

From J.:

What is the relationship between abolition and progressive and leftist coalitions (based on racial and economic justice, immigrant rights, public education, affordable housing, environmental justice, etc). How can we better ally ourselves with these movements to create a stronger, more unified left?

What role does reforming or "taking over" the Democratic Party play in this building of a progressive movement?

From L.F.:

The need to reconsider universal participation in economies of violence and creating community support rather than prison systems of punishment is hugely important, but in what active ways are prison abolition and community building feasible? I've heard an intriguing idea that community treatment programs for those who commit violent/criminal acts will need to include members of a larger local community rather than just a "convicted" community; how can we reduce the stigma associated with this and create larger participation?

From W.:

I hope you don't find this question as an attack. How do you engage with policymakers in state capitals while calling yourself an abolitionist? While abolition might be a fine goal, it might not help win over any potential allies for specific policy changes or proposals in government as well as allies in the broader community that might not have the vocabulary or ideology of abolition down. What if we think of abolition as a strategy (not allowing any more prison construction, reducing the prison population, dismantling prisons, tackling poverty, and reforming laws and sentencing guidelines) rather than a goal. Is the ideology and ideal worth the potential sacrifice of not being "taken seriously" in the community and by policymakers? Does the term do more harm than good with regard to policymakers and community mobilization?

From E.S.:

1) In the video both of you talk a lot about the ways in which violence and danger are constructed in very racialized, gendered, ableist, etc. ways, and that there are whole groups of people who are not considered dangerous or violent, but may in fact be perpetuating the most violence – the police, the military, corporations, etc. It might be that I feel compelled to ask this question because the logic of the prison system and punishment is so ingrained in my way of thinking, but if we DID see violence in this other way and these WERE the people getting convicted of crimes would imprisonment still be a bad idea? Obviously, this is a very hypothetical and maybe even impossible scenario, because people in power wouldn't sustain a system in which they are the ones getting locked up, so maybe the question is irrelevant. But is the problem with the prison system that it disproportionately affects people of color, poor people, queer and trans* people, etc. and perpetuates violence in these communities or is it the very logic of imprisonment and punishment that's the problem?

2) When thinking of abolition as a set of principles and something that people can and should practice everyday how do you measure success? If you're working to decrease policing in a certain area or rescind a drug law that is sending thousands of people to prison then it's pretty easy to tell when success is happened – when police presence has decreased or the law has been repealed. But how do you know when you or others around you are practicing abolition as best as you could or as much as you could? It seems like the impact of this would be harder to recognize.

From G.L.:

I was very interested in the point Reina Gossett made and Dean Spade reiterated that even within safe spaces created in prisons there sometimes develops a hierarchy of violence and oppression. These are

problems that are clearly rampant within the prison system but they also don't seem to be symptoms exclusively of prisons. How will the abolition of these prison systems, which are but one of the systems that enable these structures, help to prevent the perpetuation of these problems elsewhere? If the answer to this is rooted in the notion of making individuals indispensable to one another, then how can we ensure that these relationships are made and maintained on equal footing?

From O.L.:

In video #1, Reina emphasizes the importance of building relationships modeled on a logic very different from one of punishment and exile. She stresses the significance of building relationships centered on the notion that we are all indispensable rather than disposable and thus punishable. In a later video, Dean points out the fact that, often times, knowing someone -- like a friend or family member-- allows us to regard that person with a less punitive mindset. My question is, how do we urge people to regard individuals that they don't have extant relationships with in this same manner? That's to say, how can we encourage people to apply this same principle -- i.e. the "I know you so I won't call the cops on you"-- to individuals or groups of people they aren't familiar with?

From C.L.:

Do you envision a post-prison future in which there are no police? What would that look like? Do you think that there are any situations or contexts in which police might be beneficial or helpful to a community?

From R.U.:

How can we critically analyze how surveillance, both as a system and as an ideology, works to justify imprisonment?

From Dr. K.H.:

Does this extend into family court? I believe we need a whole new approach to relationship issues and disengagement of marriages. I work in the courts everyday and I find them, as they stand, a public health problem.

From A.L.:

I watched the third video and found it made many valid points, including how rare serial killers, rapists, et al are. I didn't hear an answer as to what would be done in the very, very rare cases when they were present, whether it's a serial pedophile such as Jerry Sandusky or a killer such as Ted Bundy.

I can see the argument for reducing prisons and changing the entire system focus' (from caging to prevention/rehabilitation) and much of what you're saying, but I'm not seeing how they can be abolished entirely when there are men/women like these examples. How would that work?

From G.S.:

I just wanted to say thank you for this overview on the topic. I had previously only heard about it once, during a speech by Angela Davis.

Since the subject is very new to me, my question might sound a bit bold, but here it is:

- Historically speaking, haven't there always been forms of prison and punishment in the civilised world? Do you see this as a deeply-rooted illness of the civilised world? I understand that no prisons exist within indigenous tribes. How do you explain this?

Thank you for your answer.

From M.:

For young activists who are new to the work you're discussing in these videos, do you have any books/websites/people etc. that you recommend we look into or learn more about? Also, do have any advice for young activists (age 17, high school senior) in general? Thank y'all for all you do!! <3

From A.H.:

I just want to say thank you, I think this is beyond brilliant - so smartly formatted, clearly articulated, a concrete educational tool that not only works for people who are at the level of asking "what about the dangerous people" but also for someone like me who just graduated with a Comparative American studies degree.

Reina - always so honored to have worked with you and grateful for the directions it sent me, I hope you're doing so well!

I will probably submit a question later too, but for now just want to say thanks for making this and congratulations.

From M.M.:

Navigating the balance between working within the prison system (as a service provider) and activism for prison abolition.

From P.R.:

What have you found to be the best ways to breach the topic of prison abolition without turning people off?

From K.M.:

what strategies do you have to gently remind efforts veering to the reformist to return to abolitionist principles while reducing the chance of resentment by folks who have worked really hard?

From L.M.:

What are some good strategies that lawyers can use to advance the cause of prison abolitionism? Is it worthwhile to try to work within the system in order to tear it down?

From E.C.:

well... Since we are organizing a public event in cahoots with this global day of action against gender based violence -and in thinking of this narrowly in terms of domestic violence maybe you could talk about strategies around domestic violence that you have seen or explored that are viable alternatives to police and prisons. i haven't watched all the videos yet. so maybe you already did. SO EXCITED ABOUT THIS!!

From L.D.:

Which entrenched cultural narratives about incarceration do you see as most difficult to deconstruct, and how do you see these narratives addressed/deployed (productively or otherwise) in popular media (anything from television shows to news media).

From M.I.:

Restorative justice is ideally an approach that addresses violence on many levels, but I have heard critiques that the kinds of violence often addressed through these approaches can place further burdens on those experiencing the violence. When restorative justice models are applied in cases of intimate partner violence, for example, those experiencing the violence may feel they are forced to take on the burden of "changing their partner." I've also read critiques of existing restorative justice models' failure to adequately address issues of safety and accountability. How can we address these concerns in restorative justice programs?

From R.K.:

Are you ever concerned that use of the word "violence" is overused to the point where it loses meaning? How do you define violence?

From K.K.:

Can either of you speak a little bit more about the precise reasons incarcerated people tend to give when explaining their preference for (or aversion to) a queer prison unit? The question of self-determination in light of multiple "selves" (and in the case of prison systems, millions of "selves") with differing experiences and relationships to certain spaces is really crucial in navigating action within our communities; and to know (as much as one can "know") these differing experiences is the prime preliminary step to such action.

From S.P.:

If we abolish the prison system, then what is the proposed solution to crime? You said that everyone is part of economies of violence, but there are definitely sliding scales of violence. There are people that actually are serial murderers and serial rapists, for example. How would we as a society work to reform those people and eliminate those violences?

From C.L.:

How do you suggest that people deal with violence within their communities (especially sexual violence and IPV) within a prison abolition framework?

From E.H.:

Thank you so much for doing this!

What are some places in the world trying out programmes that we could emulate? Are we seeing some institutions or countries having success with reforming the prison system?

From K.P.:

First of all, thank you both for some very interesting insights. My question is: What happens after the abolition? The abolition removes a lot of harm and violence that is justified as necessary - but what happens after? Do we abandon law regulation all together? Do we let communities figure things out on their own (and couldn't that in fact lead to more violent regulation than we are seeing now)? As I see it we won't be able to live outside of some kind of system whatever it is a law regulated system, anarchy or something different and if we overthrow this one, do we then have a plan or an ideal of the system we would like to replace it with?

From M.J.:

How does the strategy to replace the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole impact the movement to abolish prisons?

From E.I.:

Massachusetts is appealing the federal court decision to fund sex-reassignment surgery for Robert Kosilek. Chelsea Manning is granted only psychiatric medication. What do you think is the necessary relationship between politics of sexual reassignment surgery and the state? Is this a state issue or a federal issue? How do you see these legislatures in correspondence with the push for universal prison abolition?

From K.C.:

This question is more aimed at the basic idea of justice than of the role of the police and the prison: Is it possible to have a society without this "apparatus of justice" composed by the judicial system, the police

and the prisons? How can we solve disputes between human beings, organizations or countries without using the hegemonic systems of laws that we build our notion of justice on today?

From KC:

Can you comment on the TV show Orange is The New Black? I haven't seen it, but from what I hear, something ain't right.

From N.G.:

Dean, you often say that "prisons are the serial killers, prisons are the serial rape." I've studied the sexual violence of prisons pretty extensively, but could you elaborate on the specifics of how prisons cause early death and murder?

From M.S.:

Do you have any advice for how we can get the mainstream LGBT movement to recognize state power as inherently abusive, rather than a source of equality to be embraced?

From J.M.:

In the fourth video, Dean made the point that violence exists in our communities, but policing and criminalization don't help to prevent it--they only serve perpetuate and escalate it further. So how do we find and help solve its root causes? What are some concrete things we can do to "prefigure the world we want to live in," as Reina put it? Moving forward from questioning the state's logic of punishment and exile, how can we curtail the origination of violence in our lives?

From E.F.:

I have two questions, both based on my view that a minimal rehabilitative prison system is necessary in any society. First of all, I wonder how well acquainted you are with the prison systems of other countries. I notice a lot of determinism in the arguments about the "Prison Industrial System" here in America, where the injustices of America's system are used to substantiate the "inevitable, inherent" violence of prison systems, exemplified in your talk by the point about how creating new prison units will increase demand for prisoners. As much as I can see the historical reasons for the state skepticism underpinning this flavor of abolitionism, I also know a prison system that I find more just. And I do not see how it is reconcilable with most of the highly commendable goals of the abolitionism you posit focusing on root causes more than what to do when crime occurs, examining the categories of the legal system and how it works discriminately, and finding creative social (as opposed to state-based institutional) responses to criminality. I am from Norway, a deeply social democratic country (entailing that at political crossroads, our polity has often opted for reform rather than revolution). Our prison system is minimal, with about a tenth of the American per capita incarceration rate, and rehabilitation is about as salient a feature of our penitentiary system as punishment is in the American one. Sure, it is a centralized state institution that enforces a notion of the illegal. However, rehabilitation is irreconcilable with the notion that certain people are inherently dangerous, or at least, immutably so why, in that case, try to change people?

So my first question is this: what is it that abolition can accomplish that a minimal, rehabilitative prison system cannot?

When you talk about "dangerous people", I noticed you went straight for sociopaths and/or the mentally ill criminal. I do not think you answered to the question of how a society with no prisons will deal with people who have committed crimes that are very hard to label as anything but criminal, and even might agree themselves to the criminality of their actions. Let us look at another Norwegian case, admittedly an extreme

case, but for abolition to be a viable option, it needs to be a scheme that can deal with the most egregious cases of criminality and violence. Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people on July 22nd, 8 through bombing our governmental building and 69 youths at the island Utøya, where the youth labor party had their summer camp. Breivik pled guilty of the murders, on the grounds that he thought all of his victims were affiliated with a social democratic movement that traited the Norwegian nation through advocating policies that, in Breivik's mind, would allow muslim immigrants to take over political power in the country. He was submitted to two thorough psychiatric investigations, one found him to be a paranoid schizophrenic, the other found him not to be. The question in court was not whether he had a diagnose, but whether he was able to understand his actions as he committed them. The judge found that he was, and punished him to 21 years of imprisonment. Those 21 years are the punitive part of his imprisonment, which he will serve while retaining certain prisoner rights like the right to vote, or even, to study. I see this as a way to humanize him, to allow him political responsibility for his actions. After that, there is the legal possibility of retaining him for the sake of protecting society, as he continues to vow to keep using violent means to combat the muslim takeover he claims the Norwegian political and cultural elite are facilitating.

My second question is thus: In a society where prisons are abolished, how would it deal with a rare case like this one?

From J.C.:

In one of the videos, Dean Spade mentions the way that social movements work to redefine and reframe notions of violence. Do you think that relying on this rhetoric of violence is ever problematic or detrimental in the process of empowering those who suffer? The state, which is invested in identifying the "criminal" as violent, employs this language all the time. I wonder if using the same language as the state then still participates in a form of hegemony. Would it be useful to use different language?

From A.D.:

I was glad to see your discussion "what about the dangerous people." However, my biggest question wasn't really answered. Yes, the system and our racist society dictates what people are seen as "dangerous" and that is resoundingly clear when you look at the populations of prisons. However, when I envision an ideal future world, I sometimes think there are people I perceive as dangerous who I would not want to be a part of my community. (As someone who believes in restorative justice, I do feel deeply conflicted and even guilty about this.) When I think "dangerous," I think unrepentant perpetrators of sexual assault who I know personally, including my own perpetrator--and in so many cases they are privileged, self-righteous, "progressive" or "radical" white dudes.

What do we do when privilege has created in someone such an irreverence and self-righteousness that calls for accountability have been ignored?

What can we do *right now* when it is not the responsibility of a survivor to have to call out their perpetrator but also while there are not structures to deal with this in a comprehensively healthy way, especially when the perpetrator is not cooperative?

I'm lost. I go back and forth. Please do help me and let me know your thoughts.

From M.S.:

What is the place of legal strategies, either being taken now or that can be taken, to begin to reform the prison system and move away from the cycle of violence in which we now exist? Do you believe legal strategies are the best way to create a change, or is there something else we can do better reform?

From A.S.:

Is it possible to make a change this fundamental without resorting to violence? Given the way the state

operates, and the level of violence it uses, what are viable strategies we can adopt to affect change that will be seen and recognized even by the state?

From M.L.:

Could you talk a little more about what kinds of organizing or institutions could take the place of punishment-centered institutions? Specifically, in terms of preventing violent offenders or abusers from stalking and/or harassing former victims/survivors?

From J.C.:

[I'm] wondering if you could talk on higher ed in prison initiatives and their relationship to the reform/abolition debate and how to make sure the perspectives of incarcerated folks are central to these debates.

From @Blackandpink99:

How do we all encourage all people to be in authentic relationships with incarcerated people?

From L.R.:

How would you think the whole system of prisons would change if every prison had an approach of restorative justice implemented in every facility? What other tools do you feel should be pushed, aside from creating visibility to abolish prisons?

From J.W.:

How do we connect personal, daily practices of prison abolition, that might appear small/insignificant, to systemic resistance to the PIC? How do we bridge the gap between our daily lives and terrifyingly gigantic structures of harm, like prisons?

From M.D.:

The idea that "no one is innocent" helps me reject the dichotomy that makes incarceration seem necessary. I feel backed into a corner by men's rights groups who use a similar phrase to imply that a person being abused and the person perpetrating the violence are equally responsible and equally need to be held accountable. Do you encounter that tension? If so, how do you respond to it?

From M.S.:

In the moment of witnessing an act of violence (say, in the subway, as mentioned in the video), what are some strategies that could be used to connect and deal with harm, instead of calling the police?

From @fyeahMadPride:

What are some major lessons you have learned from survivors of prison, former or current prisoners?

From B.C.:

If abolitionists related the prison industrial complex to a system of genocide, do you think it would help elevate consciousness of the problem to an international and historical issue?

From @Blackandpink99:

How do we let go of the idea that we need to balance support and abolition? Rather abolitionist support strategies.

From @Blackandpink99:

Dean: what are our preventative strategies? While there are norms of violence in our communities how do we support all?