Photo of the Day



UConn students study in the Auriemma Reading Room in Homer Babbidge Library in Storrs, Conn. on Feb. 18, 2026.. PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

BLM To ICE: Lessons in abolitionist organizing

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It is quite clear that America is currently in a crisis. As federal immigration efforts have escalated racialized violence across the country, many Americans are confronting very uncomfortable realities for the first time. Instead of simply appearing in online videos and news articles, more people are interacting with state violence on a personal level. In response, communities across the country have taken to the streets in protest, largely starting in cities like Minneapolis and growing outwards in solidarity.

In this context, an incredible shift has occurred. Whereas in 2024 a significant majority of Americans wanted stronger enforcement efforts, YouGov polls now show that 46% support abolishing ICE. This rise in popular dissent against law enforcement and calls for abolition sharply resembles Black Lives Matter, 2020-era politics. However, even by those standards, these are unprecedented numbers — in June 2020 only 31% of Americans supported the much lower bar of simply "defunding" police.

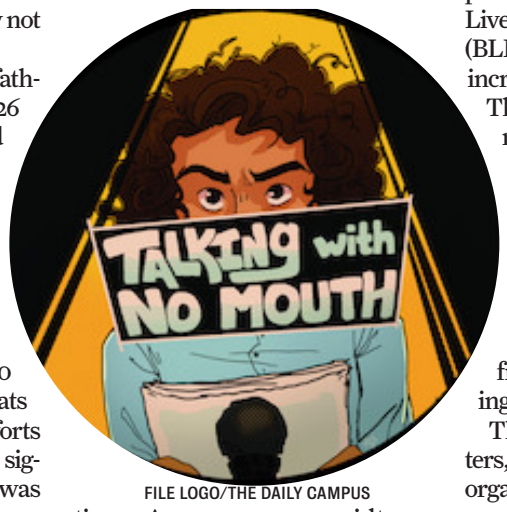
The opportunity now presented to grassroots organizers is incredible, but not without its dangers as well. To push the needle and not let this effort fall into obsolescence, a critical eye must be taken to previous abolitionist movements — especially BLM — so that those rallying against ICE do not repeat past mistakes.

In 2024, two researchers from Oxford University tried to examine the material impact of the BLM movement across America. They found very simply that the movement did not create decreases in police budgets in the vast majority of the 264 major cities analyzed, and actually led to many increases in Republican-led areas. Although there were still many positive outcomes which came from the organization and collective action developed during this time, the ultimate policy goal was clearly not achieved.

It's a reality that is hard to fathom, given that between 15 to 26 million people were involved in BLM protests during the summer of 2020, according to the New York Times. So, what went wrong? And what do we learn from it? There are two key takeaways.

As the seasons changed and the red-hot summer of 2020 turned to autumn, Democrats began to go full tilt on their efforts for the presidential election. A significant part of their strategy was utilizing the incredible anger over racial tensions to position themselves favorably against the belligerently racist Republican party. They showed off Senator Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi kneeling in Kente cloths, tugging on sympathies and pushing energy from the streets into the ballot box.

Yet, in private they disparaged the movement, with some saying it was "killing the party" and alienating moderate voters. Instead of fully embracing the movements' demands, they relied on old strategies of trying to quietly diffuse dissent and cut momentum that would threaten their position. Then the election passes, the Democrats see record voter turnout in their victory and the new President Joe Biden increases police budgets across the country by billions of dollars. It was a complete betrayal of everything the movement stood for.



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Now, ICE abolitionists face a similar situation. As midterm elections approach, it's clear that the party machine is already attempting to shift momentum into electoral efforts. An op-ed was just published in USAToday by a longtime federal prosecutor, arguing that "Abolishing [ICE] won't bring justice... That said, a midterm blue wave would bring accountability." This so-called accountability will most likely take the form of bodycams, extra trainings and increased funding, the same tired strategies which entirely failed to address police violence. To avoid this cooptation, communities must reject the allure of being dragged into electoral efforts by the Democratic Party.

The second warning is deeply tied to the first, for it is not just the Democratic which tricked communities in 2020, but movement "leaders" themselves.

When the ideas behind BLM took off in 2020, the official nonprofit organization behind it, Black Lives Matter Global Network (BLMGN), became the subject of incredible international attention. The central organization, despite not being the people doing the groundwork and deep community organizing to drive the movement, was the force that shaped its narrative. Leaders focused on media work and elite-level politics, disparaging radical action from their supporters and trying to keep a clean face.

The connection it had to its chapters, as reported by many former organizers, was incredibly undemocratic and murky. This resulted in a break between the central nonprofit and some of its largest regional organizers, who would go on to the be known as the BLM10. The cause? It was revealed that BLMGN had raised over 90 million dollars in 2020, none of which was sent down to support its local chapters and help them build communities. Instead, it was slipped into the pockets of the Democratic machine through a secret BLM PAC. They had willing sacrificed their own movement on the electoral altar, leaving it to die slowly without energy, money or support once the push to elect Biden was over.

A movement's strength is in the grassroots. Across the country, communities are coming together to protect each other from ICE without the need for motivation from nonprofits or name brands. The goal of official "Organizations" in this area must be to support the natural level of self-organization that occurs between families, neighborhoods and people. This is not to say that added structure and analysis from experienced political activists cannot help develop a struggle, but democracy and accountability to those who are on the ground must be central.

If the new actors of the current moment are able to synthesize these lessons into a better way of fighting back, the potential for positive change is high. The abolition of ICE can and will serve as a catalyst for a new type of politics which looks past what exists and towards something new. As this still nascent effort grows, these lessons must provide hope that this end is possible; the point of analyzing previous failures is not to lament. Mistakes and failures have never stopped liberation movements, only slowed them down. There is a collective responsibility and opportunity to face them honestly and learn, as Malcolm X recognized in his quote: "Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance next time."

Husky Talks

What's your biggest hot take?



"People should never cook with their puke bowls!" (Photographers note: "huh?")

KELLY GARCIA
PSYCHOLOGY AND SPANISH
4TH SEMESTER



"Walking is better than taking the bus, even if it's -5 out."

THATCHER KLING
DIGITAL MEDIA AND DESIGN
2ND SEMESTER



"Morgan Wallen sounds like nails on a chalkboard if the nails were boulders."

AVA GUTTERSON
PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES AND DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN
2ND YEAR



"Blueberry's are disgusting and all blueberry factories need to be blown up."

MILO DIAMOND
POLITICAL SCIENCE
2ND YEAR