

## Critical Conversation #2: Green

October 21, 2021

**Charlotte Rosen:** Great, excellent. Wonderful. So welcome, everyone, to our second Study and Struggle Critical Conversation. Thanks all for bearing with us as we got ourselves together on our end. But our event is entitled Abolition Must be Green. Huge thanks to Haymarket Books for hosting this event with us and all of their work on the backend to make this event possible. We are extremely appreciative. And thanks, also, to our captioner and to ASL interpretation services this evening.

I want to acknowledge I'm a settler on Native lands, and I believe we'll talk about more about this today, but I want to acknowledge that a big part of what it means for abolition to be green is for the land to be given back to Indigenous people.

I'm one of the organizers with Study and Struggle and I'll be the moderator for the evening. And for a brief overview of Study and Struggle, we organize against criminalization and incarceration in Mississippi. Each fall, we put together a bilingual Spanish and English curriculum with discussion questions and reading materials as well as provide financial support to over 100 participants and radical study groups inside and outside prisons in Mississippi.

And we also make the curriculum fully available online for other study groups across the country and the world to use as they see fit. And finally, we come together for online conversations, like this one hosted by Haymarket Books.

So for our fall 2021 four month curriculum. We have borrowed and augmented, slightly, Ruth Wilson Gilmore's argument that abolition is about presence, not absence. It has to be green in order to be green, it has to be red. And in order for it to be red, it has to be international.

And so we at Study and Struggle built on that and added intersectional as a fourth category that further moves us beyond single issue organizing.

So for today, though, we're going to be tackling what it means for abolition to be green and we have a truly fantastic lineup of panelists tonight. I'm going to introduce them in a moment.

But I wanted to explain a little bit about the format for our panel, it's going to be somewhat unique. Because four of our panelists Wayland, Bryant Safear, and Lawrence, are currently in prison, we've prerecorded their remarks. We'll hear segments from our imprisoned panelists which our live panelists, BP and JT, will respond to and be in conversation with. And I want to let everyone know about our next Critical Conversation, which will be November 9th at 7:00 p.m. Eastern with Stephen Wilson and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the person who inspired the framework for this entire curriculum. And they're going to be talking about why abolition must be red. And I know that's going to be an extremely rad conversation. I hope to see you all back here with us in November.

And one final thing, a bit of housekeeping, I wanted to remind those tuning in that we should, hopefully, have a little bit of time at the end for Q&A with our panelists, so please, put questions

in the chat as they come up and we'll try to ask them before the event comes to a close. Great. So to kick things off, I'm going to have our two live panelists here with us, introduce themselves, and the pre-recorded panelists will introduce themselves in the videos, as well. But just to kick us off, why don't we have JT, do you mind introducing yourself?

**JT Roane:** Thanks, everyone, for joining us and thank you to the organizers, the folks in the background, the signers and the captioners and other folks that are working with us tonight. I really appreciate it. I'm on the National Organizing Committee of People Strike and also I'm an assistant professor at Arizona State University where I lead the Black Ecologies Initiative. And I'll pass it over.

**Charlotte:** BP, you want to take it away with an intro?

**Bigg Villainus (BP):** I'm an artist and organizer, I organize against prisons, we're an abolitionist organization that fights environmentalism and prison abolition. We know that prisons are toxic to everybody and the environment. Quick intro. That's it.

**Charlotte:** Wonderful, thank you, BP, so I think with that, we should get to one of our first video segments. John, do you want to pull that up and we'll be back with JT and BP to reflect on the words from our other panelists.

**Safear Qaswarah:** I know that I'm gonna die. For me, that's a scary thing, but it's true. I don't have cancer, or AIDs, or any life-threatening condition that I am aware of, but I do know that one day, I'll breathe my last breath, and cease to exist this life. One day I'll die. Most of the time I don't think about it, most of the time, I don't even want to think about it. And then sometimes, in life things happen where death is the only thing I can think of. After I got sentenced for my case, I remember counting the years on my fingers like, I'm 26, I got two years then, six and a half years to my minimum, 27, 28, that means I'll be 32. I'll still be healthy, young enough to have kids, start a family, get my life in order, I can still live life. But then I start saying oh, what happens if I don't get out at my minimum. Another year puts me at 33, maxing out my sentence, I'll be over 40 years old, and I'm doing all of this calculating against the inevitable. Time is my life. And I'm trying to calculate if that time is survivable. I'm comparing it to death. Will I survive prison?

Then when I got to Fayette, I learned from other prisoners that we live on a dump site for toxic coal waste, I heard about the toxic water. And a few months later, I found a lump on my body, and it was scary, to say the least. I was going down to medical, wasn't getting any relief. And the medical neglect inside the prison is nothing new, right, these private companies come in and give medical care; of course, they have a profit margin to reach, and their notorious for misdiagnosing and under diagnosing, there's no preventative medical care. You know, you usually have to be wheeled out on a stretcher to get any real care. So I'm going down to medical and their saying to me like, nah, you're okay -- clearly, I'm not okay, I know my body. I know I have a lump, I know something is wrong. And [this is a call from state correctional institution Fayette. This call is subject to recording and monitoring] I was confronted with the inevitable. Even though I tried to block it out, I kept thinking, will my time in prison be the death of me?

**Wayland X Coleman:** The environmental racism that exists in the poor Black communities of America today are the perpetuation of a long history of white supremacist attitudes that have sought and still seek to disenfranchise Black people in order to maintain the sense of white superiority and Black inferiority. These attitudes are not a thing of the past.

After the Civil War, the prison industrial complex became the vehicle to reroute ideas of slavery and racism. When we fast forward to the Civil Rights movement and the period of black integration, and to white communities in schools, we enter a period of white flight, where the government funded the development of suburban infrastructures so that whites could flee the inner cities that Blacks were migrating to.

The government then redlined those inner cities communities, intentionally causing urban decay and creating what we know as our ghettos. This race based, political economic move or political strategy largely contributed to the modernization of environmental racism.

**Bryant Arroyo:** To give you an idea of where I'm geographically located, I'm in the thick of the eastern anthracite region of Pennsylvania, North Cumberland county. Of course, the geography of prisons shapes the lives of those inside and those surrounding it in ways affecting our overall health and health risks, to the point of developing the insidious monster I call cancer.

Speaking of which, did you know that I'm incarcerated in the heart of Schuylkill county, Pennsylvania, which is considered the number one highest rate of cancer clusters in the nation, surrounded by several state prisons: Mahanoy, Frackville, and where I'm presently housed at, Coal Township coupled with two other federal facilities in the surrounding area, Allenwood and Lewisburg.

**Lawrence Jenkins:** Actually looking at what's being grown, there are a lot of specialty crops that are grown right here in the prison, and a lot of gourmet crops that are usually gourmet foods and stuff. And you know initially like, to me, I was like wow, I never grew none of this stuff, so it was like a learning experience. But I started asking like, as I learned about what was growing here, I started asking the staff, like, where is the produce going? Is it going to the prisoners? You know, these are things that could really enhance your health, you know what I'm saying, especially those having underlying conditions or [who] are maybe struggling with mental disability. There's a lot of stuff growing out here that could really, you know, improve health in prisons, you know and I'm just curious to see, you know, like, if the prison was even conscious or even supported [prisoners eating the food they grew]...

I learned that they were sending the produce that was grown, and they still are, to local food banks just for charitable recognition or charitable causes to get positive publicity in the media. And there was like a complete disregard or even interest for, you know, prisoners being able to access these health foods that were growing. And you know they even had strict rules on those that were growing the produce, they couldn't get caught eating it or taking it back into the unit, where they lived at, like, the plot was right outside of the living unit, so [if] they get a cell search or something like that, and produce was found, they would fire them and give them a major infraction [you have 60 seconds remaining].

This ultimately resulted in loss of good time, it resulted in people being denied for clemency if it was a serious infraction, and it resulted in other things, you know like you can't get a job for a while. So, they would punish anything and everything we would do to try to share in this produce, or eat it or consume it.

**Charlotte:** Great. All right. So yeah. BP, or JT, I think the floor is yours to kind of react and respond to the prerecorded clips.

**JT:** BP, would you like to jump in or should I go ahead?

**BP:** I guess I could jump in if you want. Well, I mean, what brought to mind is talking about how the environmental impact on them, which is really crucial because when we talk about historically and refer to the Civil War, specifically, even going to slavery at that point they always use the scraps and the things they didn't want, the things that were seen as bad for your health and gave it to us as food, right? And transitioned into slavery used into using us as chain gangs and holding us in contaminated facilities.

And this is good, it made me reminisce, specifically, about...sorry, I'm blanking, in the uprising that happened -- Attica, and how they were doing tests on prisoners inside Attica using them as experiments. And one of the things we talk about FTP, a little bit, is how every federal facility is built on top of a superfund site.

So they're using us as a way to as a national sacrificial site. Very much with intent. Because we can see that not just by where they put us and how polluted that land is when we're incarcerated. Saying that as an ex-con, so I keep saying we, to be clear, maybe people that don't realize. But also, the food they give us and the water. I was in, for example, the copper rates was extremely high in the water, I didn't know that until I joined FTP [Fight Toxic Prisons]. And there was somebody that we built with that was incarcerated and FTP with me, I didn't know them but we were in the same facility.

And so, that was, is the norm. And not only that, going into history, like, we also talk about the experiments they did on people. There was one, I remember reading about a while back, they injected small amounts of plutonium into the bloodstream of people. And that was a way of testing what would happen to our bodies with those small amounts.

And it's, it's not like accidental, I want to say it's by design. And it is not only to break us as individuals, but to break our communities. I guess it's all I've got to comment on at the top of my head. So.

**JT:** Thank you for that. I think it's very much the case that environmental racism and toxic prison sites bring to the fold the kind of disposability and exposure and extractionism and violence that creates the kind of wider political ecology that we're dealing with in the contemporary moment.

And I think that what happens in terms of those, especially with the superfund sites, with federal facilities and also just all kinds of the site of these kinds of spaces, it mirrors what people on the outside in Black and Brown communities and particularly Indigenous communities face more broadly on the outside, technically, on the outside, right?

We can think about that internationally. We could think about the ways, particularly, that anti-Blackness is a fundamental grammar of racial capitalism globally such that it names what where things can be taken from but also, where the toxic, the toxic aspects or material that's produced out of those relations, where that can be dumped. And I think that is, that prisons bring that really to the center, right. They really make that really crystal clear and really sharp.

And I think, also, I heard in there, the connections between urbicide and ecocide, urban but rural communities is in many ways the kind of outlook as the idea that an area could be or an ecology or an environment can be used to the maximum and disposed. I think in that context, we're drawn to a function within wider western thought. One of the speakers mentioned just the kind of larger ecologies and geographies, I think, of white supremacy, that's very much at play.

And I think that the references to thinking about this connect to a green future. A liberated green future. I think there's a lot of green futures in our contemporary moment. But some of them don't undermine the fundamental toxic dynamic, the toxic stewardship that underwrites racial capitalism. They want to decarbonize, right? They want to remove carbon from that scenario. So that we don't use coal or we're not using oil. With Bolivia saying a few years back, no, we're not going to open up and sell off our lithium within a couple of weeks. We're at a site and a place where that horizon, the horizon of a green future that's not connected as Gilmore says as a rare future, international future to abolitionist future is really no future at all.

**Charlotte:** Yeah, we're going to pause briefly to do an interpreter switch. One second. OK. Great. Yeah, thank you, both, JT and BP. I think just to kind of riff a little bit on what you both just said. I think, you know, absolutely, I think BP what you're talking about with, you know, the environmental racism, it's not sort of an additional thing on top of prisons, right, it's by design. Prisons themselves are toxic, and that's going to be a theme that carries through in the rest of the remarks.

I was struck by Wayland's remarks about sort of, you know, it's like red lining is environmental racism. Needing to think beyond even just inside the prison, although, the prison is absolutely critical and central to this conversation in particular. A green future, right, is going to require thinking even beyond those walls.

So anyway, do either one of you want to add anything else? Or before we move to the next clip?

**BP:** In my mindset, to have a green future that literally requires abolition of the prison. It's the backbone of the military industrial complex. One of the programs utilizes Unicom that uses things to build missiles or things like seemingly innocuous trailers that carry weapons and we know the prison complex and military complex working together, it's one of the biggest on top of it.

And carbon, our carbon issues are not close to enough right now. Let's be 100 about it. That's all I wanted to add right now.

**Charlotte:** Yeah, that's great. JT, any thoughts or you want to roll to the next clip?

**JT:** I think let's roll to the next clip.

**Charlotte:** Yeah, John, why don't we roll the next clip when you get a chance.

**Wayland:** Something that's interesting to me is that public health experts are looking at prisons and their relationship to overall public health and have begun to discuss ideas of abolition as a necessary remedy to the effect on society as a whole.

Many abolitionists have talked about the taxpayer cost of prison and how the mass caging of human beings sucks up community resources that could be used for other things such as academic development and technological research towards things like climate change.

Massachusetts itself has a caged population of between 7[,000] and 8,000 people, yet the annual DOC budget is usually around 500 to 600 million dollars. When we scale this out to bigger incarceration states such as California, hosting more than 160,000 caged citizens, compared to the 7 to 8,000 in Massachusetts, you can imagine what the annual budget looks like. When the government decides to take billions of taxpayer dollars out of something in order to build and run prisons we know that those dollars are being stripped from poor Black and brown communities. In addition to the dollars being removed from our communities when prisons are built, the institution or political intention is to fill them and so the question becomes, with whom?

**Lawrence:** In here like, like when you look at the prison menu, it'll say that one day we'll eat sweet and sour chicken over rice, you know with pineapples in it. But it doesn't tell you that all of this food for this meal is processed so it appears that we're eating health foods or a delicious meal but really it was over processed, frozen, overcooked, and then all the nutrients are being cooked out of it, so by the time we get it, it's just depleted with nutrients.

This something we know, but also we felt in our bodies, you know, all the time we're consuming it, so the produce that they would provide outside of that was ultimately all GMO produce, or just undesirable celery, carrots, apples, oranges, just the basic fruit and vegetables that probably would come from like surplus farms and a lot of this stuff was picked before it was ripened, you know, and whatever the prison or the correctional industries, however that was outsourced, or that relationship with that farmer -- you know you can kinda tell just by the quality of what we're getting that it was purely about capitalism, you know what I'm saying, giving some kind of economic opportunity to one of their stakeholders versus actually going to the local farmers in the area that takes pride in what their growing and growing stuff in season that's surrounding these prisons and getting it from there, and that's what they used to do, so there's that difference in the menu, when it switched over to correctional industries, the quality of food we're getting....

**Bryant:** Right now, I would like to take this opportunity to pose a very interesting question -- [This is a call from Pennsylvania state correctional institution Coal Township. This call is subject to recording and monitoring].

Right now I would like to take this opportunity to pose a very interesting and peculiar question. Do you happen to know what's a superfund site? A superfund site is a lull that provides money from the US government to clear up areas that have been polluted with dangerous substances, but that allows the government to demand money in the court of law from the companies that make the area dirty. What if the government knows the land is polluted, toxic, and uninhabitable, but intentionally and deliberately refrains from publicly declaring it as poison land? This is the government's big secret -- that the prison industrial complex utilizes to locate and construct the building of prisons of the nation. Did you know 600 United States prisons are built on top of toxic mine dump sites, where profit over the value of human labor is heavily emphasized? A staggering 2.2 million prisoners generating a wealth of revenue at the expense of being housed in federal and state prisons located within three miles of a superfund site tantamount to a death sentence if you ask me.

**Safear:** There are certain things that bring death to the forefront of my mind. Being in prison is one of them. Living in a toxic prison is one of them. And all prisons are toxic. All prisons contribute to the deterioration of health, sanity, family, community. Prisons have not made our communities any safer, they have not made human relations any healthier. Prisons are toxic.

But this prison, SCI Fayette in Pennsylvania, is compounded in its toxicity. A report entitled No Escape by the ALC and the HRC exposes that Fayette is surrounded by 40 million tons of waste, two coal slurry ponds, and millions of cubic yards of coal combustion waste. They say SCI Fayette is inescapably situated in the midst of a massive toxic waste dump. That's true. When I go outside on the yard, I'm surrounded by hills of coal waste, mountains of coal waste.

**Charlotte:** Great. OK. So, yeah, JT, or BP, you can take it away.

**JT:** Thank you, I want to speak to the pointed statement that all prisons are toxic, right? And connect that back through what some of the other kinds of comments that are threaded throughout about the nutritional violence, especially.

I think that nutritional violence of prisons really replays the kind of violence of starvation and of kind of forced feeding that happens across the different sites of this location and also, this commenting and enclosure that happened, starting with the slave castle and the slave ship as a nexus where people are part of the preparation for the transatlantic journey is a persistent hunger where in that kind of, in the hull of the ship and in the kind of castles that proceed that space, people were crowded together. And all kinds of things they would not have eaten in their day to day lives, right. How that extends to the enclosure of the plantation and the context of the Americas through, again, at least in the Antebellum period and in the US context, the combined formation of nutritional violence.

One that uses starvation but also heightens starvation through and a day-to-day lack of food through feasting, right, through these kinds of eventful moments where and that really struck me with the comment that was made about the kind of overprocessed food.

Food that for the moment feels like it's nutritious or tastes OK. But the reality is that that's toxic. I think that resonates very importantly with plantation enclosures in the kind of food system in which people are forced to work long, drudgery, hours full of drudgery and starve, but also, periodically given a feast, again, to enhance the violence of regular day to day starvation.

And I think that kind of although, I think there's a moment of possibility during Radical Reconstruction, when you get to the chain gang and Jim Crow enclosure, nutritional violence is central to that.

As was said in the 1930 *Rural Negro*, what had been the open hunting ground and the open fishing ground suddenly are transformed in the 1920s between the 1880s and 1920s into sites of private, white leisure. Right? So what had been these open spaces along with sites of Black agricultural and aqua-cultural production, Jim Crow is a regime of starvation. Right?

That continues into the that is codified or hidden under the discourse of the food desert. Which I think Ashantè Reese and other people have pushed up against. It euphemizes that these are intentional issues to political and social control.

And I think that system also continues to kind of show the shared disposability between our communities inside and outside and the need, again, to go back to BP's point for abolition for, to really disrupt and interrupt these kinds of legacies and ongoing practices of violence, nutritional toxicity.

**Charlotte:** BP, before you speak, we're going to do a quick pause to switch interpreters. OK. Good? Great. BP, go for it.

**BP:** So, I mean, sticking on the same theme of food. Like I mentioned earlier about. I speak from experience of this. The one thing I specifically remember. People would take food out of the kitchen. People would notice the protein specifically, but a lot of food in general is like not for human consumption on the label of the containers.

And so, like, it goes back to they're saying the toxicity of everything that's happening there. From the food up. And then, not to mention that when you talk about that, of like how we're kind of low key starving in there and keep as minimum calorie diet as possible, that pushes us to buy commissary. But commissary itself might be higher quality, but not by much. It's top ramen or sausages you can get at the store. 7-Eleven, pretty much.

That's what people live off of. And that's the upgrade of the kitchen. And I remember one of the things I witnessed specifically was a person that was literally growing a tumor out of their head. I don't know if it was the diet or what it was. They weren't trying to give medical care. When it comes to medical care, that's not really a real thing.



Unless you get a broken bone, but even at that, my shit did not get placed when they cased it. They just let it do its thing. So and then, one of the things you mentioned is the new Jim Crow and the thing is, I always want to emphasize it isn't in prison. That's the new slavery. It's when we get out. And we are banished to by having a felony and records, where we are forced to live in environments that are completely polluted. Like, and also living off of cheap, high carb food that tends to be highly processed on the outside. And trying to get out of the cycles will land us right back into prison. And it commits a cycle. For example, we mentioned the food deserts going out and then, you eat at 7-Eleven because you don't have a car or you can hustle, buy a car, buy food from other places, and by hustling, you end up getting locked up and going back to prison.

What are your choices really? How it seems to have been intentional pushing us into those corners and not just polluting the prisons, but the environments we grew up with in the first place and keeping us there and keeping us in poverty. I don't want to advocate moving away from the way we grew up. But instead, enhancing the places we lived in so we could have prosperity within those places and still retain community. I think it is, like I said, before I think it's by design. I think it's intentional. I don't think these were done by accident. Oh, we don't care, let's go back. I think that's a sense of a lot of what liberal philosophy wants to believe. I don't really buy that. It seems that all of it was intentionally put in place to keep the cycles happening. To make sure people find themselves in the same situations and not being able to get out of the situations because, one, capitalism itself needs a labor source, a primitive labor source to keep itself surviving. It needs to pull from something and that's where the slave labor comes from, inside of prisons. But also, we need to make sure that people find their place within society and stay there.

And when I mean their place, the place that capitalism has assigned them. And that means being slaves and being impoverished. Being service workers at best if you're lucky. And one of the things is, well, where are we going to put toxic areas? People who go towards the margins? That's where we're going to put the toxic areas. We're going to cipher in the toxicity to the most marginalized. Not that everybody's immune from it. It affects everybody. That's all I'm going to say for right now.

**JT:** Could I say that cycle of violence and starvation and kind of hunger that you mentioned BP, I think, you know, again, it's not to make an easy slippage between the kind of different political situations, but I think I've been... I was struck by recently looking through, you know, just court records for Essex county, Virginia, in the 18th Century, original plantation Virginia settled illegally in the 1640s even by the Crown's own you know, the English Crown's own law, settled illegally and in the 1750s increasingly settled legally, quote, unquote. But of course, pressing against the other groups in the power tank of confederacy.

But plantations in the 17th and 18th Century, like, in this area, really depended on hunger. They depended on the kind of physical malleability of people's enslaved bodies and that included Africans and that included Indigenous people in this context, to be forged in hunger. And that often led to a cycle of punishment and violence and all of that for theft for food.

So for example, in the 1650s and 1660s forward, there are a bunch of cases at Essex County where people have their ears nailed to the public pillory for days because they stole a hog or because they have broken into a storehouse to eat something they're not supposed to.

I also want to emphasize the fact that, I think this will come out more as we talk the reality that despite the kind of these various rounds of enclosure and the way they limited food, Black experiences with food to hunger or forced blood in some combination of that that there was always resistance, right, there was always this, you know, first of all, the fact that people even though we captured their stories or get their stories when they're caught, people who are hog stealing and sharing hogs in the woods.

That's a whole other kind of fugitive relationship. That doesn't correspond with what the plantation's logics are about where people should be and what they should eat and when and all of those other things.

But I think, also, a kind of Black commons where Black people fished and engaged the land in partially Indigenous ways to create all kinds of alternatives. And I think, you know, that would come out more when we talk a bit more about resistance. But I think that's so key that even in those context on slave ships and slave castles, on plantations, during the Jim Crow era, you know, up through our own moment of confinement and violence between the nexus of the prison and our communities that there's all kinds of alternatives that are percolating, and it's about abolition, it's about putting those forward, as well, as much as it's about destroying the incarceration in the violence of that.

**Charlotte:** Yeah. Thank you, thank you, both. That's a pretty good segue into our next. So maybe we can turn to that now. And I think, in this next clip, we'll get into these a conversation about resistance and perhaps, also about, you know, the challenges of kind of doing this work around the environment and the planet in the free world and how you know free world environmental organizations think about these issues and the challenges sort of building there. John, why don't we let that roll?

**Safear:** And the local free world community is also affected by this. And they filed a lawsuit. And it was reported to me that at first they collaborated with prison organizers. But once they got some relief, once they won their lawsuit, they forgot all about the organizers and the prisoners that were fighting with them.

The correctional officers of the prison also filed suit. In mediation, they were given the option of being able to bring their own bottle of water rather than drinking the water in the prison. And of course, they were never, they never even considered prisoners in the first place. And to this day, prisoners remain captive in the same conditions that both of those groups fought against. We're still in the same spot. Clearly, some people are considered more disposable than others.

And this is not an occasion trying to argue about who is more oppressed. It's just to recognize that they're in a hierarchy. And those lowest on that hierarchy have a higher level of disposability. What does it mean to be disposable? Just think about a garbage disposal. All the food someone doesn't want gets thrown down the sink, chopped into pieces, and flushed away.

This is what happens to us. The powerful have no need for us, so they throw us away, chop up our lives, and discard us. And once you're considered to be trash, you can be disposed of in the most toxic conditions.

**Lawrence:** That this, these foods, you know what I'm saying, and what's being put in these foods, and the quality of care and all that stuff that comes with it, a lot of us, you know, fear that we won't make it home, you know, and that's something that, as a organizer like myself, an activist like myself, I have to a lot off work, you know, with my peers, you know what I'm saying, I'm letting them know like, hey look you gotta get a job in the garden, just giving a different strategy to tactics to use to get healthier access, or when you spot someone that is really struggling with their health, you know, we'll do everything we can to provide for that individual, you know what I'm saying, no matter what the consequences that come with that, you know what I mean it's more, we gotta take care of each other, you know what I mean, cause if the community isn't able to provide the kind of support that is needed, and the prisons ain't budging then ultimately it does come back to down to us, you know, and that's what, you know, we realize the power of grassroots organizing and mutual aid inside, even though it's small scale, it does - it helps our situation, and it does save lives, and it helps people stay grounded and actively engaged in, what we gotta do to change our situation.

**Safear:** You know I think about what does it mean to battle environmental injustice when you're not even considered or recognized as human?

What does it mean to fight environmental injustice while you're being held captive? That means that the free world folks who are also fighting against environmental injustice that they are allies and accomplices beyond the wall. That our dehumanization originates from the same source as their dehumanization. That our incarceration originates from the same people and institutions as their oppression. We gotta recognize that the same systems and people that cannibalize the earth for profit are the same systems and people that are cannibalizing prisoners. Cannibalizing prisoners to maintain a white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist, hetero normative, patriarchal social order. The oppression from the same source.

And then when you do finally realize that we're fighting the same enemy, start examining the many ways the enemy has pitted you against us, and us against you. And dismantle that shit.

**Lawrence:** There was a collective of us, mainly lifers, and people with long sentences that were very, very afraid for what kind of effects this CI [Correctional Industries] products were gonna have on their bodies and their mental health. So, we had long conversations out there in that space as we're building green houses, composting systems, aquaponics, we also build plots for prisoners to rent at \$5 for a whole season, and rent from April to September so basically the funding was going back into the horticulture program to try to get seeds and materials to sustain the program but it was basically ran by us and for us and it was something that we had to take care of and nurture and grow and teach each other about because we weren't -- there was no class around horticulture or food science or any of that so we would collectively study books that family members would send in, we'd have long conversations about, you know, what healthier food, how it benefits us, you know, different ways to share it, you know, although it's against the rules, you know, to barter and trade inside, and we just kind of grew our knowledge collectively

just based on our lived experience with growing a program where all we were given was the permission and the tools and supplies to build it and that was it, so that experience alone really made me be like, this is something I really gotta take serious and learn more about and read everything I can, and study everything I can, because this is for our survival.

**Charlotte:** Brief pause for our interpreter switch. Good? OK. Great. Yeah. So JT or BP, either one of you want to hop in?

**JT:** I think that, I want to play with the metaphor of cannibalizing people in the earth that one of the speakers mentioned and also, the reality and possibilities of shared food in the capacities for that to be transformative.

I think that's such a powerful metaphor for not only the kind of situation or directly linking the situation between incarceration and the kind of disposability of people, but also, the kinds, that's evidenced there. But also, the kinds of violent reterritorializing of the planet that could be under the rubric of cannibalizing.

It reminds me of Delores Williams writing in the 1990s and comparing what so called breeder women under slavery, women who were forced into sexual relationships with people because they were understood as being able to produce future offspring of future slave population and strip mining in the 1990s. Williams makes the connection between how those are interrelated processes historically and ongoing ways.

And I think that cannibalizing is such a powerful metaphor, as well. I think, again, going back to what I was saying about the kind of enclosure that precedes the prison, the industrial complex. Often, enslaved Africans brought on to slave ships imagined they were going to be cannibalized. And I think, you know, so I think about Equiano, thinking these people were ready to consume him. We think of that as naive interpretation, but when we think about the way the slaves in the Caribbean on sugar plantations that are the kind of commercial origins of industrial capitalism and the system, slaves are disposed of, right?

They're used within, you know, the average life span is 7 years and so they are cannibalized. And so that metaphor resonates, I think, across these kinds of different modes of enclosure. And I think an important counterpart or counterpoint to cannibalizing as a metaphor, again, is commensality. Like really I was struck by that person really talking about the possibilities of power of collectively growing food and other means that bring people together through reciprocity. That struck me, especially, the facility, the state facility that's closest to my hometown in Virginia was the Hayesville correctional center. And in that case, they didn't drop a prison on top of a superfund site.

But what they did was place it in an old agricultural field, you know. I'm thinking with Gilmore's understanding of excess land and excess state power and excess people how that materializes the, you know, in the context of California the state. But also in places like Virginia, similarly.

And so, these old agricultural fields have a long history of being disposable as landscapes. That being tied to the history of disposability from slavery and Jim Crow and Black communities.

But now, being a kind of site for these facilities that continue to cannibalize our communities and I think cannibalize is such an important metaphor, as well, for the political situation and gerrymandering and the violent redistricting that happens in front of our faces, right? Where people are placed in these kinds of facilities, shifting the whole political and economic balance of state budgets and stuff, right?

So I think cannibalization and commensality are really powerful, I think, metaphors for the current situation in terms of cannibalization and also the possibilities for future through commensality. How we sit together, how we eat together, is the basis for the world. We need the abolition of the world.

**BP:** I also want to say that's a really good analogy, use cannibalistic in this nature. I think it's a metaphor, but I think it's like some degree is material reality, right? Because the prison's inherently cannibalistic, right? They take you from our community and devour you into this system uses and devours the labor. Not just your labor and your very existence to bring itself material benefits. Disposable, as well. Who is disposable? Who is disposable is poor, Black and Brown communities, Indigenous communities. That's who. The same people they brought over here to do slavery, the same people they genocide and steal the land from in the first place, and they're just perpetuating ongoing genocide. People see this as just some form of oppression, but it's more than that. Genocides can last long periods of time.

They're moving children from homes and putting them into juveniles and sending them to the prison industrial complex afterwards. Those things are literally, like if you look up the definition of genocide is within that system of genocide. And that's also part of what, like, is devouring about it. Take those bodies and use those bodies to feed yourself, right? And so, I know people think cannibalism is we've got a knife and fork and get to eating. That's not what they're talking about. That's not how they're doing it. They are devouring us nonetheless.

I want to, I feel like the speakers underestimate themselves a little bit, because he said "there's allies behind the wall." But I would say it's not just allies behind the wall, it's the *forefront* behind the wall. That's the front of the struggle, it isn't the back by any means. And when we think about it as people who are sitting here walking streets under, as somebody, honestly, an enemy but said very wisely was in the lower custody prisons. Because this isn't enough for society either -- we're literally coerced into cooperation by the existence of these things.

Especially, if you're Black, Brown or Indigenous. Especially if you're impoverished. This is how they keep us going because of that threat and the threat of violence that is prison. By saying that the people who are coming and catching you, the slave catchers, called police, are perpetrating against you in an attempt to take you into slavery, right? And it made me think about, right, they're talking about made me think back talking about how what's introduced to their bodies, right? Made me think about COVID, right?

Because I don't know if people realize but COVID testing was one of the first things, it was first done or was proposed to be done to prisoners. And as a way to test a COVID vaccine, right? But

not because they wanted to make sure people inside were safe but because they wanted to make sure that oh, we have some test subjects that nobody's going to care about.

And at the same moment, they were not giving people masks or providing the necessary things to be able to keep COVID from spreading.

So that, like, that is also in a way devouring people's bodies. That's taking that experiment and using that energy. Using their life force and risking their lives to be able to provide while not even doing the minimal to keep them safe.

And, of course, why would a system that is based off of slavery keep their slaves safe? Let's be honest, when people are imprisoned, they are being enslaved. They start talking a lot about how they were gardening and mutual aid. And one of the things it made me think about when I was incarcerated, when I got to prison, at Victorville, one of the things, we have things called cars, the group you belong to. The Black car would come and bring you hygiene items and care items, which was like basic mutual aid to start off with just because you were Black. Nothing in return. I know there's stories about what to fear, but that care package was legit. Soap, things to keep you going to be able to provide for yourself.

And I think a lot about how prison in some ways is one of the forefronts of mutual aid because people depend on each other within prison to be able to survive.

Well, they talk about food and resources and when they talk about politically, being able to be a safety net. For example, Black folks stick together in case there are race conflicts. And so, those things are being interdependent, we are interdependent beings. But we are divided from one another outside from each other a lot of times and we don't think about it a lot of times. When you're in prison, it becomes necessary quickly because you have to deal with each other and deal with a system that is holding you enslaved and the guards that commit so much violence against you at any given time depending on their moods or if you dare to stand up to them. So yeah.

**JT:** Can I add to that? Thank you for that. I think in the other context that we've been riffing through in terms of, you know, the context of slavery and abolition in the kind of original US sense, I think mutual aid was also day to day work of abolition in that context.

I think if you listen, look or read narratives from formally enslaved people interviewed in the 1930s who were young people during slavery, they mentioned the ways that runaways, permanent and semipermanent run aways, depended on the day to day mutual aid of other slaves, whether it's through the garden plots and other stuff, handing off food or helping them to hide or alerting them about what's about to happen.

I think when we think about a kind of revolutionary abolition in that context, we think of someone like Nat Turner, it took them 6 weeks to find him in a cave. And someone was feeding him. I think those day to day acts of mutual aid are what allowed slaves in the context of the 1860s when the Union Army approached to know it was time to go. It was that day to day mutual aid, that day to day moving through the woods to create sociality and formulations for living

together through Black collectivities that allowed them to amass, a massive disruption of slavery and to end it, right, during the Civil War.

And I think also, I wanted to say that ecocide and urbicide bring out animalization and the kind of mark of animality. I think ecocide and urbicide and I'm thinking about Jackson's work here. But I think the demarcation of animalization and relation of Black communities, especially indigenous communities, as well.

And even the kind of marking of the territory of animals as somewhere out over there that can be disposed of that those are two related ways of engaging the world through racial capitalism that have so many consequences for humans and the biosphere, and I wanted to highlight that shared grammarability that happens as between the animal and animalization.

**Charlotte:** Perfect. Oh, yeah. Go ahead, BP.

**BP:** I want to ask a question, I don't need an answer for, but people to think about. They're talking about runaways, hiding Nat Turner and how people would say they would be part of the underground railroad. But I want people to ask themselves, how many people would be willing to hide somebody with a warrant? Especially a big one?

**Charlotte:** Yeah, thank you, both, and I appreciate that question, BP. Just looking at the time. I want to make sure we get to the next prerecorded video. So I think we're going to roll into that now and we'll come back for final remarks and maybe Q&A if we have time.

**Bryant:** What should people outside know about environmental racism in Pennsylvania prison? And speaking for the minority-majority of the prison population, environmental racism is seen in various forms, primarily the form in which people of color are the dominant make up of prisons, herein lies the issue. We all know that statistics prove disproportionate impacts among communities of color. If Black and latinos are incarcerated at the same time, or rather at the same rate, as their white counterparts the prison population would decrease an astonishing 40% overall. With a number that significant we can't turn a blind eye by permitting the corporate raiders, destroyers of mankind to continue to build these prisons on or around toxic land sites.

**Lawrence:** You know in imperialism, and in corporate codes, and corporate rules and all make it can seem like we don't have a right to share and express as humans in those kind of ways, and they do have a lot of zoning, coding, and just different codes and laws and regulations that we're trying to repeat that process, we gotta dismantle those barriers, you know what I'm saying, we got really just take back, you know what I'm saying, our right and reaffirm our right to access adequate, nutrient dense food, and knowing that we have the skills and the abilities to produce these things our backyards, in the community parks, you know, in these spaces that we're living around, you know, and really looking at and learning from the Indigenous people, you know what I'm saying, that, the land here was stolen from, and learning from them on better ways to steward land, you know what I mean, and you know, produce natural resources that can sustain not just humans but non human living beings as well, and the connection with all that, you know, the more we connect sustainability, Afro-ecology, abolition, and these practices, you know, the

more culture we can get, the actual autonomy, independence and self-determination, freedom, and ultimately progress, you know, as a people free from colonialism.

**Bryant:** As a final thought, awareness and education is the first step to ending environmental racism in prisons. Because the sad truth is that a great percentage of inmates, and even their family members, lack the awareness of their toxic grounds. As an environmentalist I would rather have one good eye than two evil eyes that the corporate raiders and destroyers continue to have in building and locating and constructing these prisons on toxic polluted uninhabitable lands.

**Safear:** I've heard people say that none of us will be free, until all of us are free -- but it seems like as soon as some people get free, in this case, free from a life of toxicity, well at least in their minds, free from a life from toxicity, then as soon as they achieve that, they forget about the people still fighting that battle, they forget about the people lower on the hierarchy than them.

And that's a issue that abolition questions. Are you fighting for all people to be free or are you fighting for a higher level on this social hierarchy? So it's upon us to not only unite on a shared sense of oppression but also recognize the ways that we may be complicit in the oppression of others. How does our privilege harm each other? And how can we use those privileges to even out power across the people?

**Lawrence:** Once we're successful with abolishing the systems that are oppressing the people, we gotta have something in place that can sustain us for generations, that can be regenerated through process that don't deplete the earth, that don't deplete non-human living beings, the things that don't deplete humanity and that's the real connection that I find myself thinking about often and building on.

**Charlotte:** Great. Just looking at the time a little bit, I want JT and BP to kind of respond to that last clip of takeaways, but I wanted to pull in a couple of the questions that are coming up in the chat as sort of maybe kind of a culminating series of remarks or thoughts.

Folks are kind of asking, you know, all of, I think we've done a really good job in this panel sort of defining the problems. And the issues and historizing. But folks want to know, what does an abolitionist green future look like? What does it entail? And I think some of the remarks from the last clip touched on this, as well. But it would be great to hear from both of you. You know, maybe in your own organizing or your own work how you're building towards abolitionist green futures and, perhaps, what folks who are on this call can do to kind of be a part of that effort, as well. Either one of you can take it away.

**BP:** I guess I can hop in. So I did want to respond to a couple things. At first, are you fighting for all to be free? What about the bottoms? That's what I wrote down on my notes. I was thinking about, to be honest, as someone who has been organizing for over a decade at this point on the ground, it does seem like there's a big pattern of people wanting to just get themselves free. Talk about everybody but then as soon as you get to that point where they cool, let's stop. We've got to ask ourselves internally, are we about getting everybody free? And if not, where do we really stand within this struggle? I think it's really important to see it has to be material in my mind,



too. It can't be we post on Facebook. We say some little comments on Twitter. Like, that doesn't...like, cool, spread we should abolish stuff but we've got to take material actions.

In my mindset and I think this goes to what creates the answers, I see myself as a decolonizer. Material decolonization. That means removal of the prisons, tearing them down, stopping them from building new ones. It means, like, actually deconstructing the system, like not just I wouldn't just say vote our way out but literally moving the material resources that gives itself power from its hands.

Trying to be careful how I say things, but I think those are the things that are going to need to be done to make changes. Decolonization, no, we've got to materially change and take the power out of the take the power out of the hands it's sitting in. We have to remove that otherwise those changes aren't going to happen. We can try to legislate it away and we can use the tools where they can be beneficial. But it will never be enough unless we take material action.

Material action can look in a million different ways. Maybe materially blocking them from making them benefit off of prisons from one way or another. That can be thinking about where are these materials that are being made with slave labor going? Maybe you could block that. I don't know. I'm not going to say what to do or what not to do. But when it is talking about this, we can't think about this in theory, in conversation. And one of the ways, for example, FTP has done it, we combine things from on the ground tactics like we did in Letcher County by being able to build support things as simple as dream boards but also taking plans and taking direct actions, as well as people fighting legislatively. Challenging prisons on their environmental. A million tactics but a material situation.

We can't just try to philosophize about it. How can we physically stop it by doing these things we've been able to stop thus far for prisons? And it's still a struggle to keep going. Probably, unless we all get on it, like right now, probably longer than we'll be alive. But I'm hoping we can change that tide because it's crucially important we all take actually stands.

I think one of the, also, things we've got to think about going forward in abolishing prisons is making solutions day to day. And that means being able to supply the resources people need, being able to house people, being able to build networks of housing where we're interdependent and not dependent on the system. And that's how we're going to keep people from being snatched up as easily. They'll have to try much harder to do so and take stands and build those communities because us being pulled apart and being separated and being individuals is a big part of they're able to control us and being able to hold up the prison industrial complex. But I don't think we can say lessen the pain, we've got to do that, too. But we have to be like, how do we stop it? How do we stop the damages going on?

And that comes from multiple different types of direct action. That comes from, also, building support networks, building mutual aid. It's not just, not just a theory but an action. And I think what it can look like, well, I think we could look at a society where prisons right hand turn a thing. Where we solve our problems within our communities and have autonomy and shared resources instead of trying to scrap and fight for them. And the only people suffering from that are the people who have been benefitting off of the slavery, benefitting off the theft that sit in

their multimillion dollar houses with billions and billions of dollars. That's who is going to really not like that happening. But the rest of us are going to do way better. But we've got to see it from the bottom up. If we think it's going to happen from where we're sitting at whatever privileged level we're sitting at up, we've got to go to the bottom, how do we elevate the bottom? Because by elevating the bottom, we elevate all of us. Yeah.

**JT:** Thank you. And I think for short, decolonization, abolition, those are not metaphors. They have to be real and they have to be, you know, they have to tack to everyday actions and our tactics to get in there. And again, I want to hold out the metaphor even though I don't mean it in that kind of sense. I think that's how we come back together, how we rebuild our communities in the wake of uricide and ecocide, is how we disrupt incarceration and also, how we plot a green future. I think, I think we're... I personally have been involved with People Strike, which emerged when folks with Cooperation Jackson in the face of COVID called for a general strike to gain, you know, to gain the power and the collective power to have mass disruption when it comes to, you know, what COVID brought to the fore in terms of disposability, both inside and, especially, inside but also outside, right?

And so, I think, I think for us, we're trying to build through people's movement assembly, which is our kind of next move, building out from the work that people Cooperation Jackson have been involved in to try to build new systems. I think we're clear that there is, there is no kind of alternative that isn't abolitionist. And there's, and there's no green future without abolition, I want to say that. And there's also no, there's also no, actually, returning to Ruth Gilmore's metaphors, right? We have to think about these inaction as well as in global solidarity.

I think, for example, a collective that's out in a township that's outside of South Africa that is doing radical work around, you know, guerrilla gardening. There's such limited space, it takes the metaphor of prison inside to outside to its limit. And yet, they find open square inches, open square feet to plant, right? To feed. And without fences, right.

And that's the kind of work we can do. Because not only is it materially real and it helps people, too, but it helps to see these kind of alternatives. The reality is that oil is not a future at all and it's one that's still being banked on, quite literally banked on. Prisons are not a future at all and yet they're ones that are being banked on. So I think part of it is direct action and part of it is the kind of interior work around how do we build our own communities so that, how do we rebuild them around different values so that we're not just being siphoned into racial, global capitalist systems that destroy us that destroy the planet and that can consider us and all life on the planet expendable for profit.

And I think, again, I want to underscore decolonization as not a metaphor. That means indigenous sovereignties, that means the return of prison lands as well as any other lands to indigenous sovereignties. And I think alongside Indigenous sovereignties, places in Virginia, the historical practices of the Black Commons. The way that Black communities in day to day create reciprocity through the land and waterscapes. That is really the seed, the trajectory, the future in many ways. And if it's not, we're doomed in many ways. That really is a return to our own ability to feed ourselves collectively to care for each other, so it is the future. So thank you.

**Charlotte:** Great. We're going to pause for a second to do a switch. Great. Yeah. I think we're at time, so I want to respect that. So but any final last tidbits from JT or BP you want to throw in there? Or we can close on out. All right. Great. So thank you so much to everyone who joined us tonight, thank you to our panelists, Safear, Wayland, Lawrence, Bryant, JT, BP, Haymarket, our captioner and the interpretation team for all of their work to make this panel happen and we hope to see everyone November 9th, 7:00 p.m. eastern for our next conversation, Abolition Must Be Red. Thank you all and thanks for joining us this evening.