

GREEN

If, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, abolition is “life in rehearsal,” then “the stage itself must tell a story.” The stage for our Study and Struggle is the land. Who decides whether land is occupied by fruit trees or nuclear waste? Shade trees or enslaved labor? Free housing or prisons? In the United States, this depends on who owns the land. European colonization brought concepts of capitalism and private property. In Mississippi, settlers dispossessed and displaced Indigenous peoples, most of whom did not have privatized relationships to the land. Settlers surveyed and divided fields, forests, and lakes for sale. Until the abolition of chattel slavery, property owners built cotton plantations that depended on the unfree labor of peoples of African descent. After the Civil War, most Black Mississippians worked as tenant farmers and sharecroppers for white landowners. Tenants could grow small gardens to eat and sell fresh food. But racial capitalism meant the strict surveillance of how renters used the land. A tenant who planted vegetables—instead of cotton—might be evicted by their landlord. A family who tried to raise their own livestock—as Fannie Lou Hamer’s did—might find their cows poisoned. Those who resisted this system were subjected to state and extralegal violence. Police frequently used vagrancy laws to arrest those they considered underemployed, turning them over to white landowners or putting them to work in the profitable and deadly replacement to chattel slavery: the convict labor system. This “slavery by another name” was eventually replaced by the penal farm, shifting profits from private landowners to the state. One of the enduring legacies of these transformations is Mississippi State Prison, known as Parchman Farm.

Parchman encompasses 20,000 acres of the Mississippi Delta on land once occupied by the Choctaw people. It is a site of enduring and unspeakable violence. The land has borne witness to centuries of gendered racial terror and unfree labor. This human suffering wrought by Parchman’s continued existence is inextricable from the harm and environmental degradation to the human and nonhuman world that surrounds it. The once-fertile farmland in the Delta floodplain, that made desirable the plantation which preceded the prison, is permeated with toxins leached from the prison’s water system. These toxins flow into the nearby tributary of rivers surrounding Mound Bayou, one of the first autonomous, all-Black settlements of the post-Reconstruction period. These environmental conditions, which poison people inside the prison and the habitat and people surrounding it, are not atypical. The communities disproportionately impacted by prison conditions often are those whose conditions are also made worse by prisons.

In almost every state, prisons are built on or near toxic sites, producing and accelerating life-destroying conditions for both humans and nonhumans. SCI-Fayette in Pennsylvania sits 500 feet from a 500-acre coal ash dump site and former coal processing waste site. People incarcerated there have reported chronic sore throats, thyroid disorders, cancer, shortness of breath headaches, sores, cysts, tumors, and vision problems. Residents in the nearby town of LaBelle, PA, which is predominantly Black, have reported similar symptoms. Prisons destroy life, human and non-human. For humans to thrive, and earth to survive, they must be abolished. This is why abolition must be green.

III. LAND

We've broken this unit into two sections. The first section, "Land," focuses on the ground beneath our feet. As you study the environmentalisms that sustain prisons and imagine an environmentalism without them, consider the physical space necessary for mass incarceration. On whose stolen land do America's prisons and jails sit? What types of violence were necessary to establish and then to maintain a system of private property? What sorts of historic and current value extraction from the earth can you think of? Who decides whether to use land to build a prison or to grow food? How does the nation-state's promise of exclusivity and security to property owners perpetuate militarism at home and abroad? Why must we be in solidarity with nonhuman relatives with whom we share the land? Have any movements provided blueprints for the present? How can we make sure we do not merely "green" the PIC? What better questions can we ask so as not to repeat past failures to organize?

Readings:

- Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (1542) in *Voices* (pp. 35-42)
- Winona LaDuke, "Acceptance Speech for the Green Party's Nomination for Vice President of the United States of America" (1996) in *Voices* (pp. 576-578)
- Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson, "Utopias and Dystopias" in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 345-348)
- Akinyele Umoja, "Why We Say 'Free the Land'" (1984) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 449-450)
- Winona LaDuke, "We Are Still Here: The Five Hundred Years Celebration" (1991) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 455-457)
- James Yaki Sayles, "War for the Cities" (1978) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 211-214)
- Lucille Clifton, "The Mississippi River Empties Into the Gulf"
- Lucille Clifton, "Generations" (selection)
- Dian Million, "We Are the Land, and the Land is Us," from *Racial Ecologies*
- J.T. Roane, "Towards Usable Histories of the Black Commons," *Black Perspectives*
- *The Red Deal*, Part I (pp. 1-20)
- Son House, "Mississippi County Farm Blues" (1931)
- Bukka White, "Parchman Farm Blues" (1940)

Discussion Questions:

Voices of a People's History of the United States

- Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (1542) in *Voices* (pp. 35-42)
 - Why do you think Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote these two accounts? To whom do you think he wrote them?
 - How does the account from Bartolomé de Las Casas change or further your understanding of the consequences of European contact on the native people of the Western Hemisphere?
 - De Las Casas wrote these accounts fifty and sixty years respectively after Columbus initially arrived in Hispanola. Do you think the intervening years may have influenced his perceptions? How and why? What happens when someone writes down an account after most of the consequences of an event are known?

- Winona LaDuke, Acceptance Speech for the Green Party's Nomination for Vice President of the United States of America (August 29, 1996) in *Voices* (pp. 575-578)
 - o What is the "seventh generation" Winona LaDuke describes in reference to sustainability?
 - o Do you think LaDuke is correct when she claims that "there is no real quality of life in America until there is quality of life in the poorest regions of this America"? Why, or why not? How do other voices in the book support her contention?
 - o What does LaDuke mean when she says that American Indians are "the only humans in the Department of Interior treated as a natural resource"?

Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson, *Remaking Radicalism*

- Part 4: Utopias and Dystopias (pp. 345-348)
 - o Berger and Hobson write that the Survival Gathering in South Dakota in 1980--dubbed the Cowboy-Indian Alliance for its broad-based coalition--recognized that "planetary survival itself was imperiled by the trifecta of environmental devastation, corporate greed, and US militarism." What are some examples from other readings, across time, that come to mind using these three categories?
 - o What are the limitations of both capitalism's and communism's belief in the nation-state as a form of political organization? How does the interconnection between earth, human, and non-human forms exceed and require such formulations?
- Akinyele Umoja, "Why We Say 'Free the Land'" (pp. 449-450)
 - o What is the meaning and significance of the call to "Free the Land"?
- Winona LaDuke, "We Are Still Here: The Five Hundred Years Celebration" (pp. 455-457)
 - o What is the relationship between colonialism and ecological devastation?
 - o According to LaDuke, how is the consumption and devastation of land tied to the consumption and genocide of people?
- James Yaki Sayles, "War for the Cities" 4.C.6. (pp. 449-450)
 - o What are the six points that Sayles makes about the connections between displacement of Afrikan people from cities and the growth of prisons?
 - o What are similarities between the dislocation and relocation that Sayles describes and various forms of settler colonialism you've studied?
 - o How does Sayles' piece help us think about land in relation to various forms of exploitation and colonialism?

***The Red Deal, Part I* (pp. 1-20)**

- Who is the Red Nation and what are their political principles?
- What is the Red Deal? What is its relationship to the Green New Deal?
- If you have the reading from Albert Woodfox's *Solitary* for Session 6, you might compare and contrast the Black Panther Party's 10-point program from that of the Red Nation.
- The Red Nation writes that they are "dedicated to the liberation of Native peoples from capitalism and colonialism." What is the relationship between colonialism and

capitalism? In what ways is the punishment system designed to uphold both? How does discipline relate to dispossession?

- What are some examples of the destruction of nonhuman relatives the Red Nation describes? How are these intertwined with colonialism?
- What is the relationship between “Healing Our Bodies” and “Healing the Planet”? Why is “Ending the Occupation” necessary to both?

Dian Million, “We Are the Land, and the Land is Us,” from *Racial Ecologies*

- What is the relationship between capitalism and settler colonialism?
- Million addresses the state violence carried out by militarized police forces in the interest of “production, consumption, and distribution.” What are the examples Million names?
- How does Million’s exploration of “place” unsettle the “antithetical split” between the “urban” and “rural” as geographical categories?

J.T. Roane, “Towards Usable Histories of the Black Commons,” *Black Perspectives*

- What is the relationship between colonialism and ecological devastation?
- How does the Black commons challenge previous uses of the land based on extraction?
- Do you think Roane writes on merely surviving racial capitalism—or—“survival pending revolution,” in the formulation of the Black Panther Party? Why?

Bukka White, “Parchman Farm Blues” (1940)

- To whom do you imagine the once-incarcerated bluesman Bukka White is singing?
- What do you think his song says about incarceration as an answer to human conflict?

IV. CLIMATE JUSTICE

We’ve broken this unit on Green into two sections. The second, “Climate Justice” emphasizes how fighting environmental degradation and planetary destruction must be a political struggle waged alongside struggles to abolish the prison industrial complex. What is the relationship between capitalism, climate change, and state violence? How do different communities experience climate change? Proposed solutions to the climate crisis are often framed through technological advancements and other reforms that leave in place the very structures which have caused it. How can we understand such solutions alongside similar technological “fixes” for policing, prisons, and other aspects of the punishment system that augment and advance, rather than interrupt, existing structures of violence? How are human relationships to nature structured by white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, racial capitalism, and other forms of hierarchy and domination? Look into where the nearest prisons in your area are sited. What is the connection between the prison and the environment around it? How does that environment shape life for the people inside the prison and the communities that surround it? What would climate justice mean without abolition? What would abolition look like without climate justice?

Readings:

- Mariame Kaba, *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us* (pp. 18-25 and 148-162)
- C.T. Butler and Keith McHenry, “Why Food Not Bombs” (1992) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 364-367)

- First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice” (1991) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 373-375)
- John Trudell, “We Are Power” (1980) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 397-400)
- Youth Greens, “Summary of Youth Green May Gathering” (1989) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 403-405)
- Keala Uchoa, *A Zine About Critical Abolitionist Environmental Justice*
- Julian Brave NoiseCat, “Standing Rock is burning – but our resistance isn't over” (2017)
- Mariangelie Ortiz Ortiz, “Rebuilding Puerto Rico, One House at a Time” (2018)
- *The Red Deal*, Part II (pp. 21-31)
- Monica White, “A Pig and a Garden: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Freedom Farm Cooperative”

Discussion Questions:

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us*, (p. 18-25 and 148-162)

- Hayes and Kaba note that PIC abolitionists are normally dismissed as “politically inactive academics” with impossible ideas. What do they say is true of abolitionists, instead?
- How does Martin Shkreli’s case illustrate the failure of the PIC to promote “justice,” even when the person going through the system is one who is responsible for massive harm? If the system punishing Shkreli is the same one that killed Tiffany Rushner, what does it mean to applaud in the case of the former while decrying the latter?
- “Cages confine people, but not the conditions that facilitated their harms or the mentalities that perpetuate violence.” How does a quote like this, paired with the authors’ use of Moten and Harney, expand what abolition is calling for? How does separating between “harm” and “crime” broaden our analysis when it comes to conceptions of dangerousness?
- What is the difference between restorative justice and transformative justice? What does each focus on?
- What does Kaba mean by “abolition is not about your fucking feelings”? Where does the instinct for punishment come from, and how does it conflict (or not) with abolition?

Voices of a People’s History of the United States

- Julian Brave NoiseCat, Standing Rock is burning – but our resistance isn't over (2017)
 - For Indigenous people, land and water are regarded as sacred, living ancestors. How does this understanding of the relationship with the land differ from the notion of “property”?
 - How does NoiseCat assert that settler-colonialism is very much alive today? Can you think of further examples of modern-day settler-colonialism in the United States?
- Mariangelie Ortiz Ortiz, “Rebuilding Puerto Rico, One House at a Time” (March 20, 2018)
 - Ortiz criticizes the United States’ inaction in providing aid that was promised. Similarly, activist Naomi Klein described Hurricane Maria as “not just a natural disaster, not just a tragedy, [but] state-sponsored mass killing.” Do you agree with Klein’s assessment? Why or why not?
 - Naomi Klein defines “disaster capitalism” as the practice by a government/regime of taking advantage of a major disaster to adopt economic policies that the

population would be less likely to accept under normal circumstances. How do we see this reflected in post-Maria Puerto Rico, and after other disasters in recent past and present?

Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson, *Remaking Radicalism*

- C.T. Butler and Keith McHenry, “Why Food Not Bombs (pp. 364-367)
 - o How does this reading reframe scarcity as a question of abundance and unequal distribution?
 - o What are some misconceptions you had about hunger and food distribution before reading this piece? How is food justice related to other forms of liberation?
- John Trudell, “We Are Power” (1980) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 397-400)
 - o What does Trudell identify as power and misnomers of power? Where does our power lie, according to him?
 - o Trudell writes that “I see the bulk of the white people, they do not feel oppressed. They feel powerless. When I go amongst my own people, we do not feel powerless. We feel oppressed.” What does he mean by this distinction between oppression and powerlessness?
 - o He also distinguishes between revolution and liberation; and human, civil, and natural rights. How does he define these differences?

The Red Deal, Part II (p. 21-31)

- How does the “divest” framework of “defund the police” fit with the solutions proscribed in the Red Deal?
- What does MMIWG2S stand for? How does the Red Nation frame it and what do they say is necessary for future MMIWG2 campaigns?
- What is a bordertown? What is their history and how do they operate in perpetuating settler colonialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy?
- What are some of the bullet points in the “What can you do about it?” sections that you feel able to address now? Note any ways to expand your current organizing to incorporate these points, perhaps by forming new coalitions or by broadening existing work you or your organization are doing. Always begin by researching to find out where the work is already being done.

Monica White, “A Pig and a Garden: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Freedom Farm Cooperative”

- Fannie Lou Hamer declares in the chapter’s opening, “Down where we are, food is used as a political weapon.” What did Hamer mean by this and how did food and land autonomy shape her vision of collective agency and community resilience?
- What were the political and economic conditions that likely informed Hamer’s decision to select Sunflower County as the site for the Freedom Farm Cooperative in 1967?
- How did white politicians, business leaders, and police utilize the law to stymie organizing efforts in Mississippi by SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP? In what ways did Freedom Farm serve as an alternative strategy of resistance to sustain activism?
- What are the lessons that can be learned from Freedom Farm? Discuss what you believe Monica White means when she writes, “The organizing strategies of black farmworkers in the 1960s offer lessons that are important today for families displaced by the automobile industry and for others in urban areas currently struggling to access healthy

food, adequate and affordable housing, clean water, quality education, health care, and employment” (87).

Keala Uchoa, *A Zine About Critical Abolitionist Environmental Justice*

- What does Uchoa identify as the limits of the current environmental justice movement? How do its theories of justice fall short of pursuing the transformation needed to realize an abolitionist world?
- Who does Uchoa bring into the history of the environmental justice movement? How does reshaping EJ history to include those fighting about state and carceral violence reshape our understanding of EJ and abolition?
- What does it mean that “the fossil fuel industry and carceral state are symbiotic”? And how do they work together to repress political action?