

Good evening everyone, I am Lateef McLeod, a grad student in the Anthropology and Social Change doctoral program at California Institute for Integral Studies and the vice president of the Lead committee for the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. I am here today to address the issue of covid-19 and disability justice. If you give a preliminary look at both of these subjects you would say that the two was pulling society in two opposite directions. There is covid-19, a ruthless and deadly pandemic, who is mercilessly killing our love ones, especially our disabled folks, poor, and black and brown people of color that in our communities. The virus is revealing how stark and harsh our hierarchies are in this society and the heartlessness in which our society deals with the most vulnerable in society. Then there is disability justice, which is a praxis that advocates for a community where those that the society marginalized are the center of our movements. Through the words of Alice Wong, disability justice professes that access is love and is advocating for a world in which everyone has what they need to live a sustainable and fulfilled life in a community that they choose.

Now if you just glimpsed at the news in the last month you have seen how horrid this country has handled the covid-19 crisis in the last month. Currently, there is still a lack of testing to determine who has the virus and need medical care. There are medical providers who are caring for the sick without proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). There are people with disabilities who are in danger of being denied care because doctors might prioritize the care of an able-bodied people over them. People with complex communication needs, that they had before Covid-19 or because of Covid-19, are having challenges communicating with medical care providers so that they could help direct their care. Also, in this country there is not a unified message among our governmental leadership as to whether to open back up the country or to keep the shelter-in-place ordinances intact, which leaves Americans confused on what will happen next. All horrible and disastrous things that we have to deal with in the dystopian reality we currently live in. Now let us pose the question how could the country handle the crisis differently if it was led by disability justice principles as the ones stated in the Sins Invalid's Disability Justice Primer, Skin, Tooth, and Bone? First we can look at disability justice having an anti-capitalist politic where medical care is not run on a profit margin, but is organized and is prepared for giving care to those who need it. Disability justice is looking for a medical care industry that does not ration care to those that doctors deem are more productive in society, namely temporary able-bodied people that the capitalists see as more valuable as workers. Disability Justice proudly exclaims that everyone is valuable and that no one is disposable. Also because of the disability justice principle of leadership from the most impacted we need to listen to the most vulnerable in this crisis and both amplify their voices and make sure their needs are met. As a result, if we had more of a disability justice mindset we would see more people getting access to care when they need it and no one being denied care. We would also would have invested more in our medical health care system so that health care providers would have all the equipment and resources that need to take care those who are sick. Also, keeping in mind the most vulnerable to commutable diseases in this country, we should listen to scientists and health professionals for when it would be safe to venture out in public again.

What the covid-19 pandemic crisis also reveals is that to protect our lives, we need a society and an economy that values our lives and work for us. We do not need to sacrifice our lives in going to work to prop up the economy. The people who own the most capital wants the economy open again

because they know that the economy, as it is constructed now, will benefit them and not us. As the Lieutenant Governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, clearly expressed, they would have us die to open back up the economy so that they can increase their wealth. We can also see this response mirrored in the Capitalists who fund these reactionary Conservative activists to protest State and local governments to open up so we can all, supposedly, get back to work. This asinine response may not make sense at first glance, but if you frame it in the Protestant Work ethic and the myth of American capitalism this reaction becomes predictable. For centuries there has been a myth in this country that if you work hard and dedicate yourself to your goals you will be prosperous. This myth was used to stigmatize those who were not prosperous as lazy and thus deserving of poverty and destitution, which included many people of color and disabled people. The stigmatization ultimately led the eugenics movement where capitalists tried to eradicate people of color and disabled people from the human genome. Thus we circle back today where many of our black and brown and disabled comrades are dying from this Covid-19 virus and we have this virulent reactionary movement that are advocating for the economy to be open so we can all die at a larger percentage. This should make us question of what is our relationship to work and is working is essentially so important that we should let many people die so that we can get back to doing labor? I thought we went to work to sustain our lives and those of our loved ones in our community. However, if we get back to work too quickly we might have the opposite effect then we intended.

So as I close, I want to say that the covid-19 crisis has shown how a wider acceptance of a disability justice praxis is sorely needed in this country. We should throw away the notion that everyone should be able-bodied in this society and construct the infrastructure needed to care for everyone in this country, regardless of how their body or mind works. We need to shift the paradigm from how everyone can work for a living to thinking about how we can care for one another and meet each other's needs. There is several people with disabilities doing this work currently, and I will like to shout out the organization BADD CRIPS for the work they are doing in mutual aid. This priorities paradigm shift goes to addressing what society we want to continue to live as human beings. Do we want to continue to live in this capitalist society where everyone has to work to prove their worth to society, or do we want to live in society where everyone has their needs met regardless of who they are and are free to realize their full potential? This is a question that we need to ask before the economy opens back up so that we can push society in the direction we want it to go when it does. I will leave it there and I thank you for your time.