

Lessons from Police and Prison Abolition for the Animal Protection Movement

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Michael Swistara

Diagnosing the Harms of a Carceral Approach

- Direct harm to humans
- Direct harm to non-humans
- Harms to the animal protection movement
- Failure to address the underlying causes of harm



Image Source: The Chicago Maroon

Abolition 101

- Abolition is a “bigger idea than firing cops and closing prisons;” it includes eliminating the reasons we think we need cops and prisons in the first place.

– Derecka Purnell

- In an “expansive and meaningful sense, abolition...refers to the construction of and investment in the systems, practices, resources, and cultural values that will make [imagining a world without locking people in cages] possible.”

– Transform Harm

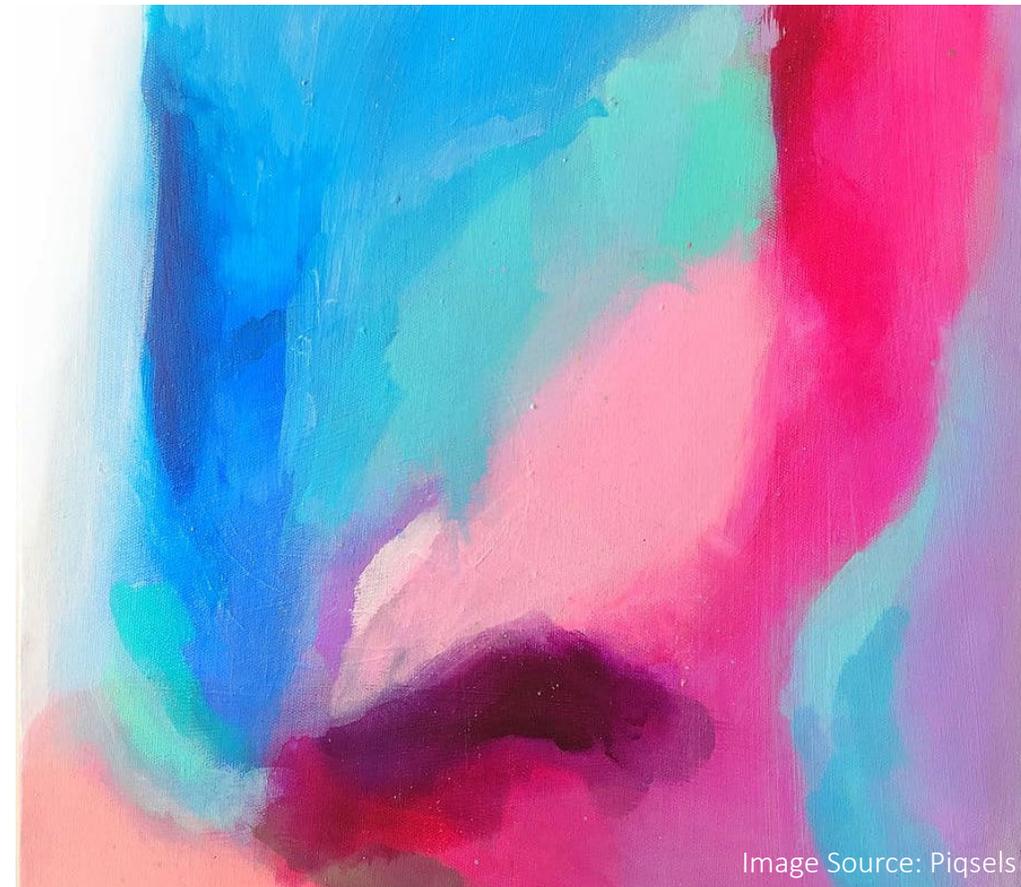


Image Source: Piqsels



Key Lessons from Abolition

Key Lessons from Abolition

1. Redefining terms like “harm” and “crime”

- Homelessness as a systemic problem vs. experiencing homelessness as an individual crime
- Laws meant to control – consider John Erlichman’s statements about the War on Drugs

2. Expanding what we perceive as possible

- Incarceration ≠ Accountability
- We need to create “new models of living” – Ruth Wilson Gilmore

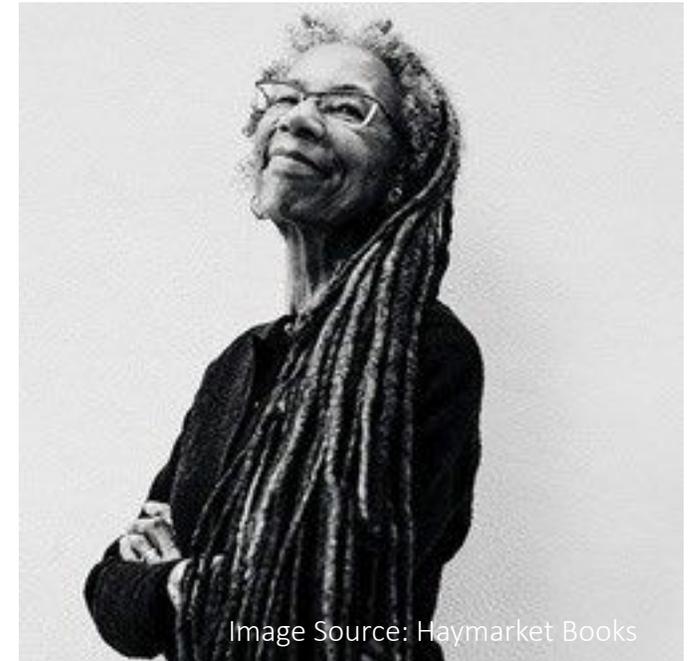


Image Source: Haymarket Books

Key Lessons from Abolition

3. Focus on taking steps to reduce harm from occurring in the first place
 - Give people and communities the resources to thrive
 - “Poverty can look a lot like neglect” – Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism*
4. Responding to harm that does occur through the lens of transformative justice
 - Aishah Shahidah Simmons: “love with accountability”



Image Source: Love With Accountability

Transformative Justice

- Responding to violence without creating more violence
- Asks: *“how can we respond to violence in a way that also helps transform the conditions that allowed for it to happen?”*
- Emphasis on what is needed by survivors
 - Mia Mingus: it’s about restoring power to the person who has been harmed

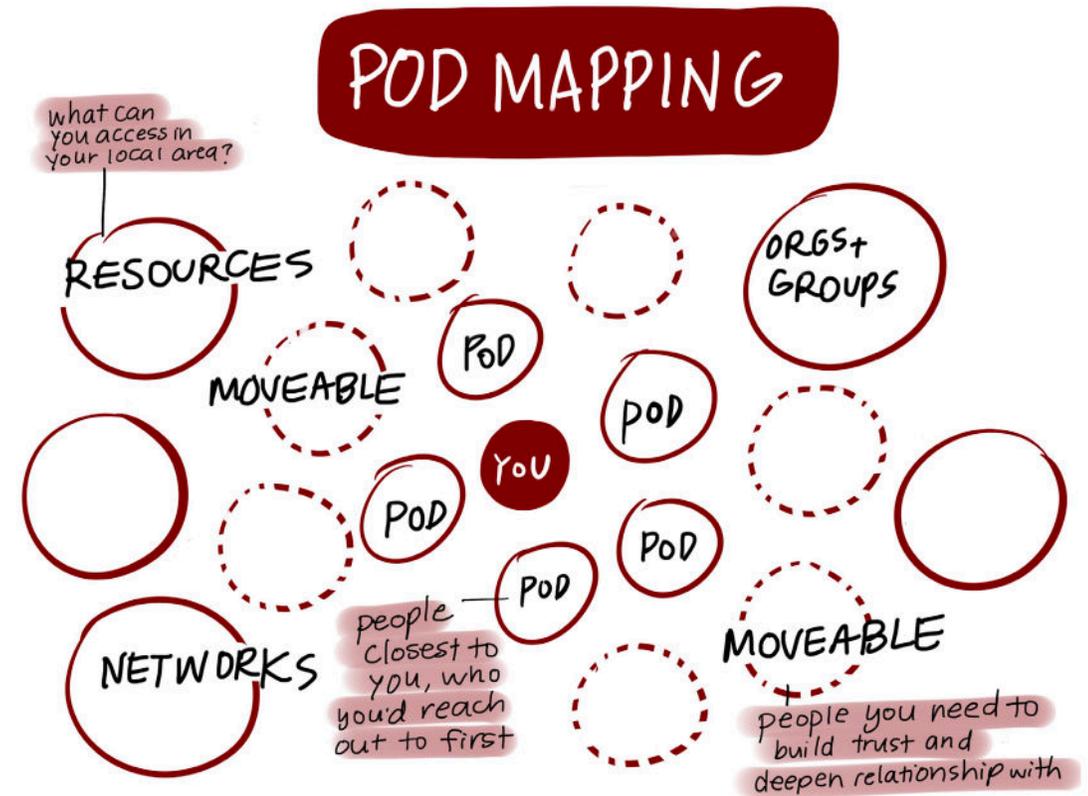


Image Source: Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective

Key Lessons from Abolition

5. “Reformist” Reforms vs Steps to Abolition

- Questions: “Does this reduce or increase funding to police?”, “Does this challenge the notion that police increase safety?”, “Does this reduce the scope or scale of policing?”

Yes:

Suspending paid leave for cops under investigation, withdrawing participation in militarized programs, getting police out of schools/traffic enforcement/etc.

No:

Body cams, more training, focus on bad apples/“jail killer cops”



Putting These Lessons
Into Practice for Non-
human Animals



Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

1. Rethinking how we define harm

- Be critical of behaviors we do or don't criminalize
- What trade-offs are we making? Who are we leaving out? Who are we criminalizing?

2. Expanding what we perceive as possible

- Not just closing slaughterhouses, but imagining and then taking steps to realize what a world without the need for slaughterhouses would look like



Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

3. Reducing instances of harm from occurring in the first place
 - Divesting from the carceral state + reinvesting to support animal-friendly communities
 - Addressing the epidemic of police killing companion animals
 - Direct resources towards preventing rather than responding to harm
 - Supporting healthy pet ownership rather than penalizing scarcity-based neglect (e.g., Pets for Life model)
 - Providing greater mental health resources for pet owners
 - Anti-poverty work more broadly
 - Youth programs (e.g., DJ Cavem's community gardens)

Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

4. Responding with compassion when harm does occur

- What does the survivor need?
 - Being careful not to apply our society's pro-carceral lens to the needs of others
- Tailor accountability needed to the circumstances
 - Spatial needs, restitution, apologies, distancing, giving time
- How do we make sure this doesn't happen again?
 - Consider the individual who was harmed, who caused the harm, and the possibility of others to end up in similar situations in the future



Image Source: HSUS

Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

**The
Intercept**

RUTH WILSON GILMORE MAKES THE CASE FOR ABOLITION

Some people might say, “Well, gosh, Ruthie, why wouldn’t you want the people who killed your cousin to be locked up?” **The answer is that wouldn’t bring my cousin back. If they were locked up forever, that would mean that their families would suffer as my family has suffered.** And it wouldn’t solve the problems that the Black Panther Party, that other parties striving for liberation, were trying to realize in the world. All of that made me an abolitionist.

Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

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Image Source: HSUS

Putting These Lessons Into Practice for Non-human Animals

5. Questions to ask ourselves when considering reforms:

Does this challenge the norm that non-human animals are lesser than humans?

Does this reduce the possibility of future animals being similarly harmed?

No:

Expanding police force animal teams,
Increasing collaboration with law enforcement,
Focusing on individual bad actors (e.g., individual workers)

Yes:

Demilitarizing police,
Challenging standard industry practices,
Building cruelty-free alternatives,
Investing in pet ownership resources, youth programs, in-house TJ/RJ



Image Source: Marji Beach

Further Resources

Books

- *We Do This Til We Free Us* Mariame Kaba
- *The End of Policing* Alex Vitale
- *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis
- *Becoming Abolitionists* Derecka Purnell

Articles

- *From Carceral Feminism to Transformative Justice* Mimi Kim
- *How I Became a Police Abolitionist* Derecka Purnell
- *We Should Still Defund the Police* Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
- *The Carceral State Will Not Be Feminist* Aya Gruber
- *What a World Without Cops Would Look Like* Madison Pauly

My Work

Mutual Liberation: The Use and Abuse of Nonhuman Animals by the Carceral State, 12 U. MIAMI RACE & SOC. JUST. L. REV. 312 (2022).

What Comes After Defund?: Lessons from Police and Prison Abolition for the Animal Protection Movement, 28 ANIMAL L. REV. 89 (2022).

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