

**ABOLITION.  
FEMINISM.  
NOW.**

*Reading and Discussion Guide*

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## PREFACE

1. How did Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (now called Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans People of Color Against Violence) articulate a collective vision of abolition and feminism? How did their 2001 statement (see page 175) present an opportunity for public engagement? How does this document insist that antiracism and anticapitalism are central dimensions of contemporary feminism?
2. As the abolition feminist movement becomes more visible, why is it important to document and learn from collective feminist lineages? How can we ensure that feminist organizing, labor, and analysis, especially from young queer people of color, is not lost? How would you like to use this text to expand dialogue, practice, and reflection?

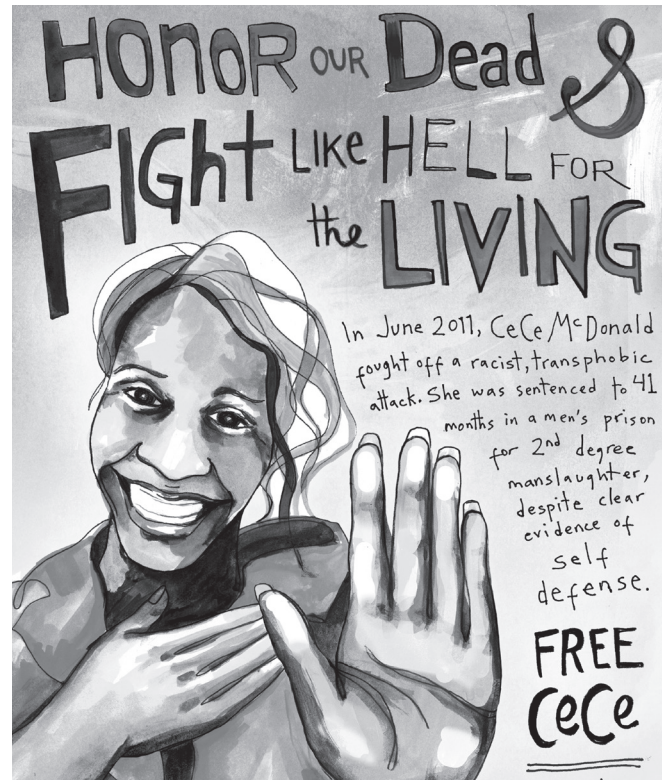
## INTRODUCTION: ABOLITION. FEMINISM. NOW.

1. Why is it important to recognize that abolition and feminism are both political methods and practices? What challenges does this present? How can you encourage others to understand abolition feminism as a living and generative framework for change?
2. What are some of the sustainable and long-term cultural and political shifts that the authors are working toward? How can you contribute to this work?
3. Why is it important to focus on supporting the immediate and everyday needs of vulnerable people while also working to dismantle carceral systems? How can we adopt a both/and approach in the work of abolition feminism?
4. What are some of the tools and resources that demonstrate a growing and internationalist abolition feminist ecosystem? Are there other tools and resources that have been helpful to you? What is the importance of creating and using tangible, accessible tools for people to practice together?
5. Why is it important to acknowledge that harm will still occur, even with a robust ecosystem of networks and tools? How has harm been addressed within your organization or community?

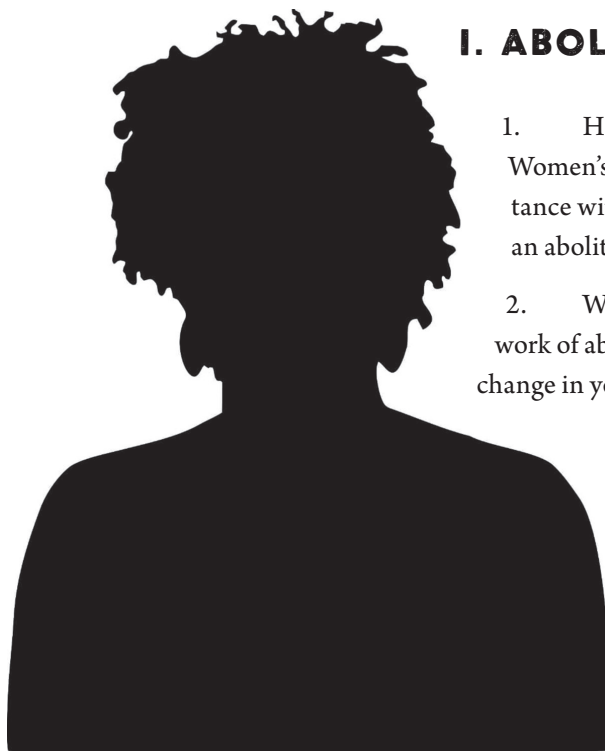


Illustration of sci-fi's kindling of radical imagination by Ira M. Leigh, 2015.

6. Who experiences the highest rates of harm from the carceral state? How can your work expand to include and center leadership by people most impacted by harm?
7. Why is feminism central to abolition and abolition indivisible from feminism? Why must gender violence be included in the fight for abolition? How is collectivism often undervalued and unrecognized?
8. What is the tension that exists between a long-term vision and engaging in messy daily practice? How do we cultivate movement spaces for political consciousness while also being accountable and flexible?
9. Why is it imperative that we work toward abolition with an internationalist lens, whether doing the work internationally or locally? How do you think about the connections between colonialism, imperialism, gender violence, and abolition feminism? What are some campaigns that have taken an internationalist approach toward ending state violence? What local organizations or campaigns are you involved in, and do they have an internationalist vision for change?



Artwork by Micah Bazant, created in 2013 as part of the campaign to free CeCe McDonald.



**MARIELLE PRESENTE**

Poster by Luciane Fortuna,  
Marielle Franco Instituto Collection.

## I. ABOLITION.

1. How did people organize inside and in support of the women at the New York Women's House of Detention? How did incarcerated women strengthen their resistance with collective decision-making and organizing? How was this an example of an abolition feminist intervention?
2. Why is it important to celebrate campaign wins while also seeing the larger work of abolition feminism work as "reframing the terrain"? How have you witnessed change in your community? What are some ways that you have witnessed change even when campaigns do not lead to wins?
3. How did Critical Resistance's use of new vocabulary, including the terms "prison industrial complex" and "abolition," impact the movement for social change? How did this new vocabulary help people make connections between neoliberal strategies to dissolve social services and gendered, ableist, and racialized forms of punishment?
4. Why is it important to disarticulate crime and punishment? How can we continuously make connections between race, gender, class, and sexuality and the current determinants of who goes to prison? What





*Free Our Queens*, made by Melanie Cervantes and the Women In Reentry Fellows at the People’s Paper Co-op to raise money for the Philadelphia Community Bail Fund, 2020.

identities are criminalized in your community? How do local narratives about punishment perpetuate the criminal legal system?

5. Why is it critical that abolitionists not only focus on what must be dismantled, but also on experimenting and building? Why must the movement include practice, engagement, and preventative community-based responses? What is your vision for abolition and what are you currently learning and building?
6. What can we learn from W. E. B. Du Bois and the genealogical connection between slavery and imprisonment? What can we learn from Du Bois about a larger emancipatory vision encompassing all aspects of society? Why is building access to economic, intellectual, and political power for incarcerated communities necessary to render prisons and policing obsolete?
7. How is vulnerability weaponized by the carceral system? How are laws like FOSTA (the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act), SESTA (the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act), and other carceral policies used to police and punish domestic sex work? How can we resist some of the most prominent mainstream approaches to gender and sexual violence that rely on carceral solutions?
8. How do carceral solutions, such as electronic monitoring and surveillance within social services, redraw the boundaries of the carceral state? How are child and family services used to harm poor families? How does this disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous women?
9. Why does abolitionist theory and practice demand a focus on structural forces? Why does abolition require continual interrogation of the impacts of racial capitalism? What are some of the concrete ways that campaigns can center what the most vulnerable people need and want to be safe?

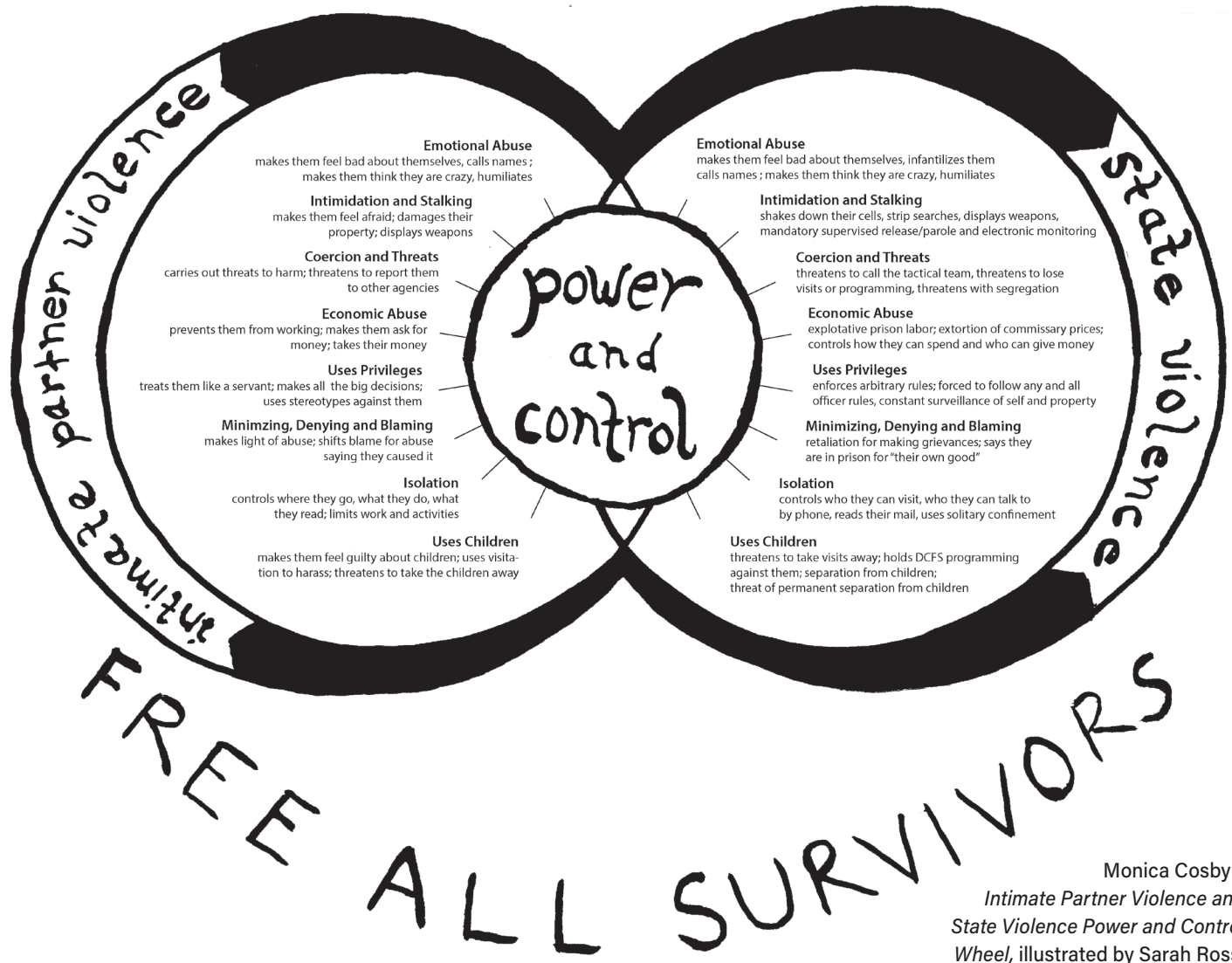
## II. FEMINISM.

1. Why is it critical that programs targeting gender violence also focus on advancing racial justice? How does the criminal legal system endanger survivors—particularly women and nonbinary people of color? How did the Moment of Truth statement galvanize support for racial justice and abolition? How did it call for a focus on the root causes of structural oppression and state violence?
2. How did INCITE! resist the professionalization and cooptation of anti-violence work? How did INCITE!'s anticapitalist, antiracist, internationalist analysis of gender violence drive abolition feminism while re-centering social justice and freedom?
3. Why are feminist, queer, women of color histories of resistance often erased by systems and institutions? What actions can you take to prevent this erasure in current movement work?
4. How have crisis services mirrored other neoliberal intervention programs within the social service industry? How can we resist narratives that frame carceral creep as inevitable?
5. Why must the experiences of trans and gender nonconforming people be included and prioritized in the work against gender violence? How did INCITE! build a collective political consciousness of gender violence over time, and what challenges did the organization experience? Despite these challenges, how does this genealogy resist mainstream histories of anti-violence movements that center whiteness and carceral responses?
6. How can advocating for greater involvement from the criminal legal system further endanger some survivors? Why is it impossible to achieve gender justice without the incorporation of an abolition feminist praxis?
7. What are some of the examples of erasure of Black women's impact on anti-violence organizing? How does this history impact women of color organizing against gender and sexual violence today? Even as gender violence is recognized as the most pandemic form of violence in the world, why is it still discussed and understood as a problem that impacts individuals rather than as a form of systemic violence?
8. What is the difference between abolition feminism and carceral feminism? How does abolition feminism create new terrains of struggle that challenge conceptions of safety and protection from the state? What new conditions need to be created in order to end gender violence?



Illustration by Cristy C. Road, 2003, featured on the cover of the INCITE! toolkit, *Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color*, published in 2018.

# PRISON IS GENDER VIOLENCE

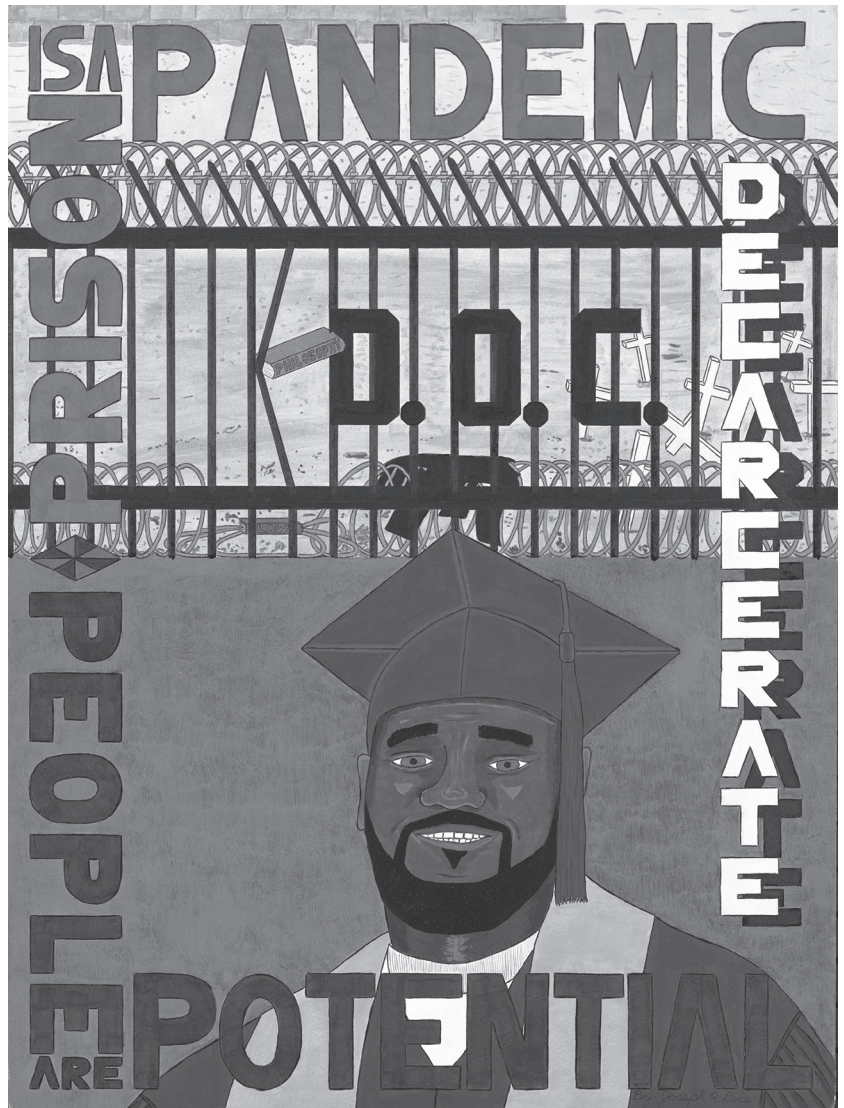


9. What are some examples of institutionalized responses to sexual violence? How do mainstream narratives align with carceral feminism and why are advocates, survivors, and organizers depicted in media overwhelmingly white? What are some of the examples in this text of the ways that women of color challenged misogyny and patriarchy in intersectional ways?
10. How does the *Intimate Partner Violence and State Violence Power and Control Wheel* by Monica Cosby (see pages 113 and 174) articulate the forms of violence that the state inflicts upon survivors? How does this framework make explicit connections between state violence and individualized sexual violence? How do prisons cause “social death”?
11. Why do policing and punishment fail to reduce rates of gender violence? Who seeks assistance from the carceral state and who does not? How does the state fail to protect people who are vulnerable to violence—Black, Indigenous, and other women of color, trans people, people in queer relationships, immigrant women, disabled people, and children?



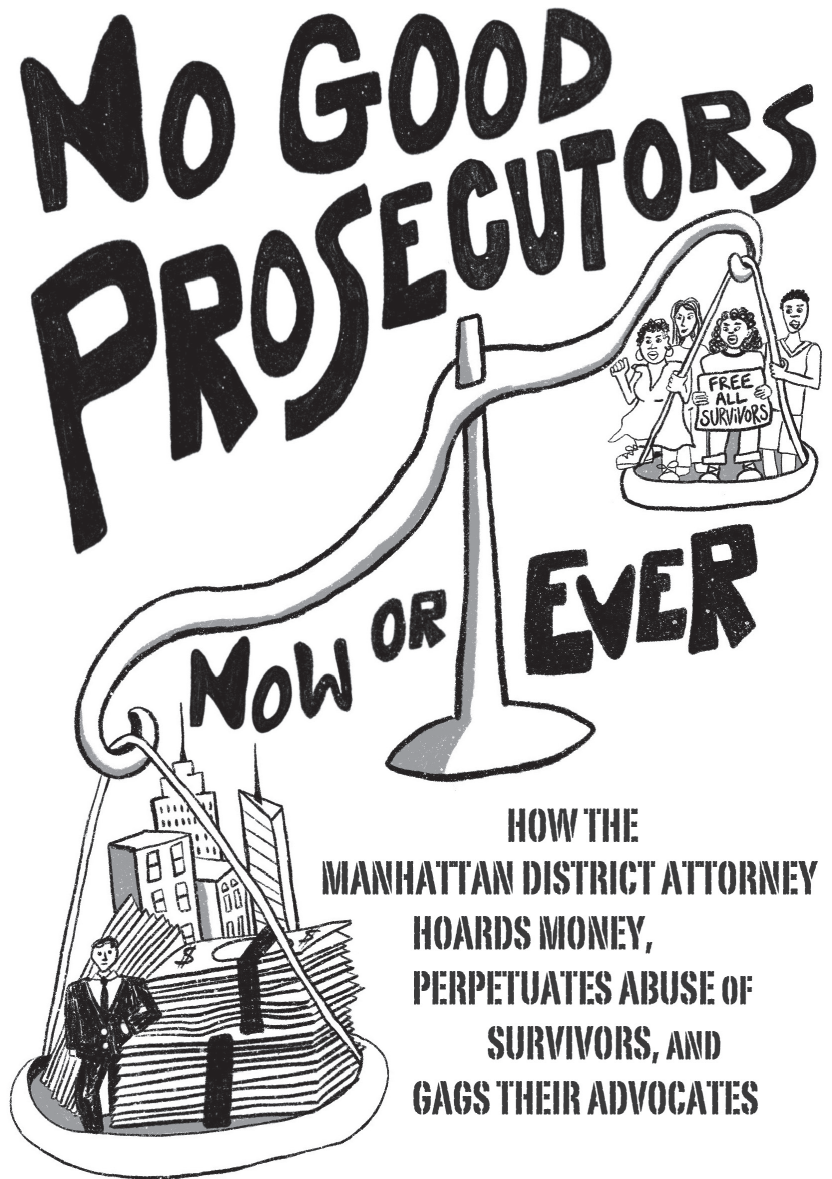
### III. NOW.

1. How did carceral state violence become more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic? What kinds of organizing surged during this time? What harms result from a failure to recognize and amplify feminist abolitionist actions?
2. How do sustained public demands to disinvest, shrink, and abolish policing do the “slow work” of deconstructing the carceral state? What are the limitations of prosecuting individual police officers and individuals who perpetuate gender and sexual violence? What solutions does abolition feminism demand?
3. What are some examples of how organizers in Chicago have challenged systemic and structural forms of state violence? How have organizers demanded measures of accountability beyond prosecution? How does this chapter, which focuses on Chicago as a location, serve to map and archive the impact of local efforts for abolition?
4. How have camera phones and social media amplified documentation and awareness of state violence? How can this lead to reforms rather than to abolitionist demands?
5. How did the murder of Laquan McDonald catalyze abolitionist organizing in Chicago? How did decades of grassroots anti-violence work before McDonald’s death impact community demands to fund Black futures and divest from policing?
6. How does making connections between sexual violence and racism, ableism, and capitalism offer pathways to imagine and develop collective responses? What kind of direct actions have emerged from this framework? How is the state unable to recognize sexual and gender violence as harm? Who is impacted most by this inability?



*Untitled* by Joseph Dole. A writer, artist, and activist, Joe is one of the first incarcerated people in the state of Illinois to earn an undergraduate degree in decades, which he completed in 2018. He is also the cofounder of Parole Illinois and a member of the Prison + Neighborhood Arts / Education Project.

7. How did organizers in Chicago fight for and win reparations for torture survivors harmed by former police commander Jon Burge? What is the historical significance of this win? How can this win advance the movement to abolish racist police violence?
8. How can accessible, free political education build solidarity between the abolition feminism movement and other movements working for systemic change? How have you benefited from political education and how can you work to expand access? What does your community need to strengthen the power of communities of color?
9. How did organizers in Chicago work to disentangle public safety from policing, particularly within the #NoCopAcademy and #CopsOut-ofCPS campaigns? How did the #NoCopAcademy campaign expand political consciousness and invite organizations to work towards shrinking the power and footprint of policing? How can inviting others into the abolition feminist movement serve as an important starting point for emergent struggles?
10. How do dominant metrics of success and failure work to erase histories of resistance and organizing? How is the dominant and mainstream understanding of history and the ecology of change hollowed out? How have you witnessed this happening within your community?
11. When working towards radical possibilities, why is it important to operate from a place of joy and hope, and to celebrate relationships and cultural shifts as wins?
12. Why is there such a strong emphasis on “NOW” in this text? Without a finish line, or a firm resolute end, what is the current work of abolition feminism? How can we create the necessary conditions to imagine, practice, and strengthen this movement?



Cover by Jett George of a pamphlet distributed by Survived & Punished in 2021.



## EPILOGUE

1. What does it mean to be in a state of questioning rather than navigating a clear path forward? How can this text offer a critical and joyful starting point for you to continue movement work?
2. How do movement tools and trainings serve to shape, deepen, and expand the abolition feminist ecosystem? What are the limitations of movement tools and tactics?
3. How will you answer the call to move expansively and generatively in the movement for abolition feminism?



*Networkers* by Molly Costello, 2021.

## FOR CONTINUED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION

1. Review the “Reformist Reforms vs. Abolitionist Steps to End Imprisonment” poster on page 185. Do you have any ideas about how this poster could be expanded to support your own work?
2. Why is it critical to utilize tactics that will improve the lives of people who are most affected by state violence?
3. Choose two or three images from this text and learn more about how they were used in movement campaigns. How does art advance the broader abolition feminist movement? How has art contributed to your own engagement and political education?
4. Read the 1977 Combahee River Collective Statement (available at [www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977](http://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977)). How did this document establish a political path for radical feminist organizing? How does it function as both a declaration and a process for collective organizing?
5. Read Eddie Ellis’s “Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language” (available at [perma.cc/JQ67-UKHZ](http://perma.cc/JQ67-UKHZ)). What calls for the use of human-centered language did he make? How can you resist the use of harmful language within your community and in the larger public narrative about the carceral state?

See also pages 192–204 for a list of readings and websites.

## ABOLITION FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS:

### **Abolition Disability Justice Collective**

[abolitionanddisabilityjustice.com](http://abolitionanddisabilityjustice.com)

ADJC is a group of abolitionist psychiatric survivors, people with disabilities, and their accomplices who believe in and work toward the liberation of all.

### **Alternative Justice** - [alternativejustice.in](http://alternativejustice.in)

Alternative Justice is a space that welcomes collective learning, curiosity and resource-sharing, in which we imagine a world where survivors of sexual harm and abuse have access to multiple and varied community-based processes that support our healing, allow us to seek tangible accountability from those who act abusively and, also, create conditions that cultivate real transformation in our communities.

### **Assata's Daughters** - [assatasdaughters.org](http://assatasdaughters.org)

Assata's Daughters is a Black woman-led, young person-directed organization rooted in the Black Radical Tradition that organizes young Black people in Chicago by providing them with political education, leadership development, mentorship, and revolutionary services.

### **The Audre Lorde Project** - [alp.org](http://alp.org)

The Audre Lorde Project is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non-Conforming People of Color community organizing center, focusing on the New York City area.

### **Bent Bars** - [bentbarsproject.org](http://bentbarsproject.org)

Bent Bars is a letter-writing project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer prisoners in Britain.

### **Black Visions Collective** - [blackvisionsmn.org](http://blackvisionsmn.org)

Black Visions Collective is a Black-led, Queer and Trans centering organization whose mission is to organize powerful, connected Black communities and dismantle systems of violence.

### **BYP100** - [byp100.org](http://byp100.org)

BYP100 (Black Youth Project 100) is a member-based organization of Black youth activists creating justice and freedom for all Black people.

### **Critical Resistance** - [criticalresistance.org](http://criticalresistance.org)

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe.

### **Crunk Feminist Collective** - [crunkfeministcollective.com](http://crunkfeministcollective.com)

The Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) is a space of support and camaraderie for hip hop-generation feminists of color, queer and straight, in and without the academy.

### **Love & Protect** - [loveprotect.org](http://loveprotect.org)

Love & Protect supports women and gender non-conforming/non-binary people of color who are criminalized or harmed by state and interpersonal violence.

### **Mijente** - [mijente.net](http://mijente.net)

Mijente is a political home for Latinx and Chicax people who seek racial, economic, gender and climate justice.

### **Movement for Black Lives** - [m4bl.org](http://m4bl.org)

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) was created as a space for Black organizations across the country to debate and discuss the current political conditions, develop shared assessments of what political interventions were necessary in order to achieve key policy, cultural and political wins, convene organizational leadership in order to debate and co-create a shared movement wide strategy.

### **Organized Communities Against Deportations**

[organizedcommunities.org](http://organizedcommunities.org)

Organized Communities Against Deportations is a group of undocumented, unapologetic, and unafraid organizers building a resistance movement against deportations and the criminalization of immigrants and people of color in Chicago and surrounding areas.

### **Palestinian Feminist Collective**

[actionnetwork.org/groups/palestinian-feminist-collective](http://actionnetwork.org/groups/palestinian-feminist-collective)

The Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC) is a US-based body of Palestinian and Arab women and feminists committed to Palestinian social and political liberation by way of confronting systemic gendered and colonial violence, oppression and dispossession.

**People Against Prisons Aotearoa** - [papa.org.nz](http://papa.org.nz)

People Against Prisons Aotearoa is a prison abolitionist organization working for a fairer, safer, and more just Aotearoa.

**Red Canary Song** - [redcanarysong.net](http://redcanarysong.net)

Red Canary Song is a grassroots collective of Asian & migrant sex workers and allies, organizing transnationally.

**Sisters Inside** - [sistersinside.com.au](http://sistersinside.com.au)

Sisters Inside is an independent community organization based in Queensland, Australia, which advocates for the collective human rights of women and girls in prison and their families, and provides services to address their individual needs.

**Sisters Testify** - [sisterstestify.com](http://sisterstestify.com)

Sisters Testify is a history project to connect with the signatories of the African American Women in Defense of Ourselves proclamation.

**Sisters Uncut** - [sistersuncut.org](http://sistersuncut.org)

Sisters Uncut is an intersectional feminist direct-action collective in the UK.

**Solutions Not Punishment Collaborative**

[snap4freedom.org](http://snap4freedom.org)

Solutions Not Punishment Collaborative is a Black trans and queer led organization that builds safety within our community, investing in our collective embodied leadership, and building political power.

**StoryTelling & Organizing Project**

[creative-interventions.org/stories](http://creative-interventions.org/stories)

The StoryTelling & Organizing Project was created to collect and share stories about everyday people taking action to end interpersonal violence.

**Survived & Punished** - [survivedandpunished.org](http://survivedandpunished.org)

Survived & Punished is a prison abolition organization which believes that prisons, detention centers, all forms of law enforcement, and punitive prosecution are rooted in systems of violence, including racial, anti-trans/queer, sexual, and domestic violence.

**Sylvia Rivera Law Project** - [srlp.org](http://srlp.org)

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence.

**TGI Justice Project** - [tgijp.org](http://tgijp.org)

TGI Justice Project is a group of transgender, gender variant, and intersex people—inside and outside of prisons, jails and detention centers—creating a united family in the struggle for survival and freedom.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE'S WRITER

Rachael Zafer is a writer, educator, and social change consultant. Rachael provides creative and technical consulting to nonprofits and institutions across the country and has led hundreds of classes and workshops in prisons and jails in Michigan, Illinois, New York, and Colorado. Rachael is the author of discussion guides for over two dozen books, including *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, and *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba. You can view her discussion guides at [www.rachaelzafer.com](http://www.rachaelzafer.com).