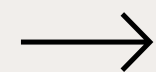
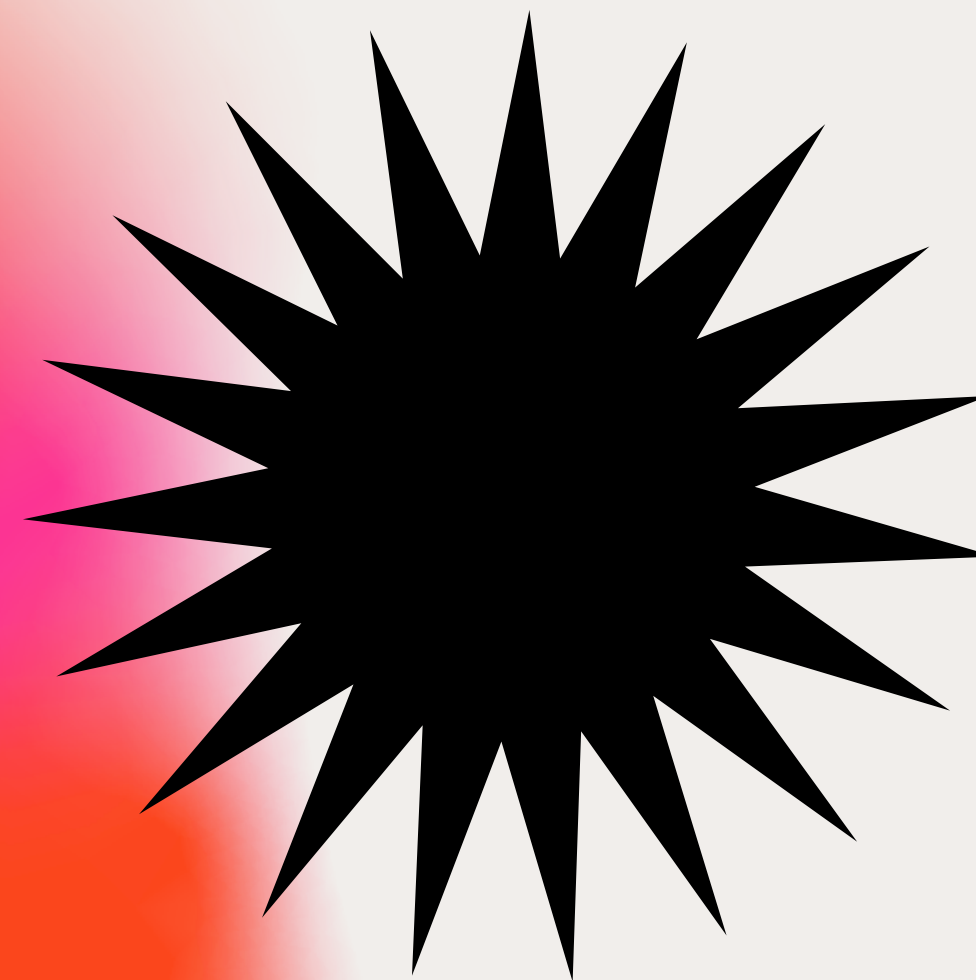


# What is "Collective Care" Today?



A ZINE BY  
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# Care as Exigence

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## **COVID-19 is a crisis of capitalism.**

Its antecedents are ecological, but its accelerants — underinsurance, precarious work, and anti-Black racism — are manmade. Preventable, preexisting disparities hastened the virus's spread. 2020 unfolded as a triple pandemic of health, economic, and racial injustice, each “characterized by capitalist inequities.”

## **The law is deeply implicated in the crisis.**

With their penchant for market logic, legal institutions favor formal equality and individualism over substantive equality and redistribution. America's time-limited, work-oriented safety net failed in its fundamental role of guarding against contingencies. Underenforced workplace laws and "COVID gag rules" left frontline workers without recourse. Self-seeking legal challenges to mask mandates, eviction moratoria, hotels-cum-shelters, and stay-at-home orders produced a chilling effect on governmental relief strategies. Regulatory responses were often mere "pauses;" they were tailored for "preventing additional forms of displacement, not affirmatively creating safe or healthy spaces for those who lacked them in the first place." Governments at all levels failed to mount recovery programs with the might to match the all-consuming nature of the crisis.

**The crisis called for nimble solutions and solidarity, but was met with rigidity and austerity.** Bounded by the imperatives of neoliberal governance, COVID relief schemes proved inadequate, failing to fully tackle both the pandemic itself and the economic and racial exclusion that preceded and fueled it.

**When the state abdicated its duty to address the triple pandemic, grassroots actors stepped up in its place.** Support groups and crowdfunding arose to expand access to care, advancing health justice. Mutual aid networks arose to improve material conditions, advancing economic justice. Mass demonstrations arose to champion the inherent value of Black lives, advancing racial justice. Movements embodying collective care fostered security in the absence of federal social protection.

**How might new forms of social and economic ordering bring top-down policy in alignment with bottom-up grassroots practice?**

# Care as Resistance

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**Systems of social protection tend to follow from systems of economic production.**

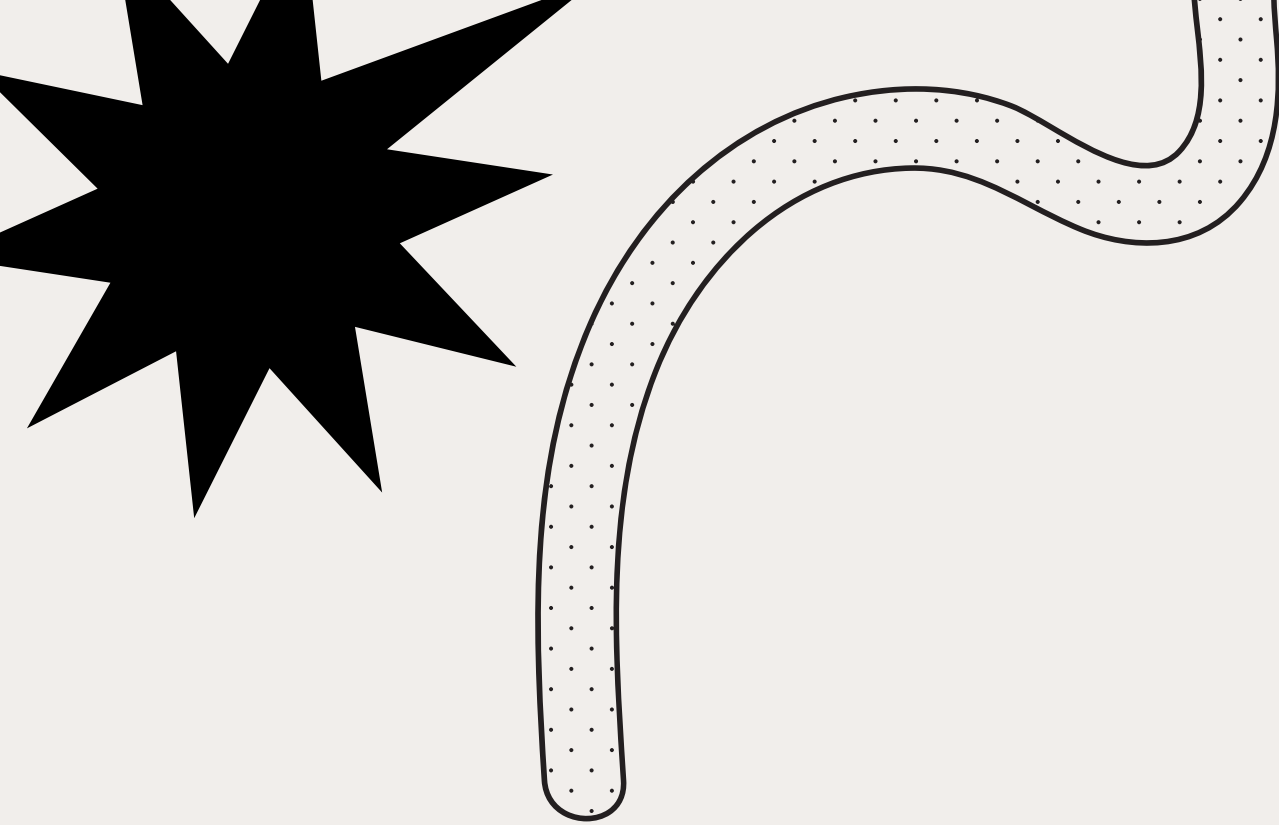
States' approaches to public welfare parallel their approaches to market relations. To say that COVID-19 is a crisis of capitalism, then, is to say that it has exposed and widened the cleavages that characterize America's liberal market economy. In the United States, policies of disinvestment, deregulation, and reduced taxation are adopted to stoke the economy and safeguard the public fisc. Investments in health, housing, and income supports are designed to optimize labor market participation, not solely to maximize human flourishing. The virus's devastation rests on these ungenerous institutional arrangements.

The implications of COVID capitalism are manifold. At the institutional level, one can consider the use of Kaldor-Hicks analyses to examine the tradeoff between lives and livelihoods and determine at which point reopening the economy should take precedence over containing the virus. At the individual level, one can consider the resources required for adhering to public health protocols: access to housing for social distancing, access to broadband for remote work and school, and access to clean, running water for frequent handwashing are each politically, economically, and racially mediated. **The coronavirus is not a “great equalizer;” its lived realities are the result of material conditions produced or countenanced by governmental institutions.**

For women of color, who are overrepresented in low-wage occupations and burdened by multiple forms of pay discrimination, managing school and daycare closures is particularly difficult. In light of these strictures, economist Mariana Mazzucato has concluded that **“Today’s capitalism is incompatible with feminism.”**

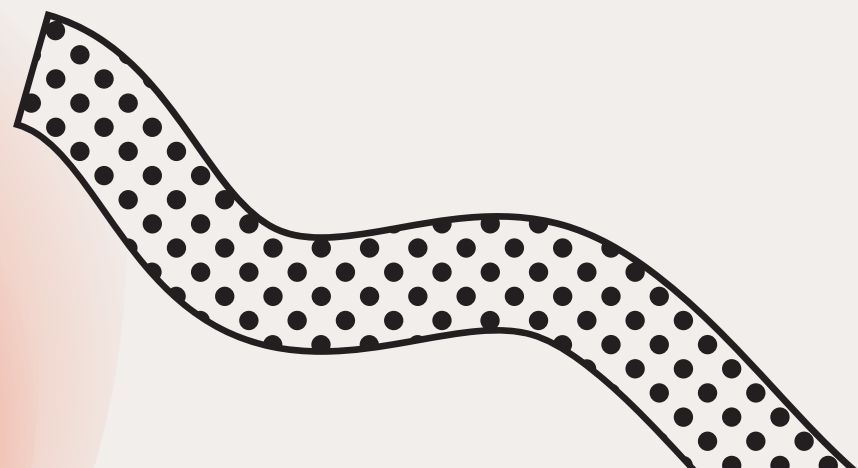
Traditionally, communities have relied on collective care to soften socioeconomic inequities, bridging the gap between capitalism and feminism that Mazzucato identifies. Kinship networks where resources are pooled and childcare responsibilities are shared, common survival strategies among people experiencing poverty, emblemize collective care. **Importantly, movements act within the interstices left by the market and the state, practicing care as a remedy for institutional neglect.** This care has taken on two forms, “feminist self-care” and “Black and brown activist care work.”

**Feminist self-care** – whether it is the tips and tricks curated and dispersed by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective or the “mutual aid self-therapy” of New York City’s Jane Addams Collective – connects private problems and political struggle, demonstrating that care, per Audre Lorde, is a “radical act.” **Activist care work** finds its roots in the Black Panther Party’s free breakfast and health programs, and is reproduced in harm reductionist needle exchanges, disability justice “care webs,” and Black timebanks. Across kinship networks and movements, collective care may be understood as forms of reciprocal community provision; it is “**how we make each other possible.**”



**Care is central to feminist legal theory's conception of social relations and the state, offering a counterweight to market-oriented government.**

While courts typically assess civil disputes based on reasonable care, constructed as mere prudence, feminist care ethics' emphasizes interdependence and mutual obligation. In the wake of the coronavirus, legal scholars have conceived of a "politics of care" that would marshal public support and dollars for a New Deal-style COVID response, forgoing austerity for shared prosperity. A capacious understanding of care, drawn from both social movements and critical legal traditions, illumines opportunities to reconfigure institutions and reinvigorate American social provision.





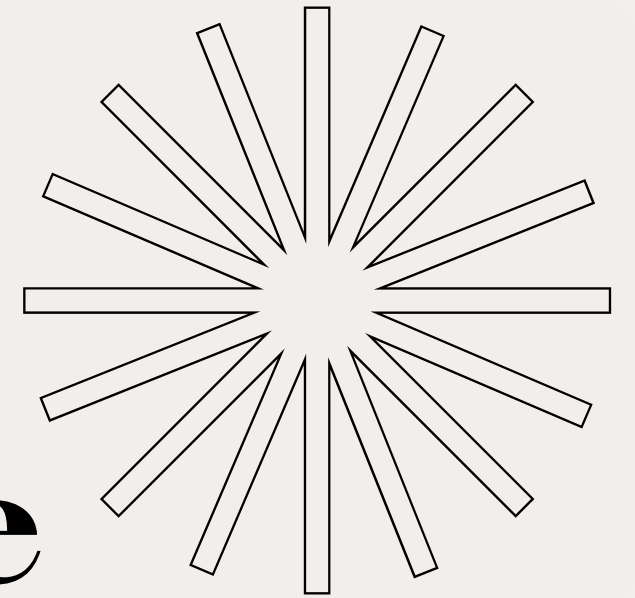
**Care, long undervalued by markets and the state, reemerged as social justice praxis in 2020.**

Ground-level actors pursued community provision in the wake of state failure.

Autonomous networks of compassion and resilience mobilized to withstand federal cruelty and disregard.

# Care as Governance

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Yet there are limits to community provision. **Inequality reproduces differential deprivation even in times of shared vulnerability.** Such deprivation requires public intervention to socialize and mitigate risk. The voluntary protection of redistributed stimulus checks and crowdfunded medical treatment is no match for the social protection of monthly relief payments and affordable health insurance. Collective care among neighbors and strangers cannot decenter bold state action, especially during a triple pandemic.

**Collective care at the institutional level, however, is a viable alternative to neoliberal austerity.** Movements can be considered models of what is possible – they light the way and ignite change. The health, economic, and racial justice campaigns of 2020 show how we might reorient the state away from profit-centered frameworks toward more people-centered ones. Care can be a mode of governance. Consider feminist economic recovery plans, which concretize care with policy demands.

First conceived by the “working class, Native, and transnational” feminists of the Hawai’i State Commission on the Status of Women, feminist economic recovery plans champion initiatives to reinvest in social infrastructure and foster equity-driven growth. Family allowances, rent stabilization, and childcare subsidies are focal policies. The authors of the Hawai’i plan “**reject inclusion, equality, and rights within patriarchal systems and destructive industries,**” favoring substantive equality over formal equality. They “**speak not only about response and recovery, but also of repair and revival,**” pairing immediate relief with scale-tilting investments to right enduring inequities. They insist that “**reciprocity must form the heart of our new economic system beyond capitalism,**” prioritizing the many over the few. Feminist plans like Hawai’i’s can scale the collective care we see on the ground.

If today's capitalism is incompatible with feminism, then feminist economic recovery plans are much-needed. 2020 has presented other hopeful policy developments. CARES Act Recovery Rebates showcased the federal government's ability to rapidly administer demogrants, making **universal basic income** and **reparations** more viable. Eviction and utility shutoff moratoria augured toward a future in which public goods are protected as a matter of **social citizenship**. Emergency release initiatives, freeing incarcerated people from jails to protect public health, **delegitimized the carceral state** and questioned how a system premised on public safety could increase one's risk of premature death. **Despite the grave inadequacy of the coronavirus response, it has revealed the potential and feasibility of transformative policy.**

Taken together, policy and practice indicate 2020 can be a transition between dispensations. **The year has reaffirmed feminist values: the importance of care, the essential nature of life-sustaining work, and the dignity and worth of people at the margins. These are values that the state can put into action.**

Collective care counsels in favor of both something more than the formal rights and individualism that pervade the law and something other than paternalistic notions of the “nanny state.” It suggests, instead, that **material security is a precondition of equality, that public provision should insure against shared risk while attending to differences in social location, and that our institutions should allow us to be careful with one another.**

# Reading + Viewing List

**Alisha Haridasani Gupta** — *An 'Electrifying' Economist's Guide to the Recovery*

**Black Women Radicals** — *Sisters and Siblings in the Struggle: COVID-19 + Black + Asian-American Feminists Solidarities*

**Care Collective** — *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*

**Hil Malatino** — *Trans Care*

**Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart** — *Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times*

**Jade Begay/NDN Collective** — *Decolonizing Community Care in Response to COVID-19*

**Khara Jabola Carolus** — *Building Bridges, Not Stepping on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19*

**WWHIVDD** — *What Would a COVID-19 Doula Do?*