

## Session Two: Introduction to Abolition

### Readings:

1. 'Introduction: Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?' in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*  
Angela Davis (2003)  
Available at:  
<https://www.feministes-radicales.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Angela-Davis-Are-Prisons-Obsolete.pdf> [12 pages]
2. 'What is Abolition?'  
Critical Resistance (no date)  
Available at: <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/> [1 page]
3. 'Nine Perspectives for Prison Abolitionists', and 'Diminishing / Dismantling the Prison System,' in *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*.  
Prison Research Education Action Project (1976)  
Available from:  
[https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead\\_of\\_prisons/nine\\_perspectives.shtml](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead_of_prisons/nine_perspectives.shtml) &  
[https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead\\_of\\_prisons/chapter3.shtml](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead_of_prisons/chapter3.shtml) [2 pages + 5 pages]

### Why these readings?

The Davis reading is a key introductory text. It invites us to question why we take prison for granted and how that limits us in developing other ways of dealing with social problems.

The Prison Research Education Action Project reading, published in the 1970s, is a useful reminder that abolition isn't new and encourages us to consider the history of movement ideas. Arguably abolition seemed more on the horizon as a policy approach in the late 70s than it feels now, which also raises lots of questions about what is different now and what work needs to be done to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of the prison.

**Questions to discuss:**

1. Angela Davis invites us to question our assumptions about prison. What assumptions do you hold about prison?
2. What assumptions about the prison are regularly presented in the mainstream media/popular culture?
3. How does the prison system perpetuate and reinforce inequalities around race, class, gender, sexuality, ability?
4. Critical Resistance describes abolition 'as a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment'. Why is the target of abolition bigger than just prisons?
5. The 'Nine Perspectives for Prison Abolitionists' was written in the seventies. Do you think they hold up for abolitionists today?
6. What do you think of the attrition model of abolition?
7. We are told that prisons are necessary to keep us safe, what do readings suggest the actual function of prison is?

*We suggest picking two or three of these questions to focus on.*