

Building a Midwest Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement

Black Ink

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This document is the product of a group of revolutionaries in the so-called “Midwestern” region of the United States, to clarify a regional political trajectory for revolutionary abolitionist practice in the Midwest. We define it as a “trajectory” because we think that any strategy and analysis we outline should be subject to constant critique, development, and revision. These are therefore not definitive words but instead present both working theoretical and practical positions. We hope that this trajectory informs revolutionaries working within our own region, as well as revolutionaries organizing throughout and against the broader white colonizer plantation society.

We are in the middle of a revolutionary period. Following the rebellions of Summer 2020, a level of revolutionary consciousness has reemerged on a mass scale throughout the United States. Over the past two years, there have been massive revolts against Capital and the State across the world. Physical infrastructures of policing and the prison industrial complex became the targets of generalized militant street action in unprecedented ways. Uprisings, escapes, and strikes still continue to persist in sites of detention, at times spilling beyond the walls. Not only is concerted militant action against the police state now a defining feature of the revolutionary seasons to come, equally important is how radical movements for Black autonomy have continued to since take root. Militant struggles for Indigenous self-determination and the liberation of colonized ecologies and lifeways daily expose the illegitimacy of the settler colonial nation. While Amerika’s imperialist death march continues to face resistance all across the planet, there are currently masses of people within the core of empire who are realizing the potential they have to stop the machinery of racist Capital and subvert its control over our communities through sustained collective action. The only logical outcome we foresee for the current global trajectory is REVOLUTION OR DEATH in ongoing fascist eco-genocide.

Part 1: Revolutionary Abolitionism

We want to define Revolutionary Abolitionism as we believe that the character of a revolution in the United States emerges from the historical conditions of resistance to captivity and forms of state dominion specific to the local articulation of anti-Blackness and white supremacy. At its deepest foundations, the United States of Amerika is a white settler nation based on racial slavery, land occupation, population displacement, and perpetual warfare. We write from the perspective that U.S.-based revolutionary groups continually fail in their attempts to import ideologies from other historical and geographic locations to carry out the initiative of revolution in this particular social context. There is a rather substantial record of revolutions, radical traditions, and organic forms of struggle generated precisely from within the belly of settler empire itself. These are longstanding histories of local-level resistance and place-specific lineages of contesting state and capital. While we believe that the countless global revolutionary traditions have much to teach us, we believe that a revolution in the United States will take on a character defined by localized social contexts that are relative to a region’s situated material history. We neither wish to recuperate the white Amerikan national map nor give its borders any shred of legitimacy. We are writing with the aim to understand and base our understanding on the histories of Black and Indigenous resistance to the most evil and depraved empire on earth. The “U.S.” is a term that invokes our enemy and target.

The history of revolutionary movements in this country while varied have always been connected to and driven by a politics of freedom struggle. For this reason, we believe that a *revolutionary* abolitionist trajectory is the most likely to resonate within the United States. The pursuit of freedom of the oppressed by their own hands utilizing any means necessary is critical to the revolutionary abolitionist trajectory in the present day. Abolition means nothing if it is not absolute freedom struggle, a movement for total liberation. An insurgent defiance against every interlocking system of oppression. We are uninterested in settler colonial Amerikan notions of “freedom” that leave the State and white supremacy intact. We are interested in a freedom that means the destruction of the United States in its entirety. The fundamental revolutionary action that has remained central to any movement in this country is the self-activity of the Black masses who were enslaved but remained constantly in revolt against the plantation society. Current revolutionary movements must take on the character of the revolt.

The main aspects we find valuable about revolutionary abolition is how it is fundamentally rooted in the Black Radical Tradition. The history of revolutionary abolitionist movements—from the slave uprisings to Attica to the Black Panther Party—are distinctly informed by the Black Radical frameworks. Revolutionary abolitionism as a trajectory of freedom struggle in the United States also encompasses a multitude of other autonomous radical traditions. These traditions cannot be flattened or collapsed for the sake of comparison to create a “movement of movements,” as many on the settler Left would have you confused. We do not believe that a revolutionary abolitionist movement should be ideologically, organizationally, or even strategically uniform. Instead, revolutionary abolitionism as a trajectory embraces a multitude of influences and frameworks such as the *Black radical tradition*, *anarcho-communism*, *Indigenous resistance*, *decolonial movements*, *autonomist forms of communism*, *Black feminism*, *radical queer frameworks*, *insurrectionary anarchism*, *eco-socialism*, etc.

Building on the ideas of three decades of radical and revolutionary Black/Native feminist consciousness in particular, we also believe the Prison Industrial Complex forms the overarching context of struggle that we are situated within and fight against as abolitionists. This perspective of the existing terrain compels all abolition movements to ask: *If the Prisoner Liberation movement is not considered ground zero in this trajectory of freedom struggle than have we failed to be abolitionists?* Both the leadership and participation of imprisoned populations, and nonimprisoned peoples’ willingness to bend the bars and connect with revolutionaries inside are important features of a movement that is qualitatively abolitionist in the United States.

While many of the above principles expelled in definition exceed the boundaries of this position paper, the terms of engagement and proposals for Midwest revolutionary abolitionists that we plot here forward are possible and in a number of places already being be actualized. Blueprints and models of course are never sufficient, and a catalyst project will always require experimentation to achieve any objectives it sets out to do. The remainder of this article will discuss the specifics and peculiar contours of the Midwest as a specific terrain we see ourselves situated in as revolutionary abolitionists in the streets, and an argument for the proliferation of the Distro form, which encompasses a Catalyst project that combines the objectives of *survival*, *study*, and *class combat* through the simple use of table, some food and zines.

Part 2: The Midwest

The regional specificities of the Midwest are particularly important for revolutionary abolitionists. Our conception of the “Midwest” is related mainly to particular conditions of life in the areas we reside that are determined by and place-specific structures we are in conflict with. We want to discuss the specificity of the region’s terrain, pathways and transportation infrastructure, the geography’s specific “car culture,” and the proximity between a variety of urban centers. These are all serious material factors in the play of accumulating revolts and the capacity of neighbors to share in the production of insurgency, to connect and maintain across space most importantly. Unlike the East Coast which is connected by a bunch of trains and major interstates and is relatively close together, the urban centers are islands within the Midwest. This does not mean we cannot find our way to new pathways. The use of cars in rebellions and the ability for our comrades to drive across large distances to build is something that we should invest deeper and consider in revolutionary strategy. We can be driving across the highways and utilizing roads to visit and build with our comrades, in addition to traveling to aid insurgents in their revolt.

Large white localities in the region present a challenge for revolutionaries invested in the destruction of whiteness. The reactionary rural and suburban areas present a dangerous terrain in the Midwest. As revolutionaries in the Midwest, we’ve driven through rural areas with Trump signs and forests where white citizen’s militias train with AR-15s. As revolutionaries, we accept the present realities of the white reactionaries as our enemies. However, the presence of the white reactionaries does not negate a revolutionary horizon guided by the Black Radical Tradition in such zones. In some senses, areas full of white reactionaries present opportunities for revolutionaries to seize on and substantial vacuums that oppositional activity can set the terms of struggle from within and fill. Many of these large white localities means a lack of presence of the Black neo-colonial elites which means the conflict defined by the revolutionary forces battling the State and their white citizen militias is clearer and less difficult to navigate than the liberal managers of capital.

While we do not diminish the danger of the white reactionary, we find that the neoliberal technocrats and Black neo-colonial elites in the major cities present a much significant danger to revolutionary forces through their ability to co-opt, defuse, and redirect movements that demonstrate to have material teeth. Thus, those of us positioned within the Midwest small cities and more rural zones have opportunities that our comrades on the Coasts may not have. We can build out revolutionary bases in many areas without worrying about liberal co-optation. Furthermore, the danger from such reactionary forces makes us adopt a stricter culture of security and community defense.

The small cities and the large cities of the region both have distinct things to offer one another. The large cities have older pre-existing revolutionary milieus which are connected to long time movement history. The experience of these revolutionaries is invaluable. In addition, movement infrastructure in these spaces tend to be more well developed in terms of physical spaces, publications and other types of things. The small cities, suburbs and rural areas offer the big cities spaces that are less dominated by the NPIC and the Establishment “Left.” This means that the groups in this area can build with less resistance. Furthermore, these spaces are not considered to be radical centers so they could provide a space for revolutionaries to build infrastructure with less amount of cost. Additionally, the State in these areas is less familiar with a revolutionary current so they are going to be less prepared to repress revolutionary movements. While in some larger cities,

the State infrastructure has spent decades refining tactics against revolutionary movements, this is not the case universally. We need to take this into consideration in regard to our tactics.

We encourage revolutionaries to build autonomy in terms of their region in addition to the immediate areas that they live in. Driving across the occupied Midwest for a couple hours to support fellow revolutionaries needs to become a more regular practice. To destroy this world, we will need to build deep roots throughout every part of the Plantation. This will happen through building intimate relationships with revolutionaries throughout our region. A box of zines or an in-person organizing conversation can go a very long way in terms of building revolutionary capacity between different places. Furthermore, our revolutionary comrades present in areas dominated by the NPIC found it often refreshing to meet comrades in areas not dominated by the nonprofits and the Academy. Our connections to one another are the key to a revolutionary project. Different regional localities must be in constant conversation as a *tactical concern*. Although much of this work has been happening informally and ad hoc, we need to think about driving a few hours to see our comrades in areas with less developed revolutionary infrastructure as a commonplace practice.

Part 3: Distro as a Form of Catalyst

As this document is not just concerned with theoreticals, we also want to present an organizational model for our comrades reading it. The Distro is a situated, place-based project—a hyper-local catalyst that addresses the specific needs and concerns of an existing neighborhood or community. The idea of this so-called form of organization is put best as the phrase “each one teach one,” and described spatially as “block by block.” As Malcolm X says, “all revolutions are based on land” as the land is the source of all life. We must be willing to seize and hold the land as we push for abolition and decolonization. Important to clarify is how this notion of place-based work is not to be confused with the common “land-based” white radical project model, which is reactionary and reinforces settler occupation and a colonial relation of dominance. The Distro is a tool of insurrectional activity that has no attachments to land as a property relation, commodity, or object of ownership. As a revolutionary abolitionist project, the Distro must therefore be rooted in a form of radicalism that is principled in its *anti-colonial* practices and *anti-capitalist* methods.

A Distro is something that someone with relatively no experience can partake in or with very little necessary resources can get started. The initial catalyst group size should be from 3 to 15 people. It is critical that this catalyst group has very clear set goals and shared principles before it engages in collective work, so having a few discussions about framework and principles is important prior to making moves within the community. The goal of the Distro is not to perform the functions of a vanguard but rather act as a catalyst for a variety of autonomous projects within a neighborhood and eventually a larger regional area. We believe that the Streetside Distro in particular is an easily reproducible form through which revolutionaries can organize in so many different settings. Distros have over the years even served to provide structure for genuine grassroots revolutionary movements to organize across prison walls.

The Distro is a versatile medium and method of revolutionary abolitionist community organizing which is based principally in collective practices of survival, study, and class combat (conflictuality). We find that these three practices are essential for the revolutionary project.

We believe that revolutionaries must be supporting each other and our communities to *SURVIVE* the brutality of capitalism. We take particular inspiration from the idea of Poor People's Survival Programs, as theorized and implemented by the Black Autonomy Federation. Faith and courage in one's capacity to challenge oppressive systems is gained through taking action to keep one another housed, fed, warm, and safe. A critical part of these survival programs is going to be developing structures of access, care, and material support for people with children, people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated people, and survivors of systemic state and interpersonal violence.

The idea of *STUDY* is the idea that revolutionaries involved in these distro projects need to be constantly developing cultures of learning, self-criticism, and accountability. The cultures of learning are going to be oral in many cases rather than dense theoretical cultures that are only accessible to academics. While we believe that it is essential for all revolutionaries to have deep knowledge of history, theory, and tactics, we believe that the main concern for revolutionaries is doing popular education about revolutionary topics. If you are not prepared to communicate the objectives of your project to people without academic jargon or in a way that moves beyond savior paternalism, then preliminary education internal to your group may be needed. We suggest therefore trying to naturalize Abolitionist Study as a feature of your immediate communities of struggle and slowly move outwards into neighborhoods, spheres of social life, or other centres of convergence.

We believe that a good popular form for political education is distributing zines. The "Zine Distro" is a useful medium for entering into the common vibration of your community, circles, social space, or whatever. Sharing literature is central but it is not the only way to communicate your ideas to people you are in relation with. Importantly, the zine distro must be oriented towards the people rather than to the personal politics of the revolutionaries. The goal of the popular education is not to try and circulate esoteric texts but rather educational material that builds and helps makes sense of the ongoing struggles and material conditions faced by a community. The goal of the Zine Distro should be to articulate and defend the revolt against settler society. This could mean that the Distro develops texts specific to the area that the revolutionaries operate in to develop a localized analysis. For instance, the Midwest has a long history and deep culture of zine distribution that interestingly has always had one of its largest audiences in the prisons. The importance of reaching into the prisons and sending literature and correspondence also can never be underestimated. Co-creating literature with imprisoned revolutionaries is also an invaluable way to sharpen one's own group analysis, as the nonimprisoned revolutionary can never fully comprehend the changing politics of power in plantation society without listening in to the pulse of the movement for Prisoner Liberation.

Finally, we emphasize the need for *class combat* as a central part of the Distro model. We believe that conflictual actions that contest the dominion of the State and racist Capital are critical. We want to emphasize that we place importance on the mass grassroots organizing model for this *conflictuality*. The Distro should help catalyze projects that fight back against class enemies such as cops, prison bureaucrats, capitalists, landlords, fascists and bosses through utilizing a variety of different tactics. The most important that the projects could look very different place by place, it could be a Copwatch in one neighborhood or a tenant's union in the next or both. The goal is to enable collective groups of people that can combat class enemies in a way that is militant, uncompromising, and continues to bring people into the struggle. The centrality of attack is critical as well. Yet the difference between this approach to class combat and what we

add to an insurrectional approach is our focus on what happens in between upswing periods of revolt and that revolutionary activity necessitates the creation of mechanisms of *community accountability* and a deep commitment to eradicating gendered and racist violence, exploitation, marginalization, domination, hierarchy, and ableism internal to our movements.

Expect contradictions to arise when you work together with people from different social positions, political tendencies, and with different ideas of class belonging, so it is important to organize a Distro with people you know and trust, and who have the same principles and respect for your autonomy and need for rest. Often times discussing the idea with some longtime friends is the best way to go about it. Or people you have developed a strong level of political trust with. Some projects might see it necessary to expand their efforts to Serve the People and simply fill a material community need. But people should collectively understand what the objective of their project is and anticipate that the consequence of expansion may be an emergent charity dynamic, savior logic, or the misguided subversion of mutual aid's transformative valence. Scaling too large might also result in burn out, so be mindful of capacity and the potential timeline of your project. It is important to constantly assess and reevaluate your objectives as a collective, and be mindful of the number of people moving in and out of planning spaces. Both for logistical and security reasons. The idea is not to centralize efforts, nor is the Distro an apparatus to manage actions that take flight over the course of its existence. The purpose of the Distro is to catalyze and not become an anchor. To repeat, *the goal of the distro is to catalyze and not become an anchor for the revolutionary process in motion.*

The moment is now...

We must seize the time. We cannot wait. We encourage readers of this text to begin organizing along the lines of the trajectory we charted out at whatever capacity you have. Small steps of a few individuals are essential for any mass revolutionary movement to catalyze. We wrote this text to be used in struggle. It is meant to be shared on a street corner, through the bars of a prison, or with comrades in another city who are struggling to find their role in movement. We build with care, urgency, and the dedication to build liberated worlds out of the ashes of this one.

Finally, it has become clear that a new Civil war among white society is on the horizon. We suggest revolutionary abolitionists seize the moment during this crisis internal to the Amerikan plantation as the enslaved Black masses did in the General Strike, during the first Civil war, to destroy chattel slavery. Settler society must be obliterated by the revolutionary abolitionist current by any means necessary. GLOBAL BLACK INSURRECTION. KNIFE TO THE THROAT OF AMERIKAN FASCISM.

For freedom and autonomy
For the end of this world
For the countless new worlds beyond

“Each generation must discover its mission,
fulfill it or betray it,
in relative opacity.”
—Franz Fanon

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