

Radical Walking Tour of Grand Rapids

Saturday, September 23

Noon

Ah-Nab-Awen Park



Hosted by:
Grand Rapids People's History Project
Grand Rapids African American Museum & Archives

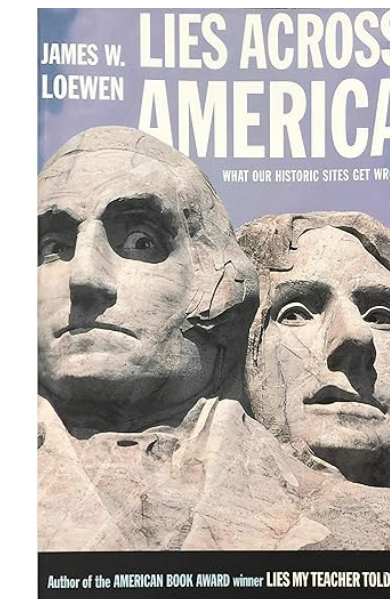


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Radical Walking Tour

A Radical Walking Tour of Grand Rapids

In his insightful book, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, radical historian James Loewen takes us on an enlightening tour of the US and examines historical markers in big cities and small towns to see what lens history is presented in.



Grand Rapids also has many historical markers, especially in the downtown area, most of which have been sanctioned by Grand Rapids City officials or by other entities that are reflective of those who run this city.

An example of numerous historical markers, are the series of statues that have been created over the past two decades, known as the Grand Rapids Community Legends Project. The Community Legends Project was the brainchild Peter Secchia, former US Ambassador to Italy, former CEO of Universal Forrest Products and a member of what I identify as the Grand Rapids Power Structure.

Most of the statues are of people who have historically been part of the local power structure, although there are a few exceptions. What I want to do in this book, is to provide a counter-narrative to what those in power have sanctioned.

The locations that I have chosen follow more of a people's history of Grand Rapids, whether we are talking about individuals, social movements or historical events that have taken place in the downtown area of Grand Rapids, or at least near downtown Grand Rapids.

I chose this book title, *A Radical Walking Tour of Grand Rapids*, in part because it could be part of an actual walking tour, indeed even performance art, that deconstructs the dominant narratives about Grand Rapids and allows us to collectively imagine how we might think about Grand Rapids if the stories of social movements and acts of resistance were how we talk about this community.

However, this book will also be an online tour that people can traverse virtually, whether you live in the area or not. There are a total of 34 locations on this radical tour, with a mix of historical markers and historical events. *A Radical Walking Tour of Grand Rapids*, is also a companion book to my book, *A People's History of Grand Rapids*.



My hope is that this book will not only get you to think differently about Grand Rapids, but that it might inspire other radical walking tours throughout the city, where we can share more history from below, instead of the kind of history we are told to believe.

Bankrolling hate and harm: On the Death of Peter Secchia <https://griid.org/2020/10/22/bankrolling-hate-and-harm-on-the-death-of-peter-secchia/>

#1 - Grand Rapids was founded on Settler Colonialism

In early 2023, the group Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. posted a message, which deserved a retraction and an apology. Their message read:

Happy Birthday, Grand Rapids! Did you know that our city was officially founded on this day in 1850? Here's to many more years of progress and growth! 2000+ years ago: Indigenous Americans settled. Early 1800s: The first white settlers arrived. 1831: Louis Campau bought what is now the entire downtown business district of GR for \$90. 1850: Grand Rapids became a city.

Early 1800s: The first white settlers arrived. Now, this statement comes right after 2000+ years ago: Indigenous Americans settled. However, Euro-Americans did not simply arrive, they used a variety of tactics to displace indigenous people and then appropriate their land.

As a foundational framework, it is vital that we come to terms with the fact that Grand Rapids, like virtually all US cities were founded on what Native scholar Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz calls Settler Colonialism. **Settler Colonialism in West Michigan** is the result of a larger White Supremacist strategy that included legal means (treaties), forced relocation, **spiritual violence (role of churches)** and cultural imperialism, most radically seen with the policy of putting Native children in boarding schools with the goal of, "Killing the Indian, Saving the Man."

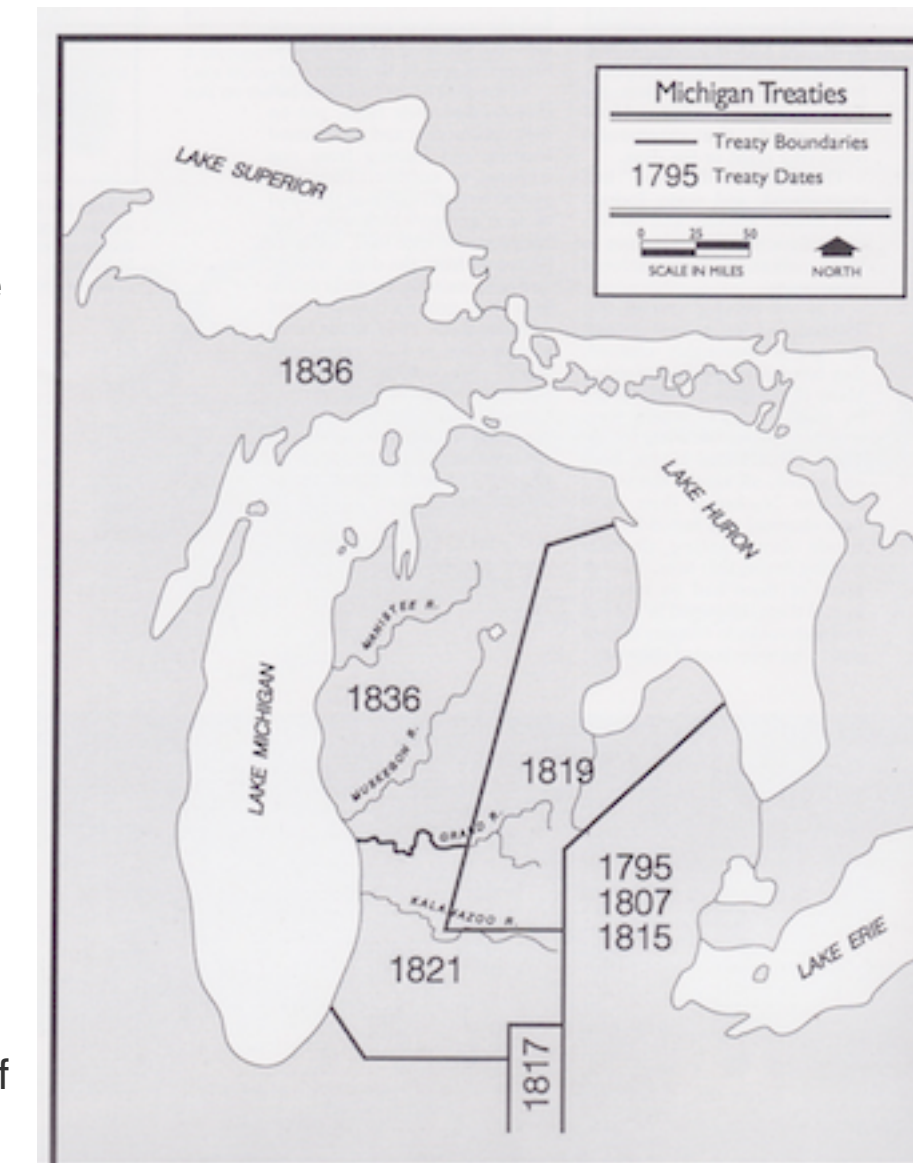
We know that hundreds of Native children from the Three Fires Nations were taken and put into boarding schools by settler colonialists, many of which were run by Christians. In these instances Native children were denied the right to speak their own languages and practice their own spiritual traditions. Most of the removal of Native children from their communities happened in the later part of the 19th Century and first half of the 20th Century.

However, on the matter of Christian missions attempting to make converts of Native communities in the 1820s and 1830s along the Grand River, it is less clear on whether or not this could be defined as a form of genocide. How much free will did Native people have on choosing another religion? Was the adoption of Christian beliefs a form of assimilation into the dominant culture and was it tied to larger socio-economic issues like food and land?

It should come as no surprise that right after the 1821 Treaty of Chicago was signed, the first Christian missions came to what is now West Michigan. The Baptist Church established a mission in 1824, under the leadership of Isaac McCoy, and Catholic missions were begun in 1833 by Fr. Frederic Baraga.

One of the things that lured missionaries to the area after the signing of the Treaty of Chicago, was a provision in the treaty which allowed funds for people to work as teachers of blacksmiths amongst the Native people along the Grand River. The government treaty called this, the "civilization fund," a phrase that underscores the settler colonial mentality. However, whatever tensions existed, they were most useful in pushing Native people out of the area as more white settlers colonialists came to the area. This increase in settler colonialists, along with greater desire for land and settler colonial expansion, resulted in a new treaty being drawn up, the **Treaty of Washington in 1836**. This treaty turned over an additional **13,837,207 acres of land** to settler colonialism's expansionist desires.

It seems that all along, the goal with relations of Native people along the Grand River were to take the rest of their land. Whether or not there was direct complicity with the early Christian missions to this land takeover is not relevant, the fact remains that they did nothing to resist such an effort.



#2 - Gerald R Ford Museum and 20th Century Genocide

Probably the biggest reference being made about former President Ford when he died in December of 2006, was that he “healed the nation.” Not surprising, this is the title of his memoirs, but what exactly does that mean when pundits and politicians say he healed the nation? It means that Ford pardoned Nixon, which is to say that he did not seek an indictment of Nixon for illegal activities during what is now known as the Watergate scandal. The Ford museum literature says that by pardoning Nixon, Ford helped restore confidence in the office of the presidency that negatively under the Nixon administration. Is this the reality or was it a way to sidestep any serious investigation of the illegal practices of the Nixon administration, which ultimately would lead people to see the very nature of the US Imperial Project? When Nixon’s crimes are mentioned what most people think of was the wiretapping of the Democrats before the election. What is usually omitted from the official record are Nixon’s war crimes in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This is what “official historians” mean when they say Ford healed the nation, that the American public was protected from the ugly realities of US foreign policy. Well, what are we being protected from? Looking at the brief history of the Ford administration might help us to answer that question.

Ford became Nixon’s Vice President in October of 1973 and was sworn in as President in August of 1974. He served as President until Carter took the oval office in January of 1977. Ford supported the repressive government in the Philippines in its counterinsurgency war against rebels. During the coup in Argentina in 1976, Ford supported the generals who took power and slaughtered thousands of dissidents. Under Ford the US provided millions of dollars in military aid to the right-wing movement in Angola known as UNITA. He negotiated military bases in Spain with the fascist dictator Franco. Ford maintained the illegal terror war and embargo against Cuba and was president during the final days of the US occupation of South Vietnam. But probably the foreign policy that best defines Ford was his support of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor.

Much has been written about what took place in the meeting between Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Indonesian President Suharto on December 5th and 6th in 1975, but it wasn’t until December of 2001 when the National Security Archives finally obtained [declassified documentation of what took place](#). What we now know is that Ford and Kissinger not only knew of the Indonesian plans to invade East Timor, but that they offered diplomatic and military support for the invasion, which became a multi-year and bloody genocidal campaign. In fact, the US role in the murderous campaign by the Indonesia military against the East Timorese people was one of the proportionately worst genocides of the 20th Century.



Ford and Kissinger meet with Suharto just prior to the Indonesia invasion of East Timor, 1975.

#3 - 1911 Grand Rapids Furniture Workers Strike

The 1911 strike was founded on longstanding worker grievances. As early as 1909, the workers discovered that the price of the furniture they produced had increased by 10%, and they demanded that their wages be increased. Some of the workers who called for the increase were fired shortly thereafter for being agitators.

The furniture workers strike began in the Spring of 1911, with estimates of between 4,000 - 6,000 workers going on strike, and with thousands more in support of the strikers. Just prior to the beginning of the strike, the Grand Rapids Employers Association sent Francis Campau to deliver a message to the press, in order to influence public opinion, that workers were being treated fairly. Francis Campau was the grandson of the brother of Louie Campau, the so-called founder of Grand Rapids.

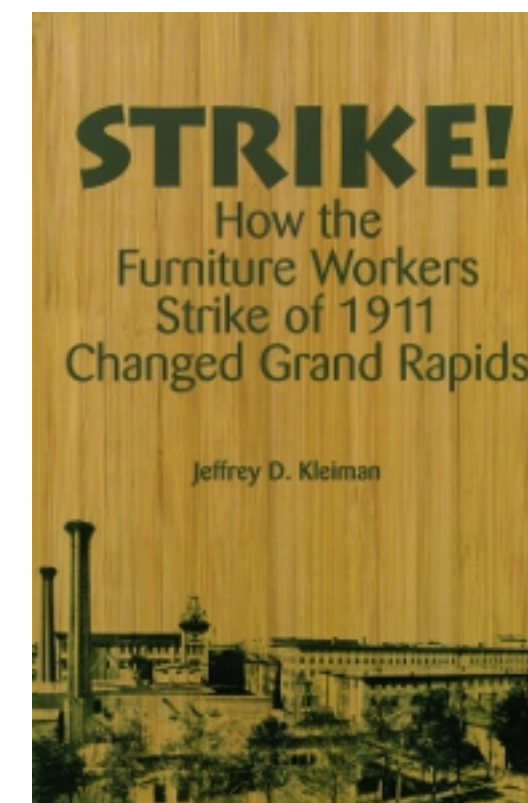
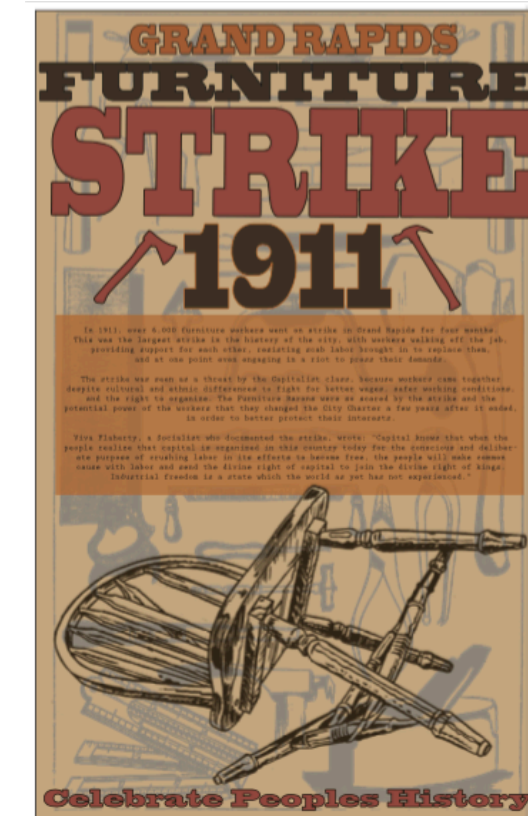
Furniture workers, on the other hand, had a very different view of life working in those factories. One important source that reflected the worker's perspective was a booklet called, *History of the Grand Rapids Furniture Strike: With Facts Hitherto Unpublished*. This documented was created by Viva Flaherty, a secretary at Fountain Street Church and a known Socialist. Flaherty documented the 1911 strike because she believed that the “people of Grand Rapids are awakened and enlightened and they can be trusted with the whole truth.”

Flaherty makes it clear in her version of the story that the strike was able to endure because of the seven unions that were involved, with membership of over 4,000 workers in thirty-five shops in Grand Rapids. She also documented that the Christian Reformed Church would not grant their members the right to be part of the union, since labor rights and organizing were not “founded on divine right.”

Flaherty documents the kind of wages earned by those in the furniture industry, stating that of the eight thousand furniture workers employed in Grand Rapids, most made less than \$2 a day.

The Catholic leader, Bishop Schrembs, came out in support of the strike, stating, “*I consider the present labor situation in our city as a most deplorable one from every point of view.*” Bishop Schrembs was later banished to the Diocese of Toledo for his solidarity with furniture workers.

The strike ended in August of 1911 and the workers did not win the demands they had hoped to. However, they did win lots of public support. During the 1911 Labor Day parade, there were an estimated 10,000 people walking in the parade. The Grand Rapids Furniture Barons, were not happy with worker demands and how much support there was from the city government. In 1916, the Furniture Barons put forward a ballot initiative that changed the City Charter from a 12 ward system to a 3 ward system, in order to consolidate their power. The current ward system we have in Grand Rapids today, is a direct result of those in power punishing workers and their families.



#4 - KKK 4th of July Parade 1925

In early July of 1925, thousands of Klan members from all across Michigan came to Grand Rapids to celebrate the 4th of July.

Both the Grand Rapids Press and the Grand Rapids Herald reporting on the gathering of Klan members 98 years ago. In fact, one of the headlines of the Grand Rapids Herald read, ***Klan, Looking for 16,000 here today, erects tent city.***

Klan members started arriving on July 3rd, 1925, in order to prepare for the parade they would hold on July 4th. Now the parade began on the westside, at Lincoln Park and moved east on Bridge Street. According to the Grand Rapids Herald, the parade started at 3pm. ***“Passing along Monroe Avenue it was greeted by throngs which crowded into the streets to witness the pageant. The crowd was orderly and for the most part friendly, breaking into applause frequently as one or another patriotic float passed.”*** It is also worth noting that the parade was led by a ***“squad of motorcycle police.”***

After passing along Monroe Avenue, the parade turned right on Fulton and went all the way down to John Ball Park, where the thousands of Klan members held a rally. What is interesting, is that none of the newspaper reporters happened to mention anything about what was said at the rally, which means they completely ignored the message and the platform of the KKK gathering, which was always a central part of their rallies.

What we do know about the 2nd wave of the Klan, is that they were anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-immigrant and anti-Black, yet there was no reporting on the Klan platform and no one from the Catholic, Jewish, recent immigrant or Black communities was asked to comment on the large gathering of the White Nationalist and White Supremacist organization in 1925.

Equally important is the fact that this Klan gathering didn't just happen, where KKK members happened to come to Grand Rapids in 1925. In fact, the Kent County chapter of the KKK hosted this gathering of Klan members from across the state.

Additionally, according to a retrospective piece by **GR Press writer Garrett Ellison**, written in 2012, where he relies on GVSU history professor Matthew Daley, “Members began arriving in Grand Rapids in the weeks ahead of July 4 and set up a tent city on the municipal outskirts near the Bridge Street hillside. Daley said mentions of “a symbol” seen atop the hill the night of July 3 suggest Klansmen fired off a cross, possibly with a matching one over Belknap, to announce their presence the next day.” Such a display certainly sent a message to the residents of Grand Rapids.



Klan parade, Grand Rapids, 1925.

#5 1995 Protest against the Klan

In September of 1995, the KKK came back to Grand Rapids, this time to hold a rally in front of the Hall of Justice on Monroe Avenue. The Klan paid \$10 for a permit and the City of Grand Rapids put up chain link fences to protect the Klan members from any harm.

Chief Hagerty stood up on the Calder Plaza level, looking down at a crowd of some 500 people who came out to protest the 10 Klan members who were present to play bad music and make shitty speeches. Chief Hagerty was accompanied by 120 cops, who were either standing in front of the fencing facing the protestors or around the perimeter of the protest, which shut down Monroe Avenue.

There were lots of people who were throwing eggs and other objects at the 10 Klan members, along with shouting them down. The GRPD did not even attempt to stop people from throwing things at the white men wearing white shirts and black ties. In fact, the only arrest that was made that day was the arrest of Rob LaDew, the owner of the Black independent newspaper, *Equality Magazine*. LaDew attempted to jump the fence, but was arrested. LaDew also was quoted as saying he was not happy with the NAACP chapter strategy, which was to stay home and ignore the Klan rally. In a personal interview with LaDew about his arrest, he noted it was appropriate that the Klan held their rally in front of the Hall of Justice, since, in his words, "*Klan members wearing white robes are no different than the judges who wear black robes, especially in terms of the harm they both do that is disproportionately directed at African Americans.*"

Klan leader unfazed by angry crowd

► It took 120 police officers, but the crowd was controlled with just a few minor arrests.

By Beth Loechler and Ed Golder
The Grand Rapids Press

Amid shouted obscenities, thrown eggs and 120 police officers, more than 500 people gathered for a Ku Klux Klan rally in downtown Grand Rapids Saturday afternoon. National KKK Director Thomas Robb, flanked by nine fellow Klansmen, took on the crowd of protesters with a vengeance. "You know a man by his friends, but you also know a man by his enemies," the Harrison, Ark., man began his 50-minute talk. "I am honored to be hated by people like



people would show up for the rally. Hegarty added, stressing the role of police was to protect all who attended the rally. "All we knew with any certainty was the volatility of the situation." The cost for officers and fences to control the crowd will be computed next week, Hegarty said. As for the Klan itself, the chief said, "I resent this rally. I resent this organization."

"The best protest against the Klan is for no one to come to a rally, for no one to show up," he said. "The only reason for being here is recruitment."

The decision to put the Klan behind two fences was made by the department, not by the Klan, Hegarty said. The police also barricaded traffic from Monroe Avenue to create standing room for spectators.

"I can't believe the city of Grand Rapids went to such lengths," said Bob Chulski, 42, of Grand Rapids. "This is costing us

#6 July 4th anti-war protest when George H W Bush came to GR

In late June of 1991, the Grand Rapids Press announced that George H.W. Bush would be coming to town to celebrate the 4th of July. It was also reported that the same kind of tanks that were used to bury Iraqi soldiers alive in the desert just months earlier, would also be in a parade that Grand Rapids would be having for President Bush.

Three Grand Rapids anti-war activists decided that they would protest not only Bush's visit, but the tanks that were used to violate international law, which would be in the parade. The activists put red paint on bed sheets to symbolize blood and decided to cover themselves with the sheets while lying in front of the tanks. However, since President Bush was in town, Secret Service agents and GRPD cops stopped the activists before they were able to lay down in front of the tanks. The cops dragged them off to the side of Monroe Avenue and put their knees on the back of the activists who were laying face down on the street.

Once the tanks had passed by, the cops walked the activists across the street to the GRPD headquarters, which was on the corner of Monroe and Michigan at that time. The police then had to walk the activists through a crowd of people who had just cheered their arrests. One activist said that the GRPD cop who was escorting him said, "When we get to the other side, I can't protect you."

Once the activists were bonded out of jail, they decided to go to trial instead of pleading guilty. challenge their arrest by using International Law as a defense. The group went to trial in November 1991 and defended themselves. The day before the trial the court change the judge, who would no longer allow them to use International Law as a defense, despite the fact that they had submitted a 40-page brief.

Judge Christensen would not allow them to use an International Law argument, so the three activists just tried to get the jury to hear their side of the story. They were charged with blocking a roadway. However, the jury found the activists not guilty, since the cops dragged them out of the way so fast that the parade never missed a beat. The Kent County Prosecutor was pissed, because he had lost to anti-war activists that defended themselves.

July 4 parade protesters are acquitted

By C.T. Revere
The Grand Rapids Press

Three men arrested July 4 for attempting to block the path of a U.S. Army tank during Grand Rapids' Independence Day parade were acquitted Wednesday of misdemeanor charges rising from the incident.

A Grand Rapids District Court jury found Jeffrey Smith, Jeffrey Danielski and Teofilo Reyes innocent of charges that they blocked Monroe Avenue as an Abrams tank used during the Persian Gulf War rolled along the parade route.

The three men, residents of Koinonia House, a sanctuary for the homeless and refugees at 424 LaGrave Ave. SE, rushed through a crowd of spectators and attempted to lie in mock death in front of the tank, which was leading a procession of military vehicles.



PRESS PHOTO: PAUL CROUSE

Teofilo Reyes, left, Jeff Smith and Jeff Danielski say they were protesting U.S. violations of international law.

#7 - 1986 anti-Contra Aid Protest

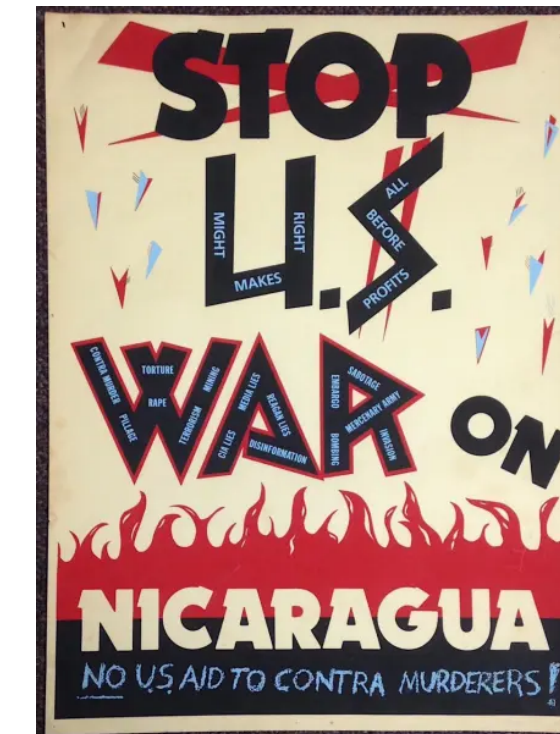
There was an active Central American Solidarity Movement in the 1980s in Grand Rapids, with people resisting the US wars in El Salvador, Guatemala and the US funding of the Contra War in Nicaragua. US aid to the Contras continued for most of the 1980s, even if that aid was so-called humanitarian.

US Congressman Paul Henry, who represented the 3rd Congressional District) continued to vote for aid to the Contras, which resulted in a series of actions taking place at this office in the federal building or outside the federal building.

In one action, several members of the community house known as the Koinonia House, made 75 wooden crosses and put the names of Nicaraguan civilians on those crosses, name of Nicaraguans that had been killed by the US trained and funded Contras. The activists began to place the wooden crosses in the grassy area in front of the Gerald R Ford Federal Building, along Michigan Street. The activists used bricks to hammer on the wooden crosses.

During the placement of the crosses, the federal building security people turned the sprinklers on those protesting, thinking that would deter them from taking action. It did not have the effect that the Federal Building security guards thought it would. However, the Federal Building Security did not even attempt to arrest the activists, instead they waited several hours after the action and removed the crosses from the grass. Fortunately there was an article in the Grand Rapids Press to document this action, along with photos taken by those who organized the action.

Even though the US Congress ended direct aid to the Contras, the CIA and other US agencies conspired to allow a drugs for guns triangle trade to happen in what became known as the Iran/Contra Scandal. The sale of cocaine provided funding for US Agencies to purchase weapons for the Contra forces, despite the Congressional ban. In addition, a great deal of the cocaine ended up in the US, where it was used as another destabilizing tool (in the form of crack) to undermine and criminalize Black communities. The Institute for Global Education's Central American Solidarity Committee created resources and even offered a class on the US-backed Contra War and the Drug Connection.



#8 - 1989 Protest at the Federal Building after 6 Priests were murdered in El Salvador

As soon as word got out to the international community about this most recent atrocity in El Salvador, those involved in the Grand Rapids Central American Solidarity movement mobilized.

About 100 people blocked traffic on Michigan Avenue in front of the Federal building in Grand Rapids. The road blockade consisted of people using two long banners that people held up, with one banner stating, "End US Military Aid to El Salvador."

After protestors blocked traffic for 30 minutes, the Grand Rapids police came and threatened to arrest people if they did not move. Most of those blocking the trafficking decided to leave the road rather than get arrested. Shortly afterwards another contingent of people went into Congressman Paul Henry's office and attempted to make a citizen's arrest against the Congressman and his staff.

Several people held signs about the most recent massacre in El Salvador, while others read the Congressman's staff their rights. Another protestor leaned over the counter in the congressional office and picked up the phone to call the GRPD, making the claim that there were "violent crimes being committed at 110 Michigan."

Eventually, the federal building security showed up and demanded that people leave. One by one the security guards dragged people out and the doors to the federal building were locked so no one could get back in.

Another action was organized a week later, where those resisting US policy in El Salvador built coffins and made cardboard tombstones to draw attention to the US financed murders. One protestor began to dig a grave in the federal building lawn, but before they could did a large enough hole to bury the coffin, federal building security came out a took the shovel away. Those protesting US policy were still able to bury half of the coffin and place the cardboard tombstone next to it, while others held signs by Michigan Avenue.



#9 Protest at Rep. Ehlers office 2003 against Iraq war/Trial of Vern Ehlers

In early March of 2003, just weeks before the US invasion/occupation of Iraq, the People's Alliance for Justice & Change organized a civil disobedience training the following week, which then led to an action at the office of Rep. Vern Ehlers.

There were a few GVSU students who participated in this action, along with members of the People's Alliance for Justice & Change. Six people were arrested when they refused to leave the federal building, so the US Federal Marshals called the GRPD.

The group had people there to speak to the news media and to hand out two flyers, one with information about the illegality of the US war/sanctions on Iraq and another handout, which was a poster of a WANTED sign for Rep. Ehlers, which called for his immediate arrest for supporting war crimes.

A few months later, the People's Alliance for Justice & Change organized a [People's Trial against Congressman Ehlers](#), with a subpoena issued and the trial proceedings video taped. The People's Judge ruled that Rep. Ehlers have violated International Law on several counts, including the indiscriminate murder of Iraqi civilians and the US military's use of torture against Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib Prison.



Student protesters from Grand Valley State University watch as their fellow students were arrested for refusing to leave the Federal Building at closing time Monday evening. The protesters were waiting to speak with Vern Ehlers about war with Iraq.

War protesters miss Ehlers, but get arrested

#10 Grand Rapids City Hall - Divests from South Africa

The South African Anti-Apartheid Movement began in Grand Rapids in the late 1970s. In 1982, organizers were able to get the Grand Rapids Community Relations Commission to draft a resolution for the City to formally divest from South Africa.

Once the resolution draft was in place, the Anti-Apartheid Movement recruited numerous organizations to write letters of support for resolution, organizations such as the Grand Rapids NAACP, the Grand Rapids Urban League, the YWCA, the Hispanic Center, the Grand Rapids Inter-Tribal Council and the Institute for Global Education, along with religious groups such as Temple Emmanuel, Plymouth Congregational Church, the Afro-America Lay Catholic Caucus of Grand Rapids and the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The resolution and the supporting letters from community groups were then presented to the Grand Rapids City Commission, which adopted the resolution and formally divested from financial institutions or companies doing business in South African. The resolution read in part:

Whereas the City of Grand Rapids has recognized that investment of City funds should not be made on an arbitrary basis, but should be based on the premise that the people's money should be used for the people's benefit;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the people of the City of Grand Rapids enact the following amendment to the City's investment policy:

To be a depository of "idle" funds belonging to the City of Grand Rapids, a financial institution shall not encourage, support, or condone legally-required discrimination against an individual on the basis of race or color, by knowingly making or maintaining a loan to the Republic of South Africa, or to a subsidiary or affiliate of a United States firm operating in the Republic of South Africa. A financial institution shall be considered to have complied with this resolution if the financial institution has filed with the City Treasurer an affidavit attesting to the fact that it has, after January 1, 1984, no existing loans to the Republic of South Africa, a national corporation of the Republic of South Africa, or to a subsidiary or affiliate of a United States firm operating in the Republic of South Africa, as determined from information obtained from the United States Department of Commerce.

#11 Beginning of the End the Contract with ICE Campaign

On Thursday, June 28th, 2018, roughly 250 people showed up to the Kent County Commission meeting, a turnout that is rarely seen at such meetings. People with Movimiento Cosecha and GR Rapid Response to ICE had been planning for months to attend the commission meeting and demand that they end the contract between ICE and the Kent County Sheriff's Department.

Organizers waited until the Public Comment period of the commission meeting and after a few people spoke, a few dozen people occupied the space in the commission chambers, where the Kent County Commissioners sat during the meetings. Some people unfurled a large banner that said, Kent County Separates Families, End the Contract!

Most of the Kent County Commissioners got up and left the meeting, with a just a few of them remaining. The End the Contract campaign organizers asked people to come to the podium and have a People's Hearing, where dozens of people, primarily those impacted by ICE violence, spoke about the fear they experienced, fear of arrest, fear of detention and fear of deportation. For more than an hour the People's Hearing was conducted, essentially taking over the Kent County Commission meeting.

This was the first action taken in the End the Contract Campaign, which lasted until the following year, when Immigration and Customs Enforcement decided to end their contract with the Kent County Sheriff's Department, primarily because of all the negative and national press generated from the protests and the abusive actions of ICE and Cops in Grand Rapids.

It should be noted that the Kent County Commission, nor the Sheriff's Department, called for an end to the ICE contract. In fact, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), is the entity that ended the contract with Kent County, primarily because of how much media attention the End of Contract campaign was getting. The amount of attention was two fold. First, the 14 month efforts of Movimiento Cosecha GR and GR Rapid Response to ICE engaged in numerous Direct Actions that not only confronted Kent County officials, it engaged the public and generated a tremendous amount of media attention. Second, when an off-duty GRPD Captain contacted ICE about a former US Marine, whom the cop thought was an undocumented immigrant, the national media began to pay attention to the absurdity and immorality of the racist profiling of immigrants. Thus, ICE ended their contract with Kent County in September of 2019.



#12 Immigrant Justice March in 2006, which became the largest march in Grand Rapids history

On March 26, 2006, thousands of people marched in favor of immigrant rights today in Grand Rapids as part of ongoing organizing efforts against anti-immigrant legislation being debated by the federal government. The march, which went from Garfield Park to Calder Plaza, was the largest march in recent history, far exceeding a [2004 march for immigrant rights](#) that was attended by more than 400 people. In Grand Rapids today, nearly 10,000 people marched in favor of immigrant rights and against legislation that would criminalize undocumented workers. Their signs read “We are ALL Immigrants,” “We do the Work,” and “We are not Terrorists.”

Starting at Garfield Park on the south side of Grand Rapids people from all over West Michigan came together from all walks of life. There were ministers, small business owners, parents, students, but most of the people who gathered today were workers. Several people I talked to said they took the day off from work, because “this issue is more important than a day’s pay.” Economics was one of the 2 main reasons that people mentioned for taking action on this issue.

A farm worker named Vicente said, “people don’t realize how important we are to the economy.....we pick the fruit, we do the work!” Teresa Hendricks from the Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project says that “if the current undocumented workforce was arrested the economy locally would shut down. We estimate that migrant workers generate about \$10 billion annually in West Michigan.”

The other issue that people kept repeating was the fact that if the proposed legislation went through it would be “a grave injustice.” The possibility that millions of people could be jailed for nothing more than being undocumented, generated lots of angry energy at the march. The legislation in question was introduced in 2005, known as the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. This bill would criminalize undocumented immigrants and even punish those who offered them any assistance, including rides, housing, and food support.

During the march, people yelled, chanted, and carried hundreds of Mexican flags. Luis Beteta, head of the Catholic Church’s Hispanic Ministry office said that “this proposed legislation itself was criminal. People should never be considered illegal just because a policy says so.” When asked about people who are not directed at risk with this proposed legislation Beteta said “in Nazi Germany many people said this doesn’t concern me and look what happened. It affects all of us. We are all Immigrants.”

The march ended on Calder Plaza, where more speakers presented information and community groups invited people to participate in the next large action, an action that was scheduled for May 1st and would be part of a national day of actions.

**‘They
are going
to better
this
country’**

About 7,000 take to streets of GR
over immigration issues

#13 GRPD tries to stop 2003 anti-Iraq War march when Bush was in town

In late January, it was then announced that President George W. Bush was coming to Grand Rapids, the day after his State of the Union address. Organizers began planning an action to confront Bush when he came into town. The announcement said he would first be at Spectrum Hospital and then take the motorcade to DeVos Hall. The plan was to line up on both sides of Michigan Street, from just west of Spectrum Hospital, all the way down to the Federal building. The GRPD was told that the demonstration would then move down Michigan Street and turn left onto Monroe. However, organizers had a different plan, which was to turn left on Ottawa, then right on Lyon St and go directly to DeVos Hall.

There were over 100 cops out in force that day in late January 2003. When the police realized that the demonstrators took a detour, they panicked. Protestors, which numbered over 1,000, began turning right on Lyon Street, near the entrance to the building, when police cruisers jumped the curb and almost ran into the building, in order to block those demonstrating to walk any further. At the same time, dozens of police officers lined up along Lyon St, facing demonstrators, in full riot gear. For nearly 30 minutes there was a shouting match between cops and protestors. What was not known at the time was that the GRPD had created a "Free Speech Zone," which was something that the Bush administration had begun to use after 9/11. Free Speech Zones were fenced off areas that were designated for protestors, often a significant distance from where those protesting had intended. The same was the case on that day, with the Free Speech Zone create in front of City Hall on Monroe, nearly a block from where Bush would be speaking.

The group I was in was detained by police on North side of Michigan Ave in an attempt to separate us from other protestors. After complaints, we traveled down Michigan to a point where we could cross. We noticed a lot of plain clothes men in suits with shades and earplugs that were directing the local police as to what to do. They would not interact with us and tried to be invisible but they were clearly in authority and control.

As we proceeded South down Ottawa, they attempted to compact us on sidewalk and when we turned West on Lyon, there they had a constricted area where they made their move and began grabbing people. My daughter was grabbed and thrown on top of the hood of a car and was arrested. I became very vocal obviously at that point toward the police, but as there was a crowd forming with more witnesses, they didn't arrest me until I was walking up the steps to the ground level of a second story level by what is now the 5/3 bank building. Again, in an area that was blocked from vision. My charge was: instigating a riot.

In addition to the few who were arrested on Lyon Street, there was a whole other group that chose not to march down to the Free Speech Zone and began marching in the streets through downtown Grand Rapids. The GRPD began arresting people for marching in the street and an estimated 17 people in all were arrested that day. However, ACLU lawyers got involved and most people had the charges dropped. Those who did not have their charges dropped were ultimately charged with misdemeanors.

#14 - DeVos Family headquarters

Behind me here, are where the DeVos family makes many of their decisions about how to make money and spend money. This building is home to RDV Corp., the Windquest Group, Ottawa Private Capital LLC, all of the family foundations and so much more.

The DeVos family is the most powerful family in West Michigan. Their reach into the political, economic, social and cultural world impacts all of us every day. Since 1990, the DeVos family has contributed more to the Republican Party than any other entity in Michigan, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to support candidates that have adopted policies that create a larger wealth gap, that has waged war against working families and labor unions, pushed the privatization of public services, embraced White Supremacist policies, criminalized the LGBTQ community, undermined public education and demonized reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

The DeVos family financial investments are so vast that we only know a fraction of where they have their money. In 2017, when Betsy DeVos was being vetted as the new Secretary of State, she had to provide documentation for where she personally had investments. At that time, we know that she had investments in 102 different financial companies, which makes it likely that the entire family has investments in over a thousands financial companies. We will probably never know, but because like all members of the Capitalist Class they do not believe in transparency.

In addition, the DeVos family foundations make it a point to redirect millions of dollars annually to fund religious right groups, far right think tanks, religious schools and charity-based groups that provide services to people who have been impacted by the very policies adopted by politicians that they have made massive campaign contributions to.

Lastly, the DeVos family has people who sit on the boards of directors of groups like the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the Econ Club, the Right Place Inc., the Acton Institute, GVSU and the West Michigan Policy Forum, just to name a few, because they are part of the interlocking systems of power in this city that will not tolerate the work of social justice movements or anything that promotes collective liberation or embraces an abolitionist view of the world. Not only do we need to know what this family does, we need to actively resist them on all fronts.



#15 First Pride Celebration in Grand Rapids 1988



#16 - Central American Solidarity Weekly vigil and Street Theater

During most of the 1980s, there was a weekly vigil at this spot, which at that time was known as the Monroe Mall, since there was no road then. The weekly vigil that was held here was in a form of resistance against the US Wars in Central America at that time. One group organizing against the US Central American policy, was the Stop the Invasion Campaign, also known as STIC.

STIC organized an intense form of street theater in Grand Rapids as a way to draw attention to the kind of brutal policies that the US government was supporting in Central America. They staged a series of mock kidnappings throughout Grand Rapids, where hooded men would drag off someone, throw them in a van and drive off. People who witnessed the mock kidnappings were not sure what was actually taking place, but moments later other STIC members handed out information sheets explaining that what people just witnessed was a dramatization of what death-squads do in Guatemala and El Salvador everyday.

The mock kidnapping began on Monroe Avenue, right in front of the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel cafe, where a van pulled up to a screeching halt and hooded men jumped out and grab a woman. The staged kidnappings then moved to the old Monroe Mall, where Father Paul Milanowski was taken. Milanowski was part of a regular Wednesday vigil that took place on the old Monore Mall against US policies in Central America.

There were other mock kidnappings, including a mock kidnapping that took place at the County building, where Kent County Commissioner Liz Oppewal was taken during a County Commission meeting.

The street theater was an effective tool to get both the general public and other activists thinking about the daily violence in Central America that was being paid for by our tax dollars. The timing of the event was also part of a larger STIC strategy to resist US policies in Central America, which included the ongoing threat of a direct US military invasion of Nicaragua.



#17 May 2020 Uprising in GR: George Floyd Protests

On May 30th, 2020, there were several converging protests and marches in response to the recent police murder of George Floyd. Some estimates put the crowd between 3 - 4,000 people, which left Rosa Parks Circle and began marching in the streets, moving east on Fulton St.

When the protest march arrived at the GRPD headquarters, they were met by dozens of GRPD cops in full riot gear, and using bicycles to prevent protestors from entering the Police Headquarters.

Several hours of a standoff began between protestors and GRPD bike cops, until eventually the cops began using tear gas to disperse the crowd. This response from the GRPD led to protestors beginning to damage property, even burning several police cars. Unable to get the crowd to disperse, the GRPD then used a chemical weapons against the crowd, known as Spede Heat, which hot one person, causing serious harm. This act of repression just emboldened the crowd to cause more damage to building in the downtown area.

Grand Rapids City officials were shocked by the rioting, and they called for a citywide state of emergency, which meant that the Michigan National Guard was brought in and a curfew was imposed on the public in the downtown area.

Sam Cummings, who is a business owner and member of the Grand Rapids Power Structure, said he was “mad as hell” over the uprising in downtown GR. “That is not who we are, and that was confirmed by talking to some folks on the police force,” Cummings said. The response by Cummings not only demonstrated his arrogance, it also reveal his ignorance about how deeply entrenched White Supremacy is throughout institutions in Grand Rapids, especially the GRPD.

The fact is that Grand Rapids responded in exactly the same way that marginalized people have responded for decades. When riots were happening in dozens of cities across the US. In 1967, Dr. King said, *“In the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity.”*



#18 - Anti-Nuclear resistance in GR in the 1980s

Beginning in the late 1970s, many people in the Grand Rapids area began to learn about the dangers of nuclear weapons and possibility of nuclear war. There were numerous educational efforts that took place, organized by several different groups, but beyond the education, there was action.

Another tactic used to draw attention to the harsh realities of a nuclear attack was to hold a Die-In on the First Friday of the month in downtown Grand Rapids. At noon, a siren goes off as a test, but it is the same siren that would be used if an impending disaster would happen, such as a nuclear attack. People involved in the Freeze Campaign would be on the old Monroe Mall downtown and when the siren went off they would scream and fall to the ground. Other members of the Freeze Campaign would hand out flyers to people walking by to let them know what would actually happen if a nuclear bomb fell on Grand Rapids.

Over time, some of these same activists would use the old weather ball (formerly located on top of the Michigan National building) as a way to draw attention to nuclear war and nuclear winter by saying, WEATHER BALL BLACK, NUCLEAR ATTACK.

There used to be a US Military Recruiting office right here on this block, so for years there would be actions about the horrors of Nuclear Weapons, One of those action was to use sidewalk chalk or ground up rubber, which people would used to make the outline of a human body on the sidewalk in front of the Military Recruiting office. The outline of a human body was all that was left near ground zero in Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan, since humans were vaporized instantly after the US drop nuclear bombs on those cities. People would hand out flyers with this information to those walking up and down what was then the Monroe Mall in the 1980s.

In addition, people would protest at nuclear weapons manufacturing sites in Grand Rapids and across the state, often participating in Civil Disobedience and going to jail to draw attention to the immorality and illegality of nuclear weapons. Dozens of people from Grand Rapids were arrested for resisting nuclear weapons, particularly in the 1980s and 90s, when Grand Rapids was known throughout the country as being part of the Nuclear Freeze Campaign.



CARRIED AWAY — While most of the 96 protesters arrested Wednesday at Wurtsmith AFB cooperated with 379th Security Police, some had to be forcibly taken to waiting buses for processing. — NHP PHOTO

#19 - No Blood for Oil Critical Mass

Critical Mass was a movement of bicyclists who were not only advocating for alternative means of transportation, but was a political act of resistance. Leading up to and in the early months of the US War in Iraq, anti-war organizers decided to do several Critical Mass rides to protest the war, using the slogan, NO BLOOD FOR OIL.

The Critical Mass rides always began here, at Veteran's Park and at one of the more powerful rides in response to the US War in Iraq, there were over 100 bicyclists. People rode south on Division, taking up both lanes going south, thus forcing motorists to have to ride behind the bicyclists.

The Critical Mass ride then turned left onto 28th Street, where it also took up both lanes going east. At one point, when the ride approached Kalamazoo from 28th street, you could look back and see that traffic was backed up as far as the eye could see.

Eventually the GRPD showed up and cut off the bicyclists. The cops told people that they had to ride down 28th street in a single file, but as soon as the cops went to get into their cars, the bicyclists continued on 28th street taking up both lanes. The GRPD followed us until we turned north on Breton. Cutting off the bicyclists a second time, the cops then threatened to arrest people if they persisted in riding in the street and blocking traffic. Several Critical Mass participants yelled out, we aren't blocking traffic, we are traffic.

This action, where participants linked the burning of fossil fuels to militarism, was critically important, since the Climate Justice Movement was just beginning around the world.



#20 - Malcolm X at Fountain Street Church

On February 12, 1962, Malcolm X spoke at Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids to an estimated crowd of 350 people. His lecture was part of the Great Speakers Lecture Series that Fountain Street has hosted for decades.

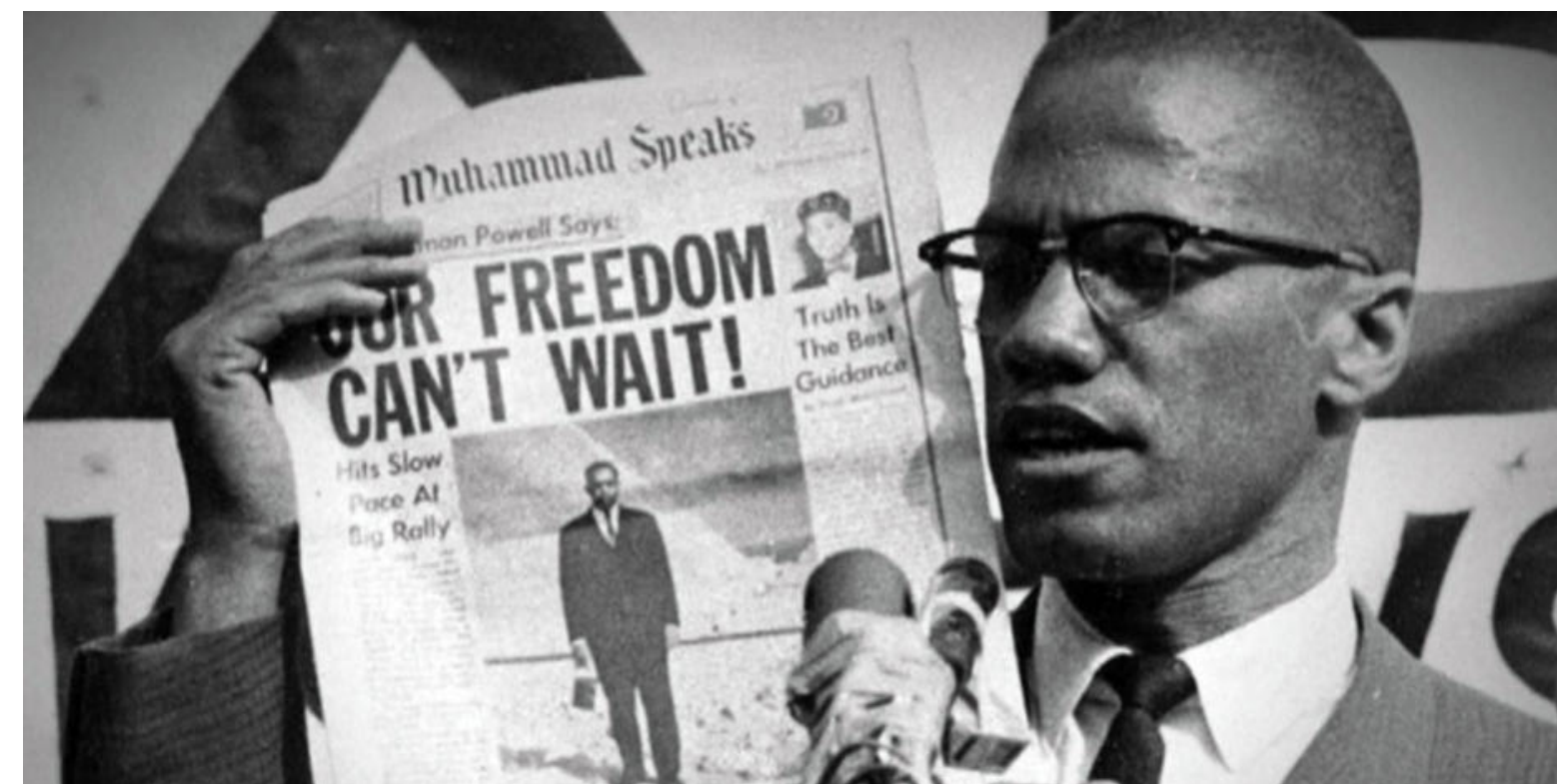
The title of his talk at Fountain Street Church was “***Segregation, Separation and Integration.***” Fountain Street Church has an audio recording of the lecture, but we have been unable to allow them to let us listen to the lecture or share it with our readers.

The only record we have is from a [February 18 article](#) written about the lecture by a reporter named Kurt Luedtke, writing for the Grand Rapids Press. The article is not very long and the headline reads, “Black Muslims’ ‘Malcolm X’ Brings Harsh Message Here.” Luedtke refers to the Nation of Islam as a “quasi-religious organization” in the early part of the article and continues throughout to engage in hostile language towards Minister Malcolm.

The reporter does note that this was the second time in six months that Malcolm had been in Grand Rapids to recruit in the Black community. The sub-heading of the article says, “Activities Alarm Leaders of Both Races.” However, nowhere in the article are any Black or White leaders cited, so the claim seems to be unfounded or at least unsubstantiated.

At the very end of the article, the reporter states, “*In its exhortation of racial superiority, Black Muslimism has been compared to the German Third Reich.*” Such a conclusion only further demonstrates the lack of understanding by the reporter and it exposes the contempt he had with what Malcolm X had to say and what the Nation of Islam represented at the time.

Despite the attempt by the GR Press to discredit Malcolm X, we believe it is important to celebrate the fact that one of the great proponents of the Black Freedom Struggle came to our city to share his passion and critique of Structural Racism.



#21 - Anti-Vietnam War organizing Park Congregational church

In March of 1969, Joan Baez did a short concert here at Park Congregational Church. However, the main reason Baez was in town was to speak out against the US War in Vietnam.

Baez was one of many well known speakers and artists who came to Grand Rapids to mobilize people against the brutal US war in Southeast Asia, people like Julian Bond, Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda.

The anti-war movement in Grand Rapids was not as militant as in cities like Chicago, New York or Washington, but there were a significant number of people opposing the war in a variety of ways. The local chapter of the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, along with the Grand Rapids Quakers organized an ongoing vigil in downtown between the City and County buildings.

Many people were involved in the anti-draft movement in Grand Rapids, like Jashui Milanowski and his brother Fr. Paul Milanowski. They conducted trainings for people on how to file as conscientious objectors, how to become a draft resister and were part of the network assisting young men who chose to engage in self-exile and move to Canada.

Many people from the Grand Rapids area also traveled to Washington, DC for the massive anti-war rallies. Many of those who went and organized buses were from colleges and high schools in the area, with Calvin College and Grand Valley State College being the most active. There were also lots of anti-war activities being organized on the campus of Calvin College, where teach-ins were held, marches, debates and draft resistance information for students. In March of 1968, forty seven Calvin Professors ran an anti-war ad in the *Grand Rapids Press*.

I myself, was in the US military at the time of the Vietnam War. I was not stationed in Vietnam, but I was part of the underground GI anti-war press. Our newspaper had a real impact on the young GIs at the time, not only providing them with a different perspective, but in many cases radicalizing soldiers who would then be a critical part of the anti-war movement in the US.

Let us never forget that Grand Rapids was part of a nationwide effort to resist the war in Vietnam and to confront US Imperialism around the world.



#22 - Acton Institute

The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, is a far right think tank, that was founded in the early 1990s by a Catholic Priest named Fr. Robert Sirico. Sirico has a long standing relationship with the DeVos family and even presided over the 2nd marriage of Erik Prince. Since their founding, the Acton Institute has had either a Prince or a DeVos family member sit on their Board of Directors.

More importantly, the Acton Institute fundamentally believes that Christianity and Capitalism are perfect bedfellows. They believe that poverty is the fault of individuals.

In addition, the Acton Institute is an anti-Black organization, which consistently demonizes the Movement for Black Lives, they have been a longtime opponent of reproductive justice and bodily autonomy, and they regularly support and perpetuate heterosexism and transphobia.

For years the Acton Institute has denied the existence of Climate Change and has even been the recipient of funding from one of the largest climate deniers, ExxonMobil.

Unfortunately, the Acton Institute has grown over the years, and now hosts international conferences on Free Market Capitalism. The Acton Institute essentially creates ideological content for far right political and religious movements. Their offices should constantly be the target of protests and resistance.



#23 - Statue of Bishop Baraga

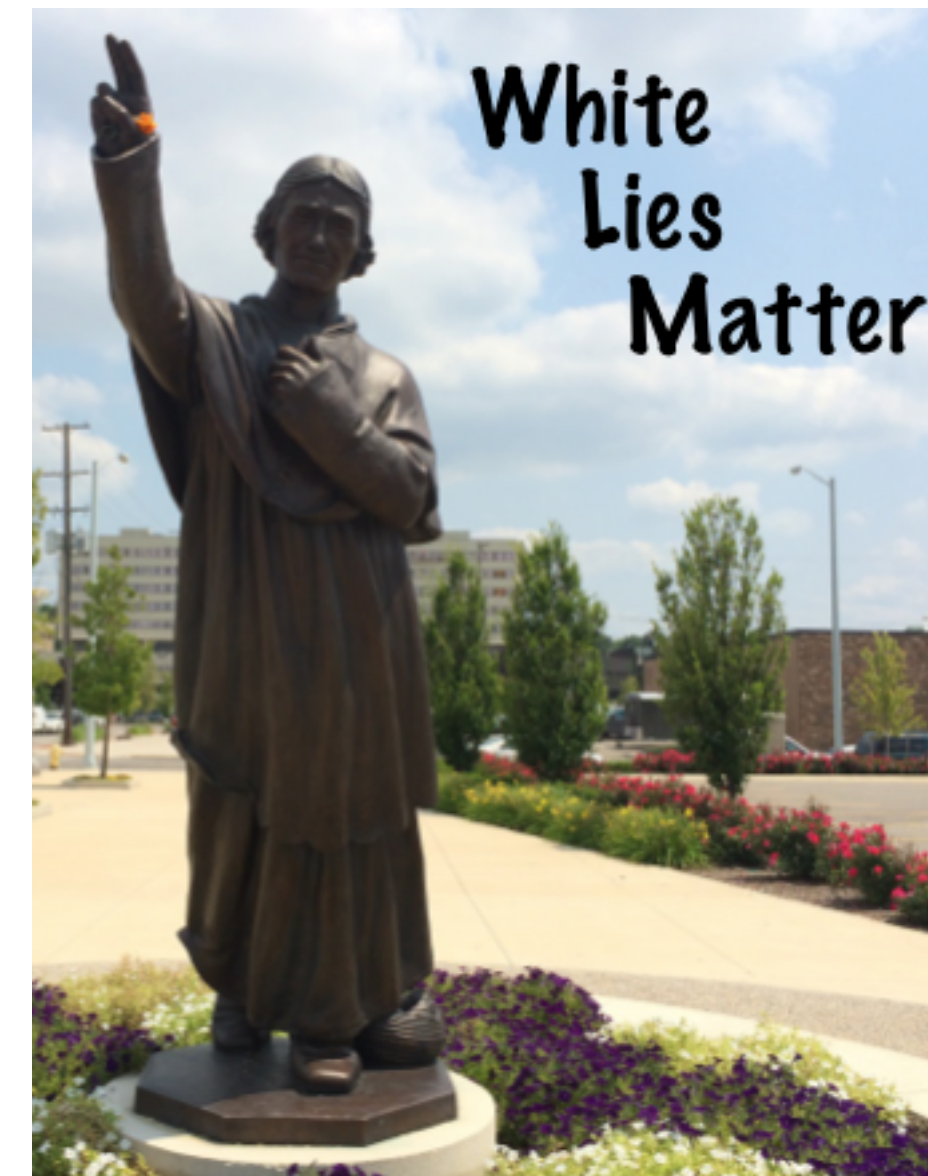
This is a statue of Bishop Baraga, the Catholic Bishop who helped usher in Settler Colonialism, in what is now called the State of Michigan. While Baraga comes across in the media and church accounts as a saintly man, there is something that is glaringly missing from what function the bishop played in the colonization of the Great Lakes region.

What has come to be the acceptable norm in the US, is that those who do missionary work are highly respectable individuals. However, the fundamental nature of missionary work is to not only convert people to your beliefs, but to automatically denounce the existing spiritual traditions of those you mean to convert.

More importantly, Baraga's interaction with the Ojibway people also paved the way for genocidal policies that Europeans have implemented over the past two centuries in this area.

Those policies include the outright killing of Native people, stealing Native lands, forced relocation and taking Native children from their communities to put them in boarding schools, something the Catholic Church did in Michigan. The history of these boarding schools included denying Native children to right to speak their language, dress in traditional clothing, it subjected them to Christian teaching and also physical and sexual abuse, as is well documented in the book, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools*.

Native American scholar George Tinker, author of the book *Missionary Conquest: The Gospels and Native American Genocide*, refers to Christian missionaries to Native Nations as "**partners in genocide.**" Therefore, we should see this statue not only as a form of propaganda, it also legitimizes what has been done to Native communities. This statue normalizes and sanitizes the history of genocide and Settler Colonialism in West Michigan and it exposes the critical role that Christianity in those policies. We will continue to say this until the statue of Bishop Baraga is removed and the land that was once ours is returned.



#24 - Central American Sanctuary - the Koinonia House

In 1986, the Koinonia House declared itself as a Sanctuary for Central American political refugees. They became the 3rd Sanctuary in Michigan, and were part of the growing Central American Sanctuary Movement throughout the US.

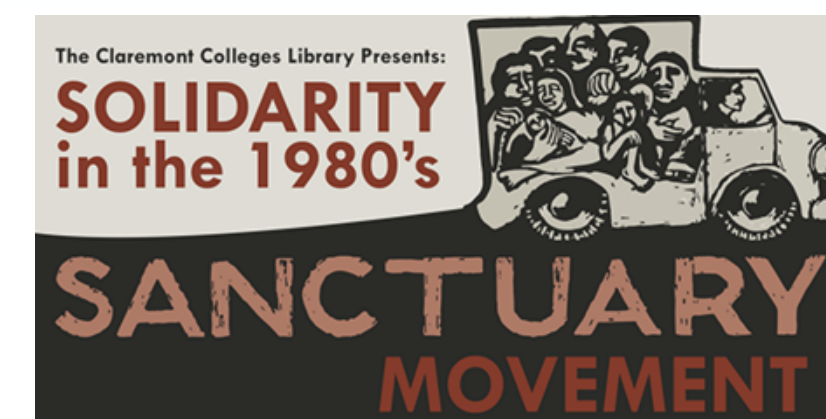
The US financed death squads in El Salvador and Guatemala were the primary source of the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people coming from Central America in the 1980's. US activists began to hear these stories in greater numbers and since the Reagan administration did not acknowledge Salvadoran or Guatemalan refugees as being political refugees, the *Central American Sanctuary Movement* was born.

The Koinonia House was a housing collective that began in 1984 and did much of their organizing around resisting US Policy in Central America. They participated in numerous protests, marches, letter-writing campaigns and even engaged in civil disobedience at local Congressional offices. However, they all felt that something more needed to be done and they decided to use their collective privilege and take a stand in solidarity with those who had fled their countries because of the US-backed repression in El Salvador and Guatemala.

In April of 1987, six Guatemalan adults and one child arrived in Grand Rapids at the Koinonia House. A few days later a press conference was held on the front porch of the Koinonia House and this marked the beginning of several years that the Grand Rapids Sanctuary offered a safe haven for those who were fleeing violence in Central America.

Besides providing a safe space for the Guatemalans to live, the other part of the Sanctuary work was to organize opportunities for those in Sanctuary to share their stories. The belief was that if people in the US were to hear directly from Central Americans who had fled their countries, it could mobilize even more people to oppose US policy in Central America.

By the end of 1987, members of the Koinonia House had secured funds to purchase a second house, which they then used as the primary Sanctuary House, which has been used by Guatemalans right up to the present. I was a member of the Koinonia House beginning in the late 1990s, and even though we were not doing Sanctuary in the house on LaGrave, we still had Central Americans coming who needed our assistance and our solidarity. The Koinonia House was a vital part of the Central American Solidarity Movement in Grand Rapids, I was a grateful to be part of that legacy.



#25 - 1967 Riot/Uprising in Grand Rapids

On July 25th, 1967, Grand Rapids police officers arrested several Black youth, when they pulled them over believing they were in a stolen vehicle. One source said that the cops used excessive force in dealing with the Black youth. This incident was the spark for a three day riot in Grand Rapids, but it unleashed decades of rage within the Black community, had been experiencing discrimination and Jim Crow style policies in Grand Rapids.

People often misunderstand the nature of most riots. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr referred to riots as, *“the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity.”*

The 3 day riot that took place in July of 1967, occurred in the near Southeast part of Grand Rapids, which Division, Wealthy, Madison and Delaware being the borders of where people rose up and rioted.

Besides the GRPD, the City of Grand Rapids called in the Michigan National Guard to put down the riot, which included throwing bricks through windows and the burning of buildings. However, what the City of Grand Rapids really wanted to do was to “restore order,” which essentially means they wanted to get back to business and not address the list of grievances coming from the Black community.

Here are a few other details about the riot that are important to note:

- One week before the riot, the head of the Grand Rapids Urban League warned City officials that Grand Rapids could be the site of a riot. However, Mayor Sonneveldt, the City Manager and the Chief of Police “positively denied that riots were possible in the city.”
- Most of the people arrested were Black, but there were a few white people arrest for carrying concealed weapons. In fact, some white residents were calling the GRPD offer to help “put down” the rioter.
- The Grand Rapids Press interviewed white people living in communities just outside of the city. One white woman in Ionia said, *“We heard they were coming here on Tuesday. We all had our guns ready if we had to.”*
- The City of Grand Rapids produced a document called, Anatomy of a Riot, which even made some recommendations on how to respond. However, most of their recommendations talked about individual issues, instead of focusing on larger societal and system problems that the Black community faced in 1967 and is still confronted with in 2023.

#26 - Displacement and Highway Construction in Grand Rapids

Another manifestation of structural racism in Grand Rapids was the push toward urban renewal. “Urban renewal” was a euphemistic term for programs that re-directed public money into the downtown area; the term sounded like support for urban residents, but it was the opposite.

As cars became the dominant form of transportation in Grand Rapids, there was a need to expand parking lots in urban spaces. White flight increased as did suburban communities, or what Todd Robinson identifies as bedroom communities. People built their bedrooms and slept in places like Rockford, but they worked and shopped in Grand Rapids. To encourage the transit of people coming from suburbia, those in power lobbied to build highways through the urban core of Grand Rapids.

In Grand Rapids, there were two separate highway projects, US 131 in 1961 and Interstate 196 in 1963. Both construction projects had a huge impact on the destruction of homes and the displacement of families

In a 1996 interview, Father Dennis Morrow, a Catholic priest, shared his considerable research on the highway construction in Grand Rapids and its impact. Father Morrow was motivated to do this research because his family home was one of those torn down.

There were an estimated 4,000 people displaced because of the highway construction through Grand Rapids. People who remember tend to focus on the near Westside destruction for I-196 and the Polish, German and Lithuanian families displaced there. While this is true, there were also numerous Black families who were displaced, particularly because of the portion of US 131 that ran south from downtown. Father Morrow compared the devastation of the highway construction to the 1960’s riots:

We don’t normally call it devastation because something was built. It was pushed through by the government and certainly you could say that some people have benefitted from it. However, if the devastation from the riots of the 60’s had been nearly as great as the devastation wrought by the freeway construction, they would have called the riots an all-out war. The number of dwellings that were destroyed during the riots were infinitesimal compared to those destroyed during the freeway construction. You can look at virtually any city where the freeway went through: the older housing stock and everything around the freeway became undesirable as a place to live.

Additionally, Father Morrow stated:

Things like tearing down homes, cleaning things out, tearing down buildings all happened, but they went about it with such a zeal. It was not originally the plan of the Interstate system as I understood it, but many of the urban planners saw this as an opportunity to clean out some of the “undesirable areas.”

As in the 1937 Home Owner’s Loan Corporation map, “undesirable” often meant “Black neighborhoods.”

#27 - The 2020 Heartside Park Eviction

Efforts began in the mid-1990s to create a park in the Heartside neighborhood, one that would serve many of the people who relied on social services from a variety of agencies. The park gained traction, but there were numerous obstacles to overcome. First, other entities, particularly the Catholic Schools, were looking at the creation of a park that would primarily benefit their sports programs. Then there was the issue of the City Commission approving an off ramp that significantly reduced the park size.

Not to be deterred, the Heartside Park efforts were finally realized in 1997, after years of a battle between the city and downtown businesses who resisted the creation of a space that would cater to the unhoused population. People raised money, held concerts and finally won a battle despite the city's master plan calling for a park in the Heartside area. Numerous agencies rallied around what was being called, The People's Park.

In late 2020, in the middle of the COVID pandemic, many of the city's unhoused had set up sort of a tent city in Heartside Park, since many of the area shelters were not safe and not the best places to be during a pandemic. As an alternative, the City was "offering" temporary housing in the Purple East building, which was right across from the encampment, but many people were concerned about being in an enclosed space and contracting the COVID virus.

At the same time, the City of Grand Rapids posted signs saying that people were going to be evicted and that their possession would be thrown away. This form of cruelty not only denied unhoused people the right to sleep outdoors, it once again demonstrated state violence, since the GRPD would forceable remove people and their possessions.

The ACLU also sent a letter to Grand Rapids City officials, stating:

We ask that the City pause the evictions at least until plans can be made to offer safe single-occupancy accommodations, not just congregate shelter, to camp residents. We also write to alert the City that is legally required to ensure that Camp Heartside residents receive clear notice, including information about how to reclaim property, and that the City must inventory and store any seized property and provide owners a reasonable opportunity to claim it. The City should also be aware that it cannot make it a crime for people to engage in life-sustaining activities like camping unless there is sufficient housing available for those individuals.

The City ignored the ACLU letter and just before Christmas, people were evicted from the Park and their possessions thrown away. We must never forget that this is how the City of Grand Rapids treats the unhoused community, all under the guise of public safety.

#28 Statue of Jay Van Andel

Jay Van Andel, along with Rich DeVos, co-founded the corporate pyramid scheme known as Amway. It's hard not to know about Van Andel, as his name is plastered on buildings all across the city. The statue of Jay Van Andel's was one of the first to go up in the series that is funded completely by another member of the local capitalist class, Peter Seechia. Van Andel, who in personality, was the exact opposite of Rich DeVos. Jay Van Andel was quiet and reserved, but make no mistake about it, his politics were every bit as ruthless as that of Rich DeVos.

Van Andel, like his Amway co-founder, funded numerous rightwing groups, both religious and secular. The religious groups that Van Andel funded while he was alive and continues to fund through his foundation are The Acton Institute, Bethany Christian Services, Campus Crusade, Creation Research Society, Morality in Media, Mel Trotter Ministries and Guiding Light.

In the secular arena, Van Andel was a big supporter of Grand Valley State University, Calvin College, Hillsdale College, Frederick Meijer Gardens and Grand Action. In fact, Van Andel was the largest single donor (besides taxpayers) to the construction of the Van Andel Arena, which is where his statue is located.

Van Andel was also a big supporter of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and had a hand in the founding of the Right Place Inc. In addition to donating money to support rightwing causes and organizations, Van Andel was also an active player in determining the policy work of several key national groups that have had a significant effect on federal and foreign policy.

Before we look at some of the national groups that Van Andel worked with, it is important to note that the main message on the plaque the immortalizes the Amway co-founder is that he was a tireless "***advocate for free enterprise.***" Van Andel believed that business should lead the way to creating prosperity and freedom, especially when the government doesn't put limits on what the market can do. Well, at least this was the public message that Van Andel was fond of espousing, but in private he was in no way interested in an unfettered market. In fact, Van Andel, like most capitalists, want the state to intervene on behalf of private capital, especially when it serves the interests of the wealthiest part of the capitalist class.

At the national level, Jay Van Andel funded groups like the hyper-conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, which crafted a policy framework that the Reagan Administration essentially adopted. The co-founder of Amway also funded the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is essentially a front group that works in tandem with the US State Department and has a long history of undermining governments that do not believe they must adhere to the wishes of the US. Besides funding the NED, Van Andel also sat on the Board of Directors for a period of time. https://thirdworldtraveler.com/Blum/TrojanHorse_RS.html

Lastly, Jay Van Andel was deeply involved in the largest pro-business lobbying group in the country, the US Chamber of Commerce. In fact, Van Andel was Chairman of the national group for a period of time. The Chamber, which often likes to present itself as a defender of the small business owner, is one of the largest lobbyists in the nation. According to Open Secrets, the US Chamber has spent \$1.8 billion on lobbying since 1998.

In addition, the US Chamber of Commerce has been one of the most consistent climate deniers in the country and has fought hard against any policy that supports working class people. The Chamber has opposed efforts to get paid sick leave policy passed and numerous other pro-worker policies. As Chairman of the US Chamber of Commerce, Van Andel made sure that whatever policies were being decided in Washington, they needed to benefit the capitalist class that he was a part of.

Jay Van Andel died in 2004, and was listed as 242nd richest person on the planet that that time.

#29 Anti-Fracking campaign exposes Wolverine Oil & Gas

This is the office of Wolverine Oil & Gas. In 2012, the group Mutual Aid GR found out that Wolverine Oil & Gas was involved in fracking. Several members of Mutual Aid GR created the People's Environmental Protection Agency and went inside the offices of Wolverine Oil & Gas to shut down their operations and read the following statement:

"Today, we occupy the offices of Wolverine Oil & Gas as one action against the consequences of oil and gas extraction in Michigan. We are confronting Wolverine Oil & Gas because they have a history of profiting from environmental destruction and particularly their use of the natural gas extraction method known as hydraulic fracturing.

We know that hydraulic fracturing is bad for Michigan because it:

- Contaminates ground water and soil with toxic chemicals*
- Contributes to the pollution and contamination of fresh water, which is one of the things that make Michigan such a magical place to live.*
- Fracking poisons plants, animals and humans.*
- Fracking is accelerating around the country and in Michigan and is contributing to the most urgent crisis of our time, global warming.*
- Lastly, fracking for natural gas reduces the need to seek truly sustainable and renewable forms of energy.*

Therefore, we occupy Wolverine Oil & Gas to say no to contaminating Michigan water; no to practices that significantly contribute to global warming; and no to companies that profit from environmental destruction.

We are occupying Wolverine Oil & Gas to demand that they release all information about the type and amount of chemicals they have used in fracking to date and the amount of water used; to release information on the location of all oil and gas wells they own and operate in Michigan, and to stop the practice of fracking where ever they engage in this practice.

No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth!"

3 Members of the Mutual Aid GR were arrested, because it is illegal to call for an end to environmental destruction, but perfectly lawful to destroy eco-systems and perpetuate the Climate Crisis.

