

Growing Our Roots

Environmental Justice Founded in Abolition



This is Hot N Bothered: Cultivating Sustainable Resistance. Because we are angry, we are concerned, we are very hot and we want to explore the methods by which we are building a new future. We aim to cover a broad range of topics related to environmental justice and the climate crisis. Specifically, over the course of the next 12 issues, we will hone in on the landscape of leftist politics and community organizing in Central Ohio and discuss the implications that these subject areas have for the future of our Midwestern city as the climate crisis progresses.

We will share worker's stories, organizer's challenges, and interview people involved in the intersecting racial, labor, and climate justice movements. Each show will balance hope and struggle, with a deep delve into the theoretical backgrounds of our topic of the month, followed by an interview, a reflection period, and some brief calls to action that listeners can feel empowered to participate in. For this issue though, you'll just get to hang out with us - your hosts. Lastly, we want to break down institutional barriers that historically gate kept this knowledge - our coverage of social theories, history, and the future will be discussed in a way that is accessible to all listeners.

How does climate relate to the increasing severity of our local housing crisis? How does climate relate to our cities' increasing demands for racial justice? How does it relate to abolition, how does it relate to queerness, how does it relate to mobility justice, how does climate relate to literally every social issue we have ever grappled with? And we are here to at least approach an answer to these questions, or maybe we will leave with more questions, but either way someone needs to be having this conversation. So we hope that you will stick with us to critically analyze these topics and join us in our daring endeavor to imagine a future that is radically different from the present.

## WHAT IS ABOLITION

The George Floyd Rebellions of 2020 put the topic of police abolition into the minds of a lot of youth around the world. Autonomous action taken during that summer helped forge networks between people who have been struggling against police brutality for years and those who don't see a sustainable future in the status quo. Simply put, abolition is the process of putting an end to an institution or practice. Our use of the term abolition is rooted in the black autonomy tradition that grew out of the settler colonial slave diaspora. By "settler

colonial slave diaspora” we are specifically talking about the extraction of Indigenous people from Africa due to the slave trade, being forcefully placed in the Americas and forced to do labor that benefitted colonists settling in Native American lands. Some of the most repeated historical conceptions of abolition come from the call to end the disenfranchisement of black labor and put an end to slavery, but the on the ground call for abolition was aimed at white supremacy as a social and political movement. The war against white supremacy hasn't ended, we continue to see indigenous peoples and cultures genocided, poc and queer bodies harassed, killed and thrown away. Generations before us understood that surviving in the United States means forced assimilation, for children born into the diaspora, some have seen our parents' attitude and self determination falter and crumble before our youths. With the concept of police abolition gaining traction it was just a matter of time that the tactic of abolition was to be applied to all the oppressive forces that plague us.

Prison abolitionists, both in and out of detention, have been calling for us to collectively address the police's role in the continuation of slavery in our penal system. The abolition of ICE detention centers, jails and prisons in action means dissolving our current institutions of detention making collective space for networks of care and rehabilitation. That logic extends to the point of contact community members have with the law, where broken civil liberties are most likely to go unreported or uncorroborated. It's important to me to note, institutions at the scale of the police and detention centers are not just dissolved but *dismantled* from the bottom up by autonomous actors. But while pursuing an end to all state-sanctioned violence, more than anything, we must be working in a way that makes such institutions unnecessary. It's vital we are building our own collective systems of liberation. These actions, and the networks that support them, are formed outside the state in an explicit move to build power. By investing in systems of dual power we gain the capacity to create new social institutions that are founded on community care. We must be confronting the on the ground struggle that our current economics model demands us to engage in.

And by that do we mean capitalism?

Absolutely! The conditions that a capitalist economic system demands are just plain unsustainable. Having rigid hierarchies and theorized “unlimited value growth” makes it almost impossible for those with capital in the 21st century not to perpetuate the patterns of centralized accumulation and unsustainable land

stewardship. Centuries of colonialism and racist economic and social policies have privileged certain classes and social milieus with the capability to accumulate capital and structure their methods of economic growth before most of us have had a chance to engage. But if we want to champion sustainable communities and lifestyles we need to escape the rat race, we must consider our soft and hard power as community members to better our own conditions and break down the walls suffocating us. The new political and social institutions we create will determine how we facilitate this trade and management of wealth and clout. For this reason we have to have these discussions that create new economic models and theories.

The current economic models wouldn't seem so permanent if not for the state's relentless efforts to protect them through the modern state institutions such as the police, military, department of the interior, and the National Endowment for (alleged) Democracy.

Abolitionist autonomous actions are the catalyst for our collective imagination for liberatory politics. A lot more people are waking up to the role of economics in our political lives and more importantly swallowing the pill that the personal is political, damn near everything is a political choice. When we choose to allow multi-unit housing to go empty for months because landowners want to exploit land as a capital asset, we are going against the vital substrate of all existence, negating the fact that we belong to the land, not the other way around.

When we contextualize how the police function to secure the neoliberal and colonial attitudes of the state, we are explicitly subverting the State's ability to demonstrate its soft power over our psyche. But to continue our struggle against the prison industrial complex (PIC) and military industrial complex (MIC) we must come together against all forms of domination. Our struggle for a sustainable future has no border, no matter how many billions of dollars nation-states will spend in attempt after attempt to legitimize borders. The Ecological crisis we are experiencing doesn't care about profit and neither can the collective institutions of our future. As William C Anderson said in his book, *The Nation on No Map: black anarchism and abolition*

“ as I confront ideas about nation building and/or trying to use or reform state power, I ultimately want to encourage others to take abolition and apply it to borders, nations and states”

They go on by,

"Envisioning a nation that doesn't need to be a nation and that doesn't need to be on a map, because it *knows* borders, states, and boundaries cannot accommodate the complexities of our struggle"

We have been barely surviving for too long, and we are running out of earth to fight over. It's vital we fight in ways that aren't reproducing oppressive structures, our means must be justified in their own right to create sustainable and just ends.

In a modern analysis of anarchic thought video essayist Daniel Baryon defines

"Anarchy is *both* individual and collective freedom to develop our full creative capacities, constituted through equality of structural power and the eternal principle of human solidarity. Such a society is not then a state of unrest, but the condition of existence in which humanity can determine for themselves what sort of future they wish to inhabit, free of direction by some dominator class, instead carried forth by their own motivated wills. If this society has been explained to you as a state of chaos, understand only that your rulers wish you to think of a society without domination, a society in which *you* are in control, as chaos"

Now sit with that for a second, if you can perhaps think that sure if "I" was in control maybe "I" might not do so well for that long, or maybe not at all. But understand that line of thinking applies to our current system, one where you have the capacity to accumulate power or signifier of power i.e. capital, and only you. That is what we are attempting to escape. What we posit through anarchic frameworks is creating dynamic social conditions where the checks and balances of our political governing systems can be self-sustaining. Not in a passive way in which we tout the party or mass line and uphold the status quo, but one that is legitimized by the active participation in societal efforts. We are coming together to increase the capacity of EVERYONE on this earth to have an impact on their material conditions. So, if upending white supremacist political institutions in their entirety means we must abolish our contemporary political governing structure, so it goes. Hopefully over the course of our time together discussing and acting out our future, we can forge a unity and an understanding that knows of such liberation.

We love to have these conversations so early on in setting the foundation of our time in this show. Because we really do need to be thinking very broadly about what abolition entails. Like most people just think it means to get rid of

prisons. But the ideology is so much deeper than only disappearing one of the many facets of this huge system that works to oppress us.

### WHY EMPHASIZE THE INTERSECTION W EJ

In Amerika, where lots of people talk about freedom and liberty without defining why or how we liberate ourselves, it leaves some of us questioning just how free we are? When our food and energy supplies are being disrupted and devastated by corporate interests, how can we claim liberty? The lack of community ownership & input coupled with the erasure of native knowledge and sovereignty, which has left our soil damaged and has had demonstrable effects on our mental and physical wellbeing, how can we preach freedom? When communities suffering from decades of old racist zoning codes and regulations are forced to compounded the stress on our youth by explaining, carefully, how to engage with law enforcement because any engagement could lead to a loss of life or mobility. We must be centering discussion of actions with felt impacts on our communities. There are so many intersectional oppressive forces that the previous colonial leaders have “left for future generations to handle” and it's become more than apparent that those who have been hanging onto that colonial institutional power have no will to put in the work of changing it. With those oppressive forces working overtime on our marginalized communities we need to be increasing the capacity for self and communal sufficiency. So we can't talk about environmental justice or liberty without first talking about abolition.

### WHAT IS EJ

According to most scholars in the environmental justice literature, and specifically Dr. Robert Bullard, environmental justice (EJ) is the principle that all people and communities are entitled to equal protection under environmental health laws and regulations. This is kind of the same definition that has been adopted by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). An expanded definition of this would include the right to not be exposed to environmental harms or toxins. This is a right to all humans regardless of race, class, or other social identities that keep folks in the margins.

The environmental justice movement, however, did not begin by addressing the intersection of these and other areas of marginalization. The rise of the EJ movement was a result of the continued work in the civil rights movement and also the emergence of an anti-toxics movement in the United

States in the early 1970s. So in the beginning, a lot of environmental justice demonstrations were focused on exposure to toxic pollution. For example, one of the critical events which is highly regarded as the “starting point” of the US EJ movement was the Warren County, North Carolina protest in 1982. In Warren County, there had been a proposal to create a dump site for PCB-contaminated soil. PCBs are “polychlorinated biphenyls,” which are industrial products or chemicals that have been shown to be very harmful to human and environmental health. PCBs were banned in the US in the late 1970s, and the producers of these chemicals had to get rid of them somewhere! So it seems they started dumping them on poor, often Black, communities with low amounts of political power. This resulted in the residents and supporting communities mobilizing against this proposal, which brought in national media attention and also resulted in over 500 arrests in civil disobedience.

In 2012, residents from Warren County acquired a historical marker for this site and held an anniversary celebration in which Rev. Ben Chavis, a civil rights activist that participated in direct actions in the name of EJ, was present to give a speech addressing the significance of this moment in history, which included a forewarning...

“PCB is polychlorinated biphenyl. Polychlorinated Biphenyl, one of the most carcinogenic, one of the most cancer causing substances ever produced by man. It's man-made, it's a residue, it's a runoff, it's a by-product. No matter what science, there's something wrong with concentrating PCB, even in the best scientific landfill. All landfills eventually leak. Thank god it has been detoxified, but we still have to raise the question. Why detoxification in the first place? Why?

We must move forward and not backward, there are forces in our society right today, They want to take our society backwards. they want to go to the days of segregation, they want to go to the days of inequity and injustice. People want to blame poor people for being poor.”

From here, the first EJ-focused social study was conducted in 1983 by the US General Accounting Office to investigate the racial demography of communities near toxic waste sites in the South. The results of the study found that 3 out of the 5 most toxic commercial hazardous waste sites in the US are located in neighborhoods where Black and Latinx residents are a majority of the resident population. This led to the eventual publishing of the famous 1987

United Church of Christ study titled “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” which was the first nationally conducted study to confirm that, above considerations of class, racial identity was the most significant factor predicting resident proximity to waste sites producing harmful toxic pollution. Rev. Ben Chavis who we just heard that speech from was actually one of the directors of the famous UCC study. Twenty years later, in 2007, a new report was published (titled “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty”) which addressed the continued presence of disproportionate exposure to toxic waste by the poor and specifically by Black communities in the US. The report states,

“It is ironic that twenty years after the original Toxic Wastes and Race report, many of our communities not only face the same problems they did back then, but now they face new ones because of government cutbacks in enforcement, weakening health protection, and dismantling the environmental justice regulatory apparatus. Our new report, Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty, again signals clear evidence of racism where toxic waste sites are located and the way [the] government responds to toxic contamination emergencies in people of color communities,” (pg. 8).

Off of this momentum, EJ formed a more coherent movement in the late 1980s which continues today. Now today we do not only see the addressing of toxic waste, but we also see EJ focusing on food insecurity, long-term community health outcomes, infant mortality, mobility, housing security, proximity to natural disaster areas, proximity to mining areas, runoff, and so many more topics which we will get into in depth in this show.

Now, some environmentalists consider EJ to be a “contentious topic” because some mainstream environmentalists do not think that JUSTICE is necessary to achieve a fossil free future, an end or at least survival through the climate crisis, or “sustainable” lifestyles. We wholeheartedly disagree with this assumption. We think that social justice has to be at the CENTER of any conversation about environmental justice, because only by abolishing the institutions that are hurting our communities can we build more sustainable futures for ourselves and the more-than-human world.

In the past too, there was quite a lot of pushback in the beginning of the EJ movement about race being the most deterministic factor of proximity to pollution, with many scholars in and outside of academia claiming that actually class was the determining factor of proximity to toxic pollution. There was also this whole chicken-or-egg debate about if industries were siting their waste sites



in existing Black and POC communities or if POC were later moving to those areas because of a lower cost of living. (Side note: Indigenous communities were being attacked this entire time, but the scholarship didn't really pick up on this for years). These claims against race as a factor have been largely refuted today, but it's brought up from time to time. Many scholars have published a variety of different quantitative studies that use different geographic data points to calculate the significance of impact of race or class on exposure to show that, even with different methods, race is still the biggest factor. Mostly I think I would consider the debate to be settled. There is just too much evidence pointing to the fact that, regardless of class, being a member of a racially marginalized group puts you at greater risk of being exposed to life-altering toxic pollution. I think we as community organizers intimately involved in this work can attest to that.

I think the inclusion of "justice" in environmental organizing is changing really fast in today's mainstream environmental movement, but you have to remember this was the 80s and early 90s, and honestly most of the early 2000s as well. I mean, there is a clear lack of understanding of intersectionality in all of those arguments from back then. Even as BIPOC scholars, who are the founders of this field of study, consistently made strong arguments that, while class is a factor, race outweighs class, the majority of social scientists at the time refuted the claims. But today, if you look at the propaganda being pumped out of the Big Tent of mainstream environmental organizations, like the Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, and Greenpeace, and even the National Park Service, they are going through this weird rebranding where suddenly it seems like at least they are AWARE of the need for justice in the environmental movement.

What does that mean for people on the ground? What kind of structural or interpersonal challenges are formed/need to be confronted when mass organizations with money and clout are playing catchup?

It's interesting, because we ... have trust issues. Right? Like I do not trust the National Park Service to actually address justice issues, I will be extremely surprised if they did in any significant way, and even then I would be skeptical. But I think what it could mean in the immediate and material future is money. Money being moved out of the hands of these large institutions which have historically not re-invested their funds into actual grassroots efforts. We may actually see that money and it will be up to us, as locals on the ground, to assess

what is the most sustainable use for those resources as they come in. Because once they realize that the justice movement would threaten their ability to make money off of nature or politics or whatever it is, the money will probably stop coming in. And in terms of relationships with those organizations, I would say that as long as there is no formal obligation to provide or do anything in order to access those resources, it could be really beneficial to smaller groups. Because once you enter into formal agreements about “this money will be used to accomplish this goal, and you have to publish a report on it, and you have to re-apply for these grants to ensure you can keep your organization alive,” then the grassroots organization has been captured.

Which is the perfect segue to going back and addressing what environmental justice has to do with abolition and why we are talking about it today. For one, environmental justice and the climate crisis are two topics that we will discuss at length throughout this show. And we cannot talk about those topics without grounding ourselves in the principles of abolition and liberation. As we mentioned earlier, abolition in general is the ending of an institution or practice. Most commonly in the United States, abolition is discussed in reference to the prison industrial complex. But there is much to be said about abolishing other violent institutions, which we would define as institutions that can exert physical or psychological violence against individuals and communities in an effort to force social control onto those communities and benefit the institution. Usually this looks like the state or the private sector (or their offspring) screwing people to make a profit. This is broad and it would include many of the institutions (and their extensions) that we often find ourselves operating within, such as any of our governmental institutions, detention centers, even public schools and yes, our economic system of capitalism. In order to achieve environmental justice, which is a process and an outcome, we need to live free from harm of toxic wastes, with access to the material resources needed to survive, while assuming a mutually beneficial stewardship with the natural world. It will require the abolition of many things, including the abolition of fossil fuel extraction, which means the abolition of capitalism, and the processes that protect it, to achieve this goal.

To actively fight for land stewardship starts with questioning the roots of our aforementioned trust issues. In our current position we cannot afford toxic cleanup when conglomerates and subsidiaries, having no budget for aftercare, ravage the wellbeing of our bioregion to exploit local resources and labor. We

lack community based investment programs that are purely focused on redeveloping our built world to meet the ever expanding needs of community members. If you consider our municipal agencies, who are kept in lockstep by local capitalist and landowner-owned NGO's and staff, the political body is up to the task, then we have a lot of work to do. That's why we're here. The prevalence of these monied interests and the mindset they impose upon the public makes it hard to remember that opportunities for change are not locked in a building in city hall. As corny as it is, we all have the power to stop injustices in their tracks. The access to information in the last 30 years has changed how generations have grown to adapt and conform to conditions they have been born into. We are a part of a social revolution around the world that has been ongoing since before colonial boats hit any shore. One that pertains to sustaining our ecosystem not in a way that preserves just what works but in a way that helps us adapt without asserting domination over our ecology.

#### WHERE COLUMBUS/HOPE FITS IN

Like we mentioned in the beginning... We are staring the climate crisis in the face. There are millions of climate refugees worldwide already. The wildfire season keeps extending. Growing seasons are changing. Floods are increasing in severity. There have been a ridiculous amount of devastating hurricanes even in the last season alone. We have seen snow maybe twice in the 2021-2022 Ohio winter. And yet we still like to pretend that we are not going to feel these effects in the Midwest. This is simply not true!!!! Lake Erie is suffering from severe algal blooms, our climate is changing in a way that is forcing native plants to move North, we are experiencing heat waves and increased rainfall. The crisis is HERE AND NOW. And we need to get ready for that. We need to organize our communities because we know that the state will not protect us as long as it is rooted in protecting white supremacy, settler colonialism and global neoliberal capitalism.

But, not only that. Yes, the crisis is here. But here in Columbus, in Ohio, we are in a pretty strategic location to deal with the impacts of the climate crisis. We do not live in a natural disaster corridor like our comrades in the Southern US or on the coasts. If we can protect them, we have the protection of the Great Lakes in return. So more than anything else we need to plan for the future in which WE are at the HEART of the battle against the crisis in the US. People will move here

from regions of the world more prone to disaster (AND ARE! ALREADY!). Columbus is poised to be a really important physical place in the next 10, 20, 30 years. So as we gear up and organize our communities, we need to be constantly evaluating ourselves. We are the future. How do we manifest our imaginations into physical reality? We need to support Land Back and Indigenous sovereignty, we need to support BLM, we need to support reproductive rights, we need to plan ahead, stop being so reactionary, and provide social infrastructure for our communities. And, we believe we can do that. We just need to start.

The truth of the matter is we are in no position to continue the use of colonial ethics, social status or financial status as a way to deem someone's worthiness for necessary resources. It all comes back to land stewardship and who our society deems fit to make those decisions. We can't be scared of our innate power as human beings, but embrace it and how we can change our built world. When we collectivize our power we can no longer be out-organized by monied interest. Sustainable social and political infrastructure is built through grassroots efforts and our elders have been putting in the work generation after generation and against all odds. We have to be ready to grow from whatever calamity is tossed our way. To never conform around the nation-state and its identity. But to carve out our own space and let it shine, to inspire and revitalize those who may feel like there isn't enough energy right now to make change. To understand the solutions to generations problems we must be looking internally at how we perpetuate those because no one is 100% innocent. We all hold the guilt of complacency that is born of privilege and ignorance. Such realizations are not prompts for mass paralyzation but calls to action to each individual who wants change. We must actively change and build on the foundation we have inherited through past struggle. Sustainable resistance is one of healthy community relations and active vulnerability to embrace hope. So, if you're reading this and ya feel the need to act, and act now, you are the resistance, stay strong!

## CALL TO ACTION

This month we want to highlight the ongoing struggle in Columbus against police brutality in the midwest, we want to shout out a group of community members working to shine light on Casey Goodson Jr.'s story and truth in light of the upcoming trial of Murderer Michael Jason Meade. Meade had shot Casey in

the back 6 times as Casey was entering his house. Meade is just one example of the how policing has been used as an instrument of terror, because if not for the community outrage we don't believe there would even be a trial. So help the community members share Casey's truth to the people of Franklin county or your local region. For more information follow @convictmeade on instagram facebook and twitter and reach out if you want to get involved.

We also want to highlight the case of James Williams, a father who was shot through his backyard fence by canton pd after shooting his firearm in the air on new years. The officers did not name themselves or engage in contact with Williams until after the shooting started. if you want to get involved with these ongoing struggles you can find updates on the facebook pages of Consistency Speaks and Persistent Media

Back to hope... here's a quote from Dr. Cornel West closing out our first zine

"I'm not optimistic, I don't believe in optimism. I don't believe in pessimism. Black folks say "I've been down so long, that down don't worry me no more, but I'll keep struggling anyway" that is not an optimistic statement, nor a pessimistic one. Neither sentimental nor cynical. It is an expression of hope. Never confuse or conflate hope with optimism. Hope cuts against the grain, hope is participatory, hope it's an *agent* in the world. Optimism looks at the evidence so see whether it allows us to infer if we can do x or y. Hope says "I don't give a damn, I'm gonna do it anyway"

## SHOUTOUTS

You just read the first zine By Hot N Bothered: Cultivating Sustainable Resistance. We would like to take a moment to acknowledge folks and organizations who have worked on and inspired the production of this content

Thank you to Jordan Mays, Vicky Abou-Ghalioum, Marisa Twigg, Samuel Holman-Smith, Jacquelyn Fleming, and Cooper Davell.

: And another shoutout to: Mutual Aid Street Solidarity (@massohio), Sunrise Columbus (@sunrisecolumbus), Convict Murderer Meade (@convictmeade), Tamala Payne (Casey's mother @misstypayne), and elders in the environmental justice movement such as Dr. Robert Bullard, Rev. Ben Chavis, Dr. Cornel West, and others who we will mention in a future episode.

: LAST THING... We are on PATREON. If you would like to support our efforts to produce this show and zine, you can do so at

[patreon.com/hotbotheredohio](https://patreon.com/hotbotheredohio). This is all volunteer work. Send us funds if you have the capacity