

## **RED**

This “Red” unit highlights histories of radicalism, primarily those of communist and anarchist perspectives. Although many have heard these words, it is more likely that we have heard them defined by their opponents than advocates. Assata Shakur described the first time she was forced to reckon with this. To impress her peers, she threw around terms like “democracy,” “communism,” and “freedom,” only to find that she could only regurgitate what she heard on television or in passing. The only language she had to describe communism was provided to her from people invested in its failure. That embarrassing event taught her that “only a fool lets their enemies tell them who their enemies are.” This unit is an effort to demystify some of what these concepts mean and give examples as to why they have been so important to revolutionaries and organizers. We encourage readers to try to challenge some of these dominant conceptions of communism and anarchism, and leverage the lessons learned by radicals towards our present struggles.

## **V. CLASS**

Class is a concept that cannot be isolated. Even if we take the simplest understanding of class—the amount of wealth that a person has—we are immediately confronted with the difficulty of drawing meaningful conclusions based on that information alone. What does it mean if the person who has \$100,000 is Black or white? What does that amount mean if their parents already have millions of dollars and what does it mean if their loved ones are in debt? What does it mean if they are a man or a woman, cisgender, trans, or nonbinary? What does it mean if they live in New York City and what does it mean if they live in Tchula, MS? What does it mean if they have \$100,000 because they lost their other \$900,000 on a bad investment, and what does it mean if it is their savings from a lifetime of wage work at the time of their retirement?

Now consider that most people look to employment as another clear indicator of class. The type of work you do, the pay and benefits you receive, the security of your position, the likelihood of getting a new position if you get laid off—each of these are further indicators of your class. But most people also understand that you can be a working-class parent with a “good” job and still have far fewer resources than an unemployed upper-class college graduate who is “broke.” Equally, an hour of housecleaning work does not merit the same pay as an hour of work writing software for an app that connects you to house cleaners. Rich people with enough money to invest in something can reap the profits of someone else’s work to become richer without working at all. Class mobility was, and is, theoretically, unlimited. Yet at no point in the country’s history has it ever been equally likely that a child of a poor family would become rich or that a child of a rich family would end up poor. Class, especially in a modern context, is a competition where the rules are unofficial, unspoken, and frequently changing. Understanding

class requires broadening, updating, and challenging our own assumptions and the ones offered to us.

### **Readings:**

- Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (pp. 93-103)
- Langston Hughes, "Ballad of Roosevelt" (1934) in *Voices* (pp. 327-328)
- The Omaha Platform of the People's Party of America (1892) in *Voices* (pp. 229-230)
- "Proclamation of the Striking Textile Workers of Lawrence" (1912) in *Voices* (pp. 272-274)
- Roberto Meneses Marquez, "A Day Laborer" (2013) in *Voices* (pp. 636-638)
- Yip Harburg, "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime" (1932) in *Voices* (pp. 314-315)
- Woody Guthrie, "Ludlow Massacre" (1946) in *Voices* (pp. 314-315)
- Coretta Scott King, "Statement to House Subcommittee on Equal Opportunity and Full Employment" (1975) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 278-279)
- "Goals of the North Carolina Prisoners' Labor Union" (1974) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 170-173)
- Willie Baptist, "Five Main Slogans: Lessons from the History of the National Union of the Homeless" (1993) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 217-220)
- Black Radical Congress, "A Black Freedom Agenda for the Twenty-First Century" (1998) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 426-429)
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* zine
- Marilyn Buck, "To Women Who Work"
- Jimmy Boggs, *American Revolution*, Chapters 2-3 (pp. 33-45)
- Phil Ochs, "Links on the Chain" (1965)

### **Discussion Questions:**

#### **Marilyn Buck, "To Women Who Work"**

- How do the forces of social class, both for the wealthy and for workers, undermine the idea of free will or agency? Why does the poem use verbs the way that it does?
- What does the poem say about the way class is made invisible? This could involve geography, age, media, or anything else that you might notice.

#### ***Voices of a People's History of the United States***

- Langston Hughes (1934 and 1940) "Ballad of Roosevelt" (1934) (pp. 327-329)
  - Why did the family from the poem no longer believe Roosevelt would help? What do you think will happen next? Why is it important that we move from being focused on a single family to the collective?
- The Omaha Platform of the People's Party of America (1892) (pp. 229-230)
  - How does the discussion of "imported pauperized labor beat down their wages" connect to the current conditions of the gig economy and outsourcing labor today?

How does this create a new class of individuals who are barred from the “formal” workforce?

- In this excerpt, The Omaha Platform discuss that “the fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few unprecedented in the history of mankind” (229) will eventually destroy humanity, in what ways does this echo the antagonisms we see today between the working class and the billionaire class? What examples come to mind?
- “Proclamation of the Striking Textile Workers of Lawrence” (1912) (pp. 272-274)
  - How do the police work to maintain social and class order?
  - Why is it more beneficial for the ruling class for the government to fund anti-strike anti-worker militias rather than just use that money to fund workers' living wages?
- Roberto Meneses Marquez, “A Day Laborer” (April 30, 2013) (pp. 636-638)
  - How can workers step away from electoral politics and engage in grassroots organizing to help change the material conditions of their lives? Why is grassroots organizing so important for those who fall under poor or working class individuals?
  - How does the ruling class and employers take advantage of an individuals' immigrant status to further exploit them and force them into working in poor and unsafe conditions? How does the citizenship status of some individuals cause them to be at constant threat of economic violence?
- Yip Harburg, “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime” (1932) (pp. 314-315)
  - How has the United States used the dream of the collective good, of everyone - especially you - benefiting from your hard work, to deceive people and justify suffering?
  - What do international wars have to do with questions of class and the American dream in the US?
  - The title and the chorus address working class people turning to each other for support. In what ways does that present a legitimate hope for the future, and in what ways might that strategy be limited while we exist in a classed society?
- Woody Guthrie, “Ludlow Massacre” (1946) (pp. 278-279)
  - This song presents the events of the massacre from a first-person perspective. It takes the reader/listener directly into the action. Are there advantages to exploring a historical event like this, rather than, say, through a newspaper article or a history book? Are there limitations or pitfalls with personal or subjective experiences of history?
  - In a democracy, the government aims to represent the will of the people. In this case, what role did the government play? Who else had power in this situation and where did it come from?

**Jimmy Boggs, *American Revolution* (pp. 33-45)**

- Presented with a dilemma on a global scale, like that of automation and technological advancement causing mass unemployment instead of increasing standards of living, it seems clear that individual workers are not at fault and that we need to take radical action to reorganize how we distribute resources in society. In our own lives, we conceive of unemployment very differently. If we get laid off, it's bad luck or a personal failure. Same goes for a loved one. Our main concern is getting a new job and feeding ourselves and our dependents. If we hear about an unemployed stranger on welfare, we might even be upset that we have to pay taxes to support someone who is probably too lazy to hustle and support themselves. What makes it so difficult to bring political analysis into our daily lives? How do we retrain ourselves to analyze and critique the society that produces suffering instead of attacking the sufferers?
- Walmart, Amazon, and McDonald's are the largest private employers in the world. Sketch out what would happen tomorrow if they figured out a way to profitably automate half of their workers. In a better world, what might happen instead?
- Can you give an example of a form of analysis (an idea/word/phrase/way of thinking) that is outdated but still gets applied regularly?

***Remaking Radicalism***

- Think about all four documents and their themes. Compare and contrast how the authors frame their struggle. How are they similar? How are they also different?
- Particularly in the section on homelessness, it is emphasized that the movement should be led by those experiencing the oppression directly, as opposed to exterior actors. Why would exterior actors want to co-op these struggles?
- Class factors focally in all four documents. Do you think, as Coretta Scott King mentions, that employment can dissipate ethnic tension and alleviate class distinctions?

**VI. REVOLUTION**

'I follow three teachers:

don pritts, my spiritual guide, "love without action is just a word."

john brown, my moral guide, "what is needed is action!"

emma goldman, my political guide, "if i can't dance, i don't want to be in your revolution."

— Willem Van Spronsen

Revolution represents a collection of thoughts, hopes, writings, art, and actions of people not willing to accept oppression in the face of destruction. Revolution is a series of committed and ongoing acts to overturn the status quo in the hope that the future can be better if we make it that way. Despite the conventional logic of capitalism, white supremacy, imperialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity that insist there are no alternative systems that could possibly be employed,

many have organized in pursuit of a revolutionary future. This collection of texts, poems, songs, and letters illustrates that revolution does not look any particular way. The following excerpts are meant to act as a brief introduction to some of the ways that revolution has been dreamt of, articulated, longed for, and organized.

These texts model examples of how we can stay committed to the study and the active process of revolution despite oppressive conditions. They can show how analytical rigor can be contained in everyday language and can help us articulate our own vision for the process of revolution. As you read, please let the following questions anchor your exploration: How does your experience fit into the context of revolution? What would revolution look like to you? How do these figures theorize revolution and how do they live it? Is it similar or different from you? What can we learn, expand, and reject from the readings provided and how can we incorporate them into our daily actions and beliefs?

### **Readings:**

- Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 195-207, 241-243)
- George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (pp. 214-230 and 233-250) (read more)
- Eugene Debs, Statement to the Court (1918) in *Voices* (pp. 294-298)
- Women's Brigade of the Weather Underground, "Message from Sisters Who Bombed HEW for International Women's Day" (1974) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 101-104)
- Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, "What Kind of Revolutionary Organization Is Useful Today?" (1995) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 419-422)
- Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, "Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons" in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 173-174)
- Martin Sostre, "The New Prisoner"
- Leonard Peltier, "An Eagle's Cry"
- Langston Hughes, "Lenin" (1934)
- Jimmy Boggs, *American Revolution* (pp. 46-60)
- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pp. 43-62)
- bell hooks, *All About Love* (pp. 3-14)
- Albert Woodfox, *Solitary* (pp. 67-73)

### **Discussion Questions**

#### **hooks, *All About Love* (pp. 3-14)**

- Reading hook's *All About Love* and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* together presents two different problems that utilize similar methods in order to define familiar terminology that can point to innovative solutions. For example, In *Love*, hooks sees conventional claims that love is "undefinable" as making space for relational dysfunction and 'lovelessness' to infiltrate understandings of what it means to behave lovingly. As such, she claims that if love is instead defined as the aggregation of what we do and how we behave, we can see that intentions that are not matched by some practical action cannot meet the criteria of love. Freire offers this same methodology,

but instead of concerning himself with love explicitly, he directs his attention at freedom and oppression. By rejecting freedom as some idyllic value, Freire begins to define freedom as the ability to transform one's future, and the absence of freedom (oppression) is the act of denying someone that capacity. Both hooks and Freire address conventional definitions, highlight their inadequacies, and suggest new definitions that allow their validity to be tested empirically.

- i) What definitions in your own life do you find inadequate?
- ii) Thinking about the definitions you've just thought of, how can we redefine them so that they are testable? They can be measured in the real world in some way?
- iii) How does this act of reconceptualization stand in as a metaphor or microcosm of revolution? How does living (and subsequently, thinking) differently allow us to create a future that meets our needs?

**Assata Shakur, *Assata* (pp. 195-207, 241-243)**

- How does Assata mimic hooks' method for analyzing love in her own analysis of revolution? What does she think of vague conceptions of revolution? (pp. 197)
- What are Assata's views on racial solidarity? Is it necessary for revolution? (pp. 200)
- How does Assata differentiate adventurism from revolutionary progress? Why must the revolution be a "people's war"? (pp. 242)
- Why is Assata's language rooted in terminology found in Marxism-Leninism and Maoism?

**George Jackson, *Soledad, Brother* (pp. 214-230, 233-250)**

- "Tuesday, March 24, 1970" discusses Jackson's views of psychological manipulation in regards to parole board hearings. Do you agree with his views? Why does Jackson think this is the first thing that happens when a prisoner enters Chino?
- In this same letter, how has Jackson already begun to theorize abolition? (p. 221)
- How does Jackson feel about non-violence? What are the two things non-violence presumes about the oppressor and oppressed? (p. 223)
- How does Jackson understand leadership? (pp. 226-227)
- What does Jackson think of 'Black Capitalism'? (p. 237)
- On pages 233-250, Jackson outlines how identity is constructed or sprouts out of the economic material history that unfolds. What does he understand the relation between Blackness and capitalism?

***Remaking Radicalism***

- Women's Brigade of the Weather Underground, "Message from Sisters Who Bombed HEW for International Women's Day" (1974) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 101-104)

- How does the Weather Underground Organization Women's Unit see the bureaucratic structure of welfare? Why do they feel like its not upholding its slogan to be "People serving People"?
- Why do they recognize women's liberation as a necessary element of revolution?
- Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, "What Kind of Revolutionary Organization Is Useful Today?" (1995) in *Remaking Radicalism* (pp. 419-422)
  - What are the two conventional responses to overcome capitalism? Why are both inadequate?
  - What is the third way proposed by the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation? How does it meet the failures of the previously mentioned strategies?
- Snapshot: Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, "Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons" (pp. 173-174) in *Remaking Radicalism*
  - How does the SCJP theorize the post-civil rights South? Where role does incarceration play in this analysis?

**Jimmy Boggs, *American Revolution* (pp. 46-60)**

- What group does Boggs think is "exploding" population-wise in the US? Why does he feel this is the case? What is the significance of labeling them "outsiders"? (p. 50)
- Why are the Outsiders capable of thinking beyond the limits of capitalism? (p. 52)

**Leonard Peltier, "An Eagle's Cry"**

- How does Peltier's poem theorize human's place in History and Nature? Does it exclude non-natives or include them?

**Langston Hughes, "Lenin" (1934)**

- What does "Lenin" represent for Hughes? Who does Hughes think Lenin's (communist) message is for? By receiving this message what do they receive?

***Voices of a People's History of the United States***

- Eugene Debs, Statement to the Court (1918) (pp. 294, 297-298)
  - How does Debs address his opposition, while simultaneously identifying groups he is in solidarity with? Where are these lines drawn? Do these ideas resonate with you? How do your ideas differ? (p. 297)
  - What does revolution achieve in Debs eyes? (p. 298)

**Woodfox, *Solitary* (pp. 67-73)**

- How does the author theorize "violence"? Why are the BPP not violent? (pp. 68-69)
- Why is unity and solidarity so important to the BPP project of Black liberation? (pp. 68, 70-71)