



An Ecological Approach to Abolition

A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems



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Introduction

Proposal, Context, and Research Focus



Project Summary

By: Ria Dhingra

The Summer of 2021 was spent by Professor Ingrid Diran and students Ria Dhingra and Anna Nelson working on a project entitled “An Ecological Approach to Abolition: A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems.” This project is a study that examines various structural inadequacies, inequalities, and injustices across numerous social spheres in hopes of recognizing patterns and finding a new framework with which to approach abolition.

The pre-conditions of this project express its intentions:

- 1) There exists a polarization of political discourse in regards to abolition.
- 2) Classes English 182: Race Labor and Incarceration and English 548: Racial Capitalism provided us with historical context on topics tied to racism and class.
- 3) There is a lack of a common vocabulary and literacy when talking about systemic inequality.

The long-term goals of this project are to:

- 1) Approach abolition from a holistic, systems perspective in order to depolarize conversations around it.
- 2) Reframe historical content from prior classes in order to identify carceral dimensions and punitive logic in places besides from prisons and the criminal justice system.
- 3) Use systems theory to develop common vocabulary and literacy about systemic injustice in various social spheres. (Recognize a historical locus of carceral dimensions and current carceral practices).
- 4) Use findings and systems theory in order to develop effective abolitionist practices and praxis that does not directly target prisons, therefore reducing polarization and increasing levels of engagement.
 - a. Form a coalition of activists whose goals are interconnected due to viewing inequality systemically.
 - b. Develop a curriculum about our methodology and findings.
 - c. Approach abolition as a resistance across all social spheres.

What work was conducted this summer:

- 1) Understanding systems theory and the implications of a systems approach.
- 2) Defining carceral dimensions and recognizing how the carceral state pervades all social space.
- 3) Reading and analyzing texts about the historical roots of and current practice that perpetuate inequality in all social spheres.
 - a. Studying systems of: Criminal Justice, Housing Market, Healthcare Industry, Education System, and Labor/Credit Market.
 - b. Studying Abolitionist Texts.
 - c. Studying Systems Theory.
- 4) Using systems analysis to recognize overlap of carceral practices and historical loci of inequality across the aforementioned social spheres.

What work is left to do (moving forward):

- 1) Develop conclusions about summer study and clearly list patterns of carceral dimensions across all social spheres.
- 2) Use findings of the summer study to map out a new framework (theory) for abolition that targets all the carceral dimensions simultaneously instead of hyper fixation on prisons.
- 3) Test the new framework in the form of a coalition of activists, scholars, and community members whose work across social spheres can be brought together as abolitionist praxis.
- 4) Introduce findings of this work and the complexity of viewing abolition holistically to a wider general audience in the form of political education.
 - a. Structure findings as a working curriculum.
 - b. Develop a class that approaches abolition holistically.

As of now:

The following document is a collection/working journal of all the research that took place between the timeframe of May 25th, 2021 and July 29th, 2021. The proceeding mini-essays explain methodology, contain reading summaries of all the texts we studied, and include analysis in a chronological fashion. The intent of the following document is not to serve as a final paper or to present overall findings. Instead, this document is a toolkit of background theory that can be

used by us and others as a starting point to begin having complex conversations about the abolition of the carceral state; therefore, the following collection is also not completely comprehensive. Instead, the summariness pre-existing text from a systems framework and builds upon itself for analysis.

The proceeding document is an assemblage of everything we studied and reviewed this summer. We translated our notes into essay format that can be understood and comprehended by the general public and other scholars. The purpose of this document is a tool to refer back to, a collection of theories about carceral dimensions in individual social spheres, when developing a framework for abolition.

Ultimately, the proceeding series of papers documents our work and thinking thus far in a chronological fashion. It closely details our initial ideas, through processes, changes in direction, analysis on reading materials, and synthesis of theory. This collection serves not as a conclusion, but as a starting place for further research.

Research Proposal

“An Ecological Approach to Abolition: A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems”

By: Ingrid Diran, Anna Nelson, & Ria Dhingra

Abstract:

From its emergence in the 18th century as a moral stance against slavery to contemporary arguments against the prison-industrial complex, abolitionist discourse has, rightfully, been organized around the unjust institution to be removed, replaced, and transformed. For this very reason, such discourse also tends to understate or assume certain links which bind the carceral system to other social systems such as education, housing, and healthcare. The current research project joins recent scholarly efforts to reframe the project of abolition in relation to these other systems that are inevitably warped by the carceral state but not directly associated with it. Adopting a holistic, ecological perspective on the social effects of the carceral system, this project will examine policing as a symptom rather than the cause of larger, social problems, identifying abolitionist stakeholders in the broader community. We assume an “ecological” stance towards a carceral state in order to identify existing and potential practices of abolition in a broader range and combination of social sectors.

Introduction: A Brief Overview of Abolition and the Carceral State

The American carceral state—a nationwide system of prison complexes and policing—is derived from another regime of unfreedom: the institution of slavery. As is well known, the 13th amendment’s formal abolition of slavery preserved a loophole permitting the reinstatement of servitude as a “punishment for crime.”¹ Consequently, abolition in the post-slavery era has been organized around the study and contestation of evolving strategies and motives behind criminalizing communities of color.² In an interview with Jeremy Scahill, abolitionist-geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore identifies a key early piece of carceral logic etched on an eighteenth-century Trenton prison: “That those who are feared for crime may learn fear of the law and be *useful*.” Stated clearly here is both sanction for the ruling classes to continuously extract “use”—that is, labor—out of those in prison, and the incentive to secure a steady stream of prisoners.³

As modes of “useful” unfreedom evolved from slavery into convict leasing, Jim Crow segregation, and mass incarceration, the logic of incarceration has also shifted from the extraction of labor to the management, extraction, and monetization of *surplus* (of land, people, and time). Since the 1990s, accelerating levels of incarceration witnessed during the California Prison boom and War on Crime have led abolitionists to critique the disproportionate targeting of Black and Brown communities through extralegal, racist practices originating in a neoliberal regime that Gilmore dubs “organized abandonment.” In this respect, contemporary abolition completes and radicalizes the abolitionist cause of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. While the latter, as historian Robin D.G. Kelley puts it, “was an effort to expand social democracy” it was based on a false presumption that the “basis of our system was sound”⁴; in contrast, the third wave of abolition—exemplified in calls to “defund the police”—questions the very soundness of the government’s foundation, its social structures and their relation to prisons. Abolition today is no longer a means of altering current law or reforming the system; it is a mass movement to change and rebuild the foundation of American social life. It disrupts the naturalization of prisons and policing, and seeks to eradicate the anchoring myth of Black criminality in the American psyche.

The agenda of contemporary abolition, while mainstreamed due to mass protests in the summer of 2020, can be traced back to the organizing of “Critical Resistance” in the late 1990s. Since then,

¹ U.S. Const., amend. XIII, § 1

²History.com Editors, ed., “Abolitionist Movement,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, August 21, 2018), <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/abolitionist-movement>.

³ “Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition,” 6AD, <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/24/the-rebellion-against-racial-capitalism/>, 22:03.

⁴ “The Rebellion Against Racial Capitalism,” 6AD, <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/24/the-rebellion-against-racial-capitalism/>, 24:05.

abolitionists have fundamentally opposed incarceration as a mode of social control and propose dismantling the prison industrial complex as a whole.⁵ For more than a century and a half, they maintain, we have been living in the afterlife of slavery, and in response to each evolution of unfreedom has arisen, dialectically, a new wave freedom of struggles. As the carceral state comes to stake itself today entirely upon the suffering and forced idleness of targeted “surplus” populations, abolition assumes a radical and unprecedented scope: coordinated opposition to all systems that perpetuate suffering and oppression.

Methods:

Developing out of ENGLISH 182: Doing Time: Race, Labor, and Incarceration, an honors seminar taught in fall 2020, and ENGLISH 548: Racial Capitalism, an upper-level seminar taught in spring 2021, the current research project is a collaborative proposal. We aim to study the history of the carceral system, abolitionist rhetoric, and activist movements and then work on developing active practices of abolition across a range of apparently “non-carceral” spaces, beginning with the university. Drawing upon Barbara Reskin’s sociological analysis of the race discrimination system, in which she argues that the disparities that exist within every subsystem—criminal justice, education, housing, residential/school segregation, labor/mortgage markets, credit/consumption markets, and health services—create a complex “web of discrimination,” we maintain that it is impossible to correct a single system without acknowledging its relations with all others as well.⁶ Thus, our research seeks to coordinate analysis of multiple institutions to build a vision of abolition as a properly *ecological* feature of the social web.

This project will be a remote, collaborative study of the conditions that led to the carceral state and the systems that reinforce it, and will foster skills of research, textual analysis, collaboration, and, ultimately, community engagement. To do so, we will divide a series of readings meet weekly via Zoom to discuss, synthesize, and contextualize our individual research into a larger, group framework. In terms of specific duties, each participant will undertake specific nodes of Reskin’s web and work to become an expert on specific systems. Then, throughout the process of meetings, each member is responsible for sharing their findings and building connections to other member’s research.

Our goal is to provide a framework for abolition that includes social reform that is already in motion and that can be coordinated across multiple organizations that may not otherwise frame their struggles as interdependent. This goal necessitates collaboration. Indeed, the pedagogical rationale for a three-person team is to base a community-focused project in collaborative methods. The manner in which we undertake this project reflects its intentions of collectivized and “applied” abolition. Thus, the proposed undertaking is itself meant to be prefigurative of larger-scale abolitionist *praxis*.

Timeline:

Stage 1: In Summer of 2021, we will synthesize sources pertaining to the history of our modern carceral state and abolitionist movements. The first three weeks of the summer will be focused on developing that knowledge. The following nine weeks will investigate studies of interlinking systems. At the end of summer, we will compose a summary paper concluding our findings. This conclusion will allow us to move from researching *about* abolition to working *towards* abolition.

Stage 2: After our initial research, Ria and Anna will apply for a three-credit class during the Fall of 2021, and form an abolitionist coalition of students, faculty, and community members. By promoting collaboration, the aim of the coalition is to coordinate community projects that actively practice and engage with abolition. We want members to notice connections between their individual activism and occupations and become conscious of their relationships with abolition. At the end of the semester, we

⁵Critical Resistance Editors. “CR Structure & Background.” Critical Resistance. Accessed July 28, 2021. <http://criticalresistance.org/about/cr-structure-background/>.

⁶Barbara Reskin, “The Race Discrimination System,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38, no. 1 (November 2012): pp. 17-35, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145508>, 23.

will conclude with another summary paper, continue to keep in touch with participants, and present our findings.

Conclusion:

Regarding the future of this project, we would like to expand our network of activists. The ultimate goal of this research is to serve as a starting point to form a coalition and change the way our society perceives punishment and carceral systems of organized violence. Within this coalition, we hope to implement our findings towards creating community solutions that collaboratively work towards abolition. Above all, we want to explore how our society as a whole formed an environment that fosters our perceptual reliance on “law and order,” and how that environment can be reimaged. The intention of this work is to remedy harm in our communities by dissecting how our society relies upon and cultivates conditions under which people are more likely to commit harm.

Note:

While this application calls for students working under a professor who is facilitating their research, we have taken a slightly different approach. For this project, all three parties (two students and one professor) came up with this research idea collectively during discussion and co-wrote this research proposal over a span of two months. In coming up with the project idea and writing the proposal together, all parties are equally invested and passionate about our work. Here, we as students are not just participating in research, but we are fostering development of the research itself. This unique opportunity allows us as students to not only involve ourselves in research, but work towards becoming researchers ourselves.

Therefore, this idea will be initiated by all three parties and responsibility will subsequently be equally distributed. The goal of this project is to coalesce numerous perspectives towards active practices of abolition. This necessitates collaboration and equal partnership rather than a fellowship structure. The need for a three-person team is a method of study that reflects its intentions of collectivized and “applied” abolition.

In working on this project thus far, we have already improved upon and learned skills of textual analysis, applicative study, interdisciplinary perspectives, scientific writing, and collaboration. By engaging in our work further, we hope to not only engage with abolition, but obtain skills in text selection, group organization, coalition participation, and applicative study.

Personal Statements:

By: Ria Dhingra

As a liberal arts student, my education has always relied upon interdisciplinary perspectives and emphasized the importance of applicative study. Additionally, as someone who plans to pursue a career in education, I have always made an effort to involve myself in community efforts that focus on progress, collaboration, and fostering/engaging with activism. However, despite these efforts, there seemed to be a gap in my learning about change and my working towards obtaining change.

My interest in activism peaked in 2018 as a junior in high school. I had recently begun an internship helping teach in an eight-grade classroom. It was here, where I first noticed the stark disparities in my suburban community. My students came from different backgrounds, had extenuating circumstances, and lacked social support to compensate for their baseline needs. Yet, as an educator, we were expected to treat them all the same in the classroom. Of course, disparities were retained and reinforced. It became clear to me then that activism is not just about advocating to “fix” effects of inequality, but examining—systemically—what caused inequality in the first place. Yet, as a student, I felt limited in my power to act upon these revelations.

UW-Madison allows students the opportunity to be activists and influencers all whilst being students. This research allows me the opportunity to directly apply my education towards examining the conditions that cause harm. I am now provided the opportunity to learn about the conditions that produce suffering and be able to articulate clearly why there is a need to change in the first place. As students, we

hold the potential and the opportunity to foster and lead change. Participating in this research finally provides me an outlet to do so all whilst growing as a student and researcher in an academic setting.

By: Anna Nelson

As a humanities major, I have spent a large majority of my class time analyzing historical texts and learning from the works of scholars. While this time is well spent, I find myself lacking opportunities to explore conclusions of my own. Through this research, I hope to apply the knowledge I have curated through the past semesters, high school courses and life experiences to create an impactful strategy for societal change.

My interest in social justice materialized during my freshman year of high school and the 2016 presidential election. As a newly matured teen, this was the first election I could participate in through discussion and debate. I quickly found my strength in defending policies and explaining arguments behind radical politics. Although this experience built a foundation for my future political and social engagement, I felt a disconnect between my strong beliefs and ability to act on them. Now, four years later as a freshman in college, I have experienced my first presidential election as a voter. Despite this newfound power, I still find myself yearning for more opportunities to create change.

As a resident of the greater Minneapolis area, the 2020 protests of George Floyd's death presented a conflicting situation. While I was drawn towards the opportunity to be a part of the historical moment, I felt hesitant about physically protesting in a dangerous environment and questioned the amount of change I would contribute to. While I knew I had to act, I felt my ability to foster change was better utilized through protesting in my hometown, helping organize art events, signing petitions, sharing information on social media, reading literature, and starting discussions. Although these actions did contribute to the movement, I am still ready to use my talents as an activist and student in a more impactful, profound way.

Prologue: What is the Carceral State?

Understanding Pervasive Carceral Elements and Comparisons to the Welfare State

By: Anna Nelson

In this project we are researching the carceral state. In order to discuss this subject, we must explain what the carceral state is. In doing so, we would like to clarify that our focus is not to define the carceral state but instead to analyze its application to systems theory. Below we have written a brief description of our take on the carceral state in relation to our research; however, we recommend understanding the concept of the carceral state alone as a requisite to our application. For more information, see The Carceral State Project conducted at University of Michigan.

What is the Carceral State?

The Carceral State is a state of being. It expands far beyond the Prison Industrial Complex and even the criminal justice system. Ruby Tapia, a professor of English and Women's studies at University of Michigan, states, "Yes, the carceral state encompasses the formal institutions and operations and economies of the criminal justice system proper, but it also encompasses logics, ideologies, practices, and structures, that invest in tangible and sometimes intangible ways in punitive orientations to difference, to poverty, to struggles to social justice and to the crossers of constructed borders of all kinds."⁷ In the Carceral State, the American government and its citizens act with punitive mindsets and create a secure environment.

Here, carceral logic is natural and ubiquitous in the minds of most citizens. Carceral logic is a form of reasoning which revolves around a punitive mindset, or the idea that harm and social issues should be addressed with punishment. One common example of punishment lies in the criminal justice system with our typical concept of incarceration; when a person breaks a crime, they are charged and possibly convicted, sentenced and punished with prison time. A more abstract example of punishment can be seen in parenting or teaching; if a student breaks a rule by running through the classroom and consequently knocks over another student's project, their teacher may yell across the room and publicly reprimand them. According to Responsive Classroom, this example shows that punishment "often calls upon an element of shame" that reinforces authority.⁸

In this punitive mindset, harm is addressed as a symptom to the problem, not the root cause. The problem here is that a student ran through the classroom and broke the rules. The symptom of this problem is that the student knocked down another student's project. The root cause of the issue, however, is not that the student wishes to break the rules and cause harm, but that the student did not have their tennis shoes for gym and now has excess energy. Addressing the problem through its symptom and punishing the student for knocking down the project does not solve the root cause of the problem. Therefore, neither the student nor the teacher recognizes the issue of the lack of tennis shoes, and the problem could happen again.

⁷University of Michigan, "What Is the Carceral State?," ArcGIS StoryMaps (Esri, April 2, 2021), <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7ab5f5c3fbca46c38f0b2496bcaa5ab0>.

⁸"Punishment vs. Logical Consequences," Responsive Classroom, September 2, 2011, <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/punishment-vs-logical-consequences/>.

In the Carceral State, there also exists a secure environment. In a secure environment, the government relies on police to manage harm and violence by relocating it from the community to the Prison Industrial Complex. This process disconnects the harm-doer from the community in which they caused harm, eliminating the possibility of the harm-doer seeing the harm they caused. For example, in this environment, when someone causes a disruption in a neighborhood, onlookers notify the police, and the disrupter is often taken into custody. Here, the disrupter is taken out of the community and away from the onlookers they harmed. The Prison Industrial Complex acts as a relocation site and the police act as a mediator between all of the community members. Security includes many other mediators besides the police to ensure protection of the community. For example, security cameras, drug tests, and background checks serve as a mediator between neighbors, teammates and coworkers by externally monitoring their behavior. These monitors and mediators replace the need for trust and relationships.

Lastly, the Carceral state operates on an individual level. In the criminal justice system, police officers arrest individual criminals, targeting the individual harm that that person caused without addressing the systemic harm that person may be a part of. For example, arresting someone who has committed domestic abuse against their partner may end the specific harm in that relationship, but it fails to recognize that this person has a child and models their abusive practices, resulting in a continuance across generations. Outside of the criminal justice system, individual operation looks like a privatization of risk for people applying for loans or buying homes. Banks and real estate agents place the responsibility of risk on individual buyers instead of balancing risk between the government and private companies. These concepts of individual vs systemic operation, secure vs safe environments and punitive vs preventative mindsets will be further discussed in following sections of this booklet.

What is the Welfare State?

The opposite of the current Carceral State is the theory of the Welfare State. In a welfare state, the American government and its citizens act with *preventative* mindsets and create a *safe* environment.

A preventative mindset aims to address harm and social issues before they cause symptoms. Going back to our example of the student, a preventative strategy would be to sit down with the student, ask why they were running, and address the harm they caused to other students. This prevents the issue of forgetting tennis shoes and building up an excess of energy from reoccurring, which also prevents the issue of running in class, breaking the rules, and knocking over other students' projects, along with a myriad of other possible symptoms, from recurring as well.

In the Welfare State, there exists a safe environment. In a safe environment, the government relies on community members of all kinds to manage harm and violence by enforcing care and directly addressing the harm-doer in the community. This process allows the harm-doer to see how they have caused harm. For example, the aforementioned disruptor in a neighborhood in a safe environment would be confronted not by the police, but directly by the onlookers they are disturbing. The members of the neighborhood all have strong relationships and trust that in speaking with the disruptor, they can de-escalate the situation and address the

harm themselves. Here, the disruptor has a chance to firsthand view how and why they caused harm to the other community members.

State	Carceral	vs	Welfare
Mindset	Punitive	vs	Preventative
Environment	Secure	vs	Safe
Level of Operation	Individual	vs	System

Why the Carceral State is Ecological

Carceral State $\neq$ criminal justice system $\neq$ prisons

Carceral State: a system of social spheres supporting carceral and punitive logic, secure environments and individual level operations. A complex system of logic that relies upon incarceration as a response to social dilemmas.

Criminal justice system: one social sphere within the Carceral State that adjudicates crime. It is a portal between the free and confined world, and the public and antisocial space. In adjudicating problems produced by other social systems (such as debt, drug use or theft), the criminal justice system perpetuates those original social problems by arresting, convicting and punishing individuals. The criminal justice system has the power to determine the very definition of crime and enforce it.

Prison: an institution within the criminal justice system that is merely one outcome in the adjudication process. Prisons are spaces of confinement that attempt to produce social control.

Incarceration: the act of imprisonment. This can be both literal, as in placing a criminal in prison, or more figurative, as in confining someone within the bounds of rules, policy, or practice.

Abolishing the Carceral State expands far beyond criminal justice reform and prison abolition. It requires a deeper look into the carceral elements of all social spheres.

Research Question, Subject, Methodology, and Hypothesis

. Research Question:

What are the Carceral Dimensions of Non-Carceral Social Spheres?

Research Statement:

We are studying the carceral dimensions of multiple social systems through a systems-theory approach in order to understand and present a framework for an abolitionist education.

Subject: Carceral Dimensions of Social Systems

Method: Systems Approach

Stakes: Abolition of the Carceral State via Political Education

Hypothesis:

If the carceral state is pervasive in all social spheres then, we must consequently approach abolition and resistance systemically and not hyper fixate on prisons because the carceral state is not upheld solely by the criminal justice system.

Subject: What is our study?

A Look into the Carceral Dimensions of Social Systems

By: Anna Nelson

The Carceral State expands far beyond the Prison Industrial Complex and the criminal justice system, permeating other social spheres. Key characteristics of the carceral state exist in other social spheres such as housing, education, health care, credit, and labor markets. In America, however, we tend to view each social subsystem as an independent entity and ignore interactions between them, even as these interactions are pertinent to understanding how harm is enforced. Drawing upon systems theory, we attend to the carceral logics and its observable effects in social subsystems that are not directly tied to the criminal justice system. We intend to investigate the carceral dimensions of non-carceral systems and how their interactions build a state of harm in our communities. By approaching the carceral as a synergistic or emergent systemic effect, we intend to expand the traditional view of prison abolition to include the abolition of the carceral state in its entirety.

Furthermore, we propose the study of systems-theory as a mode of political education. We intend this education— in discerning complexity and in situating oneself within it— to empower those who have been disarmed by the current political discourse, and to enable them not merely to mobilize, but to organize.

Method: A Systems Approach

The Vocabulary to Talk About Systemic Problems

By: Ria Dhingra

When approaching the subject of our study—dismantling the carceral state— we have drawn on pre-existing work and activism was used as a starting point to formulate our research question, one that asks: how can abolition be conducted from an ecological perspective? An ecological perspective is one that examines the carceral state as a complex system, not just a focus on taking down the prison industrial complex. For this reason, we draw on systems-theory in order to better navigate the complexity of a state whose carceral elements, like its racism, is systemic

Indeed, since our research is concerned with a systems-based approach to abolition, we have found it indispensable to make systemic literacy a key component of that research.

What is Systems Theory?

Systems theory emerged in the 20th century with the goal of modeling dynamic relations and primarily being used as a tool to solve complex problems. Typically, systems theory models connections between dynamic parts and displays relations between pre-conditions, products, emergent properties, and synergy. The theory itself is applied to a wide range of subjects from computer science to psychology to political science. Visual models are often used in many areas of study to portray problems that are more complex than a linear cause and effect chain. Instead, systems theory examines conditions, interactions, and is viewed as a realist approach to problem solving.

By viewing problems/subjects as systems, systems theory can be used to explain why hyper-localized or non-integrated methods of reform are inadequate for systemic change.

Key Vocabulary:

- System: a dynamic group of interrelated parts bound by space and time that is defined by purpose, expressed through functioning, and can influence/ be influenced by its surrounding environment. Energy moves through a system.
- Isolated system: A system that does not interact with the environment outside of its boundary.
- Open System: A system that does interact with the environment outside of its boundary.
- Nesting Encapsulation: A system within a system. When the elements within a system are complex systems themselves.
- Synergy: When the whole system has effects that are greater than the sum of its parts.
- Emergence/Emergent Properties: The whole system has properties that the elements within a system do not have. A new outcome (often behavioral) due to element interaction within a system.
- Exogenous shocks: An outside environmental change that targets either an element in a system or the entire system.
- Recursion: A method of problem solving when the solution depends on solutions to smaller instances of the same problem.
- Cybernetics: When applying systems theory to political science, cybernetics is a study that examines how the output of one element is the input for another.

How we are Using Systems Theory:

When abolition is seen from the perspective of systems-theory, punishment and the carceral become legible as elements in a larger, dynamic system known as the carceral state. The

carceral state itself is an open system, one that interacts with its environment and is shaped through and by the interactions of its constituent subsystems. In systems theory, this is expressed by saying that the carceral state is a system defined by *nesting encapsulation*, meaning it is made up of smaller systems (systems within a system). By trying to view prison abolition holistically, it becomes imperative to apply systems theory on a larger problem of the carceral state.

This study will demonstrate how the system of the carceral state is composed of five subsystems: criminal justice, education, healthcare, housing, and the credit and labor market. Then, it will examine how the emergent property of carceral logic is a product of said system. Similarly, we shall examine how punitive mindset and large-scale incarceration is synergy from the system. Finally, this study will mainly examine each individual subsystem and their interactions with the carceral state, keeping in mind a systems approach. In doing so, we aim to use recursion and cybernetics in order to propose a working framework for dismantling the carceral state rather than a reform/proposal grounded in an exogenous shock that only targets a single sub-system.

Dismantling the carceral state requires looking at all of its elements: every subsystem it is related to, every element it affects, and every property it produces. It is this ecological, holistic study—grounded in systems theory—that will be the method of study we conduct.

Method: Systems Theory and Problem Solving

The Importance of Viewing Systems Holistically

By: Ria Dhingra

Systems Theory and Products

After modeling a system, one can view complex interactions between its parts (often smaller “subsystems”). This holistic view of a system allows researchers to problem solve in a more precise manner.

In a complex system, interactions between elements and parts produce products that affect the system and can affect its surrounding environment.

Synergy is when a whole system has effects that are greater than the sum of its part. In a way, synergy amplifies interactions between elements to produce results not independently obtainable. Examples of this include looking at the water cycle: when groundwater movement coupled with rainwater movement lead to mass amounts of water being spread across the globe. Similarly, a business merger that leads to an expansion of sales by combining two regions is an example of synergy in the workplace.

Emergence of Emergent Properties are when interactions between elements of the system produce properties (of the system as a whole) that each element does not process on an individual level. For example, the stationary gears of a bicycle lead to transportation when they interlock and interact correctly. Or when interacting emotionless neurons in the brain result in humans feeling fear and joy.

To understand the difference, synergy is a geometric, mathematical increase whilst emergence is a merging of properties to produce something new. *Synergy is the sum of actions while emergence is the product of interactions.*

Products and Problem Solving

It is important to note that systems can have multiple products/behaviors/functions as a result of synergy or emergence. Being able to identify a subject of study or a problem as either a product of emergence or a result of synergy can help researchers narrow down/pick problem solving tactics.

For example, recursion is a technique used by programmers when solving problems where the solution depends on solutions to smaller instances of the same problem. Such problems can generally be solved by iteration. Recursion is then a good way to approach products of synergy.

Similarly, is a discipline that views systems as large feedback loops. When applying a cybernetics approach to a problem, it is understood that the outcome of one element is the input for another. Problem solving becomes focused on breaking down these cycles and chains.

So What?

While our work does not look at code recursion or environmental science, we are applying a systems approach (an ecological perspective) to the carceral state. Therefore, keeping in mind that specific products of systems are approached with specific forms of problem solving can be helpful further down the line. As we work to move from theory about abolition towards praxis for abolition, we will need to present a problem-solving framework. By being able to categorize certain products as either synergy or emergence, we can attempt to dismantle said products in a more direct manner.

We can now ask ourselves: Is a carceral effect an amplification of earlier practices or is it produced as a part of a feedback loop? Depending on the answer to the question, a problem-solving strategy can be chosen to address the carceral effect of the system.

It is important to note that the vocabulary of systems theory applied onto another subject results in a plethora of field-based terms. While we do not want to directly apply these terms to our work, relying on these concepts allows us to view examples of specific forms of problem solving. Take recursion—while we may not be able to code in a mathematical manner, we can model eliminating a carceral dimension in every subsystem of a larger carceral state. Using systems vocabulary allows us to try such approaches and narrow down our options.

Stakes: Why Research Looks Like Teaching
How Political Education Can Combat Polarization
 By: Ingrid Diran and Ria Dhingra

Research Can Look Like Teaching

Our aim in this study is to work towards an inclusive, collective praxis of abolition. In order to do so, we have adapted an ecological approach to systems of punishment that sees these in the context of a larger system we refer to as the carceral state. Systems theory is our working framework for modeling how this state works and what pathways exist for dismantling mechanisms that produce harm. Our ultimate goal is to gather a coalition of activists and scholars from multiple disciplines to “test” the findings of our aforementioned framework pragmatically and experimentally.

Thus, the goal of study is to create a working and usable framework, not a final paper, that can be taught, presented, and discussed by a coalition of scholars, students, and community members.

Our methodology of using theory to create a sort of curriculum of abolition is a novel way in which to organize research. In doing so, we would like to propose: research can and often should look like teaching.

The Polarization and Oversimplification of Political Discourse are Linked Processes.

We take as axiomatic Angela Davis’s suggestion that the divisiveness of contemporary political discourse is a function of its oversimplification. As ideological positions are rendered increasingly easy to understand and to repeat across various media, extremist views are made to appear incontrovertible (common sense), and this, in turn, disarms people from contesting what they hear, rendering them captive audience to, rather than active participants in, the modalities of democratic life.

Remedying Polarization Begins by Complicating Political Discourse

By linking ideological polarization to the oversimplification of political problems, we see how a remedy to the former may lie in addressing the latter. That is, one antidote to a polarized intellectual and political climate is to embrace complexity and to nurture a greater public tolerance for it. The rationale behind this position is that complicating political discourse actively neutralizes polarization by resisting neat divisions (e.g., us-vs-them) in the process of disclosing far more nuanced distinctions and contradictions.

A Curricular Approach: Abolition as a Pedagogy of Systems

It is important to note that—often—qualitative work in humanities is a new way to see and interact with a subject of study rather than to solve for a variable that is known in advance. As Angela Davis puts it, philosophy “is a way to see beyond the given.” This means looking at a subject and taking time to understand its complexity is often just as valuable as presenting simplified, digestible findings.

By applying a systems approach to an existing movement—abolition—our work expands past prison to examine the complexity of the carceral state. *This reintroduction of constructive*

complexity cannot be “presented” as if it were self-evident; instead, it must be taught, challenged, and engaged with. After all, it is teaching that empowers people to take on complexity and political education that provides the tools to engage with an environment. Therefore, research—especially work that aims to dismantle a system that is “normalized” in the American psyche—should encourage engagement with complexity.

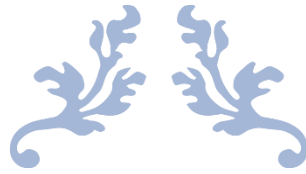
As mentioned earlier, the reification and oversimplification of complex political terms (such as crime, punishment, credit, debt) make productive discussion and research in regards to policy extremely difficult. Before research can even be presented, scholars must first re-explain, re-contextualize, and remind readers of a forgotten history with which the present remains entangled. In a way, researchers working in the field of social policy must first “teach” the context and necessity of their work (explain the subject) before proceeding to explain findings on said subject. In doing so, researchers are already engaging with forms of political education.

The advantage of structuring all work and findings in the form of a course design art is that curricula can be easily adapted, excited, changed, reformatted, and shared. This means that the research presented is dynamic, a way of practicing theoretical thinking, challenging norms, and navigating complexity.

Complexity is not Demobilizing. Complexity makes Organizing Possible, but it Requires Training.

Learning how to navigate complexity empowers scholars, students, and community members not merely to mobilize, but to organize. For complexity is, by definition, not a matter of self-evidence but of analysis, which requires its own form of education and training and also demands forms of response that are as complex as the problems they seek to address. That is, the very perception of and engagement with complexity must be learned and taught, especially in the context of highly-charged political questions. If complexity is not a given but an emergent effect of a system, complexity itself becomes tractable only once the system is understood as just that—a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Systems-theory is a formal study of complexity. Yet in its application, systems-theory is largely limited to modeling in the natural and social sciences, and far less often featured as part of the qualitative analyses that are specific to the humanities (except, perhaps, as metaphor). We propose to reverse this trend by developing pedagogical materials that relate systems-theory to contemporary political realities.



Section One

A Systems Approach



A Brief Summary:

This section serves as the prerequisite to our summer work, a project consisting of the identification and analysis of carceral properties/behaviors across a wide sphere of sub-systems.

In order to proceed with our work, Section One is a series of short essays covering content discussed in initial meetings: how to model our work, sociological influences by Barbra Reskin and Malcom Gladwell, and how scientific models can be used as a way to portray the inherent objectivity of a narrative analysis (humanities). These essays map out the conversations and thought processes that lead to a more mechanical methodology for the remainder of this collection.

Additionally, this Section includes two reading summaries of works specifically focusing on Abolition. These readings were conducted in a book club fashion, with deadlines and regular discussions. These summaries are formatted in a way conducive to being the basis of a lesson plan. The purpose of these readings was threefold: 1) To practice how we would approach reading/analysis of texts not explicitly tied to abolition 2) To refresh our memory on abolitionist ideals, practices, and primary concerns 3) The practice of constructing these reading summaries was an informal “test” as to how a class, study group, or coalition could do the same.

Why the Models and Metaphors?

By: Ria Dhingra

Both humanities and STEM oriented forms of study arose from the same need: the need to pursue truth and find answers with whatever tools are available. Often, the goal is to explain the unexplainable. For example, early civilization aimed to understand the stars and the presence of the cosmos. It can be argued that the implicit human desire to find both truth and meaning led the modern study of astronomy to be characterized by a history of myths, philosophy, and scientific advances. Understanding the stars was a process that started with questioning, led to justification, then organization, mythology, religion, philosophy, natural/mathematical philosophy, data collection, and— finally— modern day scientific observation.

The point is, both humanities and STEM oriented classes begin with an extremely similar thought process. Still, it's important to note that STEM based classes tend to be classified as more solution oriented and objective, while humanities are characterized by their apparent subjectivity.

It is not our goal to completely standardize humanities, doing so would change the very nature of a subject into something it is not. Additionally, contorting a subjective form of study to fit an objective framework is subliminally saying that the subjective form of study is inadequate on its own in terms of what it is trying to achieve. We are not arguing that position, nor are we trying to change humanities into something it is not. Subjectivity, room for multiple theories, and ideas is precisely why humanities is an important lens to study from.

Instead, we want to use STEM-based models as inspiration/a starting point to create models that organize and visually explain humanities.

Thinking is not linear. It never was. And unfortunately, humanities classes focusing on papers and final products often presents thinking in this way. Often, it is easier to show an idea in the form of a mind map or a table instead of an organized paper. These sorts of models make it easier to show connections, simultaneity, and unfinished work. Compared to a paper, a model is easier to edit, add to, and change with new developments. There is value in organizing thoughts and findings in the form of mind maps, cycles, tables, lists, and diagrams.

Therefore, we want to present the findings of our project as a model: a working framework that we can grow and expand with increased study. The purpose of comparing our models to existing ones (STEM-based ones) is because that is all that is available. A comparison to a familiar diagram is often an easy way to understand a new concept. However, we do not aim to standardize our findings as one would a data table. Instead, we merely use diagrams to present theory and praxis in an organized manner.

Why Reskin's Discrimination Web?

A Paradigmatic Parallel to Approach Dismantling the Carceral State

By: Anna Nelson

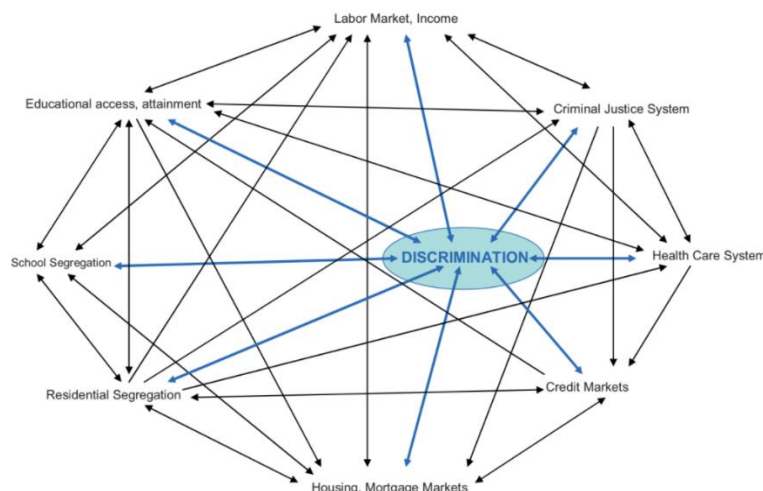


Figure 1
The race discrimination system and emergent discrimination.

In 2012, sociologist Dr. Barbara Reskin relied upon systems theory to illustrate her model: The Race Discrimination System⁹. In this paper, Reskin argues that multiple social systems (housing, credit market, labor market, healthcare, education, and the criminal justice system) are interconnected and influence the circumstances within other systems. While this argument is accepted by most in her field, she extends this to state that disparity multiplies due to discrimination compounding via the connections between each system. The emergent property (intensifying disparity in each system) in this complicated and tangled web of social systems is discrimination. And this, in turn, leads to more discrimination—protecting and maintaining the status quo. It is important to note that by describing this discrimination is an emergent property, Reskin explains it may not be present in each individual social system. Instead, this new behavior is an outcome from social systems interacting. Overall, viewing race discrimination as a system rather than a cause-and-effect type of product explains why targeted “reform” in individual social spheres is not successful. As Reskin states, “We cannot reduce Black and White disparity in one sphere until we realize that any sphere reinforces discrimination in all spheres.”¹⁰

Currently, with Professor Ingrid Diran we will rely upon Reskin’s analysis and her model to create a parallel model for our research entitled, “An Ecological Approach to Abolition: A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems.” Reskin’s web serves as a starting place in this project; one that examines abolition from a systems perspective. This “ecological approach” means we are looking at abolition in the context of all the social systems affected by the carceral state.

⁹Barbara Reskin, “The Race Discrimination System,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2012): 17–35, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145508>.

¹⁰ Reskin “The Race Discrimination System” 11.

Each of the aforementioned social systems plays a role in the carceral state, but the criminal justice system in particular holds the sole responsibility of enforcing it. Examples of this include placing cops in schools, exploiting prison labor, and using law enforcement as responders to health crises. In each of these instances, the criminal justice system enforces a punitive, carceral logic in areas of education, labor, and healthcare. To focus only on criminal justice reform to abolish the carceral state, therefore, is a minimal focus on only the enforcement of these logics, not their root cause.

Our project aims to approach the praxis of abolition from a systems perspective—not just directly target the criminal justice system. To do so, we adopted Reskin’s web and systems analysis. We aim to use this same web, but focus our attention to explain the problem of the carceral state. To understand this parallel, it is important to note that Reskin analyzes the system of race discrimination, while we will analyze the system of the carceral state. The carceral state, while inclusive of race discrimination, expands beyond discrimination, requiring a larger scope and different system. As another parallel, Reskin argues that targeting a leverage point, or single important node of the web, will weaken an important subsystem and aid in dismantling the system as a whole. The single node in the context of the Race Discrimination System is Housing. Housing is especially important to the Race Discrimination System because it is paradigmatic of all other systems. Not only does the housing system produce discrimination, but it enforces the discrimination of other subsystems. Similarly, we argue that the Criminal Justice system is the “key node” in dismantling the carceral state because it is also paradigmatic of all other subsystems by enforcing the carceral logic within them.

Reskin’s model illustrates how the emergent property of discrimination grows through interactions. This discrimination feeds back into the web and reinforces it with time. Similarly, carceral logic that reinforces the carceral state is also an emergent property that often goes unnoticed, becoming naturalized and internalized as normal by the general public.

After adopting this web and using the paradigm of housing and discrimination as a parallel to our focus on criminal justice and the carceral state, the question becomes: What now? How can this model be used as a tool in this research project?

While Reskin argues that targeting a leverage point *directly* will weaken the system as a whole, we have found that current practices of abolition that directly target the criminal justice system are flawed and do not acknowledge the ecology of the web. As aforementioned earlier, Reskin notes that targeted “reform” in individual social spheres are not successful. Therefore, we must target all social spheres and aim to abolish carceral logic in all of them. By indirectly targeting the criminal justice system through study of its relationships to the other subsystems, we can both acknowledge the importance of the criminal justice system while utilizing the web model. We will attempt to view the carceral dimensions of non-carceral systems and how their interactions build a state of harm in our communities. In order to abolish the carceral state in its entirety, we must identify ties the criminal justice system has with other subsystems. Subsequently, we must break those ties. The approach then becomes focusing on the other five social spheres (housing, credit market, labor market, healthcare, and education) and improving conditions within them so there is a reduced need for interactions with the criminal justice system. To do so requires strengthening ties, relations, and practices within these five systems in order to fill the “gap” that comes from removing the criminal justice system from the web.

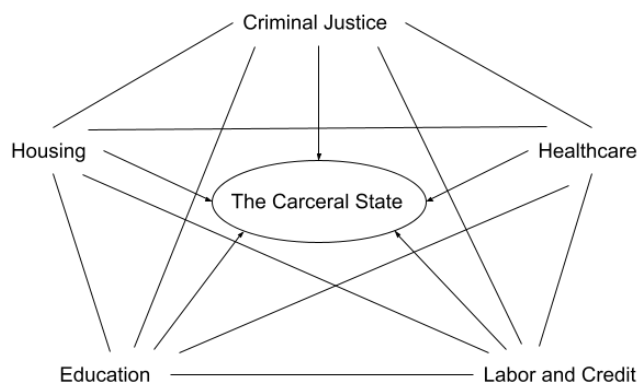
Theorizing on how to problem solve systems with complex interconnection, sociologist Malcom Gladwell argues that in certain sports, like soccer, a team is only as strong as its weakest player, whereas in basketball, a team with a sole star player is stronger than a team of ten average

players. Gladwell labels these concepts as “strong-link” (focusing on a single player/system) and “weak-link” (focusing on the whole team/system) approaches.¹¹

Abolition solely targeting the criminal justice system appears to be a strong-link approach to a weak-link web of social ecology; there exists a hyper-fixation on the criminal justice system, a single node in Reskin’s tangled web. Ignoring external connections to other social systems and straining this single node provokes symptoms like over-policing and violence. Therefore, going forward, we are interested in applying Gladwell’s weak-link problem solving theory to Reskin’s interlinking web in order to redirect abolition away from prisons and reframe abolition in a holistic and ecological form.

In summary, the carceral state expands far beyond the Prison Industrial Complex. Viewing this state as a system allows us as researchers to view interactions social spheres have with criminal justice and how social spheres engrain carceral logic. By adopting this model, research going forward will be system specific analysis on improving conditions and reducing interaction with the carceral state.

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Some additional thoughts/organizing principles:

- Carceral state is itself a way of acknowledging the emergent effects of our current social system, in which various systems have adapted methods originating in punishment
- A systems-theory approach allows us to map interactions/ties among different spheres or micro-systems within the overall system and overall operation of the carceral state
- Carceral logics are an emergent effect of a punitive system.
- Thus, while the carceral logic of the criminal justice system (with its logic of security, surveillance, punishment, etc.) is paradigmatic/exemplary for other systems (providing a blueprint for their methods and modes of organization), the criminal justice system itself does less to cause than to *enforce* carceral logic. In other words, the criminal justice system *perpetuates* and ensures the *reproduction* of carceral logics, but is not their sole point of origin.
- Other systems provide other points of entry, or “nodes,” for shifting the overall function of the carceral system.

¹¹ Malcolm Gladwell, “My Little Hundred Million” July 20, 2016, in *Revisionist History*, produced by Pushkin Industries, podcast, 00:11:07, <http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/06-my-little-hundred-million>

Reskin's Subsystems:

- Labor Market/Income
- Criminal Justice System
- Educational Access/Attainment
- School Segregation
- Health Care
- Residential segregation
- Credit markets
- Housing/Mortgage Markets

Our Subsystems:

- Criminal Justice System
- Health Care
- Housing
- Education
- Credit and Labor Market

Systems as a Chemistry Equation: Chemical Catalysts

By: Anna Nelson

In our current carceral state, we see the criminal justice system's interactions and the production of a secure environment through a net ionic equation; we overlook the catalyst that plays a role in triggering the reaction. The secure state is the current status quo. The status quo, however, is not static; its production requires a catalyst. We take the product (status quo) for granted and normalize its existence as the only possible reaction. When analyzing different reactants (subsystems) and the catalysts (conditions) that produce the status quo, however, we see that different combinations produce a variety of possible reactions and outcomes. Overall, however, catalysts have a duality, and they can be negative and produce product one (status quo), or they can be positive and produce product two (change). We would like to focus on analyzing which combinations of reactants and negative catalysts create the status quo of a *secure* environment. After analyzing how these reactants and catalysts interact, we will flip the negative catalysts to their respective positive catalysts to create a new reaction that causes change and creates a *safe* environment. Lastly, it is important to remember the effect of titration. We plan to analyze the quantities of positive catalysts that are necessary to pass the threshold and trigger a reaction for change.

Often, when trying to get people to examine catalysts and reactants, they are incentivized to frame the equation as one that is "neutral." While this may have good intentions (trying to frame change in a way that is appealing to all) the very nature of "neutralizing" is carceral, for it is reductive and forces us to ignore how everything is political and the political agency we hold/political agency that is being taken away from others.

For a reaction to happen, there must be acids and bases and charges. If things are neutral, combining two "neutral" things will do nothing. So neutral framing prevents people from trying to cause reactions. Everything is inherently charged and has a unique ph the same way everything in our lives is politicized. Every action, every choice is political. We cannot ignore this in order to appease others. Instead, framing must be done in a way that positively showcases how "being political" isn't a bad thing.

Catalyst Equation Model Explanation:

Definitions:

- *System:* Carceral State
- *Subsystem:* Criminal Justice, Healthcare, Housing, Education, Labor Market
- *Institutions:* an established organization that exists within a subsystem and can be public or private.
- *Programs:* organized public services created by the government.
- *Practices:* exercises carried out by workers within institutions or programs. These can be policies or unspoken. (Practices are the catalyst! These are what we are looking to change)

Examples:

1. Criminal Justice
 - Institutions: prison, jail, juvenile detention
 - Programs: drug court, rehabilitation
 - Practices: violence, selective enforcement

2. Health Care

- Institutions: Hospitals, private practice, specialty facilities
- Programs: Medicare/Medicaid
- Practices: forcing birth control or sterilization

3. Housing

- Institutions: Real Estate, HOA
- Programs: public housing
- Practices: blockbusting, slum clearance, highway building, gentrification

4. Education

- Institutions: preschool, K-12, College/higher education
- Programs: after school, Free lunch
- Practices: white washed curriculum

5. Labor Market

- Institutions: hiring corporations
- Programs: governmental unemployment aid
- Practices: segregated factory placement

Equation Examples:

Reactant One: CJS	Reactant Two: Subsystem of focus	Other reactants (If needed): Subsystems or institution	Catalyst: Practice	Equals (=)	Specific product of secure state
CJS	Healthcare	Housing	Segregation of food resources	=	Food deserts, unhealthy neighborhoods, correlated stigma
CJS	Healthcare	Housing	Segregation of general resources	=	Lack of value for certain human lives
CJS	Healthcare	Labor Market	“Feeling poor”	=	Loss of health ability and power (cycles)
CJS	Housing	Real Estate	Blockbusting	=	Fear, racism and propagation of harm
CJS	Housing	Transportation	Slum clearance	=	Breaking of community
CJS	Housing	Real Estate	Redlining	=	Targeted policing of neighborhoods

CJS	Housing	Credit Market	Gentrification	=	Forced migration, disconnect of community
CJS	Education	Housing	Police in Schools	=	Over policing of certain neighborhoods, School to prison pipeline
CJS	Education			=	
CJS	Education			=	
CJS	Labor Market	Healthcare	Job sector segregation	=	Targeted welfare discrimination
CJS	Labor Market	Housing & Labor Market	Segregated factory locations	=	Pollution and poor health for blue collar, possibly majority minority areas
CJS	Labor Market			=	

A TEMPLATE READING SUMMARY “WORKSHEET” FOR EDUCATIONAL USE:

_____ ***Title of Reading*** _____ by _____ ***Author*** _____
 _____ ***Subtitle of Mini Paper (Focus on Main Idea of Takeaway)*** _____
 By: ____-Writer of this mini paper’s name _____

Summary (of reading):

<1-2 Paragraphs>

Key Quotations:

<5-6 Quotations>

How This Connects to Main Idea/Weekly Discussion/Class Theme/Topic of Focus (Analysis):

<1-2 Paragraphs>

Moving Forward with Information from this Work (Takeaways):

<most important part>
 <1-2 Paragraphs>

***We Do This 'Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba**
Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice
 By: Anna Nelson

Summary of Text:

We Do This 'Til We Free Us is a collection of abolitionist papers written by Mariame Kaba and edited in early 2021 by Naomi Murakawa (associate professor of African-American studies at Princeton University).¹² Throughout her essays, Kaba acknowledges America's dire need to address harm in our communities by transforming the systems in which the harm is created. The Prison Industrial Complex is not a broken system, as many Americans believe. The Carceral State grew directly from its racist and violent predecessor institutions. Policing and Incarceration is meant to control and regulate harm, but our communities need preventative measures. Because of this, reform is not enough; we need complete dismantling and divestment.

Each essay highlights a specific movement or case that relates to how we misunderstand justice, safety, abolition, and harm. Harm often enters our communities as sexual abuse and racism, but the lack of accountability within the criminal justice system leads to a cycle of violence without true justice or safety. Therefore, true abolition requires drastic demands for change from American citizens.

Key Quotes:

- "Cages confine people, not the conditions that facilitated their harms or the mentalities that perpetuate violence"¹³
- "Abolition is not about your fucking feelings"¹⁴
- "The doctrine of preemptive killing and preventative captivity finds expression in the daily lives of all Black people in the United States"¹⁵
- "Hope is a discipline"¹⁶

How This Connects to Research:

In her essays, Kaba makes a key distinction between secure and safe communities. A state of security manages harm and violence by removing it from the viewer's perspective. A state of safety, on the other hand, requires relationships between community members that enforce care and *prevent* harm and violence from reoccurring. For example, in a secure state, when someone hears a loud disruption coming from their neighbor's house and calls 911, the police act as mediators between the violence and the viewer, often arresting the harm-doer and detaining them in a facility. This process disconnects the harm-doer from the community and vice versa and brings the possibility of police violence into the situation. Contrarily, in a state of safety, the neighbors have a relationship of trust, and the viewer can comfortably enter the disruption themselves to address the harm. Here, the harm-doer remains in the community,

¹² Mariame Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. (Chicago USA: Haymarket Books, 2021).

¹³ Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us*, 24.

¹⁴ Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us*, 26.

¹⁵ Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us*, 32.

¹⁶ Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us*, 229.

confronts the harm they have caused, and is aware of the consequences it has upon their relationships. Unlike a state of security, the harm is addressed, instead of hidden and perpetuated.

The carceral state is a state of security, where harm cycles through communities and the government acts as police who control that harm. On the other hand, the welfare state is a state of safety, where harm is addressed and the government acts as doctors who care for the wellbeing of their citizens.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

After reading this piece, we met to discuss how the ideas could provide a framework of perspective for our oncoming research. In doing so, we created what we call our Chemistry model—a reflection of how the secure state is created and viewed. Once the model was established and deliberated, however, we found a lack of focus in our work. Researching prison abolition and the carceral state brings forth a vast number of media and discourse around the topic. Additionally, due to our interest in creating an *ecological* model, our list of available sources expanded into sociological studies of individual subsystems. In order to narrow our focus into a manageable project, we decided to read the introductions and key chapters of books that acknowledge the nuances and histories of discrimination within each subsystem. Also, to make up for any specific, key topics that the main readings do not cover, we will be adding a shorter, supplemental reading to each week.

Abolition Democracy by Angela Davis

A Heuristic of Justifying Harm: Davis, Dual-Definitions, and Active Abolition

By: Ria Dhingra

Summary of Text:

Written in 2005, *Abolition Democracy* is a series of interviews conducted by Eduardo Mendieta (associate professor at Stony Brook University) and Angela Davis (internationally known abolitionist).¹⁷ The interviews take place in 2004 in light of the breaking of the Abu Gharib prison story and pictures of torture at the Guantanamo supermax prison.

In these interviews, Davis discusses how international torture is a reflection of domestic methods used in prisons. As she details the relation between the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex, (along with the militarization of the police), larger questions about the very definition of democracy arise.

Davis invites us all to question how we have normalized injustice in a capital driven democracy, and how democracy itself is commodified as a justification for torture. In doing so, topics of disenfranchisement, capital extraction, social branding, racial contract, ritual violence, sexual coercion, surplus repression, and interconnected systems are covered as means of oppression and targets of abolition.

Overall, a failed post-slavery abolition democracy results in a normalization of militarized prisons that racially inflict torture, terror, and harm. Davis then discusses how we—as activists—can work to “de-naturalize” and think critically about prisons as an institution rather than normalizing and justifying the harm inflicted in said institutions.

Key Quotes:

- “Extraordinary [torture] sometimes has connections to the ordinary [prison violence]”¹⁸
- “Pursuit of global dominance by military means is rationalized by defense and spread of American Democracy”¹⁹
- “Communities are always political projects, political projects that can never solely rely on identity”²⁰
- Globalization “reflects and extends normalization of torture in domestic prisons”²¹

How This Connects to Research:

Some words, like “air,” are hard to define due to their abstract nature. Therefore, to define “air,” we must define it by its properties, actions, movements, and effects. (Note: “air” is a noun).

Other words, like “hot,” are easier to define despite them also being relatively abstract. These sorts of words are defined by “dual pairs” and antonyms. Unlike air, these words have direct dialectic pairings. “Hot” is defined as the absence of “cold.” (Note: “hot” is an adjective). In this case, nouns are ubiquitous concepts (norms) that are only identifiable when

¹⁷ Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy: beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*. (New York City, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Davis, *Abolition Democracy*, 43.

¹⁹ Davis, *Abolition Democracy*, 57.

²⁰ Davis, *Abolition Democracy*, 69.

²¹ Davis, *Abolition Democracy*, 78.

In this book, Davis describes how words like “justice,” “democracy,” and “freedom” are all abstract nouns that are hard to define. Yet, unlike “air,” our existing definitions of these words are not properties or descriptions. These words are instead assumed to have self-evident definitions and are oversimplified by politicians into “dual pairs.” For example, Bush-isms detail that a citizen is either “for justice” or “against it.” Additionally, a free citizen is defined by being able to vote and “be,” implying that there are some citizens (incarcerated) who cannot vote and “be.”

That fact that these words are defined by conditionals or a “lack thereof” opposite, dual pair, proves that there is a fundamental flaw in how our society describes and uses these terms. We treat them (nouns) as adjectives: “democratic society,” “a just trial,” and “free citizens.” Yet, the words “a just democracy” should not be a descriptor of an institution, it should be a fundamental institution itself. If the very definition of these words presents a “lack thereof,” then we need to re-imagine and re-define these institutions and terms, not reform them.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

Moving forward, Davis provides justification for why reform is not an option. This justification validates why our work (re-imagining a world without a reliance on the criminal justice system) is pertinent.

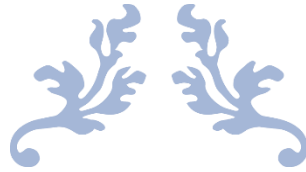
We should not be shocked by international atrocities if they are based on and rooted in domestic forms of terror. Instead, we need to expose the atrocity in the “ordinary” and de-naturalize our immediate reliance on the criminal justice system. Our work going forward will work to examine links the criminal justice system has with other social spheres and then work to eradicate those links.

Additionally, this text ties in very well with how citizens perceive Reskin’s web and the education system/culture that normalizes the presence of a prison industrial complex.

In psychology, a heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows people to make decisions quickly without thinking. It is also used as a tool to organize the world. For example, a child learning about animals will categorize every new animal as either a “dog” or “not a dog” since that is what they are taught. Or, a young adult will immediately call 911 upon hearing a loud noise outside because they have been told to call the police when they feel unsafe. Both examples showcase an immediate reaction that is learned, naturalized, and conditioned.

Davis illustrated how we have a heuristic in our minds that associates’ prisons with safety and America with “democracy.” This heuristic prevents us from thinking critically when a prison enforces harm or torture (unsafe actions) or when American sanctions and supports actions deemed un-Democratic. Rather than thinking and speaking critically of said examples, we justify and organize them within our present, pre-existing heuristic. This creates the idea of “American exceptionalism,” conditions where certain forms of harm are permissible. The discussion about torture is now related to what circumstances make it permissible, not why it is being conducted in the first place. Davis demonstrating these connections allows us as researchers to focus on the social sphere that teaches said connections.

Most importantly, the takeaway about self-evident definitions can be used by us as researchers when examining concepts of, reliance upon, and resistance to current definitions of: safety, justice, freedom, and democracy.



Section Two

The Housing Industry



A Brief Summary:

This section details reading summaries for two selected texts concerning the Housing System. While our selected readings examine racism and inequality in Housing as an isolated system, we contextualize our analysis based on prior readings of abolitionist texts.

Since this was the first “sub-system” of a larger carceral ecology, we spent more time trying to standardize a practice we could carry over into analysis of further sub-systems. Our goal was to map out how social institutions uphold the carceral state and how the carceral state relies upon, reinforces, and perpetuates the status quo.

Quickly, we began to note patterns, perspectives, and practices that could be categorized as related to “the carceral.” These practices and outcomes were often a product of explicit, racially coded, policy transitioning to implicit, hidden, racially motivated private practices. In this section, we list those practices, and coin the term “Carceral Dimensions” to highlight how “carceral” as an adjective qualifies numerous institutions, tying them all together.

For this section, and three that follow, we begin to map out the Carceral Dimensions of the status quo, working towards supporting the hypothesis and moving towards a new starting point: recognition that progress, reform, and change cannot be isolated to one institution, as the carceral dimensions themselves (permeating all social institutions) are what must be dismantled.

A Working List of “Carceral Dimensions” To Track in Reading/Analysis of The Social Institutions Composing the Carceral State

{Intended Purpose of These Discussion Notes: Educational, for Lesson Plan Development}

Patterns/Carceral Dimensions:

- Exclusionary vs inclusionary methods
- Public vs private partnership
 - What the Public Sector wants vs what the Private Sector will actually do
 - Dual incentives to appease—> nefarious practices
- Performative change: Fake progress (top down not bottom up)
 - Creating new problems through “progress”
 - Questions to consider: How have people attempted to make solutions? What problems did they create? How should we approach these problems now?
- Color blind universalism
 - Justify differential treatment
 - Pacify activists (performance)
 - Parallel to Juneteenth as a federal holiday
 - Note: What happened in 1968 was most progressive the USA ever got in terms of “reform.” Note: Reform vs. Revolution
- Privatize Risk
 - Emphasis on Individual Responsibility
 - Use individualism/“hard work” as a justification for unequal outcomes
 - Treating unequal parties as “equal” is the greatest injustice
 -

How is the Housing System Behaving in Ways That Are Carceral? {DISCUSSION NOTES}

- Property rights are viewed as an expression of citizenship (conditional to express freedom as a citizen)
- Differentially target women of color (whether it be via avoidance or predatory inclusion) as a way to profit of their condition (also pre-determined)
- *Rely upon segregation and hierarchy to determine “value” of suburbs*
 - Persisting discrimination, does not deal with conditions
- Reification of “color-blind” and “equal” laws does not account for unequal conditions (instead it justifies and naturalizes cultural myths about blackness)
 - Reforms and changes were top down, not bottom up. Meaning, inequality still exists, but is harder to address.
- Color blind universalism: perpetuate and justify differential policy
 - Systemic inequality was never addressed and confronted
 - Masked by layers of time and reform, but flawed origins that relied upon racism where never fixed
- Policy and Law (changes) do not transform practice and perspective [limit of law]
- Public-Private Partnership//Formation of risk by race
- *Equal opportunity NOT same as Equal access (to fair treatment by law and policy)*
- Social “risk” (systemic) in public sphere, when transfer power to private sector (individualize risk to vulnerable)
- The Government tried to address economic market while voters and people demand change—> housing (gov needed to justify gutting social welfare... provide “equal” housing...so now those who need welfare are responsible for own state: it’s on “them,” not on the social dilemma
 - Blame beneficiary of welfare state//Justification to eliminate social welfare

***Race for Profit* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor**

How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership

By: Anna Nelson

Summary of Text:

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor is an African-American Studies assistant professor at Princeton University, as well as a writer and activist for the Black Lives Matter movement. In her book, *Race for Profit*, Taylor outlines a historical procession of racist practices in the housing market.²² Taylor focuses specifically on the shift from redlining practices of the early to mid-1900s, to new financial incentives to receive loans in the late 1900s. During this time, homeownership programs began looking at Black, poor, women as their *ideal* buyers instead of excluding them from the housing market as they did before. This new practice of predatory inclusion targets this demographic because these women have a higher likelihood of not being able to pay bills and therefore entering foreclosure. Explicit references to the demographic and their race in particular, however, transformed into implicit links between race and the geography and physical condition of Black homes.

Key Quotes:

- “Historian Nancy Kwak describes how the change in policy from federal redlining to inclusion shifted the priorities of civil rights advocates from ‘fair access to credit’ to ‘access to fair credit’”²³
- “The suggestion that Black equality in the real estate market could be achieved by the formal end to housing discrimination failed to take into account the very ways that racial inequality was structured and embedded within the architecture of the system of buying and selling real estate in the United States”²⁴
- “The end of redlining and the introduction of conventional real estate practices into the Black urban market ended one set of predatory practices, like homes for sale on land installment contracts (LICs), without fully resolving the conditions that gave rise to those practices in the first place”²⁵
- “For years after the *Brown* decision, courts and local officials stood idly by while southern officials established all-white “segregation academies” in a blatant flouting of the Court decision. It was not until 1968 that the Supreme Court ruled in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* that states must dismantle segregation ‘root and branch’”²⁶
- “In a classic formulation of postwar racial liberalism, exclusion from the normalizing institutions that governed life for white America was situated as the central problem for African Americans. Racial liberalism posited inclusion as the antidote to the crises created by exclusion”²⁷

²² Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

²³ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 6.

²⁴ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 7.

²⁵ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 7.

²⁶ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 15.

²⁷ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 17.

How This Connects to Research:

This narrative provided our first focused, in depth look into a single subsystem: housing. In this reading, we identified key carceral elements of the housing market.

The first key carceral element of housing is the predatory practice of inclusion. Inclusionary methods attempt to provide colorblind policy from the top down, without addressing the entirety of social problems and racism that exist in other spheres. By making the housing market inclusionary, policy makers discard their responsibility in perpetuating the problem of racial disparity and turn the blame back on the oppressed groups themselves. Homeownership programs can argue that minorities now have equal opportunity to own homes, but they are still missing payments, therefore, it must be the minority's fault. Furthermore, this type of logic can also be used to bolster a skeptical view of welfare.

The second key carceral element is the relationship between the private and public sector. By creating a top-down policy change without clear enforcement, the government entrusts the private sector with the responsibility of making social change and fixing the unequal, substandard housing. The private sector, however, is far more concerned with making profit, so they protect themselves by creating the colorblind, inclusionary practices discussed earlier and privatizing risk. Instead of keeping the risk of foreclosure spread across all parties participating in the buying/loaning process, banks place all of the risk on individual buyers, who will then be individually blamed if they cannot make their payments.

The last key element is performative change. Performative change is a change in policy or law that provides a sense of progress, but misidentifies the root issue, and therefore fails to provide a longstanding solution. Examples of these changes include the Fair Housing Act, which ended redlining, and the Housing and Urban Development Act (both of 1986) which began inclusionary practices. Performative change allowed for the government to please both the public, who are looking for social justice, and the private sector, who are looking to profit off of inequality.

Overall, the colorblind practices of equal opportunity in housing perpetuate inequality and misidentify root causes of racial disparity.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

The carceral elements of housing outlined above will now serve as an outline for acknowledging similar elements and patterns in other subsystems. We hypothesize that within each subsystem, the way in which inequality and carceral dimensions present themselves will be similar. Just as a tree forms branches in a similar way, we predict that the bifurcation of our social systems will create a pattern as well.

As we move forward with healthcare, education, credit, and labor, we will look for the elements of inclusion, privatization, colorblind practices, and performative change.

Segregated by Design by Mark Lopez

How Racially Coded Public Policy Upholds Inequality

By: Ria Dhingra

Summary of Film:

“Segregated by Design” [2019] is a short, animated, film based on the book *Color of Law* [2017] by Richard Rothstein.²⁸ Both the film and book cover the history of racial disparity in both housing policy and enforcement spanning the first half of the 20th century. The film in particular works to explain how the current segregated state of America (along with a number of other racially divided social dilemmas) are a direct product of unfair housing policies and practices from the early 20th century.

The film is broken into segments as followed: the forgotten racial history of the housing market, racist public policy, the creation and clearing of slums, state sponsored violence used to maintain segregation, the resulting racial wealth gap due to lack of housing equity, and overall effects of a segregated housing market on Black Americans. The film ends by proposing that housing practices during the 20th century behaved in ways that were fundamentally unconstitutional. Therefore, we today – as citizens – must acknowledge and understand this history in order to improve current conditions under color blind laws. Additionally, Rothstein asserts that upon taking accountability, we as citizens must demand housing policy that promotes equal opportunity, access, treatment, and compensation.

Key Quotes:

- “If federal programs were not, even to this day, reinforcing racial isolation...we might see many more inclusive communities.”
- “We’ve indulged in the comfortable delusion that our segregation has not resulted primarily from state action.”
- “Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments defined where whites and African Americans should live. Today’s residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and of otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but of unhidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States. The policy was so systematic and forceful that its effects endure to the present time.”
- “Private discrimination also played a role, but it would have been considerably less effective had it not been embraced and reinforced by government.”

How This Connects to Research:

Rothstein details how the housing market’s inequality originated and perpetrated itself into modern day. In doing so he highlights how the housing market behaves in a carceral manner in three key ways: implicit racism, explicit disparity, and state sponsored violence. He argues that implicit color-blind language coupled with explicit racism in housing practices contributes to inequality. He further claims that state sponsored violence in the form of riots and increased policing ratifies this inequality.

²⁸Mark Lopez, “Segregated by Design,” Segregated By Design, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.segregatedbydesign.com/>.

Racism in Housing:

De jure segregation at the federal, state, and local level led to an initial segregated America. This initial segregation was soon upheld through redlining, racially coded policies, and targeting Black Americans who lacked adequate housing and funds.

Effects of Bad Housing:

By having housing in undesirable areas whilst having to pay more, Black Americans today lack the generational wealth acquired by White Americans who had home equity. These conditions prevent Black Americans from affording higher education at the same rate of and quality as White Americans. A lack of equal access translates into lack of equal access into the job market, resulting in a wealth gap. This wealth gap impeded generational mobility and success, now maintaining segregation in an implicit way.

Upholding Myths with Brute Force

The wealth gap faced by Black Americans and the lack of Black homeownership today is justified by myths that Black Americans are unfit and bad homeowners. These myths are a result of Black Americans being concentrated in slums and then being blamed for the poor conditions in the slums. Rather than recognizing that Black disparities are a product of slums (conditions), it has become naturalized that Black Americans—through their behavior—cause slum like conditions and disparity.

These myths were first spread by real estate agents who profited off assigning more value to white suburbs in contrast to Black slums. Then, these myths were enforced by state sponsored violence when police did nothing to protect Black Americans who tried to enter suburban areas. Instead, cops “ushered” and even participated in riots to remove Black residents. State sponsored violence—such as facilitating riots against Black residents—upheld the myth of an unfit Black homeowner. With time. These myths became naturalized and reified in our culture—maintaining segregation subliminally.

Key Idea

Explicit racism is replaced with color-blind laws that promote exploitation and implicit racism. These implicit practices are then justified through racist myths that are naturalized and normalized by means of myth, state violence, time, and misattributing causes of conditions.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

Segregated by Design details how implicit racial segregation is upheld by a forgotten history of racially coded policy and reform. As we, in this study, work to uncover forgotten histories and make comparisons about policies and practices that uphold/perpetuate racially divided harm, this text provides us clear practices to look for. By searching for state sponsored violence, private exploitation of public inequality, and sources of shifting “blame” of inequality onto those who face it, we can find similarities across all subsystems.

As we move forward and look at other systems aside from housing, it will be imperative to analyze how racist public policy is upheld by “equal” private policy/reform. In doing so, one can understand why pervasive myths and racist justifications arose. In doing so, in looking for and analyzing state-sponsored violence and the performative public-private “reforms” that uphold inequality, one can find practices in subsystems that behave in a carceral manner. In highlighting carceral practices and looking for overlap in types of practices across ALL subsystems, we can then figure out how to eliminate carceral behaviors that uphold and cultivate racial inequality.

Housing Timeline: A Look at Carceral Dimensions

1791: 5th Amendment²⁹: treat all citizens fairly

1865 13th Amendment³⁰: abolish slavery and all aspects of it, or second-class citizenship

1868 14th Amendment³¹: treat all citizens equally

1896 Plessy v Ferguson³²: separate but equal

1930s 1st Civilian Public Housing Program³³: built separate projects for races

1954 Brown v Board³⁴: racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional

1962 JFK Executive Order³⁵: “ordered a ban on racial discrimination in any new, federally subsidized housing. The order fulfilled a long-standing campaign promise to wipe out housing discrimination with the “stroke of a pen.” Because the order was not retroactive, though, it was limited to a small percentage of the actual housing market. Even within this limited scope, the enforcement mechanisms of the executive order were ineffective, calling only for “public or private hearings for . . . compliance, conciliation and persuasion to cure violations by any person, firm, state or local agency.””

1964 Civil Rights Act³⁶: “banned discrimination in *any* federally subsidized housing with an important exception: homes purchased with an FHA-backed loan.”

- Title VI: “allow- ing federal officials to withdraw federal funds as a form of punishment against municipalities or localities engaging in discrimination.”

1968 HUD Act³⁷: Inclusionary practice for low-income people

1968 Kerner Commission Final Report³⁸ or the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: concluded that “that substandard housing was a recurring factor in the annual bout of riots that roiled American cities,” and identified segregation as the cause for public unrest, therefore calling for change

Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act)³⁹: stopped redlining

1968 Green v County School Board⁴⁰: “states must dismantle segregation “root and branch.””

²⁹ U.S. Const., amend. 5.

³⁰ U.S. Const., amend. 13.

³¹ U.S. Const., amend. 14.

³² Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

³³ Lopez, “Segregated by Design”.

³⁴ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 15.

³⁵ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 14.

³⁶ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 14.

³⁷ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 8.

³⁸ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 12.

³⁹ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 14.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Race For Profit*, 15.

The Carceral Dimensions of the Housing Sub-System

How Color-Blind Universalism Permits Public-Private Partnerships to Promote and Retain Inequality

By: Ria Dhingra

A Brief History of the American Housing Industry:

From the early 1900's till the mid 1960's, public policy itself—in the form of federal, state, and local government— was explicitly racially coded and worked to promote racial segregation. This was done in the forms of redlining, separated racial projects by the American Housing Authority, and subsidizing the development of suburbs by race. These exclusionary policies prevented Black Americans equal access to homeownership and spread racist rhetoric. In fact, real estate agents placed economic value on suburbs based on how segregated they were.

In the 1970's, a shift took place that broke the precedent of explicit racism and segregation in the housing market. This shift took place for two main reasons. First, many wealthy, White citizens were dissatisfied with public government and the condition of the welfare state. These citizens felt that welfare squandered and “handed out” resources to Black Americans. On the other side of the political spectrum, Black civil rights activists pushed for greater access to fair housing, as homeownership was seen as synonymous to citizenship. In order to appease both groups, public policymakers of the 1970s dispensed explicitly racial legal language and promoted “equal opportunity” for all citizens (regardless of race) to housing. While the normative goal of this shift toward colorblindness was to promote equality, the functional outcome was to appease groups demanding opposed, but equally radical, forms of change while maintaining the unequal practices that profited off of racial segregation .

Thus, federal aid and funding was provided to promote and enforce racial equality in housing, in response to distrust in the public government. Private contractors were then entrusted to build new affordable housing—a public-private partnership—an act that reflected the faith the public held within markets. This meant that while real estate agents previously viewed Black homeowners as a financial risk, they were now federally compensated if a family was unable to pay a mortgage. Suddenly, the very “riskiness” of Black American homeownership proved profitable. Public policy was then exploited by private sectors who controlled the majority of the housing market. Relying upon previous racial segregation, real estate agents took advantage of high demand and low supply of housing for Black Americans in order to upcharge them and/or sell them inadequate housing (and then to collect federal insurance if and when they defaulted on loans). It is also pertinent to note that by relying on a private housing market (one that spent 60 years profiting off of segregation and inequality) to now promote policies aimed at reform and “equality” was a conflict of interest of the highest magnitude. Private actors that historically profited off of segregation were neither motivated nor capable of eliminating it, especially in the absence of meaningful government oversight.

Today, in the 21st century, inequality in homeownership, generational wealth, and suburban racial composition is not simply a product of old policy. Instead, this inequality was and is systematically cultivated, reproduced, and protected by allowing the housing industry to privatize risk onto Black Americans. In doing so, the Black Americans who were once avoided as buyers, due to low income and inability to pay mortgages, are now *targeted* for the same reason—and subsequently profited off of. With Black homeowners unable to pay off mortgages, wealth and housing inequality was retained and compounded over time. (The “risk” shifts from

real estate agents and the government onto Black Americans themselves). The shift from exclusion to predatory inclusion for Black Americans in regards to housing still produces segregation whilst also normalizing and reifying myths of the “unfit” Black homeowner to justify said segregation.

The Carceral Dimensions of the Housing System:

As mentioned in an earlier essay, the Carceral State is a complex interaction of all social systems that result in and create punitive orientations rooted in differences. Simply put, the Carceral State is a social order that produces and maintains logic, ideology, practices, and structures related to racialized hierarchy, punishment, and security.

Therefore, Carceral dimensions—or Carceral Practices—in individual social systems can be identified and defined as practices and policies that produce and uphold inequality, create hierarchy, and punish those at the bottom for being responsible for a set of conditions that negatively impact them.

Looking Specifically at the Housing Sub-System:

During the 1960’s, there was a distinct transition between explicit racial policy and practice to implicit racial policy and practice in the housing industry. This “reformative” shift meant there were also shifts from public to private responsibility, from racially coded laws to “color-blind” ones, and from exclusion of risky (low income, Black) homeowners to targeting them. These shifts were then upheld, maintained, and enforced by the state.

The “shifts” in policy and practice that facilitated the transition from explicit racism to implicit racism in housing—still resulting in inequality and now contributing to justifications for state punishment—are the carceral dimensions in housing. This means that private responsibility, color blind laws, and predatory inclusion of Black Americans are all carceral dimensions of the housing sub-system. Additionally, each of these three carceral dimensions can be broken down and described in further detail based on their effects and interactions.

Some Key Carceral Characteristics in the Housing System (Both in Policy and Practice):

- Transition from exclusion to “predatory inclusion”
 - Profit off of Black economic vulnerability
- Public-private partnership
 - Providing federal aid to private companies and expecting them to promote “equality” despite them profiting off of a racial hierarchy
- Privatizing risk and individualizing responsibility onto Black Americans for poor living Conditions
 - Widespread myths that there is equal opportunity to be a homeowner
 - Lack of equal access to quality homes
 - Shift focus and blame for inadequacies onto individuals who experience structural harm
- Performative Change
 - Top-Down initiatives that do not examine the conditions that created and continue to cultivate inequality
- Legal, color-blind universalist rhetoric
- State violence as a tool to uphold implicit segregation and racism

Specific Connections to Other Subsystems:

Detailing how each social system influences, affects, or is affected by other spheres will present a degree of overlap. Mapping this overlap alongside mapping an overlap of carceral dimensions can produce a framework that serves as a basis for identifying “key points” of change. Therefore, for each system we examine, we hope to list relations to other systems from the perspective of the specific system we are studying. This is to say that we shall list connections to other subsystems based on importance, relevancy, and order of the system we are examining.

Housing and Healthcare: A lack of equity acquired by home ownership takes a toll on Black American’s economic health, which manifests itself as adverse physical health effects. Additionally, stress plays a role in creating worsening chronic conditions.

Housing and Credit: Eliminating the public welfare state in favor of increased opportunity to homeownership reduced Black American’s access to credit. Additionally, Black Americans paid more and got less when it came to quality of housing. Finally, a lack of home equity prevented the accumulation of generational wealth.

Housing and Labor: Due to lacking adequate housing and—in turn—education and credit—Black Americans were often forced to work constantly in order to pay bills or to buy a home. This results in having less time to attain education and jobs with increased requirements—segregating the labor market.

Housing and Education: A lack of generational wealth and suburban comfort due to lacking home equity results in less access to affordable and quality education.

Housing and Criminal Justice: State sponsored violence often facilitated or participated in riots against desegregation. Additionally, Black Americans were criminalized for not being able to pay mortgages or bills on time. Police also acted as agents of the state when it came to clearing the slums.

Moving Forward in Relation to Our Study:

Due to numerous texts, such as Reskin, Rothstein and Davis, citing unequal and unfair access to Housing as a root cause of discrimination and racial inequality in America, this was the first sub-system explored in our study.

As we progress forward, we expect to find similar transitions from explicit racism to implicit racism in each social sphere. In the case of Housing, the modern day carceral dimensions were the changes in practice and policy that facilitated the precedent shift. When examining other subsystems, looking at the transition between explicit and implicit racism will be a place to start when trying to identify respective carceral dimensions. Additionally, we expect an overlap in the carceral dimensions between subsystems.



Section Three

The Healthcare System



A Brief Summary:

This section, like the last, examines a social institution in the context of abolition. This section includes two reading summaries and a collection of discussion notes. All content included is not a presentation of findings, but a starting point for future discussion and talking points for conversations detailing overlapping carceral themes visible across the carceral state.

The analysis here continues to support the hypothesis, and the “carceral dimensions” (punitive and “incarceratory” perspective, practices, and policies) in healthcare resemble those in the housing system. This pattern is evidence of interconnectedness within social spheres, together composing the carceral state. The introduction of complexity, linking racism and economic inequalities in social spheres together, is not meant to dissuade activists. Yes, the problem is bigger and more complicated than what meets the eye.

However, in connectedness, there is hope. Hope that activists do not abandon their efforts, but re-direct them. Hope that limited progress insofar is not a product of aversiveness to change, but a focus on the wrong kinds of changes. Targeting carceral dimensions (across all social spheres simultaneously) is the only possible way to put a halt to the continued harms of the carceral state. Stopping a system (one that reinforces and perpetuates itself) requires more than changing an individual policy or practice; it requires consciousness towards the connections between policies and practices. In interconnectedness there is hope, in coming together—in connecting—there is care.

A Working List of “Carceral Dimensions” To Track in Reading/Analysis of The Social Institutions Composing the Carceral State

{Intended Purpose of These Discussion Notes: Educational, for Lesson Plan Development}

How is the Healthcare System Behaving in Ways That Are Carceral? ***{DISCUSSION NOTES}***

Consider: What bifurcations might repeat?

- Risk: individualize and privatize (designate individuals)
 - Equal color-blind laws and equal human bodies logic (top-down) means explanation for disparities in health fall onto on the individual group and their lifestyle
 - Mechanism by which problem is misidentified
 - Biological level (myth)
 - Structural impersonal stuff is blamed on lifestyle (effected actors) “CHOICES”
 - Justify Vulnerability
 - Failure of personal responsibility instead of blame system
 - Risk reduction (shift burden)

Emergent Property of Myth of Black Criminality/Epigenetics/Inadequacies

- Profiling in Health
- Use statistics to justify and reinforce myths about health (rationalize)
- Bolster and reify myths (law and practice)—> with time, we forget the origin of said myths

A Brief Summation of Discussion Notes:

By: Ria Dhingra and Anna Nelson

{Intended Purpose of These Discussion Notes: Educational, for Lesson Plan Development}

We discussed that colorblindness and race-based remedies are, in fact, two sides of the same problematic coin: While colorblindness, in erasing race from law, obscures the persistence of unequal structural conditions to which that law applies, race-based medicine biologizes these same conditions, making it appear as if race *caused* poor health.

We saw a similar pattern in housing law, where the elimination of racial language from zoning, covenants, and mortgage agreements (colorblindness) did not eliminate racism in housing conditions; rather, racial terminology was simply replaced by apparent ‘synonyms’ (urban, low-income, public housing, etc.) and adjudicated in ways that only tended to perpetuate earlier harms (synergistic amplification). At the same time, race-targeted policies (like the HUD act) constituted a form of ‘predatory inclusion’ whereby the profitability of the real estate industry was in fact predicated on the likelihood of Black homeowners defaulting on loans and confirming their ‘risky’ financial status. Risk, once racialized, paid.

We then discussed risk as a doubly carceral mechanism insofar as it, first, takes structurally-based forms of vulnerability and translates them into a financial problem for the market (vulnerability = profit); in doing so (translating vulnerability into a monetary amount) risk also translates public into private problems (debt of the “risky” person, credit for the bank/lender). Risk, then, is a way of treating a ‘bottom-up’ (or emergent) set of problems from the top-down (as if they were just one thing). Rather than dealing with the structural conditions on the ground that make it hard for a Black female welfare recipient to make payments, policy-makers turn her inability to make payments into a financial ‘instrument’ to be bought, sold, profited from, etc. (Again, racialized risk pays.)

In turn, we talked about the complexity of medicine, in particular, when dealing with questions of systemic racism. Medicine is especially tricky because racism clearly does affect the body (which is its own system, as when we speak of ‘systemic’ health) and permeates the everyday experience of embodiment. Rather than confirming the ‘essential’ basis of race, however, this fact—and the health disparities related to it—show that racialization, which is a social process, has biological and physiological effects. In cybernetic terms, this means that the racialized ‘output’ of various social subsystems (like housing or education) is the ‘input’ of bodily life. The bodily ‘outputs’, which often take the form of health disorders (hypertension, etc.), thus do not look like the inputs—or are not related synergistically to them—but instead they take on certain ‘emergent properties.’ These properties—renamed racial ‘symptoms’ or ‘pathology’ or disorders—can then be “treated” by the ethno-pharmacogenomics industry as if they are “caused” by race.

Finally, we touched on the way in which emergent properties do not resemble or amplify (synergistically) the conditions that give rise to them (i.e., hypertension does not *look* like a late rent payment). This fact makes it easy (a) to act as if the emergent effect is caused by the visible thing that late rent payments (socio-spatial input) and hypertension (bodily output) have in common—i.e., Blackness. For this reason, the complex/non-linear causality of emergent properties (what we called the absence of a ‘smoking gun’) makes them (b) excellent candidates for racial myth-making (e.g., “Black people are at special risk of health problems,” “are risky investments for a bank” - or in another context, “are at special risk of becoming criminals.”)

***Race Based Medicine and the Spectra of Debt* by Nadine Ehlers and Leslie R. Hinkson**
How Racially Targeted “Reform” Compounds Harm and Perpetuates the Conditions that Cultivate it
 By: Ria Dhingra

Summary of Text:

Published in 2017, *Subprime Health*⁴¹ is an interdisciplinary collection of essays that examines the concept of race-based medicine and its relationship to debt. Editors Nadine Ehlers and Leslie R. Hinkson each explore the role of race and racism in the history of the American healthcare system while arguing that race-based medicine is not an adequate reform for disparities in the healthcare system. Instead, race-based medicine biologizes the persistence of unequal structures and conditions to make it seem as if race *causes* poor health rather than race being affected by—and manifesting—adverse and unequal health conditions.

In the introduction entitled, *Race Based Medicine and the Spectra of Debt*, the editors take time to explain racial disparities when attempting to access to adequate healthcare and the adverse effects of said inequalities. Then, the editors define debt as a matter of owing money, goods, and services (possibility as reparations) and define indebtedness as a state of dependency when having to owe something. Finally, the editors define race-based medicine as healthcare that relies upon race to study disease, administer pharmaceuticals, and rationalize different forms of care. Many view race-based medicine as a way to repay health debts experienced by Black Americans, while others view the practice as placing the debt and responsibility for poor health onto Black Americans.

Upon laying out these definitions, the editors suggest that viewing race-based medicine in regards to its relationship with debt allows for a more holistic and sociopolitical analysis of a healthcare reform instead of focusing solely on biology. By looking at the relationship between debt and race-based medicine, one can fully understand the motivations (benevolence, self-interest, upholding ontological narratives, and reducing government spending) and the costs (perpetuating an ontological narrative, withholding direct funding from communities in need, reinforce social divisions) for the practice.

Overall, the editors examine the history of racism and healthcare and analyze the motivations, costs, affects, externalities, and relations to debt in race-based medicine. In doing so, the editors argue that race-based medicine racks up more debt than it seems to absolve, maintaining the institutions and biological fallacies that led to racial disparity in the first place.

Key Quotes:

- “Despite the persistence of racial inequities, the past three decades have seen an ideological shift from race-conscious to color-blind policies throughout American society. This shift has been evidenced not just in popular opinion but also in the judicial system.”⁴²
- “The very bestowal of freedom established the indebtedness of the freed through a calculus of blame and responsibility... Blacks showing they were able to take on the onus of accountability, self-reliance, and self-responsibility—the traits associated with liberal individuality.”⁴³
- “Race-based medicine, when it is understood in this sense, is scientifically flawed, commercially motivated, and politically dangerous.”⁴⁴

⁴¹Nadine Ehlers and Leslie R. Hinkson, *Subprime Health: Debt and Race in U.S. Medicine*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

⁴²Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 14.

⁴³Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 17.

⁴⁴Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 18.

- “Race is often framed in essentialist terms as a fixed biological reality.”⁴⁵
- “The effect was biological, not the origins.”⁴⁶
- “Race-based medicine perversely attempts to rectify a past debt that was often produced through biomedical knowledge, research, and practice in the first place.”⁴⁷

How This Connects to Research:

When reading *Race Based Medicine and the Spectra of Debt*, three main throughlines became apparent in regards to how the healthcare system has flaws and carceral dimensions similar to other subsystems: color blind universalism, purposeful misidentification of conditions that cause racial inequality in the first place, and the production and exploitation of vulnerability.

Color Blind Universalism (1)

Neoliberal, color-blind rhetoric in law shifts blame for health disparities onto Black Americans by proposing a “level playing field” of equal opportunity. In this case, Black Americans are to blame for adverse health conditions due to lack of responsibility or poor lifestyle choices. By using color-blind law, the false premise of “equal legal opportunity” ignores the reality of unequal access to fair, safe, and affordable health care.

However, race-based medicine is no better than color blind policy in regards to health. Race-based medicine approaches healthcare by looking at race, promoting an ontological narrative that being a certain race “causes” baseline health disparities and certain health conditions.

The editors’ note that both color blind universalism and race-based medicine ignore the unfair social conditions that contribute to poor health in Black Americans and instead shift responsibility and “cause” of poor health on Blackness itself. Color blind universalism blames the lifestyle of Black Americans for poor health while race-based medicine blames genetics. Neither approach examines how and why disparities emerge, but instead focus on shifting blame and correlating it to race. This prevents true change in improving the health of Black Americans and providing them access to equal healthcare institutions.

Perpetuating the Problem (2)

Race-Based Medicine presents itself as a reform that inadvertently (or often intentionally) reifies Blackness as the cause of poor and unequal health disparities. By misidentifying the problem, the true causes of poor health amongst Black Americans, race-based medicine perpetuates narratives that blame Black Americans and contributes to/does not change the conditions that cause poor health. Now, vulnerability is compounded and risk is racialized and individualized.

Exploitative Targeting (3)

By correlating impersonal conditions that cause poor health as an individual risk indicated by the race of a patient, the privatization of vulnerability to poor health can be exploited by healthcare practices for wealth. Now, Black Americans can either be ignored or denied access to adequate healthcare on the premise of poor lifestyle choices, or they can become

⁴⁵ Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 19.

⁴⁶ Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 20.

⁴⁷ Ehlers and Hinkson, *Subprime Health*, 26.

targets for pharmaceutical companies who recognize the demand for treatment. Either way, Black economic wealth is negatively impacted, leading to adverse physical effects.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

The most critical takeaways from this introduction were detailing how reform can perpetuate the problem by misidentifying its direct cause and the definition of “race” provided by Ehlers and Hinkson.

As mentioned earlier, this introduction details how conditions of harm are first upheld by racism, responded to by color-blind approaches, and “reformed” by race targeting. This chain reifies and justifies the initial racism, perpetuating harm and placing debt, cause, and blame on harmed parties.

Additionally, when presenting their argument Ehlers and Hinkson take time to define race. The editors say that while race is a social construct used as a means of and logic for inequality, that the general public views it as a scientific, biological reality. By using race to define a body, to justify inequality, and to biologize harm, a social construct transfigures into a definition described by unequal political treatment. Meaning that our current definitions and uses of race inherently uphold racism.

Moving forward, this complex definition of race and understanding how both color-blind and race targeted reform is harmful can be used when analyzing and studying racial disparities and carceral dimensions in other subsystems.

***Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts**
Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty
 By: Anna Nelson

Summary of Text:

Author Dorothy Roberts, American scholar and social justice advocate, describes a detailed narrative of the history of birth control alongside race and the eugenics movement in her book *Killing the Black Body*⁴⁸.

As accessible contraceptives gained momentum in the nineteenth century, Black men argued that birth control was “race suicide”; they wanted Black women to produce more children and bring power to the minority⁴⁹. Conversely, White men believed that birth control should regulate Black women’s birth rates because they were “unfit” mothers. Simultaneously, they urged White women to increase the White population⁵⁰. Although the birth control movement began “as a crusade to free women,” men quickly intruded with eugenic ideals and turned birth control into “a method of sound social policy”⁵¹. As the social policies compounded, birth control became, as Roberts quotes Angela Davis, “a ‘right’ for the privileged” and “a ‘duty’ for the poor”⁵².

In order to establish social policies, physicians and politicians used discriminatory health and welfare institutions to coerce Black women’s choices. Due to a disproportionate lack of access to sound medical care, Black women had higher rates of maternal mortality and a more dire need to control their pregnancies⁵³. Additionally, many of these women were on welfare and had dire economic needs that could be met by the economic incentives accompanying sterilization and Norplant⁵⁴. White women did not use birth control under the same circumstances or prejudice as Black women. Black women were forced to overlook the dangers of procedures and expose themselves to risks those White women had the medical and economic privileges of ignoring.

In an attempt to correct disparities like early pregnancy, low achievement, and poverty within Black communities, policy makers confused cause and effect. By blaming disparities on reproduction instead of social systems, white men distracted from the true “political, social and economic forces that maintain[ed]” their own higher status⁵⁵. The same health and welfare institutions used to coerce Black women’s reproduction created the issues birth control was meant to solve. In using extralegal disparities within these institutions, policy makers avoided seeming explicitly racist.

Key Quotes:

- “What began at the turn of the century as a crusade to free women from the burdens of compulsory and endless childbearing became by World War II a method of sound social [gender neutral] policy”⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. (Vintage, 1998).

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 84.

⁵⁰ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 60,64.

⁵¹ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 58.

⁵² Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 58.

⁵³ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 101.

⁵⁴ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 111.

⁵⁵ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 102.

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 58.

- “Eugenic sterilization enforced social judgment cloaked in scientific terms”⁵⁷
- “By identifying procreation as the cause of black people’s condition, they divert attention away from the political, social and economic forces that maintain America’s racial order”⁵⁸

How This Connects to Research:

Roberts identifies that race was confused as a cause for early pregnancy, low achievement, and poverty. Race, however, has no biological or logical basis. It is a construct and therefore a false premise for racist assumptions. The true *cause* for disparities in pregnancy, achievement, and wealth are *racist* practices that exist in social spheres beyond healthcare. For example, as our other subsystem-specific readings will show, Black women were and are given less fair access to credit, jobs, higher education and birth control *because* they are Black. Then, the outcomes of early pregnancy, low achievement and poverty are then used as “proof” that Black people are less capable than their White counterparts, and therefore should not have children. These outcomes, however, are produced and reproduced by a set of social practices, not by Black bodies. They are not caused by race. In our main text, *Subprime Health*, the editors describe the same faulty logic of confusing race as a cause or effect of disparity in the healthcare system.

The doctors in this book provided healthcare through race-based medicine. They targeted reproduction as a means for indirectly racist policy. Race-based practices are a key element of the carceral state.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

This supplementary text is meant to serve as a specific example of how race-based medicine enforces the false premise of biological race and racial health disparity.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 70.

⁵⁸ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 102.

The Carceral Dimensions of the Healthcare Industry
Race Based Medicine and Color Blind Equal Opportunity
 By: Anna Nelson

A Brief History of the American Healthcare Industry:

Much like the Housing Market, the Healthcare Industry also made a shift in the 1960s that was presented as being intended to be more equitable for African Americans. However, while the housing sector shifted the language of its policies away from explicit racism towards colorblind equal opportunity measures, the health sector developed its own products and market around race-based health policy. This shift relied on the false premise of “race” as a biological factor in individual health, rather than as a mode in which social factors are experienced and lived in the body. Race is commonly understood, then, as a set of physical differences that distinguish people in relation to their ancestry and susceptibility to illness. This concept, however, has no biological basis. It is a construct that displaces social realities onto biological ones. There is no one trait that makes blackness or whiteness or any color. Therefore, the idea that people are inherently, biologically or socially different based on their race is false.

In the early twentieth century, racist health policy continued the legacy of earlier racism by taking the form of segregation and explicit refusal of care. However, as the Civil Rights movement grew, new policies attempted to reverse this inequality by creating apparently equal access to care with treatment options suited according to racial differences.

Race is an organizing *social* principle for distinguishing between people. That is, race registers the differentiation and the effects of differentiation (disparity) and constitutes one way in which these differences are lived, but as such, it is not the *cause* of differentiation or disparities—and still less, of their harmful effects. Racism, on the contrary, clearly *is such* a cause and can be defined as a set of practices premised on the belief that one social grouping is better than another and is thereby enjoys justifiable or “natural” advantages. These advantages are seen to have a natural basis in the body, with racism centering on the difference between those with darker or lighter skin. In the context of healthcare, racism naturalizes—or more specifically, biologizes—disparities in health that are a function of racist social practice, such as higher likelihood of developing hypertension. In this case, hypertension, as a biological outcome that correlates with race, is treated as if race *caused* it to appear. Race based medicine- built on the false premise that race is a biological factor in the susceptibility to disease that should determine a course of treatment, rather than an embodied reality of racist conditions of social life. The real cause of adverse biological outcomes, of course, is not race, but the situational differences society places around people it designates as belonging to different “races.”

Connection to our Research:

By basing their new, equal policy on race, the Healthcare industry created top-down reform that completely overlooked the real cause for health disparities- racist social conditions as seen in other subsystems.

The Carceral Dimensions of the Healthcare System:

The shift toward race-based medical practice was facilitated by carceral logics similar to those that informed the Housing Market’s adaptation of colorblind laws and policies. The

carceral dimensions in play here include private-public relations, supposedly colorblind practices, and performative or superficial changes that leave underlying causes untreated.

The private-public relations of the government created an environment in which private companies targeted vulnerable communities, and turned that vulnerability into each individual's private asset or liability. The commodity form of vulnerability was called risk. Just as homeownership programs looked at individual mortgages and labeled them as high risk of foreclosure, healthcare businesses looked at individual bodies and labeled them as high risk for disease or injury. By placing all of the risk in or on already vulnerable individuals, they not only exacerbated existing problems, but also made vulnerability into a profitable good.

The shift from exclusionary practices to colorblind equal opportunity likewise targeted vulnerable, risky, populations of color and reinforced the concept of "race"—in this case, as that which was to blame for various ailments. When doctors acted as though each population had equal access to healthcare, they ignored the conditions created outside of healthcare that cause health issues like product availability, clean water and pollution (issues usually grouped under the heading of environmental racism). So, when populations that are exposed to these conditions still had health disparities, doctors and the industry attributed it to their race, and used the disparities of biological outputs between races (injury or disease) to prove that there was a basic biological disparity between races as well. Thus, the rhetoric of "equal opportunity" or inclusionary practices only made these vulnerable populations easy targets for social blame and medical marketing alike.

Lastly, insofar as the inclusionary pretext of race-based medicine created no substantive shift in social conditions, they amount to merely performative changes in the medical system. They did not acknowledge the bottom up—indeed, the systemic—effects of racism, and therefore neither identified nor addressed the true cause of health disparities. Nonetheless, these changes kept the private sector happy by allowing them to continue reaping profits, while making it appear that they were honoring and responding to citizens demanding change.

Each of these elements contributes to perpetuating racism and racist policies, making them key to the perpetuation of the carceral state as well.

Specific Connections to Other Subsystems:

Healthcare and Housing: Rural areas or low-income areas do not have the same income nor property tax money to afford or staff hospitals and clinics like that of higher-class areas. .

Healthcare and Education: While expensive and large higher education universities like UW Madison offer student healthcare packages, hospitals, and clinics, those who do not attend large universities or higher education at all may find it much more difficult to locate and afford those resources.

Healthcare and Credit: Without access to credit, health emergencies and large medical bills may require different loans that result in longer payments and higher interest.

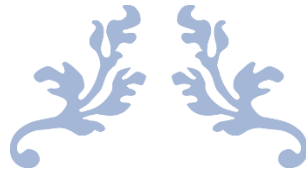
Healthcare and Labor: Health insurance is often extraordinarily expensive to pay out of pocket, but many people receive insurance through their employer. If lower paying jobs or non-career jobs do not pay insurance, their employees may also not be able to afford health care on their own, increasing the class divide.

Healthcare and Criminal justice: As discussed in *Killing the Black Body*⁵⁹, the crackdown on drugs that began with Nixon's "War on Drugs" affected how mothers of color were seen by the healthcare and criminal justice system as animalistic or unevolved. Mothers on crack, specifically, were treated as criminals before humans and not provided with proper healthcare.

Moving Forward in Relation to Our Study:

This section has shown there is a difference between race-based policies and color-blind equal opportunity that requires further scrutiny and clarification in future sections. While these two ideas are contrasting in approach, they work towards the same goal.

⁵⁹ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. (Vintage, 1998).



Section Four

The Education System



A Brief Summary:

This section, like the prior two, continues to examine social institutions in the context of abolition. For this section, there are two reading summaries, collection of discussion notes, a reflection by professor Diran, and a historical timeline mapping the origins of carceral dimensions. As always, all content included is not a presentation of findings, but a starting point for future discussions.

As we move into this section, a recurring list of carceral dimensions, alongside a concrete definition of the term is developed. We hope this section in particular (as education has always inherently been political) can be a topic of discussion in classrooms (provided the content is formatted like a lesson plan or assigned to a reading group

A Working List of “Carceral Dimensions” To Track in Reading/Analysis of The Social Institutions Composing the Carceral State

{Intended Purpose of These Discussion Notes: Educational Purposes for Lesson Plan Development}

Patterns/Carceral Dimensions:

- Exclusionary vs inclusionary methods
- Public vs private partnership
 - Individualize and profit of risk
- Color blind universalism
 - Need to look at mechanism for discrimination
 - Perpetuate racist policy b/c race isn't named
 - Punitive logic
 - Blame race for things race just registers as effects
 - Race does not cause anything
 - Race is the effect of differentiation
 - Deal with conditions because of race but race does not cause conditions
 - Feedback mechanisms (cybernetics)
 - Non-linear cause and effect
 - Not a smoking gun “point” or a reason
 - Simplified and forced linear narrative

Note: Carceral dimensions are dimensions of a system that enforce, uphold, and produce inequality and punitive logic. Most of these carceral dimensions have their origins in the transition from explicit public racism to implicit privatized racism (institutionalize).

How is the Education System Behaving in Ways That Are Carceral? {DISCUSSION NOTES}

Consider: What bifurcations might repeat?

- Color Blind Policy
- Targeting
- Public/Private
- Performative Change
- Inclusionary vs. Exclusionary
 - Value of an institution is dependent on segregation (Continues today)

Inequality today is a product of unfair practices and laws. However, by now, these behaviors are institutionalized and hidden under a color-blind blanket. When a state founded on racial apartheid decided to disavow that language—it maintains forms of inequality by handing responsibility to the private sector (who profit off of segregation). Therefore, the social actors whose livelihoods depend on racism are then expected to “fix” racism. Blame is now shifted, policy looks “inclusive” and individualized responsibility for inequality (state sanctioned system) falls on those most impacted by it. Tracking how inequality is produced (both historically and the current carceral dimensions of a system) allows us—as individuals—to combat inequality today.

***Cutting School* by Noliwe Rooks**
Privatization, Segrenomics, and the End of Public Education
 By: Anna Nelson

Summary of Text:

The author of *Cutting School*⁶⁰, Noliwe Rooks, is an African Studies professor at Brown University and a contributor to media publishers such as the New York Times and Washington Post. *Cutting School*, published in 2017, won a nonfiction award from the Hurston/Wright foundation. Rooks is currently researching the connections between capitalism, land, food and cannabis under a Kaplan Fellowship.

Her introduction of *Cutting School* explains the “segrenomics” of American education. Segrenomics, as Noliwe defines, is “the business of profiting specifically from high levels of racial and economic segregation”⁶¹. Segrenomics in American education explains the key connections between disparities in wealth and disparities in school facilities, materials, curriculum, and teacher training. Rooks argues that racial integration in schools is not enough to combat these disparities; America needs *economic integration* as well. In arguing this, she notes the major historical events and practices that contributed to segrenomics and current misconceptions surrounding it. Some of these misconceptions include the belief that Black people do not value education, that poverty has no influence on school quality, that racism is a problem of the past, and that the education system is “broken,” rather than built on segrenomics.

One major shift in policy that Rooks explains is the shift to privatizing schools and the growing entrepreneurial interest in education. The main shift occurred during the Reagan administration when a task force published a review of the dilapidated American school system and its faults. The solution was seen to reside in smarter business decisions around education, and since that report, funds have shifted from public hands to private, resulting in profit-based motives for curricular and other changes, as well as deregulation of the financial side of education.

Privatization and segrenomics is detrimental to the public school system and only exacerbates racial disparities in life chances pertaining to education, health, and income.

Key Quotes:

- “The upshot of all this activity was that racial and economic inequality—and segregation—have essentially become the business partners of so-called public education in America.”⁶²
- “Far too many people consider the act of talking about structural racism— analyzing it, discussing it, or just pointing out that it exists— to be racist in and of itself.”⁶³
- “The default response is often that it can most easily be solved by the victims, who simply need to change their beliefs, their frame of reference, and their behavior. Structural forces are largely overlooked.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Noliwe Rooks, *Cutting School: The segrenomics of American Education*. (New York The New Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 16.

⁶² Rooks, *Cutting School*, 30.

⁶³ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 33.

⁶⁴ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 34.

- As James Baldwin once wrote, “Words like freedom, justice, democracy are not common concepts; on the contrary, they are rare. People are not born knowing what these are. It takes enormous and, above all, individual effort to arrive at the respect for other people that these words imply.”⁶⁵

How This Connects to Research:

The American education system is an important space for cultural change, and learning is the crux of progress. Therefore, American schools are responsible for providing facilities, curriculum and teachers that promote this change. The schools cannot create effective change, however, if they are in need of change themselves. As seen in Rook’s list of policies and practices, carceral elements such as privatization, performative change, colorblindness and inclusion exist in the education system.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

We plan on discussing this text alongside a supplementary reading in order to identify specific carceral elements in education. We will then see how well these elements fit into our pattern of elements curated from the housing and healthcare subsystems. In adding this subsystem to our repertoire, we aim to strengthen our evidence for already recognized patterns and identify new carceral elements as well.

⁶⁵ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 34

A Brief Summation of Discussion Notes: On Cutting School

By: Ingrid Diran and Ria Dhingra

{Intended Purpose of These Discussion Notes: Educational, for Lesson Plan Development}

In our conversation on *Cutting School*, we discussed the relationship between public-private sector partnerships and the shift from race-based to colorblind policy. This relation can be described as follows:

- In the 50's and 60's, the public demands for change (from both above and below) towards policies tied to racial relations, force the US. Government to address these demands. However, the government entrusts the private sector with delivering on the promise of change, even when the private sector is the primary beneficiary of the problem (conflict of interests).
 - What happens? The private sector does business with its bottom line in mind, not focusing on the public good. However, they are able to obtain money via government (tax-funded) policies or contracts (e.g., real estate industry using FHA insured loans or business using stimulus dollars from 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act)
- What takes place in the process of entrusting private actors to take on public problems is complex.
 - First, it requires an act of translation: thinking in monetary terms what are in fact social problems.
 - Second, it privatizes and thereby individualizes the scale at which change happens (e.g., progress/failure is assessed in terms of individual homeowners/lenders or individual SAT test takers)—we called this “misrecognizing” or misconstruing the problem (and, thereby, dooming the solution). The right answer to the wrong question doesn't help solve the right question.
 - Third, government policy's supposed beneficiaries (e.g., Black homeowners or students of color) and those entrusted with executing or distributing benefits (realtors or education investors) are often at odds. This is because private sector folks use the policy in a way that benefits their business, which means treating the supposed “beneficiaries” of policies as customers. The goal here remains private profit from the transaction, not the public good (if a “customer” benefits, that is incidental).
- Hence as Rooks puts it: “While some things changed between the mid-twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first, it is still the case that in the United States it is just not possible to fully understand the role, success, and proposed function of education [or housing or healthcare] without weaving a tale inclusive of how segregation, race, and economics have combined to become the story of public education [or public housing or public health] in America.”
- Further: Rooks' book shows the connections between past and present business and philanthropic interests in the education sector and the necessity of having the high levels of racial and economic segregation consistently required for their often-experimental educational strategies to be tested. There have been few periods in American history when the success of business and philanthropic interests in education did not rely on high levels of racial and economic segregation.
 - A pattern of cyclical regularity has emerged wherein powerful interests “plunder” public education dollars earmarked for poor students of color in order to enrich

certain powerful individuals and their business interests. That is then followed by a period during which those same funds are “hoarded” and primarily used to educate students who are white and relatively privileged.

- There have been moments when we have had the collective will, funding, and infrastructure in place at the same time to successfully educate non-white, non-wealthy children. However, those moments are few and far between.
 - [translation: the philanthropic and business interest in education has been tied to experimentation—which requires a guinea pig who don’t have a say in being tested. These guinea pigs are supplied by the poor, esp. students of color. And keeping them poor ensures a steady supply of future guinea pigs.]
- So, the parties entrusted with fixing social problems are often the primary beneficiaries of these problems, and only profit from their worsening.
 - **Carceral Turn:** At the same time, since the problem is viewed as one of economics and of dollars well or poorly spent, those who are targeted and preyed on by (housing or education or healthcare) capitalists are
 - (a) **blamed** for not improving their lives (i.e., blamed for the success of the industries that have used public money to make the policy profitable for themselves) and
 - (b) deemed **risky investments for the future**. This more speculative moment justifies disinvestment/abandonment of poor communities of color because of their unworthiness as homeowners, students, or citizens - framing them, instead, as welfare queens, dropouts, or criminals. This is also how **racism** is depersonalized and **becomes a market principle**.
- A systems-theory view will focus on relation between *Police Violence and Policy Violence* (“Slow murder by other means”)
- According to Rooks, much of our contemporary conversation around how and why Black Lives Matter has focused most specifically on the lack of judicial response to police murders of unarmed Black people and on the seemingly unchecked growth of the prison industrial complex in the United States.
- Yet there is another story to be told about the relationship between our broken educational system and larger issues of social justice. The most high-profile cases associated with the emergence and growth of the Black Lives Matter movement are synonymous with cities, towns, and states that either have aggressively fought desegregating their traditional public schools or have downsized their traditional educational systems and replaced them with a variety of alternative educational plans. This is slow murder by other means.

What's Wrong with Accountability by the Numbers? By Richard Rothstein
 and *Grading Education* by Richard Rothstein, Rebecca Jacobson and Tamara Wilder
 By: Anna Nelson and Ria Dhingra

Summary of Text:

Richard Rothstein is an author and academic focused on economics and segregation in housing and education. He is an affiliate of the Economic Policy Institute and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund senior fellow. In his two articles, he questions the need for quantitative measures of qualitative subjects like learning. A school with good numbers on paper is not necessarily a “good” school for all students. For example, a school that is low income and high mobility may look worse than a high-income school when it comes to test scores, but they provide more extracurricular classes, have better one-on-one time with students, and spend time teaching children what they are most interested in, not just math and reading. Test based accountability ignores all of these extra factors that play a role in children’s education. It provides a “narrowly quantitative incentive” that results in a distortion of educational goals across the nation.⁶⁶ Rothstein argues that instead of relying purely on low quality standard test scores, America should shift to a broader system of accountability that considers both quantitative test scores and qualitative reviews of schools.

Furthermore, this system of accountability should be expanded to include all other “institutions that support our children.”⁶⁷ Rothstein notes the importance of a systemic approach to education, including all facilities and community members that are involved with child development both in and out of school. This application of systems theory is a strong example of the approach we are taking on abolition with. It explains the importance of external conditions on education, which can also be applied to the importance of external conditions on incarceration.

In fact, many of the external conditions that affect incarceration, like socioeconomic status, affect education as well. There is a prevalent gap in the performance of students across levels of social and economic advantage. In order to narrow this gap, schools must integrate and provide support services beyond teaching to the test. Disadvantaged students are affected by crime rates, insecure households, high mobility, health problems and a lack of intellectually stimulating environments. Teaching math and reading alone cannot narrow this gap of disadvantage; therefore, schools have a responsibility to teach critical thinking, art appreciation, employment preparation, physical health, and a myriad of other important skills. Rothstein ends by proposing a new framework for a system of accountability using the system of English Inspection as a model.

Key Quotes:

- “Attempts to hold schools accountable for math and reading test scores have corrupted education by reducing the attention paid to other important curricular goals; by creating incentives to ignore students who are either above or far below the passing point on tests; by misidentifying failing and successful schools because of test unreliability; by converting instruction into test preparation that has little lasting value; and by gaming, which borders on (or may include) illegality.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶Richard Rothstein. “What’s Wrong with Accountability by the Numbers?” *American Educator* Spring (2009): 23, <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/ROTHSTEIN%282%29.pdf>

⁶⁷Rothstein, “What’s Wrong with Accountability by the Numbers?” 23.

⁶⁸ Rothstein, “What’s Wrong with Accountability by the Numbers?” 23.

How This Connects to Research:

Children's education is affected by conditions that manifest in other social subsystems such as healthcare and housing. In turn, these conditions are also affected by educational attainment. The carceral dimensions of other social subsystems bleed into education in this process of feedback loops creating an amplification of disadvantage across racial, gender, and class divides. Education intersects at one juncture between these multiple systems.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

After discussing our third subsystem, we discovered a new pattern in the carceral dimensions. Housing, Healthcare and Education all share yet another carceral dimension: *biased systems of appraisal*. In housing this manifested in homeowner and real estate programs like redlining that refused to sell homes and provide loans to people of color and labeled those people "risky" for foreclosure. In healthcare, doctors also labeled people of color at particular risk for health conditions due to their race. In education, this biased system of appraisal lies in both appraisal of schools and appraisal of students (as reflected, for instance, in rankings and standardized test scores). Our current system of appraisal in education ignores pertinent systemic factors that contribute to a healthy learning experience, making it biased towards approving outcomes (high test scores) that wealthy and white typically have an advantage of producing. Each system of appraisal in our subsystems has proven biased, and in order to abolish the carceral state, they must be recognized and dismantled. Moving forward, we will look for more evidence of biased appraisals in credit and labor.

Education Timeline: A Look at Carceral Dimensions

19th century to early 1950s: “question of education in the South, the region of the country where a majority of Black people then still lives, centered most specifically on issues of funding, type, and its relationship to the economic health of the larger region.”⁶⁸

1933: Miseducation of the Negro by Cart G Woodson⁶⁹

1940: Briggs v Elliott⁷⁰

1954: Brown v Board of Education⁷¹

1969: Alexander v Holmes County (ended dual school systems).

1971: Swan v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education said schools could bus students to other schools to end segregation (Nixon opposed).

1974: Equal Educational Opportunities Act: did not allow for federal funds to provide bussing for integration purposes.⁷²

1970s: “those same concerns left the confines of the South, along with a migrating mass of Black people who were leaving for urban cities in the North, West, and Midwest in search of jobs and equal education. Once there, they found themselves overwhelmingly confined to racially and economically segregated urban ghettos with schools that were underfunded and many teachers no other district or school wanted.”⁷³

1970 to 1990: “the Black–white gap in educational attainment shrank in racially integrated schools, and yet this strategy is no longer discussed, and there is no “vocal pro-integration constituency” pushing for it.”⁷⁴

1980s: key moment in shifting “funds from public to private hands.”⁷⁵

1981: A Nation at Risk report under President Ronald Reagan, “a scathing appraisal of public education.”⁷⁶ Task force found that almost 23 million Americans were functionally illiterate and we are all just complacent to the dilapidating systems

1989: “the National Business Roundtable urged its state and local affiliates to work more closely with state governments to radically restructure the nation’s public schools. The National Alliance of Business circulated pamphlets instructing CEOs and business groups on how to shape local school policy toward economic restructuring goals. President Reagan and his education secretary, William Bennett, were in full agreement with such sentiments. In regard to public schools, integration was out, business was in.”⁷⁷

⁶⁸ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 26.

⁶⁹ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 25.

⁷⁰ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 25.

⁷¹ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 24.

⁷² Rooks, *Cutting School*, 27.

⁷³ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 26, 27.

⁷⁴ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 27.

⁷⁵ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 18.

⁷⁶ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 28.

⁷⁷ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 29.

1989: National Goals 2000 Program “called for privatization, deregulation, and competition between schools.”⁷⁸

1990s: Clinton continued NG 2000 Program.⁷⁹

2001: No Child Left Behind Act: aimed to improve the reading and math test scores of all children, especially those of disadvantaged backgrounds (Since then there has been reform of test-based accountability).⁸⁰

2008: Obama began to turn those goals/strategies into policies.⁸¹

2009: Obama gave money to low performing public schools in response to Ty’Sheoma. Money was given for construction and infrastructure, not educational integration.⁸²

2010 to 2013: School Improvement Grants program which increased funding from when GW Bush started it.⁸³

2016: “a federal analysis showed that test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment were no different in schools that received money through the School Improvement Grants program than in schools that did not.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 30.

⁷⁹ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 30.

⁸⁰ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 5.

⁸¹ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 30.

⁸² Rooks, *Cutting School*, 20.

⁸³ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 21,22.

⁸⁴ Rooks, *Cutting School*, 22.

The Carceral Dimensions of Education System

How the Illusions of Meritocracy and Equal Opportunity Maintains and Produces Segregation

By: Ria Dhingra

A Brief History of the American Education System:

See timeline on the prior page

The Carceral Dimensions of the Education System:

As a quick reminder, the Carceral State is a combination of interconnected social systems that works to establish and maintain punitive orientations rooted in differences. America today can be described as a carceral state due to the way in which individual social systems, separately and in combination, produce the logics, practices, and ideologies that work towards enforcing structure, hierarchy, punishment, and security.

A Carceral State is upheld and reproduced through its practices, each of which contains a Carceral Dimension. We define a carceral dimension as the specific aspect of social practices and policies that produces and upholds inequality, creates hierarchy, and punishes those at the bottom for being responsible for a set of conditions that negatively impact them. Recognizing carceral dimensions in individual social spheres allow us to search for patterns and to target points for reform, change, and abolitionist transformation.

Looking Specifically at the Education System

When most people think of carceral practices in regards to the education system, what comes to mind is the School to Prison Pipeline. While the relation between dropout rates and incarceration is a significant and important statistic to track, the School to Prison Pipeline itself is a product (not a cause) of the carceral dimension of the current education system, which perpetuates inequality through various means.

During the Reagan administration of the 1980's, there was a distinct transition between explicit racial policy and segregation in education towards more implicit and subversive practices in the field of education. The key change was a shift of funds moved dramatically from "public to private hands." (Rooks, 18). This meant instead of trying to reform, integrate, and support public schools and communities, there was a rise in alternatives to public education such as charter, online, magnet, and private schools. These shifts were then upheld, maintained, and enforced by the state. This shift was initially seen as "reformative," providing low-income parents "options" to move their children to better, more focused forms of education. However, this shift from public to private education also shifted public, governmental responsibility for providing quality education onto parents themselves. Now, low-income parents and teachers were blamed for poor school performance, not a lack of government funding or poor external community conditions. This shift in blame serves as a justification for not funding public education, retaining a cycle of racial inequality—now coded under "public versus private" education debates instead of direct racial segregation.

Overall, it is pertinent to note that the "shift" from public to private education was facilitated by a series of practices and policies. These practices and policies still maintain educational segregation and educational inequality whilst also now serving as justifications for increased state punishment tied to schooling. (Note: The segreconomics of education—profiting

off of a racial achievement gap—is incentive for public government to retain educational inequality.) In sum, the carceral dimensions of the education system can be categorized as these facilitative practices: color-blind “equal opportunity,” individualizing educational responsibility, and predatory targeting of low-income families.

The private sector conducts this transition from public to private education, the aforementioned carceral dimensions facilitates and maintains this shift, Black individuals are now responsible for the shift (individualizing blame), and the criminal justice system surveils and enforces this shift. Together, the shift from public to private education needs to be maintained, facilitated, surveilled, and enforced constantly, a dynamic that mimics the Carceral State. Additionally, each of the three preceding carceral dimensions can be broken down and described in further detail based on their effects and interactions.

Some Key Carceral Characteristics in the Education System (Both in Policy and Practice):

- Color Blind equal Opportunity
 - All citizens have the opportunity to utilize quality, private education
 - However, not all citizens have realistic fair access to said quality private education
- Individualizing Education Responsibility
 - Matters of social responsibility (impersonal historical wrongs in education such as racial segregation) are now dubbed as a product of individual irresponsibility and criminalities
 - Justify by race and PUNISH by race for impersonal conditions
- Predatory targeting of Black, low-income families
 - Test Preparation and tutoring companies profit off of an achievement gap
 - Black parents are forced to rely on increased educational services to supplement poor public-school education (segreconomics)
- Punishment
 - There is no real accountability in a carceral system. Misidentifying the problem leads to institutionalizing practices in the form of punishment.
 - Respond to a deteriorating public school system with
 - Cops in schools
 - School to Prison Pipeline
 - Increased expulsions, suspensions, and zero-tolerance policies

Specific Connections to Other Subsystems:

While detailing how each social system influences, affects, or is affected by other spheres will present a degree of overlap. Mapping this overlap alongside mapping an overlap of carceral dimensions can produce a framework that serves as a basis for identifying “key points” of change. Therefore, for each system we examine, we planned to list relations to other systems from the perspective of the specific system we are studying. This is to say that we shall list connections to other subsystems based on importance, relevancy, and order of the system we are examining.

Thus far, we have created such lists for both housing and healthcare, tying the carceral dimensions of one social institution to another, highlighting overlapping practices and points of shared interest. The intention of such mapping is not only to display a systems ecology, but to use said map as a starting point for education efforts, coalitions, or collaboration.

In the case of Education, the topic is both the medium and subject. As we educate ourselves about carceral dimensions, we would like to acknowledge we are doing so through a

public grant, a higher education university—an institution of social productive. Awareness of our own position, limitations, and biases as we work to uncover others is critical to our work. That being said, this section (and toolkit as a whole) has implicitly related the institution of Education to all other social institutions studied. As our project notes, explicit perceptions, policies, and practices are often the object of criticism, subject of reform/protest. Our work aims to unveil the implicit roots of said explicitness, to redirect our focus to a larger, more holistic picture. Now, we would like to invite readers, whoever you may be, to do the same.

Activity:

Spend a minute developing connections between the summaries provided, the timeline, the readings, and your own background knowledge and personal experiences. Think about what makes education carceral, how carceral dimensions affect and shape education; think about how this all produces, reinforces, and strengthens the status quo. Ask yourself: *Why?* Why are things the way they are? Imagine, without constraint: *A better world.* In a world with an egalitarian, just, education system, what other conditions would have to change? Then, list these findings, these discoveries. Discuss them with the people around you. Finally, organize these thoughts as relations between education and other social institutions.

- *Education and Healthcare:*
- *Education and Credit:*
- *Education and Labor:*
- *Education and Housing:*
- *Education and Criminal Justice:*

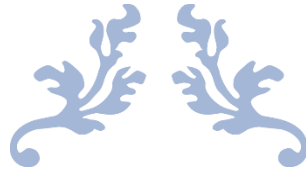
Moving Forward in Relation to Our Study:

Our analysis of the Carceral Dimensions of the Education system follows the pattern seen in other systems so far: that the transition from public to private agency is the time period and “root” in terms of identifying policy and practice that can be defined as Carceral Dimensions. Shifting from public racialized policy to implicit racially coded policy diverts attention from governmental failings onto individual acts of “irresponsibility.”

The Carceral Dimensions of Education mimics what was seen in both the Housing and Healthcare system. However, our study of the Education system also provided us with new information and insight.

When reading Richard Rothstein’s “What’s Wrong with Accountability by Numbers?” We encountered a proposal that claims regional educational accountability should also assess daycares, public parks, youth services, and community programs on top of teacher and student test scores. This is the first time we see practices comparable to mutual aid being proposed as an institution, not voluntary reform. Rothstein exemplifies systems theory by noting how education can be impacted by other environmental conditions. His proposed holistic assessment of educational accountability suggests that abolitionist transformation (removing carceral dimensions) can be done through establishing connections in social systems that supplement the carceral dimensions in place. Essentially, housing, healthcare, and education can interact more to compensate for removing their relative ties to the criminal justice system.

Moving forward with this study, we expect to view similar patterns of Carceral Dimensions in future analysis of other social systems whilst also considering Rothstein’s argument for increased public conditional accountability.



Section Five

The Labor/Credit System



A Brief Summary:

This section analyzes the final social institution studied in the summer installment of our project. Contextualizing labor and credit in the context of the carceral state and relating it to other social institutions allows us to finally, fully, map out the ecology of the carceral state. Our analysis of labor and credit marks the end of work for Summer 2021, but the beginning towards a plethora of potential forms of praxis. The theory, the consciousness, towards the expansive reach of the carceral state is now laid out. The question we leave off at becomes: *Now what?* As our findings are not conclusions, but an emphasis on what already exists—it's depth perception, and then deciding what to do with it. We hope this section, along with others, can serve as the basic toolkit for educators and activists.

Golden Gulag by Ruth Wilson Gilmore
Constructing a Socioeconomic Setting fit for a Carceral State
 By: Ria Dhingra

Summary of Text (and Analysis):

Abolitionist, scholar, and geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore details the history of and explanation behind the 1980's California prison boom in her book, *Golden Gulag*. She argues that prisons should not only be viewed as a *location* in the margins of the social sphere, but a *moment* and approach to how social problems are now dealt with. To do so, Gilmore examines the history of the California prison boom in relation to simultaneous economic, social, political, and economic conditions. Through her work, Gilmore is able to provide context behind the harsh reality of the prison industrial complex whilst also elaborating how an economic crisis laid out the foundation of a Carceral State.

In the first ninety pages of her analysis, (Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 2), Gilmore takes time to explain the history of conditions that serve as a basis of establishing a prison industrial complex—and with it, a carceral state.⁸⁵ First, Gilmore defines the term Political Economy as a method of analysis that examines relationships between individuals and larger society, between markets and states. Similar to systems theory, Gilmore utilizes political economy as a lens to organize the myriad of factors that led to the prison boom. Next, Gilmore dives into explaining the business cycle and Keynesian economics. The business cycle is a positive feedback loop where capitalists use labor to produce goods, and then sell subsequent goods back to laborers at a higher price for profit. A business cycle is maintained as long as capitalists are able to have laborers, sell the goods produced, and have laborers in the economic position to purchase goods. This means that the general public workforce should have the economic security and means to participate in the economy. In the case of the postwar 1970's, a capital boom led to the initial expansion of the business cycle.

However, surplus soon becomes a crippling problem. Gilmore identifies four key types of surpluses. A surplus of goods (capital) in a system where workers are overexploited for labor (not fairly compensated) results in laborers not being able to purchase goods. In an economy based on consumption, not purchasing goods leads to unstable cycles of inflation/deflation/stagflation and economic crisis. Economic crisis then leads to layoffs, resulting in surplus labor and surplus people. Additionally, surplus land as a product of capital development results in regions with mass lacks of capital development.

With four types of surpluses occurring at once, the government is forced to deal with an economic crisis and political outcry. During the war and its immediate aftermath, “military Keynesianism” (an economic theory that stated increased military expenses and capital could go towards economic growth in the form of welfare and tax cuts) formed the bedrock of the California economy. Using capital generated from the military-industrial sector, Keynesianism works to compensate for designed capital inequality. In the post-war era, inequality persists without any sort of supplemental, leading to surplus and capital crash. Simultaneously, public

⁸⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. (University of California Press, 2007), 1-90.

outcry over the economic crisis and other social issues leads to an overall distrust in government and government funded social service programs such as welfare. Defunding such social service programs only worsened the imbalance of the business cycle.

At this junction of capital, labor, and political instability, the political economy of prisons is established. Rather than solving root capital inequality, a complex problem that would require an undoing of capitalism itself, a public to private transition takes place. Industries such as housing, healthcare, and education shift from public programs to private ones. Privatization, in turn, leads to individualization of responsibility and blame in regards to experiencing inequality or unfair conditions. Finally, individualization of responsibility can be surveilled and criminalized, leading to increased forms and practices of criminal justice and state sponsored punishment.

Under these conditions—suddenly—prisons become incredibly appealing. Prisons can hold a surplus of people. Prisons can exploit a surplus of labor (at no extra expense). Prisons take up surplus land and can be placed in areas with little capital development. And prisons can be privatized for profit. By relying on prisons as a way to respond to socio-economic surplus and political instability, prisons inadvertently now house people who once dealt with complex social realities. Prison itself was and is a way to respond to social dilemma without facing the root problem—capital development rooted in racial hierarchy. Now, victims and products of all similar social problems (each with a complex history of inequality) are incarcerated rather than acknowledged. To keep up with high levels of incarceration, the California prison boom, and increasing demands for social order, increasing forms and levels of criminal justice is utilized. Additionally, punitive mindsets, practices, and policies become the standard in all social spheres, institutionalizing over time and becoming instilled mindsets—resulting in a carceral state.

Gilmore finally repeats her argument of how a national response to surplus sets up the conditions for prisons in four different settings, or “cuts.” By examining the relation between capital, labor, and prisons at the levels of a state, a capitol, in rural Corcoran, and in South Central Los Angeles, Gilmore’s methodology reflects the complexity of her inquiry. An inquiry that ultimately reflects how complexity was initially negated when addressing socioeconomic dilemmas, producing a prison boom.

Key Quotes:

- “The state built itself by building prisons fashioned from surpluses that the newly developing political economy had not absorbed in other ways.”⁸⁶
- “After several years of relative relief underwritten by new rounds of military investment, California entered another slide in the world recession.”⁸⁷
- “Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”⁸⁸
- “The new state built itself in part by building prisons. It used the ideological and material means at hand to do so, renovating its welfare-warfare capacities into something different by molding surplus finance capital, land, and labor into the workfare-warfare state.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag*, 54.

⁸⁷ Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag*, 40.

⁸⁸ Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag*, 28.

⁸⁹ Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag*, 85.

How This Connects to Research:

Gilmore's analysis of the prison industrial complex through the lens of the political economy mirrors our study of the carceral state through systems theory. In viewing this parallel, we were provided with a sense of clarity, organization going forward, and found overlapping goals with Gilmore.

Categories	Gilmore	Us
Subject of Study/Problem	Prison Industrial Complex	Carceral State
Method	Political Economy	Systems Theory
Focus	4 "Cuts" As a geographer, Gilmore looks for patterns spatially. She explores the history of the political economy of prisons in 4 unique settings. By examining the problem of prisons at the levels of a state, a capitol, in rural Corcoran, and in South Central Los Angeles, Gilmore's methodology reflects the complexity of her inquiry. It is crucial to note that the multiple retellings in different settings is crucial in grasping the prevalence of the problem (subject).	5 Social Spheres In using systems theory, we are looking for patterns across different fields and systems. By looking at the implicit carceral dimensions of housing, healthcare, education, credit, and labor alongside the explicit cancer behavior of the criminal justice system, we can better understand the makings of a carceral state. Here the method of inquiry reflects the complexity and prevalence of our problem (subject).
End Product/Goal	Book <i>Golden Gulag</i> itself is an educational tool that reintroduced complexity when talking about prisons. In writing and publishing the book, an educational tool, hopes for increased political education can be used by readers to connect their own forms of advocacy across space.	Curriculum Since our research findings are structured in the form of a curriculum, an educational tool, we hope to reintroduce complexity when talking about the carceral state. In increasing political education and detailing relations across social spheres, we hope this curriculum can be used to promote collaborative advocacy.

Gilmore's organization of her project can be used as an analog for our project. Both her book and our research aim to increase understanding of our respective problematic subject areas. In doing so, in increasing widespread understanding, we both aim to acknowledge the complexity of the problem. This way, the problem cannot be normalized, institutionalized, or misidentified. Instead, we can now examine the problem holistically. In having the same aim of widespread understanding, both *Golden Gulag* and our work aim to achieve the same thing: By showing relations across space and system and understanding of said relations, we hope to

promote collaborative advocacy across spheres and space. To start conversations and discussions, to provide the tools to question the status quo. Both her book and our final curriculum serve as educational tools to increase political awareness. As polarization is often the product of oversimplification, increasing political education, reintroducing complexity in the form of a book or a class, can work to reduce polarization in favor of transformative and productive discourse.

Moving Forward with Information from this Work:

As aforementioned earlier, Golden Gulag can be used as an analog to our own work. Finding this parallel allows us to refine our own goal for this project whilst also having a better understanding about the carceral dimensions in the labor market and in capital.

Additionally, while it is important to distinguish the Carceral State from the Prison Industrial Complex, many carceral dimensions and practices are a product of knowing we have prisons. Behaviors are punitive and criminalized upon knowing there is a space to house those deemed as “criminals.” Gilmore detailing the prison boom of the 1980’s relates closely to public to private transitions in the 1960’s-1990’s in other social spheres. Connecting these patterns and the root of carceral dimensions to the political economy of this time period provides us a starting point to examine abolition and reform.

Labor Timeline: A Look at Carceral Dimensions

1929: Stock Market Crash: Classical economists argued that we should not mess with the market, and market value will naturally fall (explain supply and demand curve)

- Sticky wages

1933: FDR inaugurated: began intervening and created CCC which made jobs to start circulating money. Practice without theory

1936: John Maynard Keynes: published his ideas in a book, which provided the theory behind FDR's actions

1937: FDR's actions did not fix the depression. Things got better after 1933 but worsened in 37

1941: US enters war: employs about 10 million people in military

1942: this then drew us out of the depression, but people worried that after the war, we would enter the depression again as soldiers came back. This did not happen

1970 connotation of "military Keynesianism" shifts as citizens push back against military production (the key to American prosperity) in the Vietnam war.

Note: Military Keynesianism got us out of depression, but it did not fix hierarchical inequality. Politicians then/now justify military spending with "Military Keynesianism." However, true Military Keynesianism theory would support using military profits for advancements of social welfare. The present term is a misuse of the concept. Acknowledging this misuse added the negative connotation.

Every politician uses some sort of shift of spending that is typically Keynesian. However, these terms are said, but not executed as intended. Keynesianism is meant to compensate for wealth inequality and is more of a theory than practice. Inequality was there before and after Keynesianism, therefore it is a natural part of capitalism, and Keynesianism is an attempted solution.

- Fish tank with hole analogy: Keynesianism is a patch, but the tank itself came faulty. Sometimes, we blame fish or rocks inside, but nothing can be done until we address the tank itself is broken.

The Carceral Dimensions of the Labor Market and National Capital

How a Surplus of Labor and Credit serves as the Prerequisite of Prisons

By: Anna Nelson

A Brief History of the American Labor Market and Capital:

The crux of 20th century economics begins with the stock market crash of 1929. As the effects of the crash crystalized, classical economists supported a laissez faire argument, explaining that the American government should not get involved, as the market value will naturally fall. This belief in the invisible hand or natural falling, however, did not come to fruition, and sticky wages brought a wave of unemployment and surplus.

Roughly four years into the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn into office and began intervening. FDR created the New Deal, which brought upon the formation of the CCC and a plethora of other national programs that created jobs and began circulating money. Although FDR chose a hands-on governmental approach, he did not have an academic theory behind his practice.

In 1936, John Maynard Keynes published *The General Theory of Employment*, which happened to provide just the theory FDR had been searching for. Keynes argued that an increase in public expenditure leads to an increase in capital, and that capital should be diverted into public or social infrastructure, in order to support American citizens and ameliorate the Great Depression. By this point, FDR had already increased public expenditure, which provided a brief respite, but in 1937, the Great Depression worsened, proving that FDR's actions were not a perfect fix.

Concurrently, war began to percolate abroad, and the US eventually joined the second world war in 1941, calling for millions of job openings in the American military. As the men deployed and the women worked the factories, the US quickly saw the Great Depression recede. Americans worried that the depression would return after the war ended in 1945 and the troops came home, but the profits from military expenditure served as a safeguard against immediate recession.

Decades later, the connotation of military economics began to shift as citizens pushed back against military production and the US's involvement in the Vietnam war. Military Keynesianism explains that the profits from military (public) expenditure should be diverted or reinvested into welfare, but politicians quickly began to justify increasing military budgets with military Keynesianism while paying little to no attention towards the step of welfare investment. Journalists, scholars and citizens began to disagree with this practice and recognize the misuse of Military Keynesianism, giving it a negative, misunderstood connotation. Today, many politicians across the partisan lines campaign for funding shifts that align with Keynesianism. These campaigns, however, are rarely executed, and wealth is retained by those who already had it.

Note: Keynesian economics is an attempt at compensating wealth inequality, but inequality existed before Keynesianism and still persists today. Therefore, it is a natural part of American economics, and Keynes's theory was a mere attempted solution. The solution, however, did not directly target the problem itself - capitalism - resulting in faulty practice.

The Carceral Dimensions of Labor Market and Capital:

Like the other social systems studied, the labor market exhibits a shift of public to private spending. As mentioned, Keynesianism calls for an increase in public expenditure and divestment of profits back into public goods, services and infrastructure. Historically, this

divestment was welfare, but in the post-war/post-depression era, there was a rise in anti-welfare sentiment and lack of trust in the government amongst US citizens. Both rises correlate to FDR's practices that alone failed to lift America from economic despair and the atrocities of the Vietnam war. Politicians, on the other hand, continued to increase military expenditure without divesting it into public infrastructure because of these protests against the war, police violence, segregation and more. So instead of investing in welfare, politicians put military profits towards private investments and tax breaks for the rich, shifting government agency towards private firms and investors. This shift from public to private investment rerouted public profits away from welfare, contributing to the privatization issues of all other social systems.

Secondly, a carceral and capitalist state never leaves a state of crisis. Performative change, such as tokenism hiring and quotas, avoids the real root of economic problems: inequality. Military Keynesianism and increased public expenditure cannot and did not entirely solve the issue of recurring economic crisis because our capitalist state relies on inequality and hierarchy. Without resolving the issues of inequality that exist across social spheres - including the labor market - economic crisis will continue.

Lastly, the tax struggles created by this capitalist economy delegitimize welfare programs and individualize blame. In chapter 2 of *Golden Gulag*, author Gilmore states that, "the outcomes of tax struggle translated into delegitimizing of programs the state could use to put surpluses back to work" and therefore the state's ability to act under Keynesianism withered.⁹⁰ As the American government's ability to invest in welfare programs withers, the livelihood and opportunities of welfare recipients consequently withers too. During this shift, the blame of unemployment and other social problems shifts off of the inequality of the social systems and onto the vulnerable, unemployed workers themselves.

Overall, the labor market and credit market exhibit three key dimensions of the carceral state: public to private spending shift, performative change, and individualizing blame.

Specific Connections to Other Subsystems:

Labor/Credit and Housing: while black Americans were enslaved, white Americans had the opportunity to gain capital through property which grew after investment, allowing them a head start.

Labor/Credit and Healthcare: COVID-19 pandemic has shown an undervaluing of essential workers and healthcare workers' labor.

Labor/Credit and Education: lack of divestment into education reform or teacher wages results in a gap between public and private schools.

Labor/Credit and Criminal Justice: those in prison work below minimum wage to be "useful" as Gilmore states in the Intercepted Podcast.

Moving Forward in Relation to Our Study:

Not only did the content of this text reinforce the pattern of carceral elements that exist in other social systems already discussed, but it also notified us of a few new patterns. First, the

⁹⁰ Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag*, 83.

shift from public to private investment resulted in a form of organized abandonment of children. As welfare investment declined in the 1970s, there was a 25% increase in child poverty, and between 1979 and 1995, there was another 67% increase in poverty rates, affecting 1 in 4 children. Not only did this abandonment display the government's complete lack of interest in being held responsible for eliminating adversity and inequality, but the abandonment of children symbolizes their adjacent abandonment of future thinking.

The pattern of performative change identified earlier in this research links to misidentification of root causes to problems, subsequently causing a misidentification (or lack of acknowledgment) of future problems and their effects. The performative changes of each social system, and especially those of the labor market have shown us that short-term thinking and band aid solutions are yet another pattern across our social spheres. Moving forward, we would like to look back at each sphere and acknowledge the specific examples of this short-term thinking and abandonment of the future.

The last new carceral pattern we identified was the labeling of idle workers as antisocial, or more generally, labeling those who are different as "others". Capitalist societies like America link a citizen's *usefulness* to their value as a human being. Working has become the pinnacle of American identity, and those who do not participate in the workforce (whether by choice or not) are shunned, and their behavior is seen as outside the norm. This irregular behavior then increases the government's "need" for control, resulting in policing and stringent regulations. Other social subsystems enforce this labeling of others through race, crime, poverty, sexuality, and gender. Now that we have read and researched our last social subsystem, we can see these new patterns emerging throughout the readings and research of the past few months. With time, we hope to look back at our collection of essays and reinforce these patterns with more examples from each subsystem.



Conclusion

Findings, Reflections, and Moving Forward



Project Summary: A Conclusion

Findings, Questions, and a Consideration of Future Directions

By: Ria Dhingra

After being awarded the Honors Sophomore Summer Apprenticeship Grant from the University of Wisconsin Madison in April of 2021, the proceeding summer was spent by Professor Ingrid Diran and students Ria Dhingra and Anna Nelson working on a project entitled “An Ecological Approach to Abolition: A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems.”

Project:

In order to understand abolition better and conduct effective discourse, discussion, collaboration, and activist forms of praxis, we wanted to reframe and contextualize the conversation around abolition towards actual stakeholders and agents. Meaning, rather than the term being largely (mis)interpreted as a radical liberal call for removing the institutions of prisons and policing, we wanted to reintroduce complexity to discussions concerning the movement. In doing so, it became clear that abolition does not just apply towards the incarcerated, but the carceral. Defining a carceral state—identifying carceral practices, and then labeling/mapping subsequent practices—became the aim of this project. Our hope, in studying abolition theory, was to clearly identify the inexplicit—to recognize that our entire status quo contributes to and is affected by the carceral.

Hypothesis:

If the carceral state is pervasive in all social spheres then, we must consequently approach abolition and resistance systemically and not hyper fixate on prisons, because the carceral state is not upheld solely by the criminal justice system.

Summary of Work:

The summer was spent studying institutions of healthcare, housing, education, labor, and credit alongside analysis of abolitionist texts. Doing these tasks simultaneously allowed for recognition of both historic and current patterns, perspectives, and policies within each respective institution that could be categorized as being carceral. Dubbing these patterns as “carceral dimensions,” we worked to map out both a historical timeline within policy that produced these dimensions and an ecological, interconnected, web that ties these dimensions (and institutions) together. As a collective, this summer was not studying a new concept, but relearning concepts we thought we already knew; it was learning to study, to see, in a new way.

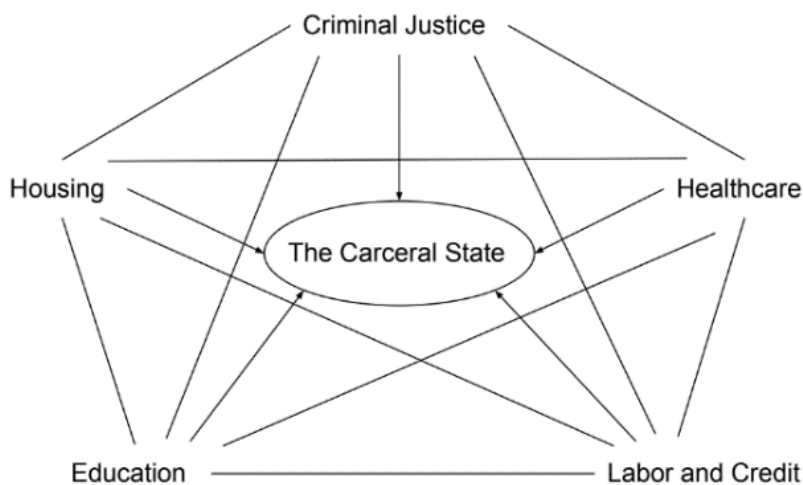
In doing so, it became abundantly clear that the carceral state is a web, entrapping everyone and differentially impacting levels of harm into individuals based on intersectional identities such as race, gender, age, and level of disability. Therefore, abolition (a movement, protest, resistance, and form of care) itself had to be just as expansive as the problem, the state, it was addressing.

Our work can be summarized as: understanding scientific models and ways of organizing, learning sociological systems theory, analysis of abolitionist texts, selected readings/study of social institutions, applying both systems theory and a abolitionist lens onto understanding of historical/current practices of selected institutions, identifying connections between social institutions, and identifying “carceral dimensions” of each individual institution, mapping patterns of both interconnectedness and the carceral.

Finally, we took these findings and organized them into this collection. The intention in doing so was to allow us to go back and reread notes summaries of each meeting, personal reading notes, and reflections. In doing so, we wanted to present not a concluding paper, but a working collection displaying our through process. We hope this collection will serve to us as a reference and time capsule. We hope this formatting of the collection—with mini papers, templates, activities, and worksheets—can be used as a starting point to produce tools for educators and used by activists to start coalitions and study groups. Above all, we would like to reiterate, that despite the title of this section—this is not a conclusion. This is groundwork. This is consciousness—which, unlike awareness, is not as easy to turn away from—of harms and the systems that produce it. And consciousness produces care. And care itself is transformation, it's the basis of revolution. We hope this collection, and our work going forward, takes this consciousness and works to apply it onto analysis of both bottom-up activism and top-down policy, to produce effective change towards addressing harm and creating a world without it.

Findings:

Our hypothesis is long. Following the time-old format of “If-Then-Because” we created a statement we hoped to support and test. However, returning to this hypothesis retroactively, it becomes clear that our “if” (if the carceral state is pervasive in all social spheres) is synonymous to our “because” (because the carceral state is not upheld solely by the criminal justice system). In this case, our work this summer can be better described as less of a project testing a hypothesis, but a set-up to a larger experiment—our work, in actuality, was a very long literature review. This summer, we solidified both our “if” and “because” statements, displaying carceral dimensions of all social spheres and the relation between them, a map of the carceral state itself.



Additional findings include:

- Between 1964 to 1997 there were a series of government policies (across all social spheres) that transitioned from public, explicitly racist, policies towards authorizing private agents to be

responsible for maintaining “legal equality,” resulting in extreme perpetuation of implicit racism within public/private practices.

- These policies resulted in practices and perspectives (across all social spheres) that facilitated and maintained this transition, allowing pervasive racism to continue.
 - These practices include, but are not limited to:
 - Public/Private Partnerships
 - Color Blind-Universalist Rhetoric
 - Exclusion→ Predatory Inclusion
 - Individualize Blame and Risk onto Marginalized Groups
 - An Increase in Punitive Logic
 - An Increase in the Number of “Crimes” (Expanding Definitions of Both “Crime” and “Criminal”)
 - An Increase in State Sponsored Violence
 - A Spreading of Pervasive Racial Myths
- The precedent policies can all be defined as *Carceral Dimensions*, practices, policies, and perspectives that act in ways that promote and uphold the Carceral State.
- Additionally, these Carceral Dimensions served as a prerequisite condition for the 1980’s Prison Boom→The Prison Industrial Complex
- The Prison Industrial Complex was a place to hold individuals not compliant towards, unable to survive in, or preyed upon by the Carceral State
 - The increase in incarceration rates justified the need for the Prison Industrial Complex
 - The Prison Industrial Complex upheld the Carceral State, allowing practices to continue and incarcerating those who did not “fit in”
 - The Carceral State supplied the Prison Industrial Complex
 - Carceral Dimensions Amplified with time and the growth of the Prison Industrial Complex
- NOTE on the Carceral State
 - The private sector conducts it
 - The Carceral Dimensions maintain/facilitate it
 - Black Individuals are held responsible for it
 - The Criminal Justice System surveils and enforces it
- Also note, how the previous four bullet points all include action verbs! This is important because:
 - The carceral state is NOT static, but a dynamic system that requires constant action in order to exist. Without said actions, (Carceral Dimensions), the Carceral State would fall apart
 - Things (the status quo) is constructed, not a constant
 - Therefore, change/progress/transformation/revolution is not as “radical” as it seems.
 - Revolution is challenging practices, entering the dynamic, and vying for progress

Moving Forward:

Returning to our hypothesis, what’s left now is our “then,” a statement that can be better paraphrased to assert: “we must approach abolition and resistance from all directions, all at once.” Admittedly, still, we are not ready to get to that exact “then” just yet. Asides from theory and us asserting we *should* do something, should “then” proceed a certain way, there is no way to assure that our “then” is possible or a methodology that ties together out “If-Then-Because.” Our “because” is restating our “if,” not supporting our “then.”

Therefore, we must reframe our hypothesis, and introduce a new word: “*how?*” Moving forward, our goal is “approaching abolition and resistance from all directions, all at once” and get others on board with doing the same. The question of “how” (how to do so, how to present our work, how to get people to be conscious of the carceral state, etc.) is what we must now test and work towards. Simply put, our work now (being empowered with our study from this past summer) is to bring people together, point them towards the “why” (why care about abolition?) and/or turn that existing “why” towards a “how” (a mechanism) that results in our “then” (approaching abolition and resistance from all directions, all at once—resulting in transformative change).

Finding an effective mechanism, and the analysis of other mechanisms, is the direction of our work moving forward: a work that has a dual focus on both education (theory) and forms of activism/resistance/mutual aid/protest (praxis)*.

What Now?: {NOTES}

Background: “An Ecological Approach to Abolition”

New “Hypothesis”: Our work now transitions into becoming a comparative study, a project that is applied and qualitative. We aim to bring people together, figure out how to best present our findings (goal 1) and then how those move forward with those findings as a collective (goal 2)

Potential Methods:

- Observe classrooms
- Conduct conversations about the carceral state with people from a variety of political backgrounds
- Form a study group
- Form a coalition of local activists
- Study Political Science, Economics, or Legal Studies
- Apply/showcase systems theory findings in study/work of said subjects

New Goals:

- Develop a curriculum of abolition
 - Provide educational tools to practice abolitionist thinking
- Analyze current abolitionist/activist movements (from a systems perspective) to determine long-term efficacy, identify progress/contradictions, and determine how approaches work together and if there is a need to redirect focus/better direct focus.**
- Form a coalition of activists across social spheres

An acknowledgment of limitations:

- The wide expanse of the carceral state goes well beyond the connections we have found. We invite others to deepen this study, critique our work, and take this project in numerous other directions. As two undergraduate students working under a professor, we acknowledge there is still so much we have to learn, and so much we could convey in a more nuanced/sensitive matter. We try and continue to try to acknowledge our own bias, not take up space with this project when the space is not intended for us, or act as educators to others—as we, ourselves, do not feel fully qualified.

- We are not the most qualified to be spokespeople for this work. However, as students we are in the position to ask questions and to explore. This research is exactly that, an attempt to find answers to our question of how to address harm and explore possible solutions.

*It is important to note that education itself is a praxis, not just theory. Inherently political, studying abolition is being abolitionist. It's dreaming of a better world, developing critical analysis skills to apply onto the status quo, and analysis of arguments/narratives of both those who work to preserve and upheave the status quo to determine effective/ineffective methodologies.

**There is no one "right" way to practice abolition. Protesting outside a Capitol building or working to lead a study group are equally necessary. However, we hope to analyze a wide expanse of efforts from a systems perspective to see if certain institutions are negated from conversations/not held accountable and bring practices together based on common goals

{The following document is a series of questions/motifs noted during the development of our project. The intended purpose of this document is educational, for lesson plans, conversations, or to guide personal inquiry.}

Questions/Discussion Prompts to Challenge the Acceptance of the Carceral State:

- How do systems cycle harm? Where does the harm originate?
- What is the Status Quo?
 - Why is it like that? Was it always like that? Why is it hard to change?
- Where do we see white supremacy, misogyny, racism, ableism, classism, homophobia, and etc.?
- What do community-based interventions or a lack thereof look like?
 - What builds a strong sense of community and what doesn't?
 - How do systems break communities?
 - How do systems individualize people?
- How does each system contribute to mental illness, poverty, desperation, stress, scarcity, and oppression?
- What do unlivable circumstances look like and how did they come to be?
 - What is "good":
 - Housing?
 - Healthcare?
 - Education?
 - Labor/Credit?
 - WHY? What makes it good?
- Where are people given or restricted personal expression?
- What is the accountability process of each system?
 - Where are people given or not given a space to admit the harm they did?
- Where do systems punish instead of provide consequences?
- How can we advocate for short term reform (addressing immediate harm) of systems while not inhibiting long term transformative change?
- Are there existing examples of accountability/addressing harm in our communities?
 - How can we use this as a starting place/example for making this more widespread?
- How have we "removed" perceptions about social systems away from the carceral state?
 - How have they been "depoliticized" or framed to be neutral?
- Do systems create a safe or secure environment? What are the conditions based in?
- How can we condition ourselves to not have a punitive mindset?
- In what ways can we take individual abolitionist steps?
- How do we make a non-punitive society a reality when faced with those who rely on existing structures?

Finally: Ask—"WHY?" All of the time. As much as you can. The status quo, the "way things are," is not static. Rather, things work, "the way they do," because they were constructed to do so. As young activists, our lives began and continue to exist in a post-capitalist meritocracy. Accepting the status quo simply because it is all we know is not an adequate justification not to question it.

The status quo is dynamic, constantly reinforced, supported, and perpetuated by a complicated series of **perspectives** that affect—>**people** that affect—>**practice** that affect—>**policy** that affect—>**perspectives, people, and practice**. Questioning each of these, respectively, simultaneously, is the only

{The following document is a series of terms encountered during the development of and discussions around our project. The intended purpose of this document is educational, for lesson plans, conversations, or to guide personal inquiry.}

Activity: What Does Revolution Mean to You?

The following terms are ones we encountered numerous times during our readings. These terms are ones that often came with implied definitions, broad connotations, and partisan usage. We challenged ourselves to not read these terms, but question their meaning and compare definitions/usage of said terms across all texts. We invite others to do the same alongside us, as these terms and practices do not and cannot have one textbook definition. Reintroduction of complexity is not just using these terms, but questioning what they mean, where they came from, and how to explain them to others; as conversations about the carceral are what lead to consciousness about the carceral.

Terms:

- Revolution
- Mutual Aid
- Abolition
- Policing
- State Sponsored Violence
- Inequality
- Equity
- Retribution
- Justice
- Crime
- Welfare
- Safety
- Security
- Meritocracy
- Incarceration
- Capitalism
- Risk
- Reform
- Democracy
- Politicize
- Polarize
- Partisan

A Final List of “Carceral Dimensions” and Social Systems Studied/Noted in this Project

Carceral Dimensions:

- Public/Private Partnerships
- Color Blind-Universalist Rhetoric
- Exclusion→ Predatory Inclusion
- Individualize Blame and Risk onto Marginalized Groups
- An Increase in Punitive Logic
- An Increase in the Number of “Crimes” (Expanding Definitions of Both “Crime” and “Criminal”)
- An Increase in State Sponsored Violence
- A Spreading of Pervasive Racial Myths

Social Systems Studied:

- Criminal Justice System
- Housing System
- Healthcare System
- Education System
- Labor/Credit System

Moving Forward: What Now?

By: Ria Dhingra

Next fall, the two of us (Anna Nelson and Ria Dhingra) have enrolled in English 699, an independent study class under professor Ingrid Diran, allowing us to continue work on this project. Additionally, between the two of us we have enrolled classes focusing on Legal Studies, Policy, Criminal Justice, Philosophy, and Gender and Woman Studies. These additional classes are primarily special topics classes tied to area of research. We hope that expanding our understanding of the world around us—especially the technicalities and functions of the criminal and legal system will allow us to better critique it. Admittedly, at this point, there is a large degree of uncertainty as to how to move forward with our work, as it became clear to us that the summer was spent working on the foundations of a project much larger than initially envisioned.

With a list of carceral dimensions, the question we are left with is: *What Now?*

Ultimately, we plan to spend fall as both a comparative and observational study, figuring out how to potentially create a curricula, coalition, or conversation space regarding the carceral state. This means shifting focus from directly studying the carceral to focusing instead on pedagogy, observing workshops, attending reading groups, and developing interpersonal conversation skills.

Additionally, admittedly, our work this summer has led us to a state where we are both experiencing higher rates of burnout, hopelessness, frustration, confusion, anger, and exhaustion. We are including these sentiments here in an effort to be honest and transparent: this work took a toll on us. We feel guilty about feeling this toll. We have had trouble working on emotional compartmentalization. We wonder if compartmentalizing itself makes us worse advocates for a cause, a project we began with outrage, passion, earnestness, and hope.

We want to reiterate we do still have hope: we are hopeful.

But we also want to admit that we are overwhelmed and unsure of how to proceed.

This fall, we want to care for ourselves and our work in a way that is sustainable. We refuse to give up. Moving forward, we want to involve others and learn from them. To share our findings and be critiqued. We want to take all we learned this summer and apply this perspective, our consciousness, to the way we practice living. To think about when our own actions might be reinforcing punitive logic, to question what our textbooks are telling us, to consider if our gut reactions in worldly encounters come from a place of implicit racism or carceral mentalities—we want to keep questioning where these mentalities came from. In questioning, we hope to challenge ourselves.

Above all, we are going to sit with the question “What Now?” and return to it even as we move forward. Revolution is not immediate or imminent, it’s happening constantly, day by day, action by action. Our goal is to find the methodology that works best for us and our community.



An Ecological Approach to Abolition

A Holistic Analysis of Discrimination Systems

