

## **Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Forward**

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### **Definitions**

Abolition: An ideology which believes in the total removal of violent and oppressive institutions.

Carceral state: Institutions, both domestic and international, that use state power to exert violence on or captivate oppressed peoples.

Carceral power: The scope of the carceral state.

Collective genius: Group efforts, both intellectual and imaginative, that go toward building the ideal society.

### **Summary**

Abolition cannot exist without imagination. Because a society free of the carceral state has not existed, being an abolitionist requires believing in the collective genius of the community. It is rethinking justice. The carceral state and incarceration cannot be limited to the physical ways it manifests (jails, detention centers, police, etc.). Incarceration makes one group asserting dominance and control over another normal and necessary. Abolition believes in the complete upheaval and removal of these systems and a reimagined justice.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### Abolition is imagination

Believing abolition is believing in the possibility of a world that does not yet exist. It is a communal dream toward a future different from the societies that have existed to this point. This can be accomplished by *collective genius*.

A key part of abolitionist thinking freeing ourselves of the traditional demands for policy reform, formal equality, and increased electoral participation. *The goal is for a society where these demands are not needed to begin with.*

#### Redefining what justice means

Abolition necessitates redefining what it means to find justice; *one that does not involve the carceral state or carceral power*. We have been conditioned to associate justice with punishment; that is not the only way. *Restorative justice*, for example, focuses on the harm done by the offender instead of punishment.

#### Reform will not work

Reform treats issues as police brutality and mass incarcerations as symptoms of the institution rather than tools. It overlooks components like normalized misery, social surveillance, and state terror by focusing on “phenomenon”. Reform concedes that the carceral state is simply a part of society.

The 13th Amendment is the perfect example of failed reform. It simply redressed a race-based power structure by redefining what justifies human capture. Reform has been trying to happen since the transatlantic slave trade and Manifest Destiny. Abolition is the only way.

### Abandoning the term “mass incarceration”

Mass incarceration suggests that there is only one “mass” targeted by the carceral state. It implies that this group is not the intended demographic, and they happen to be victims. When, in fact, the entire carceral state has always depended on the criminalization and gendered violence for Black, indigenous, queer, poor, and colonized peoples.

The term believes that the law and tools of law enforcement have been magically manipulated to oppress marginalized groups. The naming of mass incarceration comes from a place of privilege and shock of the “phenomenon” of mass incarceration; it’s a catch phrase. The same can be said for the term “police brutality”, which makes occasions of state sanctioned violence against Black people seem incidental.

### The carceral state normalizes captivity

Carceral institutions *naturalize* state captivity of criminalized people. It suggests that when uncriminalized people (white, cisgendered, straight, males) are incarcerated it is unjust, wrong, scandalous, and therefore *unnatural*. Therefore, they are in captivity, or incarcerated, for shorter periods of time compared to marginalized groups for whom criminalization is deemed *natural*. The carceral state assumes that because someone may be Black, Latino, queer, alternately abled, poor, or uneducated, it is natural for them to be incarcerated.

### Incarceration is more than physical structures

In order to understand abolition, one must understand that incarceration is not an isolated occurrence, and it is not limited to the physical places where it may take place. Incarceration is a means to enforce control in any capacity. It creates the normalized dominance over certain people’s existence and environment.

Incarceration is apartheid, military occupation, environmental racism, compulsory schooling of indigenous peoples, and normative sexual and gender categories.

“Incarceration facilitates...fatal forms of oppressive violence through the power relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, national origin, religion, and citizenship, among other socially ascribed differentiations of human beings.”

