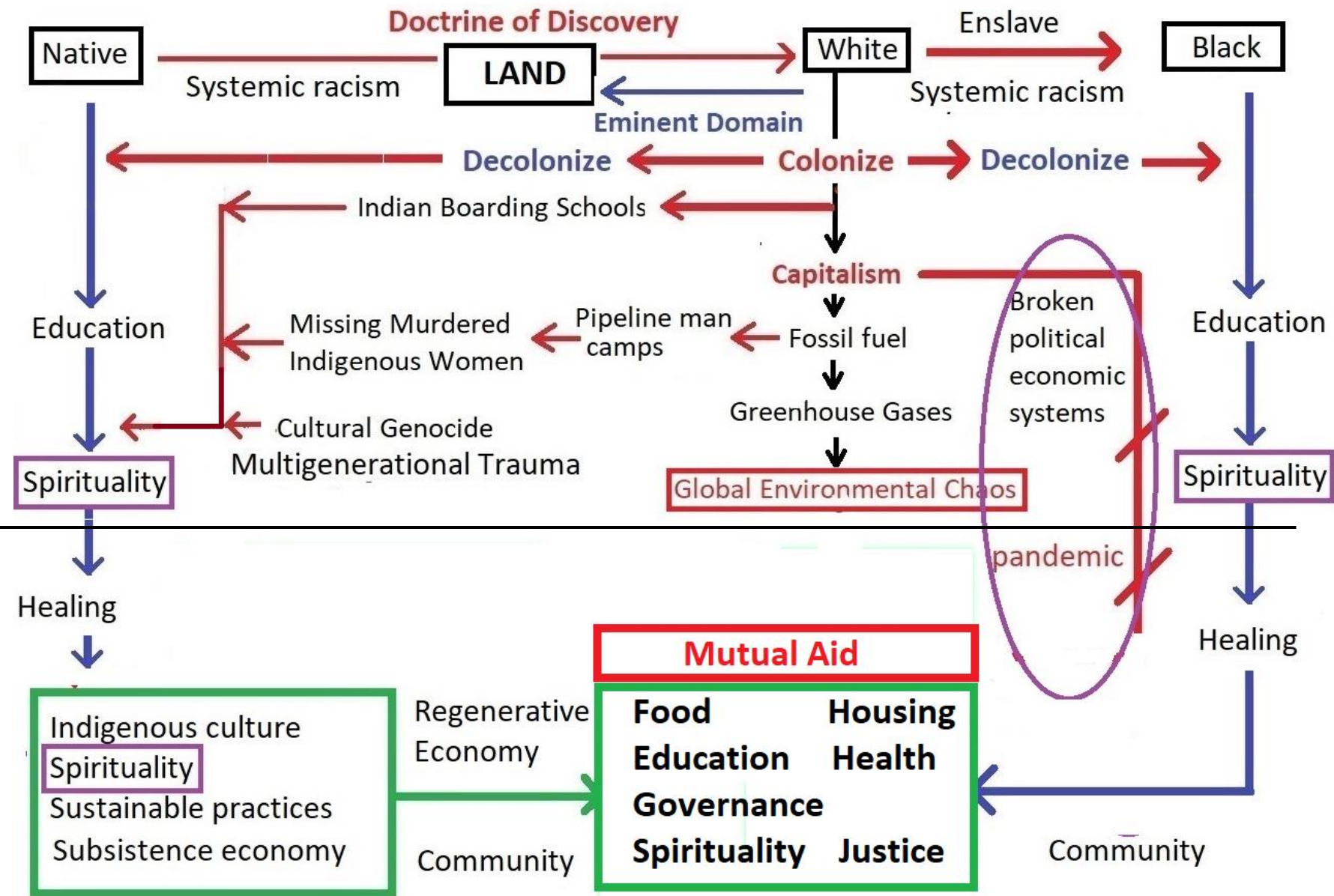
... capitalism and colonialism created structures that have disrupted how people have historically connected with each other and shared everything they needed to survive.



Colonial Capitalism



Colonial Capitalism



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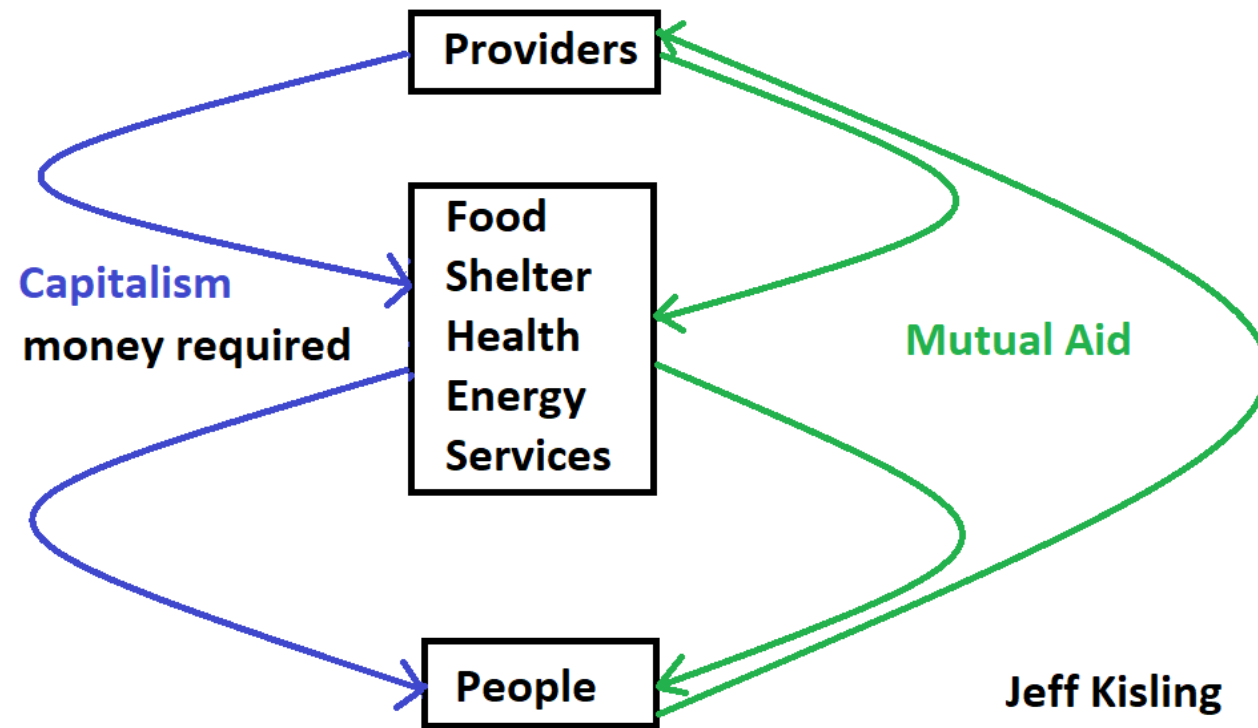


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Mutual Aid Instead of Capitalism



- In the name of liberation, capitalism must be reversed and dismantled
- Meaning that capitalistic practices must be reprogrammed with mutual aid practices.

Des Moines Black Lives Matter



How I learned about Mutual Aid

- Vigil for Wet'suwet'en
- Ronnie James attends
 - Indigenous organizer
 - Mentor – teaching me about Mutual Aid
 - Reference for much material here



Mutual Aid

A tool of survival

- Accelerating environmental catastrophe
- COVID pandemic
- Economic collapse
- Political collapse
- Dramatic increase in insecurities
 - Food
 - Water
 - Housing
 - Medical
 - Safety
- Spiritual poverty



3 Key Elements of Mutual Aid

1. Work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.
2. Mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements.
3. Participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)

Work locally

Rather than disengage and feel powerless, mutual aid allows us to plug in where we can make the most impact — locally.





What is Mutual Aid?

- Getting people together in your community to provide material support to each other
- Building relationships with your neighbors based on trust and common interest
- Making decisions by consensus rather than relying on authority or hierarchy



What is Mutual Aid?

- Sharing things rather than hoarding things
- Treating no one as disposable
- Providing all kinds of support, ranging from food prep to childcare to translation to emotional support, and recognizing the value of all of them

Mutual Aid 101 #WeGotOurBlock

Mutual Aid is not...

- Quid pro quo transactions
- Only for disasters or crises
- Charity or a way to “save” people
- A reason for a social safety net not to exist



A tool of
revolution





Mutual aid is inherently anti-authoritarian

- Demonstrating how we can do things together in ways we were told not to imagine
- We can organize human activity without coercion
- Most people have never been to a meeting where there was not a boss or authority figure with decision-making power.
- Most people work or go to school inside **hierarchies** where disobedience leads to punishment or exclusion.

“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival” by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020



Mutual aid is inherently anti- authoritarian

- We bring our learned practices of **hierarchy** with us even when no paycheck or punishment enforces our participation, so even in volunteer groups we often find ourselves in conflicts stemming from learned dominance behaviors.
- But collective spaces, like mutual aid organizing, can give us opportunities to unlearn conditioning and build new skills and capacities.

“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival” by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020

Des Moines Mutual Aid



- Food giveaway
- Houseless
- Bail Fund

Des Moines Mutual Aid



DM Mutual Aid

<https://www.facebook.com/Des-Moines-Mutual-Aid-108955753983592/>

DM Rent Relief

<https://www.facebook.com/DSMBLMRentRelief/>

DM Bail Fund

<https://www.facebook.com/dsmbailfund>



My experience with food giveaway

- Mutual aid – we are all encouraged to take food ourselves
- Dated food and donated vegetables
- No hierarchy
- Diversity
- Joyful work
- Empathize with those picking up food
- COVID practices
- Conversations



My experience with food
giveaway yesterday

- Snow
- Outside tables of food in the snow
- Few people to take food
- Adapted
- Snow ball fight



what is mutual
aid?

collective way
of taking care
of community

Providing mutual aid for people facing deportation

- The AFSC Iowa Immigrant Rights program recently partnered with five other organizations to host a successful supply drive for people facing deportation.
- The Iowa Immigrant Community Fund, partly administered by AFSC, has received a \$750,000 **donation** to support immigrant meatpackers and farmworkers.

AFSC: How to create a mutual aid network

No matter who wins the 2020 U.S. election, we will need mutual aid for our shared well-being.

The multiple challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, and continuing white supremacist and state violence in 2020 have been catalysts for communities to come together to help each other when the government can't or won't.

When systems fail to protect our **survival**, many respond by working together to keep their communities safe and healthy through **mutual aid**.



AFSC: How to create a mutual aid network

At this moment of

- global pandemic
- racist violence
- economic strife

it is evident that structures in our society leading to inequality and systemic oppression create chaos and harm everyone.



AFSC: How to create a mutual aid network

Creating new structures of collective care can help us through this period, and engaging in **mutual aid** is a way for us to build new social relationships that recognize the importance of our solidarity.





AFSC-AZ's ReFraming Justice Mutual Aid Campaign

<https://afscarizona.org/2020/05/22/faqs-afsc-azs-reframing-justice-mutual-aid-campaign/>

Mutual aid is a way for families of incarcerated people and others who care to take concrete action to solve a problem. In the process, we demonstrate our values:

We belong to each other. We take care of each other. No matter who, no matter what.

What the RFJ Mutual Aid Project Provides for Incarcerated Loved Ones:

- Paper towels
- Toilet paper
- Bar soap
- Feminine hygiene products



What we have is each other

As bleak as this is, there is a significant amount of resistance and hope to turn the tide we currently suffer under. We stand on the shoulders of giants that have been doing this work for centuries, and there are many lessons we can learn from.

The first, and possibly the most important, is that it was not always this way, which proves it does not have to stay this way.

What we have is each other. We can and need to take care of each other. We may have limited power on the political stage, a stage they built, but we have the power of numbers.

Ronnie James



Mutual Aid versus Capitalism

I'm of the firm opinion that a system that was built by stolen bodies on stolen land for the benefit of a few is a system that is not repairable. It is operating as designed, and small changes (which are the result of huge efforts) to lessen the blow on those it was not designed for are merely half measures that can't ever fully succeed.

Ronnie James



Mutual Aid versus Capitalism

So the question is now, where do we go from here? Do we continue to make incremental changes while the wealthy hoard more wealth and the climate crisis deepens, or do we do something drastic that has never been done before? Can we envision and create a world where a class war from above isn't a reality anymore?"

Ronnie James

Mutual Aid Over Capitalism

- mutual aid is the new economy
 - mutual aid is community
 - capitalism has violated the communities of marginalized folks
 - in the name of liberation, capitalism must be reversed and dismantled.
 - meaning that capitalistic practices must be reprogrammed with mutual aid practices.
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Des Moines Black Lives Matter





Build the world we want

By participating in groups in new ways and practicing new ways of being together, we are both building the world we want and becoming the kind of people who could live in such a world together.

“Mutual Aid is essential to our survival” by Dean Spade, Truthout, October 28, 2020



Envision that world our
ancestors want for us

We each have skills and resources we can utilize towards the abolition project. Some of us can use the halls of the system to make short term change there, others have skills that produce food, provide medical care, or care for our precious youth, some are skilled in the more confrontational tactics needed. Once we envision that world our ancestors want for us, finding our role is natural.

If we are to survive, and more importantly, thrive, we know what we will have to do.

All Power To The People

Ronnie James



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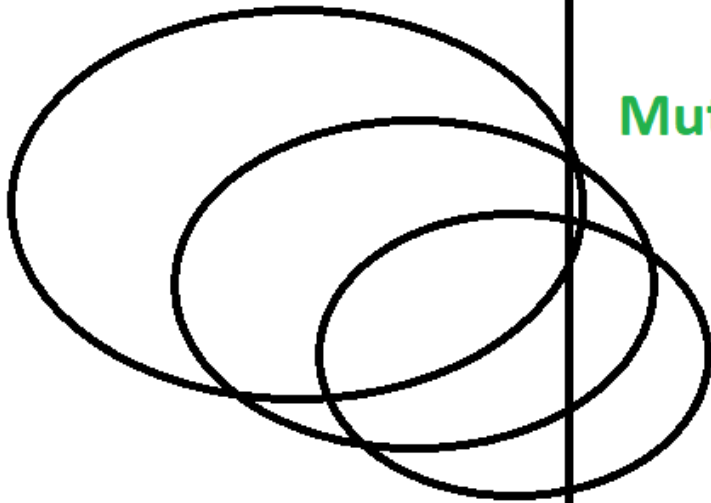
A tool of revolution

A radical act

In this context of social isolation and forced dependency on hostile systems, mutual aid— where we choose to help each other out, share things, and put time and resources into caring for the most vulnerable— **is a radical act.**

Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 119-120). Verso.

Capitalism
White supremacy



Mutual Aid

Jeff Kisling

*Mutual aid is not only a tool of survival,
but also a tool of revolution.*

*The more we take care of each other, the
less they can fracture a community with
their ways of war*

Ronnie James

Next steps



- What Mutual Aid groups are in your area?
- What relationships do you see between your peace and justice work, and the concept of Mutual Aid?
- What would your justice work look like if you adapted it to the Mutual Aid model?
- How might faith integrate with Mutual Aid?
- How could Mutual Aid expand who you do your justice work with?
 - Bring in more Friends
 - youth
 - other people in your wider community?
- How can we create ways of meeting our needs, making decisions, and organizing ourselves and solving problems outside of the State structure and the capitalist system?