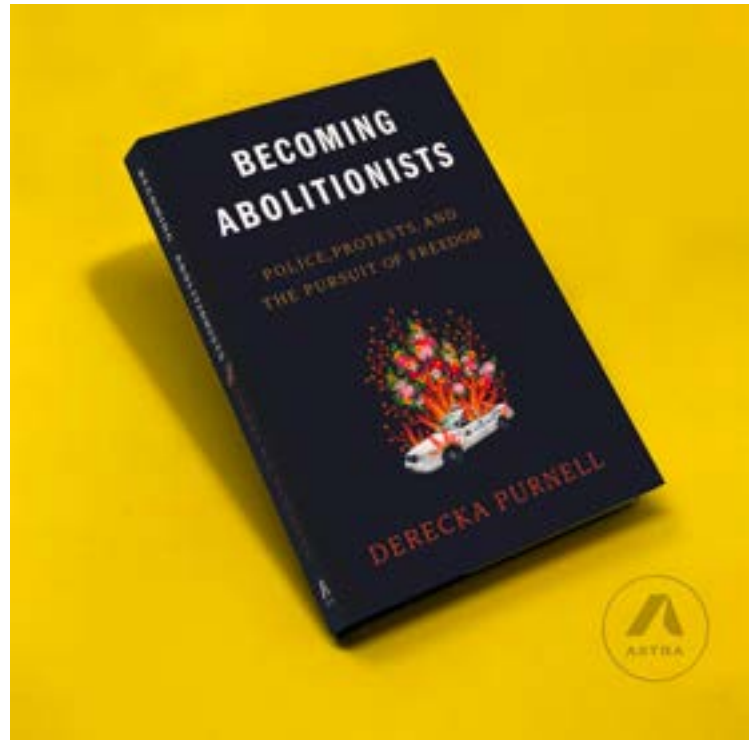


READING GROUP GUIDE

Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom by Derecka Purnell

1. In *Becoming Abolitionists*, Derecka Purnell shares her own initial skepticism about police abolition. What was it about her experience that made her doubtful? When and why did her beliefs about the system begin to change?
2. What is your own experience with policing, whether personally, socially, or culturally? What was your introduction to policing? How does your experience inform the way you approach the concept of police abolition?
3. In the introduction, Purnell writes, “This is not a ‘how-to’ book on becoming an abolitionist. This is an invitation to share what I have been pushed to learn in developing the politics of abolition; this is an invitation to love, study, struggle, search, and imagine what we have around us to make this possible, today.” How has her journey challenged or aligned with your own experiences, teachings, and beliefs? In what ways did the book spark your imagination of how abolition might look for your community?
4. Purnell argues that policing cannot be reformed because the institution is not broken but rather effectively executing its original purpose. How are the origins of policing reflected in the behaviors we see today? How does our understanding of the purpose of policing inform our efforts toward social change?
5. In chapter 1, Purnell gives a brief synopsis of the development and function of policing, from the wake of slavery to the present. What are some of the purposes police have served in the midst of struggles such as the movement to abolish slavery, the civil rights movement, and the Ferguson uprisings? What role did you see police play during the 2020 uprisings?



Derecka Purnell, Photo by Alyssa Lisbon

6. Over the course of her journey, Purnell's thinking on what justice looks like evolved, writing: "Growth requires us to constantly evaluate the ideas we hold dear" (92). Purnell frequently acknowledges ways in which her understanding of policing and other issues has changed and developed over time—for example, Purnell explains her journey from organizing for the arrest of George Zimmerman to believing that arrests and prosecutions do not lead to justice. What beliefs about policing or justice do you hold now that you didn't a couple years ago? What do you want to explore further in the coming years?
7. Purnell notes that Michael Brown was killed by Darren Wilson, who claimed that he first stopped Brown for jaywalking. Why were people likely to walk in the streets in Ferguson? What does this suggest about the link between physical space, infrastructure, and criminalization? How does a focus on place and space expand the scope of abolitionist demands? What are some features of your hometown that either encouraged or prevented criminalization?
8. In sharing some of the conversations she had while organizing, Purnell shows how important it is to unpack the root causes of harm. Think about the harms that most worry or frighten you in your community. What might their root causes be, and what might be some ways to address them? Are there ways you already see your community addressing the sources of harm or harmful behaviors without the police?
9. People experiencing mental health crises are disproportionately subjected to police violence. What systems might be set up to prevent these situations, and what systems might present better, safer response options should a crisis occur?
10. In times of protest and uprisings, Purnell explains in chapter 3, government leaders often turn to the same scripts. What is this script? Have you seen leaders use such a script? How did this script reemerge during the 2020 uprisings? How was the response to the 2020 uprisings different from uprisings in the past?
11. What are some of the problems with popular police reforms in the wake of protests, such as body cameras, "community policing," and increasing diversity of police forces? Why are these responses inadequate? How do they affirm, rather than challenge, police power?
12. Purnell discusses W. E. B. Du Bois's and Angela Davis's concept of abolition democracy and the competing visions of abolition democracy. What were these competing visions? Which one won out? What were the consequences?
13. What is the prison industrial complex? Why is it important that we include policing in our analysis of the PIC and mass incarceration?
14. In chapter 4, Purnell offers a distillation of police abolition as praxis from Rachel Herzing, naming four connected pathways to making police obsolete. What are they? Do you feel drawn to one?

15. What are some of the ways Purnell responds to and reframes common questions from those who are skeptical of abolition, such as “What about the murderers?” or “What about the rapists?” What might you say if someone asked you the same questions?
16. In chapter 6, Purnell discusses some organizations that are working to intervene in gender-based violence and violence against queer and trans people. Which of these models and efforts did you find compelling? Are there anti-violence efforts happening near you? What are some of the ways you’ve seen people intervene in violence against women and LGBTQ people?
17. What was the Harriet Tubman Collective’s critique of the first version of the Movement for Black Lives platform? Why must disability justice be a central framework for abolitionists? How does policing not only target disabled people but also create disability?
18. How do environmental racism and climate change increase police violence? How is police abolition an integral part of climate justice? What cycle of events does Purnell describe in California leading both to the burning of the forest and the state’s reliance on incarcerated laborers to “solve” it?
19. What does it mean for abolition to be “red, black, and green”?
20. When Derek Chauvin was found guilty of the murder of George Floyd, Purnell writes, “We will never know what justice for him might look like because justice requires the participation of the impacted. The dead cannot participate.” What do you think justice might look like in the face of police violence? And, in general, when harm occurs?
21. What are the five (or six!) features of Purnell’s vision for neighborhoods? Which of these does your neighborhood have? What would you add?
22. How did you think about abolition when you began reading *Becoming Abolitionists*? How was that understanding changed, challenged, or reinforced? What are you taking away from this book?

SOME FURTHER RESOURCES

Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom by Derecka Purnell

On radical movements

Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America*

W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880*

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*

Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s*

Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (editors), *Futures of Black Radicalism*

Dan Berger and Toussaint Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*

Angela Y. Davis (editor), *If They Come in the Morning . . . : Voices of Resistance*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (editor), *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*

Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*

Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson (editors), *Remaking Radicalism: A Grassroots Documentary Reader of the United States, 1973–2001*

On prisons and incarceration

Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*

Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*

Beth E. Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*

James Forman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*

Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics*

Joy James (editor), *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*

Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law, *Prison by Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms*

Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg, *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform*

SOME FURTHER RESOURCES

Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom by Derecka Purnell

On policing

David Correia and Tyler Wall, *Police: A Field Guide*

Adam Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*

Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*

Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*

Paul Butler, *Chokehold: Policing Black Men*

Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing*

Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton (editors), *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Blacks Lives Matter*

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*

Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*

Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces*

On anti-carceral feminism and transforming harm

Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*

Ann Russo, *Feminist Accountability: Disrupting Violence and Transforming Power*

Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (editors), *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*

Judith Levine and Erica R. Meiners, *The Feminist and the Sex Offender: Confronting Sexual Harm, Ending State Violence*

Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights*

Creative Interventions (editor), *Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence*

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (editor), *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*

On LBTGQIA+ liberation

Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith (editors), *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*

Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*

Ryan Conrad and Against Equality (editors), *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (editor), *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*

Emily K. Hobson, Lavender and Red: *Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*

SOME FURTHER RESOURCES

Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom by Derecka Purnell

On disability justice

Liat Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*

Keith Rosenthal (editor), *Capitalism and Disability: Selected Writings by Marta Russell*

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*

Talila Lewis, “Disability Justice Is an Essential Part of Abolishing Police and Prisons”

Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey (editors), *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*

On climate change

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*

Kate Aronoff, *Overheated: How Capitalism Broke the Planet—and How We Fight Back*

The Red Nation, *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth*

Max Ajl, *A People’s Green New Deal*

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*

On faith and abolition

Joshua Dubler and Vincent Lloyd, *Break Every Yoke: Religion, Justice, and the Abolition of Prisons*

Laura Magnani and Harmon L. Wray, *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System*

Garrett Felber, *Those Who Know Don’t Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State*

Lee Griffith, *The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives on Prison Abolition*

On (settler) colonialism and the criminalization of migrants

Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*

César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, *Migrating to Prison: America’s Obsession with Locking Up Immigrants*

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not “A Nation of Immigrants”: Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion*

Nick Estes, Melanie K. Yazzie, Jennifer Nez Denetdale, and David Correia, *Red Nation Rising: From Bordertown Violence to Native Liberation*

Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America’s Long History of Deporting Migrants*

Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*

SOME FURTHER RESOURCES

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ORGANIZATIONS AND BOOK CLUBS

All of Us or None: www.prisonerswithchildren.org/about-aouon

Appalachian Prison Book Project: www.appalachianprisonbookproject.org

Believers Bail Out: www.believersbailout.org

Black and Pink: www.blackandpink.org

BreakFree Education: www.breakfree-ed.org

BYP100: www.byp100.org

Critical Resistance: www.criticalresistance.org

Dream Defenders: www.dreamdefenders.org

Dreaming Freedom, Practicing Abolition: www.abolitioniststudy.wordpress.com

Fight Toxic Prisons: www.fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com

Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop: www.freemindsbookclub.org

Freedom Reads: www.freedomreads.org

Hacking//Hustling: www.hackinghustling.org

HEARD: www.behearddc.org

Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee: www.incarceratedworkers.org

INCITE!: www.incite-national.org

Liberation Library: www.liberationlib.com

Movement for Black Lives: www.m4bl.org

Project Nia: www.project-nia.org

Southerners on New Ground: www.southernersonnewground.org

Survived and Punished: www.survivedandpunished.org

Study and Struggle: www.studyandstruggle.com

Find more organizations at The Abolitionist Map by The Digital Abolitionist: www.thedigitalabolitionist.com/the-abolitionist-map

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TransformHarm.org: www.transformharm.org

Prison Abolition Resource Guide: www.micahherskind.com/abolition-resource-guide

Prison Policy Initiative: www.prisonpolicy.org