

INTERSECTIONAL

This unit is about intersectionality, a concept coined by the Black feminist intellectual Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. Laid out in an essay titled, “Demarginalizing the Intersection,” Crenshaw argued that for many people of color, it is the intersection of multiple forms of power and inequality that determine their experiences, opportunities, and life chances. Crenshaw sought to use the term to challenge frameworks of oppression that focus on a single determinative cause, like racism, as the source of subordination and inequality. Against this “single-issue” perspective on how systems of power like white supremacy and racism operate, Crenshaw argued that for many people framing the violence and injustices they experience requires that we examine the intersection of multiple systems of domination and power. For example, many Black women experience both racism and misogyny in the workplace as they confront white supremacy, just as the working lives of many undocumented Latinx immigrant workers in the United States is shaped by the intersection of racism and citizenship discrimination. Further still, the violences and social divisions that Black and immigrant trans women confront often occur at the “intersection” of racism, misogyny, transphobia.

As Crenshaw argued for these members of the community, a single-issue framework like racism at the workplace to describe their social experiences or to mount a defense of their lives only denies their intersectional reality. Finally, addressing the antiracist and Black freedom movements in particular, Crenshaw argued that when we advance single-issue frameworks in our movements for liberation-- such as when we restrict our understanding of racism to the experiences of men of color-- we implicitly or inadvertently create strategies that better the social conditions of some in our communities, while maintaining or worsening the marginalization of those in a community who daily face intersectional social oppressions. For Crenshaw, a major aspect of intersectionality is taking the time in our thinking and activism to analyze the frameworks we are using to understand power. Intersectionality teaches us that before we can address and remediate intersectional oppression, we must learn how our own frameworks and analyses of power have limited our understanding of intersectional oppressions. Without learning how our own thinking created intersectional blindspots, we remain in danger of creating ideas and institutions that continue to marginalize.

As we conceptualized our 2021 curriculum, we intentionally started with this section on intersectionality to foster a sense of group intimacy and vulnerability. In order for us to build institutions that truly address the harm we’ve experienced, and prevent harm from happening in the future, we have to trust each other. The Intersectionality section has two subsections: Relationships and Community Care. The first subsection, Relationships, focuses on the frameworks we often use in everyday life to identify ourselves and those around us. The second subsection, Community Care, focuses on the ways that institutions built under racial capitalism fail to meet our needs, and the ways that we can build ideas and institutions that are truly life-giving, connective, and sustaining.

I. RELATIONSHIPS

The first section, “Relationships” focuses on the frameworks we often use in everyday life to identify ourselves and those around us. As you think about the idea of intersectionality, begin by

thinking about how you define your social conditions. Do you experience intersecting oppressions and inequalities, like racism, sexism and/or poverty? If so, can you name some of the social forces, inequalities, and oppressions that make up your intersectional experience? Now think about how others see you and address your life? Do they see and name that intersection or do they focus on only this or that part of your intersectional context. For example, do they only address you as a Black person, or as a Black woman, but fail to see how homophobia or transphobia is also part of what you must navigate? Likewise, think about how you look at those around you or the folks you are doing this study group with. What parts of their identities do you see when you think about the oppression they have faced? What intersections might you be missing or not seeing when you focus on that single, often dominant, oppression?

Readings:

- Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (pp. 103-147)
- Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 1-44)
- Monami Maulik, "Organizing in Our Communities Post–September 11th" (2001) in *Voices* (pp. 604-605)
- Vito Russo, "Why We Fight" (1988) in *Voices* (pp. 534-547)
- Robin McDuff, Deanne Pernell, and Karen Saunders, "An Open Letter to the Antirape Movement" (1977) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 41-44)
- Daniel Tsang, "Third World Lesbians and Gays Meet" (1980) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 44-46)
- Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color against Violence, "Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex" (2001) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 61-64)
- Rustbelt Radio, "Queering Abolition"
- Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s" (1982)

Discussion Questions:

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (pp. 103-147)

- What is a participatory defense campaign? (p.110-111)
- What does "care is the antidote to violence" mean to you? (p.111)

Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 1-44)

- Assata shares some of her family history in these chapters. She talks about her grandparents, her mother, and others. What intersectional identities do you see just within her family? As she describes the diversity in her family, how does this complicate our ideas of Blackness?

Rustbelt Radio, "Queering Abolition"

- Treva Ellison talks about "Queer Abolition" as a way to expand "our geography of the carceral." How do you currently think about the "geography of the carceral?" What does it mean to expand it? (e.g. relationship dynamics, child protective services, schools, etc.)
- What are some of the logics that the carceral state uses? (e.g. ostracization, punishment, individualization, etc.) Where/ how do we see those show up outside of the physical prison?

- How are they defining queer criminality? How is this an intersectional approach?

Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s” (1982)

- In this essay, Audre Lorde writes, “As Black people, if there is one thing we can learn from the 60s, it is how infinitely complex any move for liberation must be.” What does Lorde mean by this?

II. COMMUNITY CARE

Building on the discussions we had last week on the ways that different oppressions materialize in our bodies and communities, this week's discussion will prompt us to think about the ways that institutions built under white supremacy and capitalism fail to meet our needs, and the ways that we can build ideas and institutions that are truly life-giving, connective, and sustaining. What can we create together to care for each other in these moments of perpetual crisis? What can we learn from the people who came before us? This week, we'll begin to think about what it looks like to conceptualize harm on a community level, how we can respond to it, and how we can take care of each other.

Readings:

- Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (pp. 163-176)
- Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 118-159)
- Angela Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation” (1970) in *Voices* (pp. 494-498)
- Gustavo Madrigal-Piña, “Undocumented and Unafraid” (2011) in *Voices* (pp. 635-636)
- Lesbians against Police Violence, interview with Barbara Lubinski (1979) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 138-139)
- Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action against US Activists and What We Can Do about It* (1992) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 156-159)
- Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, “Copwatch: Keeping an Eye on the Cops” (1995) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 163-164)
- Creative Interventions Toolkit, “Introduction”
- “We Keep Each Other Safe” art, *Trans Day of Resilience* zine

Discussion Questions:

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (pp. 163-176)

- How does Mariame Kaba talk about the importance of experimenting as we organize towards abolition?
- What does Mariame Kaba mean that “the cops are in our heads and hearts?” What do you think the process looks like of getting the cops out of our heads and hearts? (p. 169-170)

Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 118-149)

- How do you relate to Assata's statement, “It has always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time?” (p. 123-124)

- What does Assata mean by “how many ways racism can manifest itself” and “how many ways people fight against it”? Were the students fighting against racism? (p.136)
- Why does Assata identify with the company? Is this something you’ve experienced before? How did that shift for Assata? (p.149)

Voices of a People’s History of the United States

- Angela Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation” (1970), p. 494-498.
 - Angela Davis writes, “The announced function of the police, ‘to protect and serve the people,’ becomes the grotesque caricature of protecting and preserving the interests of our oppressors and serving us nothing but injustice.” Have you seen examples of this in your own life? (p. 497)
 - When do you feel the most protected and the most safe?