

My name is Ethan Pezzolo and I am a second year student at UCSC.

The story you have been given portrays me and my fellow students as criminals, as criminals who broke the law, as criminals who sought to hurt the community.

I am standing before you today to tell you that I am not a criminal. But there are real criminals in this world, real acts against our humanity that occur everyday. The real criminals are the police officers who, working under a white-supremacist, systemically racist umbrella of state-sponsored violence, murder countless Black and Brown people as they cry out under the weight of their oppression. The real criminals are the CEOs of private prison systems who enslave our Black and Brown youth under the pretense that they are to blame for the injustices of the system they were shipped into. The real criminals are the government officials who decided that it was a more profitable decision to incarcerate marginalized youth, instead of putting them through school. The real criminals are the 25 UC Regents who decide, year after year, to ignore the homeless students sleeping in cars in campus parking lots, to ignore the students who don't have enough money for food, to ignore the students failing their classes because they have only one TA in a class with 400 people, to ignore the students banging on their doors and yelling in their meetings to stop treating them like loans and start treating them like full human beings.

Our actions on March 3rd were to raise the public's awareness around the real criminals, the ones in power. The University and the State chose our fate when they decided to put profit over people.

Today, I plead no contest. But do not think that I am accepting the indicated sentence because I agree with the court. I am accepting the sentence because the State never seeks to provide fairness to people who speak out. The justice we seek can not be found in the courts, but in the hearts and minds of the community.

From Ferguson, to Palestine, to New York, to Baltimore, to Santa Cruz -- the students and marginalized people all over the world have had enough. We will not stand for a system that was designed to dehumanize and enslave us behind bars and behind lifelong debt.