

The Flint water crisis is an example of what happens when the needs of profit and industry are deemed more important than the needs of the people. Flint residents lost their local democratic rights and their local elected officials had their powers usurped due to the imposition of Michigan's emergency manager law. Supposed debt in majority Black and Brown populated school districts and municipalities, in addition to assets that could be privatized, were the driving motivator for the communities who would lose their democracy. Since the passage of the emergency manager law in March 2011, no majority White community within the state of Michigan has been taken over by the state and lost their democracy.

My foray into the fight for clean water was embedded in the larger fight for the restoration of democracy in Flint. At the time of the switch I was a member of the Flint Democracy Defense League, a grassroots group of Flint residents who came together after Flint went into state receivership. (This group was itself a collective offshoot of two other groups, Occupy Flint and Stand Up for Democracy-Genesee County). Immediately after the switch to the Flint River the water coming out of my tap was brown, yellow, and/or smelt like an open sewer. Within a month I was boiling my water and had a point of use Brita filter in the kitchen. Unfortunately, I was still bathing in unfiltered water. I was getting rashes and I had what I believed to be cystic acne. We had boil water advisories. Our water bills ballooned to the highest in the Genesee County. Little did we know at the time we were paying one the highest water and sewer bills in the country for poisoned water.

Because our group understood the emergency manager law, we knew we had to force the state to switch us back to a clean source of water. The fact that your government was the primary party responsible for the poisoning of a community was nearly unheard of.

I have worked as a community organizer and racial justice facilitator for over fifteen years. One lesson I took from the work is "The expertise is in the room." Unfortunately, residents weren't in the room when solutions to the Flint Water Crisis were crafted. We never wanted to live our lives using bottled water. Bottled water sends a message that water should be commodified. How can there be a price tag to something essential to human life? In addition, the plastic is sourced from petrochemicals, which in turn resources the fossil fuel industry. These refineries are primarily in communities of color. We wanted Medicare for all but received non-income test Medicaid, leaving people over the age of 21 and non-pregnant adults without health care. We wanted water mains, internal plumbing, and service lines replaced but received service line replacement through a settlement agreement. We wanted people held accountable for the coverup but in June of this year the Michigan Attorney General's office dropped the charges for the fifteen state and local employees responsible for the Flint Water Crisis. The state employees who didn't resign reported back to work in July.

If there hasn't been a long-term plan developed to fix Flint, how can you fix any other community? It is a false argument that compliance equals safety. 12ppb, 15ppb...those numbers are all made up. The American Medical Association says there is no safe level for lead. So why don't we have health-based standards at the EPA? Flint was denied a federal disaster declaration because of the Stafford Act. The Flint Water Crisis didn't occur because of a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake. It was caused by environmental racism, white supremacy, patriarchal decision-making, and belief that the needs of large corporations like General Motors are more important than the needs of poor Black and Brown people who can't afford to pay \$200-300 a month for poison water. The Stafford Act needs to be amended to

include the poisoning of communities through air and water. We have a registry, but we don't have a compensation fund to meet our long-term health care needs. Finally, we need massive infrastructure investments to remove these lead pipes once and for all.

It's been over five years since the switch the Flint River. 1,970 days to be exact. My life has changed in ways I couldn't even imagine. My health has gotten worse. One of my seizures has partially paralyzed my vocal cords and has changed my voice. I no longer can raise my voice. Even though they are mostly under control now through the help of medication, I know if I didn't have a job that offered an affordable comprehensive medical plan it I would have to make some decisions between bills and medication. I also have the opportunity to travel and tell my organizing story in this long haul fight for reparations and justice.

Thank You