# AN ABOLITIONIST SYLLABUS: DIVESTING FROM HARMFUL INSTITUTIONS AND INVESTING IN COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES



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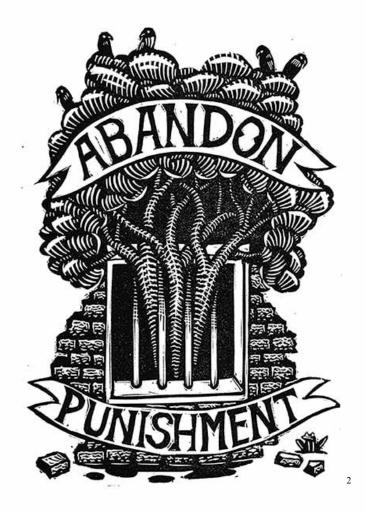
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>An anti-police brutality protest in Brooklyn, New York, on June 2. Erik McGregor/LightRocket/Getty Images

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# WELCOME:

# An Introduction to our Abolitionist Alternatives



Now more than ever, people are thinking about and fighting against police brutality and racism. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery sparked a fight against racial injustices and police brutality in the past year. People are beginning to question not only police but the criminal punishment system overall, as this system works to target communities of color. The criminal punishment system has worked and continues to work towards breaking families, communities, and individuals apart. This punishment system works

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://justseeds.org/graphic/abandon-punishment/</u>

towards segregating people from the world by locking them in the prison system where they are under constant surveillance, are expected to listen to commands, and are put into solitary confinement. Specifically, the criminal punishment system has shown to be a racist system that is meant to fail marginalized communities. Oftentimes, in order to "better" this system, people want to invest in more training and in reformative justice. However, it is important to realize that by investing in more training and in restorative justice, we are only continuing to allow the systems of power to have control over the marginalized communities that are affected by the criminal punishment system.

With this in mind, we invite you to look at our work through an abolitionist perspective. Prison abolition works towards having a society with no prisons and incarcerations. Through an abolitionist perspective one can focus on the importance of divesting from harmful institutions, such as prisons, and investing in alternatives that do not rely on the criminal punishment system in any way. As noted, the criminal punishment system only works towards targeting marginalized communities, and for this reason it is important that we consider alternatives that do not rely on the criminal punishment system. In this course, we will address how we can divest from harmful institutions and invest in community alternatives for the marginalized communities of: LGBTQ+ youth, disabled youth, and foster youth.



<sup>3</sup> Renoir Gaither, "Street Art, Graffiti", Minneapolis, George Floyd Protests 2020

# How to Use this Guide



This document was created by six separate individuals from various backgrounds that came together as a group for an Ethnic Studies term project, but during the making of this assignment we grew to be vulnerable and empowered by each other's testimonies and emotional labor. Our syllabus suggests a designed plan for a six-week study group, similar to our own cohort model. Each week contains a specific topic related to the overarching theme of abolitionism and transformative justice; we have organized the course materials in a two-week sequence throughout the syllabus in accordance to correlating topics. Furthermore, the authors of this syllabus have included resources/readings/videos/listenings for each week, and all of which do not exceed the time of three hours per week and are recommended to be completed in order. Although our group understands time availability is scarce throughout this pandemic, especially in efforts to commit to a structured study plan, we encourage readers to go beyond our syllabus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-prison-abolition-movement</u>

by establishing oneself into an extensive radical study, also known as "political education," because it is a main component of movement-building. Abolitionism is, in addition to dismantling harmful institutions and building community alternatives, undoubtedly about transforming our surroundings and ourselves in conjunction with this larger movement. Perhaps, this syllabus can be the starting point for many readers desiring to transform themselves in concert with others by just studying together.

We hope that these materials will be both transformative and informative for you and your chosen community. In addition to the given materials, the authors have also provided a supplementary reading list at the end of this document. This should be used, but also not limited to, expanding your knowledge and possibly even your study plan. While most of the material is free and online, we do ask for the consideration of purchasing these items through a Black-owned bookstore.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://rickfrausto.com/products/angela-davis-drawing-6-x-9

# **INTRODUCTION**

I think the importance of doing activist work is precisely because it allows you to give back and to consider yourself not as a single individual who may have achieved whatever but to be a part of an ongoing historical movement. - Angela Davis

<sup>6</sup>Angela Davis (1944-) is a well known Activist and Educator. Her Education was an enhancement to her influence. Originally she was recognized due to her involvement during the 1970's in a politically charged murder case. In Birmingham, Alabama Davis impacted by her segregated childhood, connected with an all-Black branch of the Communist Party. Additionally, joined the Black Panthers Party as a young woman. Following these steps Davis accomplished becoming a professor at UCLA. Unfortunately, due to her ties it led to her departure with the administration there. Two years later, Davis was charged with aiding the careless escape attempt of imprisoned the Black radical George Jackson. Before her acquittal in 1972 she served around 18 months in jail. Following lecturing and her time spent traveling, Davis wrote several books and returned to the classroom as a professor. Art is expressed in various forms, including when

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/5863103.Angela\_Y\_Davis

one is not conscious of their talent. Angela Davis' story and words cease to move those who follow her and come across her story.

# Video: What it means to be revolutionary?



## Video: Alternatives to 911



At the start of the mentioned video, Youth Justice Coalition introduces Alternatives to 911, which focuses on creating community alternatives to calling the police for when an issue arises in the community. They work towards creating a society in which targeted communities can have access to alternative ways to resolve their problems, as opposed to relying on the police. Because of the violence that they have experienced with the policing system, this offers community members help without fearing additional violence from those who are supposed to help them.

The prison system unfairly targets marginalized communities. Therefore, the Youth Justice Coalition explains what transformative justice is and reminds people of its importance. As stated in the video, "Transformative justice is a community building a justice system within themselves to hold people accountable". They remind people that communities have the strength to build strong alternatives. Instead of fighting and arguing with each other, they encourage that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "Community Alternatives to 911" Youth Justice Coalition, 2019

communities should come together and use their strengths to create safer spaces for targeted communities.

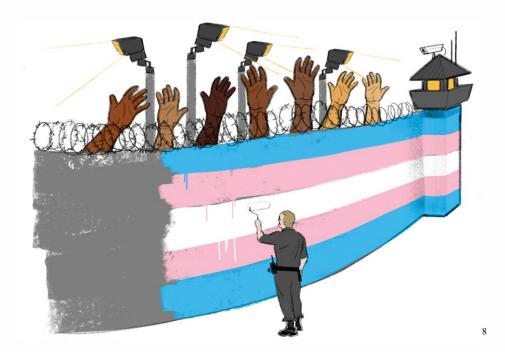


# Video: Abolition 101: Orisanmi Burton

The stems of underground work made for the vision of the future while getting people on board with collective work while Creating the knowledge of people to gain skills and ideas related to prisons and police. It's been clear that the living world is a journey for Abolitionist. People of color are the majority working towards a more positive change when it comes to changing the views of the criminal system and how its set up. The realizations of how the prisons operate can be a life changer when we engage in these conversations of group work. In other words, "Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, surveillance, and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment." This has been known as a negative process of tearing down human beings and can cause rebellion within the communities. Emerging the act of struggle is also a way of being productive. Many abolitionist requires to change one thing which is everything. There is no singular definition for abolitionist it is more about what they need and what they want. For example, Policing is slave patrols and control the behavior of the white people and not the same treatment based on the other color people. Preventing native people from reclaiming their land. There are many key sources that constitute the origin of policing. Key changes of process are now that these institutions are more diverse. These are all the root causes of policing and more violence. Forces need to organize to avoid hard and meet people's needs such as housing, education and have access to the basic human rights. Criminalization is the state of power. Criminal punishment system is reforming all the time. Form shape and molding the problem to make a change.

# WEEK ONE:

# The Policing of Queer and Trans Youth



### Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

This week, we will be starting our exploration of the criminalization towards marginalized young people, specifically LGBTQ+ youth. This section, and Week 2's topic, will examine the historical and contemporary contexts of an abolitionist praxis as central to the efforts of queer and trans liberation. We will begin by watching two films, both produced within a critical trans analysis of the carceral state and specifically provided to establish an understanding of the past and current circumstances many QTBIPOC folx face. In this week viewings, we will come to find that interactions with law enforcement aren't the sole instance of violence, but rather queer, trangender, and gender non-noncoforming people have been subjecting under scrutiny and hostility from the carceral state for many years and still to this day.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/the-dangerous-illusion-of-the-humane-prison

We encourage study groups to gather safely, either through social distancing or virtually, to collectively watch and/or examine these films together as a community.

Once you are done with documentaries, please move over into the readings for this week. Included for this week, we have a zine involving the founders of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, and an essay from the anthology, *Captive Genders*, written by Wesley Ware. These readings should be done individually. Once you are done with this task, please re-group and discuss the following questions with your group: How can you describe the positionality of queer and trans folx in conjuction to the carcercal, or even further, LGBTQ+ youth? What are some of the similarities and differences between the historical and contemporary aspects of the policing and incarceration target at the LGBTQ+ community?

### Read, Listen, or Watch

Watch - Susan Stryker's Screaming Queens! Riot at Compton's Cafeteria

Watch - Jacqueline Gares" Free Cece!

Read - Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle

Read - "'Rounding Up The Homosexuals': The Impact of Juvenile Court on Queer and Trans/Gender Non-conforming Youth" by Ware from *Captive Genders* 

# WEEK TWO:

# The Revival of A Radical Queer/Trans Future



## Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

For Week 2, we will be continuing to study the topic of queer and trans prison abolitionism by focusing on contempary works that explcitly and solely discuss the possibilities and need for an aboltionist praxis within trans activism. The first assignment is to watch the film, *Major!*, which covers the life story of Miss Major, one of the original pioneers for the Stonewall Riots and a well-advocate for abolitionism within the LGBTQ+ community. After you have finished watching the movie, please go ahead and move over to listening the roundtable discussion, *Futures of Abolition: Trans and Queer Resistance Against the Prison Industrial Complex*,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "We Find Safety In Each Other", Kah Yangni, 2020

freaturing some of today's most infuential trans advoates and abolitionist. Lasty, we will be finishing this week with the final reading, "Building a Queer and Trans Abolitionist Movement with All We've Got" from *Captive Genders*. Although this will be the course plan's fina reading associated with this given topic, we still encourage study groups to continue past the given materials by learning and absorbing other films and readings related to queer and trans liberation.

As you begin to finish these assigned materials, please reflect on your thoughts, especially on what is covered throughout the week, by writing a personal 200-word reflection addressing the following prompt: Provide a concise summary and reflection relating to how these readings/viewings/listenings impacted you. Utilizes your past experiences on how this informs your future in conjunction with the given topic of queer and trans prison abolitionism. Please be specific about how this directly and indirectly affects you. Furthermore, once you are done with this task, please come together as a group to discuss your reflections.

### Read, Listen, or Watch

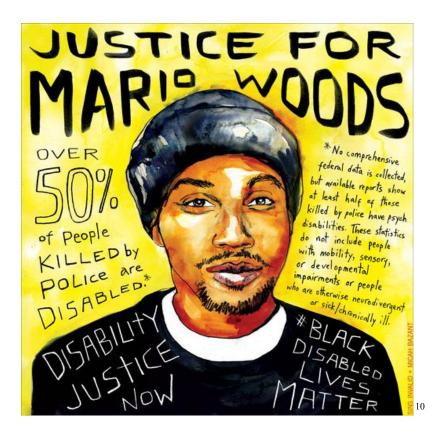
#### Watch - Major!

Listen - Futures of Abolition: Trans and Queer Resistance Against the Prison Industrial Complex: A Panel Discussion with Reina Gossett, Janetta Johnson, CeCe McDonald, Miss Major, and Eric A. Stanley

Read - "Building a Queer and Trans Abolitionist Movement with All We've Got" by Spade, Bassichis, and Lee from *Captive Genders* 

# WEEK THREE:

# The Criminalization of Disabled Youth



# Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

This week you will learn about the disabled youth community and the ways in which they are criminalized, discriminated, and labeled. The material provided through this week discusses the ways that the intersections of race and disability can put these individuals with these identities at higher rates of criminalization. You will be introduced to a podcast that discusses violence on all disabled people and then you will continue with material that focuses on disabled youth. The readings for this week, in addition to addressing how multiple marginalized identities

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Justice for Mario Woods", Micah Bazant and Sins Invalid, 2015

can affect youth, it will also discuss how the education system serves as an institution that also targets disabled youth of color leading them to criminalization and labels of "criminals".

You will first listen to an episode from the Disability Visibility Podcast titled "E7: Violence and Disabled People". In this podcast you will hear from Mahdia Lynn, who is a writer, educator, and community organizer. You will also hear from the perspective of Dustin Gibson, who is a community builder and who identifies as a Black disabled man. This episode discusses topics such as police violence toward disabled people, thoughts on police training, police accountability, and prison abolition. As Mahdia mentions in this podcast, as of now police officers are the ones who end up responding to mental health crises and this can lead to many individuals with mental health issues and disability to the prison system. Many people might respond to this by saying that in order to help eliminate the violence on disabled people. In this podcast you will hear how police training is ineffective and how it is essentially more harmful to the disabled community. The podcast further discusses the need for community support and transformative justice, which you will learn and explore more next week.

In addition to listening to the podcast, we have provided two readings that focus on disabled youth of color and the impact of their intersections. Disabled youth of color are not just targeted by police in their communities, but they are also targeted in the education system. The first reading by Jyoti Nanda (2019), examines how schools contribute to the construction and criminalization of disability. Nanda (2019), targets how the multiple marginalized identities of disabled youth can leave them at risk to face more interactions with police. In the next reading, Subini Ancy Annamma (2018), interviewed and worked with ten disabled girls of color who are criminalized. Annamma (2018), discusses the intersections of race, disability, and gender and

how these intersections increases chances of criminalization. You will also learn through this reading on the school-prison pipeline and why Annamma (2018), prefers to refer to it as "school-prison nexus". Through Annamma's work you will learn about the experiences of ten disabled girls of color and how each of their identities impacted their lives all leading to incarceration.

Lastly, for this week, we want to expose you to disability justice and transformative justice in preparation for next week's topic. You will watch a video that discusses the intersections of disability justice and transformative justice. We want you to think about what these two forms of justice mean and how could disabled youth benefit from it. After you complete the materials for this week please respond to these discussion questions in 250-500 words: What information impacted you most this week and why? How does the policing in schools and communities affect disabled youth, specifically disabled youth of color? What impact do you believe abolition would have on disabled youth? We hope that through the material this week you can understand the impact that harmful institutions have on disabled youth, and that you begin to think about ways of alternatives for this community.

### Read, Listen, or Watch

Listen: Disability Visibility Podcast "Ep 7 Violnece and Disabled People"

**Read:** Nanda, J. (2019). The Construction and Criminalization of Disability in School Incarceration. *Colum. J. Race & L.*, *9*, 265.

**Read:** Annamma, S. (2018). *The Pedagogies of Pathologization: Dis/abled girls in the School-Prison Nexus*. Routledge. Introduction, Chapter 1, 1-59.

Watch: "Intersections of Disability Justice and Transformative Justice"

# WEEK FOUR: Young People Creating a Disability Justice

# Movement



# Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

This week, we will discuss how disabled youth can create a disability justice movement that does not rely on an oppressive system. According to research, there may be up to 43% of targeted and incarcerated youth that have a special education disability (Mallett, 2012). Therefore, it is important for our youth to create a disability justice movement that provides support and justice for youth with disabilities. Disability justice is defined as the advocacy and need for ableism to be eliminated; it focuses on providing justice for the disabled community

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> <u>"Ten Principles of Disability Justice"</u>, Patricia Berne, Aurora Levins Morales, David Langstaff, Sins Invalid, 2018

(Jampel, 2018). This can be accomplished through the creation of community alternatives. They can provide for the needs of the community, and they do not have to rely on the system that polices them. When creating community alternatives that focus on youth with disabilities, it should be them who lead the disability justice movement. They should have a say on which community alternatives will benefit them the most.

For this week, you will be reading "Ten Principles of Disability Justice" by Berne, Morales, Langstaff, and Invalid (2018). This article discusses the importance of disability justice. Berne et al., (2018) remind us of the principles that are needed in order to create a disability justice movement. Leadership of the people impacted the most, intersectionality, anti-capitalistic politics, the recognition of wholeness, listening to the voices of all of the community members, independence and liberation that is collective are needed to accomplish disability justice. Youth with disability can create a disability justice movement by acknowledging that intersectionality exists within the community. Many factors can impact the experience of an individual, such as class, race and gender. Youth can continue to create a movement by also acknowledging how capitalism actively works against individuals with disabilities. A disability justice movement must also recognize everyone's "wholeness". The value of a person with a disability should not be measured through how they can contribute to capitalism. As stated, "Disabled people are whole people" (Berne et al., 2018, p. 228).

Additionally, Berne et al. (2018) remind us that a disability justice movement can be created by including and hearing the voices of every single person in their community. Not every single person in their community has the same disability. Therefore, with the perceptions, experience and voices of everyone, the youth can work towards eliminating ableism and other existing oppressors, such as classism, patriarchism, and racism. Youth can also create a disability

justice movement by helping their community members receive their necessities. This can be done collectively. As stated, "... we can ask that our needs be met without compromising our integrity... we can be unafraid of our vulnerabilities knowing our strengths are respected" (Berne et al., 2018, pg. 228-229). We just discussed the ways in which a disability justice movement is created; they all focused on community alternatives to an oppressive system. They remind us that communities can come together to provide each other with the support that institutions have failed to provide. Additionally, for this week, you will be watching "Disability Justice and Abolition with Elliot Fukui". In his presentation, Fukui further explains what disability justice is. He goes on to explain how communities can help their members and not have to rely on abusive institutions. We must understand that communities have the power to create a powerful movement that addresses the needs of their community members.

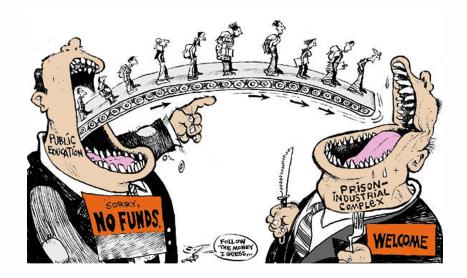
### Read, Listen, or Watch

**Read:** Berne, P., Morales, A. L., Langstaff, D., & Invalid, S. (2018). Ten principles of disability justice. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, *46*(1), 227-230.

Watch: CAT911 Disability Justice and Abolition with Elliott Fukui

## WEEK FIVE:

### **The Foster Care-to-Prison Pipeline**



# Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

This week we will discuss how foster youth children are being pushed into prison beginning with people of color who are more likely to be in foster care than whites and it is a breeding ground for the criminal justice system. As the research continues, I learned that 50 percent of children in the foster care system are black or Latino. Also, 30 percent of foster youth are getting sent to the juvenile system due to having several behavioral cases. This comes to show the importance on where the focus is when it comes to the lives of foster youth. As it is, these children are already walking into the government system with families they have never seen, confusion, fear and much more insecurities. The misunderstanding being caused by who places them in a juvenile detention instead of seeking other help options is where the first mistake is done. Due to just controlling foster youth lives, 25 percent of young people who are

leaving foster care lead to incarceration a few years after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. One of the biggest and most important focuses can be when the foster youth is getting ready to age out and creating a plan. You see, many foster youths become homeless due to the rule of having to leave the foster home placement just because they turn 18. There is no funding, no plans being shown to these children to help care for themselves. There is a failure to think that children with no family will be okay just because they turn of age.

Many foster youths want to break the cycle of dysfunction but it becomes more challenging. In education, 24 percent of foster youth battle with disabilities while in school. Due to lack of resources 55 percent attend college and only 8 percent will graduate and those who experience more placements are 15 percent likely to complete any educational program or degree. Therefore, every child who is or aged out of the foster youth system deserves to start creating a legal advocacy project to help plan for a better future and establish stability. This is a trauma we need to shut down

### Read, Listen, or Watch

#### Read: Criminalization of the foster care system

http://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/curated/new-toolkit-help-milwaukee-organizations-com bat-school-prison-pipeline/

# WEEK SIX:

# **Abolitionist Alternatives for Foster Youth**



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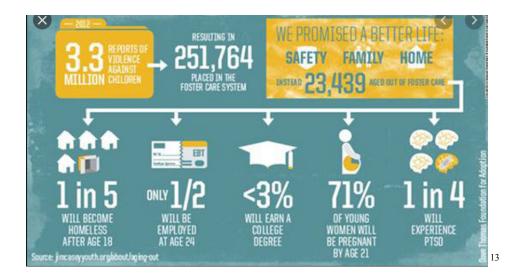
### Here's What You'll Be Studying This Week

In the final chapter for this course, for week six you will be studying what the issue is with the foster care system? If the foster care system was abolished, then what would replace it? Abolitionist Alternatives for Foster Youth. We will read and discuss two pieces both *"What does it mean to abolish the child welfare system"* and watch *"Kinship care, An alternative To Foster Care."* 

<sup>12</sup> http://www.kahyangni.com/

For a moment, imagine you are in class and have a check in scheduled with your teacher but, on the day of your scheduled check in it gets rescheduled due to your class being large and there not enough time in the period for your teacher to meet with every student. Well this is the same within the foster care system it has reached its capacity and proceeds to grow at an exponential rate.

The Foster Care system promises to provide a home, better safety and security for children who are abused, neglected and unable to be cared for properly. Instead more times than not the government funded institutions are over crowded with children with understaffed, underpaid and overworked employees. All of the following result in poor quality which lead to a failed system that can not be trusted. While employers are looking for homes to put children in, they are overlooking the true needs of children including a safe foster home and vital developmental skills to prepare them for their future as soon as they turn 18. Instead this is the reality the foster youth face...



#### **Seen Timeline Below:**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://foundationforfosterchildren.org/who-we-are/mission-stats/

The system doesn't teach the kids on how to get ahead, they only show the children how to get by. With only teaching the youth within their system how to get by, these children are then not equipped to be able to function effectively in society because they "age out" at eighteen years old, and are expected to leave the foster system.

What if instead there was an alternative within the community who could teach children within the system about social capital?

There is..



Social capital: What foster children really need | Victor Sims | TEDxLakeland

Social capitalism, "meaning a network of relationships around people that enable people to function effectively" (Sims 2018). A major alternative would be to create community alternatives that include mentors or advisor within the community that can teach foster kids about the importance of doing well in school, resources that are available to assist them through their life

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRPxTjB41Lg&t=313s

and coming up with a plan for before they graduate, go to college, become employed and purchase their first home.

Another growing alternative for foster youth instead of foster care is foster kinship. This allows someone close to a child if not family to oversee their care and proper development, with also understanding where the child comes from and their needs. For situations where children's parents are not abusive, they just need time to get their life in order, this allows the opportunity for them to do so to still have a relationship with their child and even one day take custody again when they are capable. Just because a system exists who's mission claims to want to improve the life of childrens whose lives are at risk doesn't mean that they are able to fulfill this mission. There is no better time than now to advocate for the creation and expansion of critical safety nets for children within the foster care system.

There are alternatives that exist and need assistance expanding through communities coming together collectively and planning for this generation and the generations to come in the future, healthy and successful development. The time is now to advocate for the creation of critical safety nets for The Policing of Queer and Trans Youth, The Criminalization of Disabled Youth, Young People Creating a Disability Justice Movement, The Foster Care-to-Prison Pipeline and Abolitionist Alternatives for Foster Youth.

### Read, Listen or Watch

Watch: What foster children really need | Victor Sims (7 minute Clip)

Watch: Kinship care, An alternative To Foster Care

# **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### Queer and Trans Prison Abolitionism:

Dean Spade, "Their Laws Will Never Make Us Safer"

Cathy Cohen, "#DoBlackLivesMatter? From Michael Brown toCeCe McDonald: On Black Death and LGBTQ Politics" (transcribed lecture)

Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle

Eric Stanley and Nat Smith, Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex

Tommi Avicoli Mecca, Smash the Church, Smash the State: The Early Years of Gay Liberation

### **Disability Justice**:

Sins Invalid, "10 Principles of Disability Justice" Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory" Eli Clare, Brilliant Imperfection Liat Ben-Moshe, Decarcerating Disability Leroy F. Moore with POOR Magazine: Krip Hop Nation The Disability Visibility Project Podcast and the #StacyTaughtUs Syllabus Talia Lewis Blog

# Abolitionist Alternatives for Foster Youth:

Advocate for the creation and expansion of critical safety net programs

Foster Club Guardian Ad Litem

Kinship

Foundation for Foster Care

What Does it Mean to Abolish the Child Welfare System as We Know It?

Improving Outcomes for Former Foster Youth

Toward the Abolition of the Foster System

Short Term 12



<sup>15</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> https://www.facebook.com/MPD150/photos/a.119889298626420/619479925334019/?type=3&theater

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