

# ABOLITION

## FOR THE PEOPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Believe in New Possibilities

By *Angela Y. Davis*

- Referring to prisons and policing, Angela Y. Davis writes, “Ironically, many efforts to change these repressive structures—to reform them—have instead provided the glue that has guaranteed their continued presence and acceptance.” Please list three to four examples that come to mind.
- The author argues that in order for abolition to be successful it must not only be pursued in the United States but also globally. What are some examples the author draws upon to support this argument?
- The author writes, “Both policing and punishment are firmly rooted in racism—attempts to control Indigenous, Black, and Latino populations following colonization and slavery as well as Asian populations after the Chinese Exclusion Act and the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans. Attempting to undo the harm of policing and prisons without attending to these immense embodiments of systemic racism is doomed to failure.” Why do you think attempts to reform prisons and policing rarely, if ever, “attend to the embodiments of systemic racism”?
- The author writes, “Just as we hear calls today for more humane policing, people then called for a more humane slavery. Abolition—of slavery, the death penalty, prisons, police—has always been a controversial political demand, not least because it calls attention to the fact that simply reforming specific institutions without changing their foundational elements may reproduce and perhaps even exacerbate the problems reform seeks to solve.” How would you describe the relationship between the US institution of enslavement and the development of police/policing in the US?

### A Future Worth Building

By *Colin Kaepernick*

- In his essay, Colin Kaepernick references the “institutions that constitute, enhance, and expand the carceral state.” Though there is no single way to define the “carceral state,” it is fair to say the term is broad and encompasses not only prisons and the police but also other institutions, agencies, practices, policies, and ideologies that see punishment and regulation as central to the maintenance of a white supremacist and hetero-patriarchal social order. According to the essay, what is the purpose of the carceral state?
- How does the author define “reformist and reactionary ‘justice?’” What are the author’s criticisms of criminal justice reform?
- What does the author mean by abolition? What elements of abolition does the author highlight?
- Beyond prisons and police, what other institutions and practices in your community or neighborhood are part of the carceral state?



## ABOLITION FOR THE PEOPLE

THE MOVEMENT FOR A FUTURE WITHOUT POLICING & PRISONS

EDITED BY

**COLIN KAEPERNICK**

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# POLICE AND POLICING

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## The Feds Are Watching

A History of Resisting Anti-Black Surveillance

By Simone Browne

- How do technologies marketed as countersurveillance tools often help to expand what Simone Browne describes as the “surveillance state”?
- The author identifies historical examples of countersurveillance technologies and strategies. Please list three to four examples.
- The author cites several contemporary community-produced abolitionist technologies and strategies that can be used to circumvent and challenge the carceral state? What are they? How do they work?
- How can countersurveillance technologies cited by the author aid in Black liberation?

## The Myth of the Good Cop

Pop Culture Helped Turn Police Officers into Rock Stars—  
and Black Folks into Criminals

By Mark Anthony Neal

- How does Mark Anthony Neal define “copaganda”? Do you agree or disagree with this definition? Why?
- In your opinion, what is the relationship between “copaganda” and police reform? What are the genre’s potential impacts on abolition movements?
- The author writes that “Black officers are . . . stand-ins for the very anti-Black violence directed at Black communities. As a whole, these characters are complements to the purposes of copaganda, serving as examples of Black exceptionalism on the one hand while suggesting that policing is race-neutral but criminality is not.” Describe the link between Black exceptionalism and the ideology of “race-neutral” policing.
- Please provide three to four examples of “copaganda” you’ve encountered in your own life.

## My Son Was Executed by an Ideal

Losing My Son to Police Violence

*A Conversation with Gwendolyn Woods,  
as Told to Kiese Laymon*

- In a conversation with Kiese Laymon, Ms. Woods flips the racist ideology of “Black-on-Black crime” on its head and challenges it with several examples of anti-Black state violence. What examples does Ms. Woods cite to show that mainstream understandings of “Black-on-Black crime” have no basis in fact?
- Ms. Woods refers to an “Officers’ Bill of Rights.” To date, over fifteen states have enacted legislation to codify their own Officers’ Bill of Rights. How do these bills of rights hamper efforts toward abolition, accountability, and harm reduction?
- What are the differences in the ways that the police and mainstream

media portray Mario Woods compared to the ways his mother understands him? Why, in your opinion, is it important to center and prioritize the narratives of community members impacted by police violence?

- “My Son Was Executed by an Ideal” is the first “as told to” piece in this collection. How did reading this conversation make you feel?

## Swat’s Paramilitary Fever Dream

When Police Play Soldier, Everybody Loses

By Stuart Schrader

- Stuart Schrader traces the history of SWAT teams to Los Angeles in the 1960s and writes that the Black Panther Party was SWAT’s first target. He writes, “LAPD SWAT attacked the headquarters of the party’s Southern California chapter on December 8, 1969. After incapacitating the Panthers with tear gas, police officers fired five thousand rounds, wounding six Panthers. Using tear gas to make the barricaded targets easier to shoot with conventional firearms was a tactic taken straight from the US war in Vietnam.” How does this history help to cement the link among the militarization of police, anti-Blackness, and anti-communism?
- How, according to the author’s research, do police respond to political protests? What are your thoughts on these responses?
- The author writes that “Police in the United States have long looked beyond borders and to the military for help resolving problems of their own making” and cites several examples. Can you think of any additional examples from your own life?
- The author ends their essay with a new hope: “a world without police or soldiers.” In your opinion (and based on this essay), what could that look and feel like?

## Disability Justice Is an Essential Part of Abolishing Police & Ending Incarceration

By Talila A. Lewis

- What is “disability justice” and how does it differ from “disability rights”?
- Talila A. Lewis writes, “The united states government and corporations have always used constructed ideas about disability and criminality alongside constructed ideas about class and race to classify, criminalize, cage, and disappear its ‘undesirables.’” What does the author mean by this? Provide examples to support your explanation.
- The author argues that “disability justice” is a requisite for abolition. Why? What are some historical and contemporary examples the author uses to support their case?
- What is “disability solidarity” and how can you participate in this work?

# Snaps!

## Collective (Queer) Abolition Organizing Created This Moment

By Erica R. Meiners

- How does Erica R. Meiners define and use the term “queer”?
- The author writes that “campaigns for police-free schools—or more widely our abolitionist present—are rarely recognized as queer struggles.” Why is this often the case? And how does the author argue that the two political projects—abolition and queer struggle—are inextricably intertwined?
- The author argues that the “tools the state provides” create harm. How?
- The author writes that “queers, including young people, have often been at the forefront of abolitionist, or proto-abolitionist, organizing” and cites organizations like Vanguard, BreakOUT!, and FIERCE!. Please take some time to explore these organizations and learn about their histories. How does their work help to usher in a world that is safer and freer?

# How Abolition Makes Schools Safer

## Funneling Our Children from Classrooms to Cages Ends Now

By kihana miraya ross

- kihana miraya ross argues that for Black youth, cops in schools are “there to protect schools from you.” What does ross mean by this statement?
- The author demonstrates that school disciplinary structures are racialized as fundamentally anti-Black. What evidence does the author draw on to support this argument?
- The author writes, “Indeed, anti-Blackness in education is not simply about the ways Black students are disproportionately punished by teachers, administrators, and actual gun-toting police officers. It is also about the ways Black students are policed more broadly—the attacks against our hair in locs, braids, and even the

Afros that grow naturally from our heads.” Do your own experiences confirm ross’s depiction? Why or why not?

- What steps can you personally take to support, in the words of the author, “the abolition of policies, practices, and structures that facilitate and support the narrative that Black students are a problem”? Further, what does a relevant and liberatory education look like for Black students? Can you cite any examples from your own life?

# We Must Center Black Women

## Breonna Taylor and Bearing Witness to Black Women’s Expendability

By Kimberlé Crenshaw

- Kimberlé Crenshaw writes, “If Breonna’s story serves as the cornerstone for a generation of activism, like Emmett’s did, it will foreground something new in the Black freedom struggle, something that the #SayHerName Campaign has been fighting for since 2014: It will make all Black women central to any analysis of and challenge to anti-Blackness.” What is the #SayHerName campaign the author describes, and why is centering all Black women central to the goal of challenging anti-Blackness?
- The author argues, “In both Breonna’s and Emmett’s deaths, the state blamed the victims for alleged behaviors that triggered the murderous responses by white men empowered to exercise their prerogative to kill.” What other similarities do you see between these two murders and trials? What differences?
- The author writes, “The contemporary failure to hold police accountable for their wanton disregard for Black lives is as much of an expression of embedded racial power as was the legal facilitation of white supremacist vigilante violence.” What is the relationship between racial power, white supremacist vigilante violence, and police impunity?
- What examples does the author cite for centering and being more accountable to Black women and femmes? How can you support and amplify the #SayHerName work?

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# PRISONS AND CARCERALITY

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# Stolen Freedom

## The Ongoing Incarceration of California’s Indigenous Peoples | *By Morning Star Gali*

- What is decolonization and how does it relate to 1) the UN’s 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and 2) the abolition of the carceral state?
- Morning Star Gali defines “settler colonialism” as “the violent uprooting, removal, and displacement of Indigenous peoples through criminalization and dispossession from our lands, communities, culture, and traditional lifeways.” How do you believe settler colonialism works in practice? Please cite a few examples relevant to your own life.
- What, according to the author, constitutes the “first institutions of incarceration within California”? How do those institutions play out today?
- According to the author, what is healing? How does the author’s analysis of healing relate to abolition? And how does the author’s definition of healing relate to your own life?

# Queer & Trans Liberation Requires Abolition

By Dean Spade

- Dean Spade writes that disproportionately “queer and trans people have been and remain targets of the police.” What evidence does the author use to make this argument?
- What was the Stonewall Rebellion and why is it an important flash-point in the long history of queer and trans activists protesting against police violence?
- The author discusses “pinkwashing” and argues: “Often police and prison expansions have happened in the name of fixing or reforming purportedly ‘broken’ systems. They have hired cops of color, women cops, even LGBT cops. They have added training. They have created countless policies prohibiting police violence. They have created special cages for vulnerable groups. Each reform adds more cops, more cells, or more dollars to a system that is devouring our communities.” Please cite a few real-life examples of these types of reforms in action. Further, what is the relationship between these reforms and police violence?
- Where does the author suggest funding for police should be reallocated? What are your thoughts on this proposal?

## Challenging E-Carceration

Abolition Means No Digital Prisons

By James Kilgore

- What is “e-carceration”? Describe some key features and characteristics of the “e-carceration” movement.
- What is racial capitalism? How does James Kilgore describe the relationship among “e-carceration,” surveillance, and racial capitalism?
- The author gives examples of resistance to “e-carceration.” Please list them.
- The author urges that we must “call for technologies of liberation that open new opportunities, not technologies that confine us to our houses and neighborhoods with geo-fences.” In your view, what might some of these technologies in support of abolition look like?

## The Fight to Melt ICE

Why We’re Fighting for a World without ICE

By Cristina Jiménez Moreta and Cynthia Garcia

- Cristina Jiménez Moreta and Cynthia Garcia write that with bipartisan support Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the two agencies primarily responsible for immigration enforcement, have continued to carry out a racist and white supremacist agenda, targeting immigrants—particularly Black and Brown immigrants—for detention and deportation with little oversight or accountability.” How has their organization, United We Dream, sought to challenge the xenophobia and white supremacist agenda of ICE and CBP?
- In 2002, then-President George W. Bush created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The establishment of this department has had negative cascading consequences for immigrant communi-

ties—particularly immigrant communities of color. Please describe.

- Based upon this essay’s arguments, what are the connections between the prison system, anti-immigration policies, xenophobia, and racism in the United States?
- In your view, how have the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations’ immigration policies and impacts overlapped?

## The Hidden Pandemic

Prisons Are a Public Health Crisis—and the Cure Is Right in Front of Us

By Kenyon Farrow

- Given the disproportionately severe ways COVID-19 has impacted incarcerated people, Kenyon Farrow writes that “public health activists who are truly interested in social and racial justice should in fact be calling for the abolition of the prison industrial complex as part of a strategy to reduce the possibility of current and future epidemics.” What are some examples the author uses to support this assertion?
- According to the author’s essay, what are the public-health concerns regarding conditions in prison? Provide three to four concerns.
- The author argues, “In order for public health to not ring as a meaningless phrase, we have to begin to tackle public health from an abolitionist framework, and not only express care or concern for the people on the outside who are not in prison now or are not rendered as reasons for the carceral state to exist in the first place—Black, Latino, Native American, poor, homeless, queer, immigrant, transgender, sex worker, drug user, or dealer.” Please cite three to four ways you believe an abolitionist worldview may be applied to public health policies and practices writ large?
- The author argues that prisons, jails, and detention centers are the antithesis of a future for human life. What do you think the author means by this? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

## My Father Deserves to Be Free

A Son’s Fight For His Father’s Freedom

By Russell “Maroon” Shoatz and Russell Shoatz III

- Russell Shoatz III describes his father, Russell “Maroon” Shoatz, as a “prisoner of war.” Provide three to four examples from their conversation to support this understanding.
- How did Maroon’s activism influence the development of his young son’s political consciousness?
- What was the role of education in both Shoatzes’ lives? How did this influence their politics? How has your education (informal or formal) shaped your own politics?
- What was the debate that the older and younger Shoatzes had around the film *Black Panther*? And what are your own thoughts on their analyses?

# We're All Living in a Future Created by Slavery

By Ameer Hasan Loggins

- Ameer Hasan Loggins introduces a new term to the Black freedom lexicon: the carceral class. Loggins writes, “The carceral class is made up of persons of African descent who are systematically stigmatized as unfit for freedom and deserving of the dehumanization that comes with being incarcerated. The idea of the carceral class is the product of an anti-Black framework that represents Black people as the locus of crime and Blackness as being synonymous with criminality.” Identify three to four examples the author uses to show how the carceral class has operated throughout history?
- The author writes, “A judicial system of injustice had waged war on African commoners, criminalizing them into a world of carcerality.” What does the author mean by “world of carcerality”? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- The author conceives of the carceral class as an anti-Black global phenomenon. Why do you believe the global scope of his analysis is important? What do you think this might say about struggles for global abolition?
- How do you see the idea of the carceral class manifesting in the everyday life of your community?

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## FUCK REFORM

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### Reforms Are the Master's Tools

The System Is Built for Power, Not Justice

By Derecka Purnell

- Derecka Purnell juxtaposes reform and abolition. Please identify three to four key differences between reform and abolition.
- According to the author, what is the relationship between incarceration and emotional/mental health?
- The author writes, “Abolition might feel threatening because it upends the status quo and delusive comforts of cops and cages.” Have you experienced people (yourself included) feeling threatened by these arguments? How have you responded to these threats? Using the author's essay, how could you challenge these concerns?
- The author shows that houselessness and incarceration are often intimately related. According to a 2018 report authored by the Prison Policy Initiative, “formerly incarcerated people are almost ten times more likely to be homeless than the general public.” Conversely, research recently conducted by the Urban Institute shows that experiencing unsheltered houselessness increases one's interaction with the carceral state. How have you seen these phenomena play out in your community?

# No Justice, No Freedom

Criminal Justice Reform Cost Me 21 Years of My Life

By Derrick Hamilton

- Derrick Hamilton cites two Clinton-era “crime” bills that have disproportionately criminalized Black people: 1) The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and 2) Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. Based on this essay, describe the two features of each of these bills and their outcomes.
- The author writes, “While I was incarcerated, no one else had a vested interest in me achieving this goal. This is by design.” What does the author mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- The author references the 11th Amendment. In your own words, describe why the 11th Amendment is important to the author's argument that “criminal justice reform” does not constitute progress for those most impacted by the carceral state.
- After spending twenty-one years in prison, the author was exonerated in 2015. What emotions does the author's story evoke in you?

## Police Reform as Counterinsurgency

How reformist approaches to police violence expand police power and legitimate the next phase of domestic warfare

By Dylan Rodríguez

- According to Dylan Rodríguez, what is reformism? How does it differ from reform? How is reform a form of counterinsurgency?
- What is the author's criticism of #8CantWait? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- What does the author mean by asymmetrical domestic warfare? Provide three to four examples from the author's essay and provide three to four examples from your own observations.
- “Abolition is not an outcome,” the author argues. “Rather, it is an everyday practice, a method of teaching, creating, thinking, and an insurgent (“fugitive”) community-building project that exposes the pitfalls of the reformist adventure.” Please provide three to four concrete examples of everyday abolitionist practice.

## Three Traps of Police Reform

By Naomi Murakawa

- According to Naomi Murakawa, what are the three traps of reform? How does each trap reinforce the others? And why do these traps ultimately reward the police?
- How have police been “rewarded” since (and in response to) the 2020 protests? Provide three to four examples.
- What does the author mean by “Policing is not law's absence; it is law's essence in a system of racial capitalism”? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- What suggestions does the author offer for avoiding reformist traps and for pursuing abolitionist futures? What are your own suggestions for pursuing abolitionist futures?

# Putting a Black Face on Police Agendas

Black Cops Don't Make Policing Any Less Anti-Black

By Bree Newsome Bass

- “The idea that we can resolve racism by integrating what is perhaps the most fundamentally anti-Black institution in the US—its policing and prison industry—is the most absurd notion of all,” writes Bree Newsome Bass. What makes this wrongheaded assumption so powerful?
- What is the author’s criticism of the argument that police violence is based on a “breakdown in trust” between police and communities? How has this argument served to promote reform and challenge abolitionist movements?
- What is the author’s analysis of the role that class plays in police reform and, relatedly, police violence? Do you agree or disagree?
- The author demonstrates that “police forces in America began as slave patrols.” Do you believe this history is important to understand integrationist/reformist impulses to policing today? Please explain your answer.

# The New Jim Code

The Shiny, High-Tech Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing

By Ruha Benjamin

- Ruha Benjamin introduces the term “the New Jim Code” to discuss about reform and abolition. Define the term. Please provide three to four examples of the New Jim Code from your own life.
- How does the New Jim Code build upon historical forms of incarceration? What, in your opinion, may be some of the dangers or concerns with these forms of technology?
- What is the technocorrections industry? Provide an example from the essay.
- The author argues that technology can be deployed both as a form of oppression and as a tool of resistance and liberation. Please provide three to four examples of both oppression and resistance/liberation from the essay. Identify contemporary technologies that can be used to build a world beyond policing and prisons.

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## ABOLITION NOW

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# Change from the Roots

What Abolition Looks Like, From the Panthers to the People

By Robin D. G. Kelley

- Robin D. G. Kelley writes that “abolition is neither new nor hopelessly utopian” and that “abolition works to dismantle systems that have caused harm, namely police and prisons, and reallocate funds to social and economic resources, and to develop new systems of community-controlled public safety and restorative justice.” Provide an example of a program/practice/policy in your community that is based on 1) reallocating funds to social and economic resources, 2) developing new systems of community-controlled public safety, and 3) restorative justice.
- What is carceral feminism and how does it stand at cross-purposes with abolition?
- The author references over twenty-five organizations that currently embrace abolitionist principles and support the larger movement toward abolition. Identify one you’re interested in researching and report your findings. Which organization did you choose? What did you learn?
- The author argues that the gender-based violence movement is integral to the abolitionist movement. Why do you think there is a connection between the two?

- Describe the link Mumia Abu-Jamal draws between the institution of enslavement and today’s carceral state—what he calls “the shadow of slavery.”
- Who is John Brown and what is Brown’s relationship to abolition? Do you believe he can serve as an example for the contemporary movement for abolition? Explain.
- The author writes, “Abolition was not a skip in the park. It is a deep, committed movement of social transformation that seeks to bring down institutions that needlessly inflict pain upon the People.” What, in your opinion, are reasons for why abolition requires a deep, committed movement?

# Survivors at the Forefront of the Abolitionist Movement

By Connie Wun

- What were the purposes of the Critical Resistance and Color of Violence conferences? Where did they differ and overlap?
- There was a joint statement written by the two organizations. Why do you think it was written? And how do you think the statement applies to current abolitionist and anti-gender violence movements?
- What are your thoughts on the movements being led by sex workers and formerly incarcerated survivors?
- How do the experiences of sex workers, incarcerated survivors, and criminalized immigrants help you to understand the work to end carceral institutions?

# Casting Off the Shadows of Slavery

Lessons from the First Abolition Movement

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

- Who is Mumia Abu-Jamal? Share three facts that you have learned about him.

# Who Is Being Healed?

Creating Solutions Is about Answering Questions Prisons Never Asked

By Marlon Peterson

- Marlon Peterson poses several important questions to readers: Who taught you that prison was justice for any human? Where did you learn that police equates to public safety? Where did you first hear that vengeance is what healing and accountability looks like? Does incarceration make the community safer? Please answer them here.
- If “prison isn’t what healed” the author, then what does the author share that did help or support them?
- The author argues that “abolition is more than closing prisons and ending policing as we know it.” What do you think the author means by this?
- Do you agree or disagree that there is a need for a new nation? Explain. And if applicable, what might it look like?

# Ending the War on Black Women

Building a World Where Breonna Taylor Could Live

By Andrea J. Ritchie

- Andrea J. Ritchie argues that “calls for police prosecutions offer an illusion of justice while reinforcing the status quo” and will not “end police violence against Black women.” According to the author, why is this the case? What examples does the author cite?
- The author lists a number of “what if” questions to push readers to imagine a different world. What are your thoughts around these questions, including, “What if our demands to protect, defend, and value Black women did not call for more policing and prosecutions, fueling a system we cannot and do not trust with our safety because it targets us?” How do they make you feel? And what world is the author trying to get the reader to imagine?
- What do you believe #SayHerName means to the author? And given the author’s arguments in this essay, what does it mean to you?
- Please list at least three community-based safety strategies that would prioritize the safety of Black women.

# We Can Dismantle the System at the Polls, Too

By Rukia Lumumba

- How does Rukia Lumumba imagine public safety?
- Please cite two to three examples the author uses to explain this statement: “Since America’s inception, our communities have been denied our right to our full humanity.”
- The author argues, “Current conditions and many of the failed punitive approaches to ‘criminal justice reform’ have clearly demonstrated it’s time to take a new approach to dismantling the system—one that combines abolition with electoral justice.” In the

author’s view, how can engaging the electoral process be used to usher in an abolitionist future?

- What do you imagine is included in a “caring economy” and how would this relate to the author’s concept of abolition?

# What Is & What Could Be

The Policies of Abolition

By Dan Berger and David Stein

- Dan Berger and David Stein reference several abolitionist campaigns over the last forty years. Please list one and describe why it is important.
- The authors cite W. E. B. Du Bois’s analysis of abolition democracy. What is abolition democracy and how does it relate to the abolition of prisons and policing?
- “The struggles to defund the police and decarcerate prisons are wholly intertwined with other efforts to transform society,” write the authors. Please list three additional contemporary abolitionist demands on the policy-level beyond the abolition of prisons and policing.
- The authors write, “Abolitionists have long operated at this intersection of opposing what is and fighting for what could be.” Please provide an example of each—“opposing what is” and “fighting for what could be”—from the essay, and cite three to four examples from your own life.

# The Journey Continues

So You’re Thinking About Becoming an Abolitionist

By Mariame Kaba

- Mariame Kaba writes, “Prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition is a political vision, a structural analysis of oppression, and a practical organizing strategy.” Why is such a framework integral to the political project of abolition?
- The author writes that over the past two decades “a Black, Indigenous, and people of color survivor-led transformative justice movement has emerged . . . to offer a different vision for ending violence and transforming our communities.” Please describe some features of transformative justice. Describe the relationship of transformative justice to abolition.
- The author explains that abolition does not center the question: “Does this mean that I can never call the cops if my life is in serious danger?” But it instead asks: “Why do we have no other well-resourced options?” Have you asked yourself and others the latter question? What has come up? And how have you addressed your responses or others’ responses?
- The author writes that abolition means to “creatively consider how we can grow, build, and try other avenues to reduce harm.” What are some strategies that you have employed to do these things? What have been some of the challenges and successes?